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POLAND ON THE EVE OF THE PUWP'S EXTRAORDINARY NINTH PARTY  
CONGRESS

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Summary: On July 14 the Polish United Workers' Party holds its extraordinary ninth national congress. The gathering is to debate issues that the party faces at the present time, sketch out its course of action for the future, and elect leaders responsible for implementing new political and organizational programs. The congress takes place in a difficult situation as the country is in the midst of an economic crisis, social life remains tense, and the party itself is politically divided. Whether the congress can provide solutions to those problems is not clear. Much demands on the party's ability, or willingness, to develop a position on dealing with social groups and movements, particularly those that have acquired a degree of autonomy and self-organization. No drastic changes in the party's orientation, however, are expected.

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On July 14 1,964 delegates representing some 2,940,000 members of the Polish United Workers' Party will gather in Warsaw for the party's extraordinary 9th national congress. There is still no firm indication as to how long the congress will go on, though it may well last for a week or more.

It is by now almost commonplace to assume that the congress will be a watershed in both the party's history and Poland's current politics. The gathering is to debate issues that the party faces at the present time, sketch out its course of action for the future, and elect leaders responsible for implementing new political and organizational programs. All these elements are of great political sensitivity and importance, especially in the current situation in which the entire country is still affected by a serious economic crisis, social and political life remains fragmented, and the party itself is divided and riddled with divergent trends and crosscurrents. To complicate matters even further, the congress's deliberations could also be influenced by pressures from outside the country, pressures related to the repeatedly expressed concerns of other communist parties over the situation in both the Polish party and the nation generally.

To a large extent, the sensitivity associated with the congress's debates and its eventual decisions is related to the special nature of the gathering. Party congresses usually take place every four or five years, in accordance with statutory requirements rather than under pressure of political needs. The current congress is an exception: it follows the previous one, held in February 1980, by little more than a year. Moreover, the decision to summon the current meeting was the direct result of the collapse of the political program adopted by the party at the February congress. That collapse was prompted by the widespread workers' strikes of July and August 1980. Attempts to put the blame on the shoulders of the former top party leaders and by removing them thereby to pacify the population have not been successful. Public criticism of both the policies and the methods of rule that have been associated in the public mind with the party has only increased and intensified, rapidly undermining the party's authority and its capacity to rule. The net result of this situation has been the progressing fragmentation of power relations in the country, seen especially in the emergence of a mass labor organization independent of the party's control, but also in the increasing proliferation of other autonomous movements and social bodies. This tendency toward self-organization and self-assertion has also affected large sectors of the party membership, particularly workers and intellectuals, producing ideological crosscurrents within the organization and threatening its internal discipline.

The purpose of the congress is to both confront and resolve these problems, though whether it will succeed in doing so is still

not clear. To assert such uncertainty, repeatedly invoked by numerous domestic and foreign observers, is not, however, to deny the current leaders' strenuous efforts to assure the success of the gathering. These efforts were clearly demonstrated during the pre-congressional election campaign, in which many would-be reformers of the party were eliminated from the delegate body. (1) They were also shown in the party authorities' fervent preparation of final documents and establishment of procedures for the congress over recent days.

#### Preparation of Documents

The final, and politically important, steps to ensure that the congress did not turn into a session of recriminations and criticism of past failures and mistakes were taken at the last meeting of the outgoing Central Committee. Held on July 10, a mere four days before the opening of the congress, and presided over by First Secretary Stanislaw Kania, the meeting apparently involved little discussion. It focused on a series of reports, delivered by key members of the Politburo, about the state of preparations for the congress.

A report on the results of the pre-congress election campaign was delivered by CC Secretary Kazimierz Barcikowski. He noted that the campaign had been marked by intense political agitation and had led to considerable changes in the composition of the local leadership bodies; however, "these changes did not exceed those that took place during the years 1956 and 1957," the time of the post-Stalinist crisis in the party. (2) Barcikowski pointed out that as many as 85 central party officials had been elected as delegates to the congress. At the same time, he admitted that such groups as workers, peasants, women, and youth were under-represented in relation to their actual membership in the party. Commenting on the anticipated results of the congress, Barcikowski said that it would "serve the tasks of consolidating the party, strengthening its ties with the populace, and restoring its credibility."

