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**GOVERNMENT AND UNIONS REACH AGREEMENT BUT PROBLEMS REMAIN**

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Summary: On March 30 the Polish government and Solidarity reached an agreement on settling their immediate differences, thus neutralizing a major political conflict in the country's public life. This paper provides a summary of the key points in that agreement. It draws attention, however, to the apparent dissatisfaction of the unions' leaders with the content of the agreement. Indeed, Solidarity remains determined to enter into another round of negotiations with the authorities in order to secure for itself a firm foundation for dealing with the government in the future. The agreement with the government prompted considerable dissension within Solidarity's leadership against the way its representatives conducted talks with the authorities. This paper is the last part of a series on the March political crisis in Poland.

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A general strike of indefinite duration, which was scheduled to start on March 31 in Poland, was suspended at the last moment. This decision was taken by representatives of Solidarity's national leadership in the evening of March 30, following the conclusion of talks between the workers' organization and the government. The strike had been set by Solidarity's National Coordinating Commission during its meeting in Bydgoszcz on March 24 to pressure the authorities to come to terms with the labor movement. On March 31 Solidarity's national leadership canceled the strike, thus removing a major threat to the existing political system.

**The Agreement**

The agreement consists of five separate sections, which correspond roughly to the initial demands made by the workers' negotiators. The first section deals with matters related to the Bydgoszcz incident of March 19, when the police used violence to evict a group of Solidarity activists from the building of the local people's council. The government fully admitted that the police action "was clearly against the rule of solving all conflicts

through political means." (1) It apologized for the beating of the unions' representatives, ordered an investigation of the incident, and undertook to "try to punish" the individuals responsible for the violence. Furthermore, the government announced that "all special police units were withdrawn from the city of Bydgoszcz and the surrounding areas." For its part, Solidarity accepted the government's argument that the police intervention might have been "partially justified by the climate of tension prevailing in Bydgoszcz as the result of the peasants' occupation of the United Peasants' Party's building as well as the activities of [the unions' local branch]." The labor organization, moreover, accepted the government's demand "to refrain from any actions such as occupying public buildings that could undermine internal peace in the country."

The second section concerns official "guarantees for the [unhampered] activity of the labor unions." Here, the government undertook to "speed up work on the formulation of a new law on trade unions" so its final draft could be presented to the Sejm before the end of April. In the meantime, both the government and Solidarity agreed that in their relations they would adhere to the principles behind the draft that had already been prepared by the legislative commission charged with the task of completing the proposed legislation. No details on those principles were provided in yesterday's agreement, although the text specified that they related to the "ways of solving disputes and the problems of payment of wages for the striking workers."

In the third section, both sides undertook "to do everything to eliminate the possibility of conflicts over the issue of peasant self-organization." They accepted a proposal to set up a special Sejm commission, to be headed by the well-known sociologist Jan Szczepanski, "to study the problem of self-organization by individual farmers." At the same time, the government declared that "until the matter of union rights of private farmers is resolved, it will not question the legality of actions connected with the matter." In addition, the government agreed to send a special team of experts to negotiate with the peasants who still occupied the United Peasants' Party building in Bydgoszcz and guaranteed that the participants in that occupation would not be punished.

In the fourth section, the government promised that the issue of "free expression in public and professional life," a euphemism used to describe the problem of dissent in Poland, would be taken up by a special Sejm commission. Furthermore, both sides undertook to set up within the first 10 days of April a common group of experts to prepare proposals for the commission's deliberations.

Finally, in the fifth section, the government proposed that after the appeasement of the current conflict both sides "start new negotiations on the general scope of relations [between the unions and the authorities] so future possible conflicts could be resolved without arousing the entire nation." The government also pledged to pay full wages to those workers and employees who had taken part in the warning strike on March 27, provided that the general

(1) The text of the agreement was broadcast by Radio Warsaw (30 March 1981) and published in Trybuna Ludu (31 March 1981).

strike was called off. For its part, Solidarity declared that "a speedy fulfillment by the government of its earlier promises would create the conditions for the unification of the entire society, which constitutes an indispensable requirement for pulling the country out of its current social and economic crisis."

When seen against the background of the warnings and demands made during the last week or so by both government officials and the workers' organization, the agreement marks a clear compromise between their positions. That much has been confirmed by Lech Walesa, the chairman of the Solidarity delegation, who told press correspondents after the conclusion of the talks that the agreement reflected about 70 % of the unions' aspirations. (2) He appeared particularly concerned about the lack of precision in some of the formulations, the vagueness of some of the general provisions, and the possibility that those provisions could be seen and interpreted in different ways by different people and bodies. Walesa also remarked that while Solidarity's main objective was still to become a fully institutionalized labor organization, "there is a need for the emergence of other bodies" capable of dealing with problems outside the scope of interests and preoccupations of the trade union organization itself.

