

**POLITICAL CRISIS DEEPENS IN POLAND**

By J. B. de Weydenthal

Summary: This is the second paper in a series of presentations on the March political crisis in Poland. It discusses positions taken by the government and the representatives of the Solidarity labor organization during their talks. It also reports on informal attempts by the Catholic Church and groups of intellectuals to mediate in the conflict. Finally, the paper provides brief information on a warning strike staged by Solidarity to press the authorities to enter into serious negotiations with the workers and gives an account of mounting pressure from abroad, particularly from the other socialist countries, upon both the Polish government and the population to end the crisis.

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**Government Presents Its Grievances. . .**

The second round of talks between government officials and Solidarity representatives brought no solution to the growing crisis. The two delegations met briefly in Warsaw on March 25 in a follow-up session to an earlier encounter on March 22. Neither of the meetings resolved the conflict, although they did provide opportunities for each side to present its views on the current state of relations between the government and the unions. The talks were scheduled to continue on March 26. They were postponed until March 27, however, as both sides were reported to have engaged in additional separate consultations.

The second session was unusually brief, lasting only about 90 minutes, in contrast to the earlier marathon talks of nearly 5 hours. Most of the time was taken up by a lengthy statement by Deputy Prime Minister Mieczyslaw F. Rakowski, who served as chairman of the government team, presenting an official assessment of the conflict.

Rakowski's pronouncement centered on two themes. One was a series of accusations against Solidarity, which was presented as being increasingly involved in political matters and negligent of its obligations to take part in the national effort to pull the country out of its economic difficulties. The other was a defense of government social and economic policies.

Accusing Solidarity of increasing politicization of its actions, Rakowski said that the unions in general, and "some branches" of the workers' organization in particular, were conducting "extraordinary agitation against the authorities and, above all, against the police and the security bodies." (1) He decried a recent proliferation of pamphlets, leaflets, and posters critical of state officialdom, of the party, and of the top political leaders. Implying the existence within Solidarity of "forces that wish to declare a holy war against the people's authority," Rakowski appeared particularly incensed by the alleged attempts of the labor organization "to counterpoise the government of General Wojciech Jaruzelski to the leadership of the party."

Speaking about the government's activity in recent weeks, Rakowski maintained that it had been characterized by a determination to continue the program of political renewal, economic improvement, and social participation in public life. Rakowski went on to stress that official policies had been oriented toward implementation of the initial plan of action as presented by Prime Minister Jaruzelski on February 12, and which had then received considerable public support.

While defending the government's performance, Rakowski listed specific instances of recent conflicts between the workers and the authorities -- the unions' strike threats, their demands for higher wages, and their calls for the removal of various politicians and government officials in different parts of the country -- as examples of social agitation that were making official efforts to improve conditions of life in Poland increasingly difficult. It was against this background of tension instigated by repeated protests, Rakowski said, that one should consider the Bydgoszcz events and their political implications.

Turning to the evaluation of the events that precipitated the current crisis, Rakowski stopped short of "declaring which side is right." Emphasizing that he would reserve his final judgment until the completion of a special government report on the matter, and expressing regret "that some people suffered from the violence," Rakowski pointed out that "the state authorities have both the right and the obligation to protect institutions and public buildings and, if necessary, they may use force in doing so." Rakowski did not admit that any such "necessity" had occurred in Bydgoszcz and clearly allowed for specific government action if those guilty of using force had exceeded their duties. But he also said that "under no circumstances did the Bydgoszcz events justify the national upheaval." Then, addressing himself to the Solidarity delegates, Rakowski rhetorically asked whether the workers' organization, "by heightening tension in the country and outside of it," intended "to prove that independent and self-governing unions cannot exist under socialism, because that brings about the fall of the state and an end to social peace?" And then, as if having answered himself in the positive, Rakowski again asked the Solidarity delegates: "If this is what you want to prove, why and in the name of what, by God, do you want to prove it?"

(1) Radio Warsaw, 25 and 26 March 1981.

. . . and so Does Solidarity

The response of Solidarity, delivered at the same session by the chairman of the unions' delegation, Lech Walesa, was equally poignant. Its main theme was the concern about the real meaning of "renewal" in Polish public life. Implying that official policies did not provide for any lasting change in political and social relations in the country, Walesa observed that little or no change had taken place in the composition of the personnel responsible for both policy-making and administration. Reminding the government delegates that public hopes for change had already been frustrated at the time of earlier upheavals, in 1956, 1970, and 1976, Walesa remarked that "we must not allow those who have already failed to fulfill the expectations of the working class three times in the past to remain in their positions, the police to beat us, or that this will be the nature of the renewal." (2) He then added that the position taken by the government representatives merely amounted to a "return to the situation of 1970 or before." In this context, the labor leader simply said that the crucial point in current Polish politics was "not to make the same mistakes as in the past." Then, explaining the labor movement's position, he stated that "perhaps our determination to assure change might be excessive in some cases -- it may be too great -- but we are firm in making certain that we do not return to the point to which we have returned so many times."