The next speaker was CC Secretary Stefan Olszowski, a leader known for his conservative views, who outlined the list of proposed programmatic documents to be discussed and approved by the congress. They included a formal CC report on political activity since the last party congress held in February 1980, reports of various CC commissions, a proposal on changes in party statutes, and several reports prepared by the government that deal with different aspects of economic policies for the future.

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(1) See J.B. de Weydenthal, "Precongress Campaign Ends in Poland but Tension Persists," RAD Background Report/195 (Poland), Radio Free Europe Research, 10 July 1981.

(2) Radio Warsaw, 10 July 1981.



Olszowski stopped short of providing any details on these documents. Instead, he implied that insofar as their content reflected "a process of the socialist renewal that had been initiated by the party and focused on the rebuilding of Leninist norms in party life, the defense of the fundamental values of the socialist system, and efforts to democratize social life and develop social self-government," they would receive support from both the population at home and the fraternal parties of the other socialist countries. Olszowski particularly stressed that those fraternal parties "express their understanding for the program of activity adopted by the Polish party and provide it with far-reaching support." In this context, he revealed that the last CC plenum, in early June, had fully confirmed "an identity of views between the Polish and the Soviet parties on the developments in Poland."

The most important report presented at the session was delivered by CC Secretary Tadeusz Grabski. It dealt with the work of a special commission set up under Grabski's chairmanship in late April to investigate the responsibility of former party and government leaders for political and economic mistakes committed during the 1970s.

Informing the CC members that his commission had already completed its work, Grabski presented them with both the conclusions of the investigation and recommendations for action. It was clear that the commission had found numerous former leaders guilty not only of political mistakes but also of far-reaching corruption. With respect to the recommendations, however, Grabski's commission took a rather cautious position: criminal prosecution, Grabski asserted, could be undertaken only "in case of a proven criminal act committed by state and economic functionaries through their either exceeding or refraining from specific actions." Otherwise, the question of responsibility for faulty policy-making could be dealt with only by political means. The implications of that stand are obvious. None of the top party officials, including former First Secretary Edward Gierek and his close associates from the Secretariat, would probably have to face any court action, since they had been responsible primarily for policy formulation and not its implementation. Instead, the brunt of possible punitive actions would probably be directed at various government functionaries charged with implementing the directives coming from the party leadership.

This does not, however, imply that some of the top government figures who were at the same time high-ranking party leaders will escape punishment. Indeed, as Grabski strongly suggested, some of them, particularly former Prime Ministers Piotr Jaroszewicz and Edward Babiuch, who had been members of the Politburo as well, would be liable for prosecution. Yet their responsibility would be judged in terms of their government rather than party services. This, of course, would not diminish the significance of the punishment, a point made by Grabski in his report, but would provide it with a specific political coloration.

The Central Committee acted immediately on the Grabski commission report, adopting a special resolution that not only approved the findings of the investigation but also meted out some punishment for the guilty. The CC decided to charge the Central Commission for Party Control with the responsibility of assessing whether Gierek and several of his former associates from the Politburo and Secretariat should retain their party membership. It also decided to deprive Gierek of some of his material possessions, including his house in Katowice, and to review his financial obligations arising from other personal activities.

As for the future of former Prime Minister Piotr Jaroszewicz, who had already been removed from the party, the CC directed that the office of the Prosecutor General immediately start a criminal investigation into his past administrative activities. Furthermore, to demonstrate its revulsion with the past practices of the high party and state officialdom, the CC decided to appeal to the Council of State to deprive many former leaders of any decorations and medals bestowed upon them during the 1970s. Though basically symbolic, this action also involves some financial deprivations. Since the recipients of medals usually receive material benefits as well.

