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POLAND SLOWLY WINDS DOWN

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Munich, 3 April 1981 (RAD/Robinson).

The smooth introduction of full-scale meat rationing on April 1 and the appearance at news kiosks of the first edition of Solidarity's new weekly paper on April 2 marked Poland's attempt to return to a semblance of normality after two weeks of high tension and constant crisis. Both the union movement and the government have now begun to take stock of the situation in light of the last-minute, dramatic compromise reached between them last Monday, a compromise that averted a general strike scheduled for the following day and ultimately led to the cancellation of Solidarity's nationwide strike alert. At a press conference in Warsaw on April 2, Solidarity national spokesman Janusz Onyszkiewicz revealed just how serious the consequences of a stalemate in the negotiations could have been. According to Western press agencies, Onyszkiewicz told reporters that the government had several times raised the possibility of declaring a state of emergency. "It was made clear that a general strike would have meant total confrontation, including some bloodshed," he said. Moreover, he added, it had been understood that the army might have been called in and that there might have been outside intervention. "This time it looked as if it wasn't a bluff," he said, and the union negotiators "felt tremendous pressure and responsibility because it was said that there was no other option."

Implicitly confirming the essence of this account, Deputy Prime Minister Mieczyslaw Rakowski said in a television interview with the American network NBC last night that the Polish government could not have made any further concessions in its negotiations with Solidarity and that the agreement finally reached represented the most that the government negotiators could have granted. Poland must not allow radicals to take over Solidarity, he said, since the country would then "enter an extremely dangerous period of existence that could lead to the end of Polish statehood . . . and to national catastrophe." If the radical forces in Solidarity were to gain the upper hand, he continued, then "I would find myself on the side of the opponents of Solidarity."

I would also be one of those who aimed at confrontation. I would respond with confrontation because not only would the interest of the whole nation be at stake, but also the peace of Europe and, who knows, perhaps of the world.

At the same time that both sides were stressing the dangers inherent in any further crisis between the government and the unions, they were also emphasizing their desire to cooperate with one another in settling the many issues of Polish life that remain outstanding. In an interview published in Zycie Warszawy, (1) Rakowski was quoted as saying that "we cannot treat Solidarity as our opponent, but as our partner. The organization is often aggressive, but this may be because it is a spontaneous movement." Moreover, Rakowski had words of praise not only for Solidarity leader

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(1) 2 April 1981.

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Lech Walesa, whom he called an "interesting discussion partner," "a skillful negotiator," and a "moderating force" within the union, but also for Solidarity's advisers and experts, whom he said were always "well prepared for negotiation" and had played a "positive role" in the talks. The latter statement, it should be noted, brought a quick and critical response from Czechoslovakia, where Radio Hvezda (2) reported that many of the experts in "Walesa's union" were members of the "antisocialist organization" KOR. This, said the radio, had been stated by UPI, which had also "confirmed" that these "antisocialist elements" were intent upon "provoking actions that heighten the tension in Poland."

Although Solidarity has not and cannot renounce its use of the strike to protest its interests, recent statements by union spokesmen indicate that it now wishes to reserve this weapon for use only as a last resort. It has made a point of the fact that it is willing to sit down at the negotiating table with the government without the threat of a nationwide walkout hovering in the background. Thus, Rakowski's statement on the need to accept the movement as a partner must have been welcomed by the Solidarity leadership, who have been demanding precisely that for the last several months. Even Rural Solidarity, the militant private peasants' union, has expressed some satisfaction over the recent compromise and the union's prospects for the future. Speaking at a news conference on Thursday, Jan Kulaj, Rural Solidarity's top leader, is reported to have said that "the agreement can be considered progress, since our operation is now recognized as legal." (3) Part of Kulaj's satisfaction is probably a function of renewed support for his cause by the Polish Primate, Stefan Cardinal Wyszynski, who was quoted as having told him and other Rural Solidarity leaders that "legal recognition . . . may contribute to overcoming the agricultural crisis and getting rid of the lack of trust between the authorities and the people." (4)

The peace that reigns in Poland at the moment is a fragile peace, but, from all reports, it has been greeted with a profound sense of relief by the large majority of Polish citizens. Internally, the major threat to its continuance now seems to be the divisions within the ranks of both the party and Solidarity that have been so clearly revealed within the past few days. Unless handled with the proper skill, they could still paralyze and thwart the process of dialogue and negotiation that has once, again begun.

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(2) 2 April 1981, 2300 hours.

(3) UPI, 2 and 3 April 1981.

(4) Ibid.