Turning to Rakowski's specific accusations, Walesa refuted the claim that Solidarity had tried to interfere in party-government relations. "We do not intend to separate the general Wojciech Jaruzelski from the others . . . nor do we wish anyone to try to divide our own movement." Here, it is important to note that party and government officials, including Rakowski himself, have frequently presented Solidarity as an organization split into various groups and torn by separate tendencies.

Walesa then went on to assure Rakowski and his associates that Solidarity had never tried to undermine the position of either the party or the government, and that it had never attacked "socialism and Poland's international alliances. . . . We never intended to become a political party or an organization that wanted to remove the communist party from power. We do not wish that and we will never push for it." At the same time, Walesa made clear that the unions "will remain determined to press for the fulfillment of all their objectives and will not rest until those objectives are reached. Everything will have to be settled in a legal and logical manner. We have no other choice, we are not antisocialist, but we regard our actions as lawful and are concerned that some official actions are not legal and that they might be repeated in the future."

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(2) Ibid., 26 March 1981.



Expanding on the character of current union activities, Walesa explained that, as a democratic organization, Solidarity allowed for and tolerated a diversity of views. He patiently suggested to the government representatives that the proliferation of leaflets and posters -- although some of them could appear antisocialist to some members of the political establishment -- might imply not so much a growth in antistate sentiments as "criticism of what has been wrong [in the country]." Here he appealed for greater tolerance and understanding from the authorities because "had we accepted the view that they were antisocialist or directed against the state's alliances, we would have come to the wrong conclusions."

The crucial element in the current crisis, Walesa said, had been "the failure to adopt a method of solving problems short of a strike." The incident in Bydgoszcz, Walesa suggested, resulted from such a situation. But he also warned that "society has already assumed that there would be no escape from this situation." Walesa clearly placed the blame for this development on the shoulders of political officials and administrators. "There are people who have achieved a great deal," he said, "but if they were true activists they would step aside now and, instead of accusing us of being antisocialist, provide us with a real opportunity to introduce a true renewal, not only on paper and in words, but in practice as well."

There was no indication that Walesa's statement had made any impression on the government team; the talks adjourned shortly after he had taken the floor. The adjournment in itself, however, was not regarded as a cause for alarm. Indeed, there were signs that the real work on finding a solution to the crisis had, in any case, temporarily moved away from the formal negotiations and into behind-the-scene maneuvering by various groups and institutions.

#### Informal Attempts at Mediation

Even before the second session of talks it was apparent that informal attempts had been made, both by Church officials and private individuals, to reach an understanding between the authorities and the labor unions. Those attempts were reported to have been directed at resolving two crucial demands by Solidarity: the punishment of those guilty for the Bydgoszcz violence and recognition of the peasants' organization. In those two cases, the compromise was said to have been suggested through setting up a special parliamentary commission charged with responsibility for establishing the blame for the incidents of violence and punishing the guilty, while the peasant organization would change its name from Rural Solidarity to the Agricultural Council and would merge with all the existing rural institutions. (3) All other workers' demands would then be taken up later at some future talks between Solidarity and the government.

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(3) Bernard Margueritte in Le Figaro, 26 March 1981.

The same report suggested, however, that all attempts to find commonly acceptable ground for a possible agreement failed when the "party leadership" rejected "any compromise on the matter of the peasant organization and even refused government representatives the right to raise the subject during the talks." This rejection was said to have been issued immediately before the scheduled start of the talks on March 25.

It is, of course, still difficult to say whether this report provided a true picture of the situation. There was no doubt, however, that efforts to seek a compromise formula had been undertaken by various individuals and groups in the period preceding the negotiations themselves. The stalemate in the talks presumably resulted from the failure of those efforts so far. In the aftermath of the session, however, those efforts were still continuing.