Aside from those punitive aspects, the CC resolution also included some recommendations for future institutional changes that would prevent the repetition of past abuses. Those recommendations, apparently to be approved by the congress, related to statutory provisions regarding party operations and were based on the general principle that party executive bodies, the Politburo and Secretariat, must be made accountable to the Central Committee. At the same time, the resolution called for a more precise definition of the relationship between the government as an administrative agency and the party as a policy-making body. No precise recommendation on this point was formulated, and the resolution, while assigning the congress the task of dealing with the problem, proposed that "experiences of other socialist countries in that matter" should be closely considered.

When viewed in the perspective of the past several months or so, it is quite understandable that the resolution on the responsibility of the former leaders would be adopted on the very eve of the congress. It is clear that the current leadership would like to close the Gierek chapter once and for all to enable the congress to concentrate on defining future actions and policies. (3) At the same time, however, one may wonder whether such a decision will be politically feasible or even operationally possible. After all,

- (3) For a discussion of some political aspects related to the issue of former leaders' responsibility for past party politics see J. B. de Weydenthal, "The Gierek Problem," RAD BR/155 (Poland), RFER, 26 May 1981.

besides the question of selected individuals' personal responsibility for obvious instances of abuse of power and privilege, the whole issue of the past experiences with decision-making lies at the heart of the present demands for change and innovation. The question, therefore, arises whether the congress will be able to address itself to future program and plans without taking a long, hard look at the mistakes of the past and how their repetition can be avoided. Apparently the outgoing Central Committee considered this possible, but it remains to be seen whether the delegates to the congress will share that conviction.

### Control over Procedure

The leadership's concern with the work of the congress could be illustrated, for example, by the work of the so-called Central Delegate Group. The group, consisting of selected representatives from all voivodship delegations, has been meeting repeatedly in Warsaw to prepare a working agenda for the congress, to examine rules of procedure to be adopted by the gathering, and to determine prospective officers for the proceedings. (4) The actual outcome of these deliberations is to take the form of recommendations that might be either accepted or ignored by the general delegate body. Considering that the composition of the group appears to be almost identical to the recently elected leadership of the local party bodies, however, it is more than likely that most of the recommendations will be approved by the congress. Meetings of the group were invariably chaired by Kania himself and were attended by other members of the Politburo.

This preoccupation with procedural matters seems to indicate the leadership's determination to streamline the work of the congress so that it does not become a forum for unending speeches and confusing debates about rules. Yet this could have a politically negative effect, by possibly preventing innovative proposals and restricting the delegates' right to unconstrained participation. Such a possibility could produce a potential undercurrent of resentment among some delegates who might find themselves pushed outside the main debating arena of the congress.

This, in turn, could produce a true dilemma for the congress. While some order and discipline are admittedly necessary for a gathering of this size, there is also little doubt that a comprehensive debate on the issues is more than necessary. Indeed, there are several problems, each of them of fundamental importance for the country's current situation, that should be thoroughly examined. Among the most important is the meaning of the very program of "renewal" and its application in party policies. Others include the problems of internal ferment in the organization and ways of approaching it, as well as the fundamental question of the relationship between the party and society.

- (4) The work of the group was briefly discussed in an interview with Ryszard Lukaszewicz, a deputy head of the CC's organizational department, as broadcast by Radio Warsaw, 12 July 1981.



The Problems of Renewal

There is, indeed, considerable evidence that the very concept of "renewal," although accepted and propagated by both the party and numerous social groups, lacks sufficient clarity to be viewed by all in the same manner. The "official" interpretation of renewal, as presented by First Secretary Stanislaw Kania in several major speeches at different CC meetings, (5) consists of a promise of operational changes within the existing system but little, if any, change in the essential power relations that provide that system with its political and institutional foundations. Kania repeatedly asserted that any changes would be conducted through political means. He was equally insistent, however, that no alteration could be made on one principal point: the leading role of the party in all aspects of Poland's organized political and social life.

The same issue of renewal has been seen by large sectors of the public, however, in a manner vastly different from the official interpretation. As projected through the activities of various groups and newly emerged organizations, and propagated by countless leaflets as well as in numerous press articles, it has centered on the problem of a potential reconstitution of different elements of power in the system so as to make it more efficient and responsive to social needs. No specific recommendations for "renewal" have been provided, however, although their common denominator appears to be a general agreement on the need for organizational plurality and its institutional recognition within the system.

Underlying these views seems to be a widely shared conviction that the party authorities are incapable by themselves of fulfilling the indispensable requirements for an effective management of social affairs. This conviction has been generated by past experiences of official mistakes and failures, and greatly reinforced by the mounting awareness of the basic backwardness of the existing system as well as the corruption of some of its leaders.

Taken together, the two concepts of "renewal," as well as many other partial interpretations derived from them, have a single element in common: a desire to find the means to ensure at least a modicum of political and economic stability. By the same token, however, one cannot escape the impression that they are hardly compatible.

Ferment in the Party

It is the realization of that potential incompatibility that has provided the ground for ferment within the party itself. Some groups, admittedly relatively small, have rejected the notion of change as both unrealistic and inherently detrimental to the long

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(5) See J. B. de Weydenthal, "CC Plenum in Poland: Continuing Uncertainty," "Poland's Party in Disarray," and "The Problems of Power in Poland," RAD BRs/241, 301, and 16 (Poland), RFER, 10 October 1980, 16 December 1980, and 22 January 1981, respectively.

established role of the party. These might be called the committed conservatives. On the other side of the political spectrum there are other groups, recruited mostly from among the party intellectuals, which assume that "renewal" is unfeasible in purely operational terms and, therefore, the acceptance of a policy of change would have to be accompanied by a profound alteration of the party organization itself. These are the reformers.

These divisions appear to be particularly apparent on the level of the rank-and-file membership. Other divisions, related particularly to the question of choosing the most efficient methods of implementing party policies, have emerged within the leadership bodies. The most publicized has been a group of hard-liners, frequently associated with such prominent politicians as Tadeusz Grabski and Stefan Olszowski, who seem to prefer decisive means of policy implementation rather than slow and protracted negotiation and compromise. Needless to say, they have sometimes been opposed by more moderate people in the decision-making groups, who, conscious of the possible danger of aggravating social tension, advocate more gradual and cautious tactics.

It is clear that the congress should discuss all these aspects of the party's internal processes of decision-making and their potential political implications for the country. At the same time, however, The delegates should not lose sight of the sentiments and views of the public, particularly those segments of society that have already secured for themselves some form of self-organization. Indeed, perhaps the most important aspect of the current situation in Poland, an aspect that makes it so different from that at the time of past congresses, is that the party is no longer the only social institution capable of shaping the character of politics. The emergence of Solidarity as well as several other popularly organized movements has already created new conditions for the exercise of authority and power. It is obvious that the positions of the party and the social movements differ, both in terms of their institutionalized prerogatives and in their capacity to influence policy orientations. For the congress to ignore the existence of such movements, however, would be a major mistake.

### The Social Factor

This point was made obvious to all as labor troubles once again surfaced in several areas of the country. On July 8 some 40,000 longshoremen went on strike in several Polish port cities. The following day, July 9, the employees of the Polish Airlines LOT, as well as the workers of the Bydgoszcz Voivodship transportation network, also staged separate strikes of their own. These strikes broke a relatively long period of labor peace; the last major industrial work stoppages had occurred on March 27, when the entire country was paralyzed by a general strike.

All three actions took the form of "warning strikes." This means that their participants merely wished to signal to the authorities the seriousness of their grievances and to indicate that all efforts to resolve the problems had failed so far. The



strikes were brief: in the port cities the protest lasted only one hour, in Bydgoszcz two hours, while the LOT workers struck for four hours. They appeared to have been related to specifically defined and localized issues: for the longshoremen, it was a question of obtaining legal recognition of their occupational rights and privileges; for the transport workers in Bydgoszcz, the principal object was to gain official approval for the removal of their company director, who had been accused of corruption; the employees of LOT, on the other hand, demanded that the government accept as the new director of the airline someone they had themselves elected.