Perhaps the most important was the Catholic Church's attempt to mediate in the negotiations. It was officially reported by the country's media that Poland's Primate, Stefan Cardinal Wyszynski, had met on March 26 with Prime Minister Jaruzelski. (4) There were also reports, particularly in the French daily Le Figaro, that Cardinal Wyszynski had conferred on the same day with party First Secretary Stanislaw Kania. (5) This meeting, if it did actually take place, would have been especially significant since it was assumed by some observers that Kania himself was behind the official refusal to accept some form of compromise in the talks with Solidarity. No details of those conversations were made public. There was no doubt, however, that the Church's intervention had been directed at finding some possibility for an eventual settlement of mutual differences between the authorities and the workers. There was also reason to assume that the Church would be prepared to use its moral prestige to guarantee that the unions accepted the provisions of any agreement.

Furthermore, the Polish media reported that a group of prominent intellectuals and artists had met with Kania on March 26 to convey to him "their profound concern about the deteriorating situation in the country." On the same day Kania was reported to have met with the leaders of the Polish media organizations and to have appealed to them to ensure that the media "adopt an involved and understanding position toward the existing situation and its potentially dangerous consequences, a position that would facilitate the task of explaining the party's stand ever since the emergence of conflicts in Poland, characterized by support for political means of solving problems, and support for the integration of the forces of reason, dialogue, and accommodation." (6)

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(4) Radio Warsaw, 26 March 1981.

(5) Bernard Margueritte in Le Figaro, 27 March 1981.

(6) Radio Warsaw, 26 March 1981.

Another element that had an important, and increasingly significant, role in the evolution of the situation was the pressure from local party bodies for a speedy resolution of the conflict. Indeed, there were numerous reports from Warsaw that the party leadership had been inundated by letters and appeals from local bodies of the communist organization with calls for a speedy resolution of the conflict. It was said that those appeals demanded the immediate clarification of the Bydgoszcz incident, the punishment of those guilty of the violence, and the settlement of the conflict with Solidarity. In some cases, Western press reporters indicated that local party committees, particularly in large industrial centers, had called upon the party's authorities to ensure that "the next plenum of the Central Committee eliminate from the leadership of the party those individuals, who are responsible for the worsening of the situation in the country."

### The Warning Strike

The atmosphere of mounting crisis was further dramatized by widespread warning strikes that paralyzed the operations of Poland's economy on March 27, disrupting work in numerous industrial centers throughout the country. It is still difficult to assess precisely the magnitude of the strikes, but media reports made clear that no major segment of the Polish industrial work force was left unaffected by the action. (8) The strikes were decided upon during a meeting of Solidarity's National Coordinating Commission held in Bydgoszcz on March 23 and 24. Their duration was then set at two to four hours so as to minimize the economic damage while providing a warning to the authorities that the workers' organization remained determined to defend the interests of its members and sympathizers.

The country emerged from the warning strikes without any incidents. While the strikes reportedly affected most factories and plants throughout the country, the situation in the aftermath of the strikes remained "tense but calm." (9) Above all, the strikes provided vivid testimony of the failure to resolve the conflict between the authorities and the labor unions through formal negotiations. This point could hardly have been lost on the party and government leaders as they must have considered the real possibility of further workers' moves, unless some form of agreement were reached soon. After all, they were fully aware that Solidarity's leadership had decided on March 24 to call upon the unions' members to stage a general strike on March 31 unless the authorities agreed to come to terms with the workers' organization. Needless to say, such action could have plunged the country even deeper into social and political crisis.

(7) Jacques Dimet in L'Humanité, 26 March 1981, and Christopher Bobinski in the Financial Times, 25 March 1981.

(8) PAP (various reports), 27 March 1981.

(9) Radio Warsaw, 27 March 1981.



New Round of Talks

Following the warning strikes, representatives of the Polish government and the Solidarity labor unions met again on March 27 and 28 in Warsaw for talks on finding ways to resolve the current crisis in relations between the authorities and the workers' organization. Both sessions were taken up by an examination of a special government report on the Bydgoszcz incident. The report was prepared by a team of experts led by Minister of Justice Jerzy Bafia. The work was reported to have been completed by March 26, but the delivery of the report to the negotiators was held up for one day when Prime Minister Wojciech Jaruzelski asked for additional information to be included in the final text.

In its complete version, the report contained a relatively comprehensive analysis of the events. (10) That much was plainly admitted by the head of Solidarity's delegation to the talks, Lech Walesa, who also told the Polish journalists that "no time had been wasted" in its preparation. (11) The one immediately raised concern of Solidarity's delegates about the report was that it seemed too general in its description of the violence and it did not list any of the names of those responsible. (12) This charge was implicitly confirmed by the leader of the government's negotiating team, Mieczyslaw F. Rakowski, who said that the report "contains some details, but it mainly concentrates on certain generalities." (13)

Both Walesa and Rakowski appeared optimistic, however, on the prospect of an eventual settlement of their differences. During a short joint interview on the Polish radio, Walesa stated that "we have to come to some resolutions; we hope that those resolutions will be constructive." Rakowski seconded that view by expressing the conviction "that we have to do everything possible to arrive at an agreement that would bring back peace to the country and eliminate the current serious conflict." (14) That interview was conducted immediately following the adjournment of the session on March 27. It appeared to have concerned primarily the issues arising from the government's report on the Bydgoszcz events.