It would be a mistake, however, to minimize the importance of these strikes. Indeed, there is reason to believe that the "warnings" could well develop into major protests unless the workers' demands receive serious attention from the authorities. The longshoremen have already indicated their readiness to stage a general strike of unlimited duration in the ports, perhaps starting on July 15. A similar intention has been announced by the LOT crews, with the date of their walkout provisionally set for July 24.

The immediate response from the government to the implicit danger of further aggravation of industrial conflicts has been basically ambiguous. With respect to the longshoremen's grievances, a government spokesman was reported to have declared the authorities' willingness to continue negotiations with the workers, expressing the hope that an agreement could be reached by the end of July. (6) As for the problems in Bydgoszcz, an official investigatory agency (the Supreme Chamber of Control) was said to have confirmed the validity of the workers' allegations about the director's failings (7); indeed, he resigned his position shortly after the strike, but there was no government pressure to replace him. Only in the case of the LOT conflict has the government taken a clear stand. On July 9, within hours of the end of the strike, the Minister of Transportation appointed a new director. He was not, however, the man who had been chosen by the employees to head the airline, but one of the ministry's own candidates. Whether this unilateral attempt to impose a solution will succeed, however, is by no means certain. After all, the main issue behind the LOT controversy is not so much the choice of one person or another for the job of director as whether the employees have the right to elect their own top managers. This was fully explained by a spokesman for the employees who said even before the protest started that it was "a strike to defend the idea of self-government and a protest against the stand taken by the Minister of Transportation, which ignored the right of the crews to take their own decision." (8)

In this context there is also the question of whether any extension of such conflicts might not eventually adversely affect the interests of the workers and their organizations. Indeed, it

(6) Radio Warsaw, 8 July 1981; also Reuter, 9 July 1981.

(7) Radio Warsaw, 9 July 1981.

(8) As quoted by John Darnton in The New York Times, 9 July 1981.

is frequently argued that as long as the government struggles with both economic and political problems, any large-scale disputes on the labor front can only intensify the current difficulties. That much seemed to have been implied by Lech Walesa, the Polish labor leader, who said at a meeting with the workers of Gdynia (a major port city) that "strikes, in general, are not the best form of protest." (9) Walesa was also reported to have described the LOT and Bydgoszcz strikes as "bad" and "dangerous," (10) although there was no available information on the full context of these remarks. Walesa had earlier appeared to support the longshoremen's strike. (11)

More important, however, were Walesa's observations on the role of the government and its relations with the labor unions. He was reported to have expressed his opposition to any attempts to undermine the "authority" of the government and declared that political "stability" should be regarded as a "common interest" by all. Turning to the issue of labor-government relations, Walesa was said to have reminded his audience that "some 640 agreements have already been negotiated with the government," adding that "the most important current problem is to synchronize and to implement them." (12)

This, indeed, seems to be the crux of the problem. There is no doubt that numerous agreements have been reached between the government and the labor movement during recent months. Nonetheless, it would be difficult to pinpoint any really major agreement that has already been implemented. After more than 10 months since the signing of the initial agreements between the workers and the government in Gdansk, Szczecin, and Jastrzebie, most of their provisions have not been fulfilled. This relates particularly to such provisions as the introduction of broad economic reforms, the limitation of censorship, access for the unions to the mass media, the formal definition of the role of the labor unions in the political and institutional system through legislation, and so on. In the absence of any determined action by the government to settle these fundamental issues, most of the subsequently signed agreements have simply fallen into abeyance.

To say this is not to deny that the authorities have already taken some steps to put the relations between the labor movement and the political system in some sort of order. Several proposals on legislation in that area have already been presented to the Sejm. This does not alter the general impression, however, that, either because of the complexity of the problems or simply as a result of official unwillingness to act, little lasting change has been introduced into the system.

This apparent official procrastination, and this is how the endless delays are perceived by many of the workers and their supporters, is the major source of the continuing public distrust

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(9) Radio Warsaw, 9 and 11 July 1981.

(10) UPI, 10 July 1981.

(11) Darnton, op. cit.; also Reuter, 8 July 1981.

(12) Radio Warsaw, 9 and 11 July 1981.

of the party and the government. And it does not require great insight into Polish politics to realize that as long as that public distrust prevails there is no real prospect of either reinforcing the party's authority or stabilizing power relations in the country.

This observation appears particularly pertinent under the current circumstances in which there are no certain prospects for any dramatic decline of tension on the labor front. Indeed, even if the recent disputes were somehow to be resolved, new troubles are likely to emerge. Such a possibility has already been made public following a meeting, held in Gdansk on July 8, of representatives of some 17 key industrial enterprises from all over the country. The meeting was also attended by delegates from some 150 other factories and institutions. The gathering was convened by the national leadership of Solidarity and its purpose was to "determine social views on the self-government and the autonomy of enterprises" within the existing economic system. (13)

According to the available information, the meeting featured several comprehensive presentations on the matter and concluded with a declaration that "both the government and the Sejm should consider the opinions of the labor movement in their work on legislation" related to the problems of the internal organization of enterprises, as well as those of the enterprise self-governing bodies. In this context, it is important to recall that Solidarity has already drafted its proposals for legislation on these matters. These proposals define the enterprise as "a socially owned institution" and the self-governing agency as the body empowered to make all decisions, both administrative and economic, related to the enterprise's operations. These decisions would include both the appointment and the recall of enterprise directors, the setting of economic plans, and the determination of the financial bases for all operations. (14) The role of the state in this would essentially be to secure basic cooperation between various enterprises and provide them with broad administrative support.

The government has never responded directly to the Solidarity proposals. Instead, it introduced in the Sejm its own proposals on the regulation of enterprise organization. (15) Needless to say, these proposals differed drastically from those of Solidarity, both in the definition of an enterprise -- it was to be either a state or a cooperative institution -- and the description of the role of self-governing bodies -- they were to be directly or indirectly related to the state administration.

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(13) Ibid., 9 July 1981.

(14) As reported by Dziennik Baltycki, 17-18 June 1981.

(15) See J. B. de Weydenthal, "Polish Sejm Debates the Economy," RAD BR/197 (Poland), RFER, 13 July 1981.



Yet, while the Solidarity proposals were formally ignored, they became a subject of strong criticism in the party's daily, Trybuna Ludu. The paper concentrated its attack on the principle of social ownership of enterprises, a principle that featured prominently in the Solidarity draft. Recalling that the existing economic system relied on either state or cooperative ownership of all economic enterprises, the paper decried the fact that to introduce social ownership of enterprises, in which that body would be "managed by self-governing units," would merely mean that "a socially owned enterprise would be a Solidarity owned enterprise." (16) This, Trybuna Ludu continued, indicated "not merely a difference of opinion between Solidarity and the government/, not only the creation of a bargaining position for future possible negotiations/, but an attempt to portray Solidarity as the only body capable of introducing improvements in the system/"

Now is certainly not the time to speculate about the future forms of economic organization that could result from the current controversy on the character of enterprises or the self-governing bodies operating in them. Yet it is clear that the dispute, however technical it might seem, involves serious issues not only of economic, but also of political importance. None of them is likely to be resolved in the near future, but it is equally obvious that neither will they easily go away.

It is also too early to judge to what extent, if at all, these issues are likely to be debated at the congress, or to anticipate the direction of the new policies, if any, to be decided there. Furthermore, one should hesitate to speak about possible political realignments of various groups that are presumably represented among the delegates. The likelihood is, however, that no dramatic changes -- in the sense of the removal of Stanislaw Kania from his current position as party first secretary, a drastic restructuring of the party's organizational structure, or a thorough transformation of the composition of the leading bodies -- will take place. This is not a revolutionary congress; it is a congress that is trying to introduce an element of order and comprehension into a very confusing situation. And this, in itself, is a very important task.

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(16) Jerzy Bielecki, "Separateness or Negation," Trybuna Ludu, 9 July 1981.