Yet, if one could they speculate that the problems related to the violent incident in Bydgoszcz would be settled through a mutually acceptable solution, other issues in the conflict still seemed largely unresolved. Above all, there was no indication that the authorities were prepared to accept the unions' demand

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(10) The text of the report, as well as Solidarity's remarks on its context, were published in Trybuna Ludu, 30 March 1981.

(11) Ibid., 28 March 1981.

(12) This is a statement by Andrzej Gwiazda, a Solidarity delegate, as quoted by John Darnton in The New York Times, 28 March 1981.

(13) Trybuna Ludu, 28 March 1981.

(14) Radio Warsaw, 28 March 1981.

for formal recognition of the peasants' autonomous organization. This demand, however, constituted one of the key elements of the workers' negotiating position.

There has never been any doubt about the political sensitivity of the peasant question. Repeated appeals by the peasants for the official acceptance of their organization have long been supported by various social groups and institutions, including the Catholic Church. They have been ignored and implicitly rejected by the party's leadership, which has firmly insisted on the preservation of the existing institutional structures in the countryside, merely allowing for the need to streamline their operations.

Against this background, it was increasingly clear that the most important decisions on the ways to solve the conflicts in the country's public life would have to be taken not so much during the negotiating sessions between the government and Solidarity as at the meeting of the party's Central Committee. This meeting was scheduled to take place on March 29.

#### Pressures from Outside

Aside from purely domestic political considerations, the discussion at the meeting was expected to be affected by intensified pressures from outside the country to "normalize" Poland's politics and its public life. Evidence of such pressures was provided through repeated attacks by the East European media, particularly that of Czechoslovakia and the German Democratic Republic, against the alleged symptoms of internal disorder, anarchy, and anti-socialist agitation in Poland. Those allegations were then reprinted and implicitly endorsed by the Soviet media, which from time to time have added their own condemnations of alleged antisocialist tendencies in Poland. Recently the Soviet press has adopted an even more direct and explicitly critical position on the developments in Poland. Following the warning strike by the Polish workers on March 27, the Soviet press agency TASS openly accused Solidarity of adopting a political stand, pointedly observing that "what attracts attention is the fact that the present strike was organized by Solidarity to bring political pressure on the government so as to make it accept demands of an antisocialist, antipeople nature." (15) The TASS report went on to charge the leaders of Solidarity with "having again shown their true colors as political instigators who are blocking the country's way out of the grave socioeconomic crisis." Similar accusations have also been made by the press media in other East European communist countries.

Another sign of the growing pressure on Poland by its communist allies was a series of recently held meetings of the Central Committees of the Czechoslovak, Hungarian, and Romanian parties. There is little doubt that the situation in Poland was the major subject of discussion during those gatherings. More important

(15) TASS, 27 March 1981.



still, it certainly did not escape the attention of many observers that only the Romanian party clearly expressed its support for the "surmounting of hardships by the Communists, the working class, and the Polish people without any outside interference." (16) The Hungarian CC said that it is "following with concern the complicated and difficult situation created in Poland, which is threatening the achievements of the Polish people, and the basic institutions of the socialist system." (17) The recent tone of the Czechoslovak press left little doubt as to the position of its party's leadership.

And then there was, of course, the issue of the continuing military maneuvers of the Warsaw Pact armies, particularly those of Poland, the Soviet Union, Czechoslovakia, and the German Democratic Republic. The maneuvers started on March 17.

Detailed reports of the exercises were constant fare in Polish television and radio broadcasting, taking also a considerable share of daily press reporting. There was no evidence that the maneuvers had influenced political developments in the country, but it would certainly be a mistake to assume that the population was left immune to their potential psychological effects.

It was thus clear that the Central Committee members' meeting on March 29 would be exposed to a true crosscurrent of pressures from both domestic and foreign sources. It was also clear that their decisions would have a profound impact upon the future evolution of social and political relations and perhaps could determine the final direction the country and society would pursue.

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(16) Agerpres in English, 27 March 1981.

(17) Radio Budapest, 27 March 1981.