This reminder of the need for a greater pluralization of the country's public life goes, of course, to the very heart of Poland's social and political problems. It is clear, however, that Solidarity cannot resolve them by itself. Instead, the issue of pluralization would have to be approached by many other groups and above all would have to be faced by the communist party and its leadership.

#### The Doubts Persist

On March 31 the National Coordinating Commission of the Solidarity labor movement decided to cancel a nationwide general strike in Poland. This decision formally ratified the decision to suspend the strike, which had been made by representatives of Solidarity's leadership on March 30. There were 25 votes in favor of canceling the strike, 4 opposed, and 6 abstentions.

If nothing else, the result of the vote was indicative of the disparity of views within the unions' leadership on the scope and meaning of the agreement reached with the government. The apparent dissatisfaction with the outcome of the talks was confirmed by a radio report from the meeting, a report that made it clear that "a majority of [the commission members] asserted that Solidarity could not be fully satisfied with the results of the agreement with the government, because not all the unions' demands had been fulfilled." (3) In particular, most members of the commission deemed as unsatisfactory the agreement's solution, or the lack thereof, of such issues as the institutionalization of the peasants' unions, a final resolution of the Bydgoszcz incident, the operation of the censorship system, and Solidarity's access to the mass media.

(2) Radio Warsaw, 30 March 1981.

(3) Ibid., 1 April 1981.



Many members of the commission were reported to have said that in view of those deficiencies, the acceptance of the agreement could have only reflected the unions' realization "of the difficult economic situation in our country as well as of society's growing fatigue with the long-lasting feeling of uncertainty." At the same time, there were indications that Solidarity remained determined "to press for the acceptance by the authorities of all of its fundamental demands."

The session produced a long and spirited debate. According to press reports, it provided an opportunity for airing differing views on the relations between the labor movement and the authorities as well as the tactics used by the unions' leaders in dealing with the government. At the heart of the debate was, of course, the issue of the agreement concluded on March 30. Many delegates reportedly complained that the agreement was little more than a collection of general and vague statements, with no firm guarantees that lasting changes in the institutional position of the labor movement within the system would follow. "The agreement is like water after you put it through a strainer," one delegate was reported to have said. (4) That much was also admitted indirectly by Bogdan Lis, one of the most popular leaders from Gdansk, who had suggested in an interview with Polish radio that "the agreement should be regarded as preliminary . . . possibly to be renegotiated later on." (5)

The scope of the agreement was defended by the members of the negotiating team, with one, Giedymin Jablonski, affirming that "it was the best agreement that could have been achieved in the time available." (6) There was no evidence, however, that Jablonski's opinion received significant support from the delegates.

#### Dissension in Solidarity's Leadership

Indeed, it has been reported that some of the participants in the debate sharply criticized the manner in which the representatives of Solidarity had conducted the talks with the government. They apparently suspected that the Solidarity team might have reached some understandings with the government officials for the sake of expediency in defusing the tense situation in the country rather than in defense of the unions' interests. Those sentiments were only fueled by several messages from separate Solidarity branches and individual activists critical of the negotiators' performance. There was, for example, a letter from the Mazowsze (Warsaw) branch of the workers' organization alleging that the negotiating team had failed to report to the government on the conduct of talks and demanding that the full protocol from the negotiations be made available to all local units. (7) There was also a letter from Jan Rulewski, a member of the National Coordinating Commission who had been seriously injured by the police in the Bydgoszcz incident.

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(4) AP, 31 March 1981.

(5) Radio Warsaw, 31 March 1981.

(6) Reuter, 31 March 1981.

(7) Dpa, 31 March 1981.

He charged that the unions "did not gain anything" from the agreement and specifically accused Lech Walesa, the head of the Solidarity delegation, of "making some bungling decisions." (8)

Such accusations were refuted by the members of the Solidarity delegation. Jablonski purportedly ~~assured~~ the meeting that "no other agreement with the government except what was reported in the official communiqué" had been reached. (9) Walesa himself was said to have remarked that "we have to stop the bickering and sort out and analyze the agreements." (10)

It is obvious, however, that suspicions and doubts expressed by the members of the commission would not easily disappear. They are indicative, above all, of the distrust still existing among the union's officials and Solidarity's rank and file of the government and its intentions. This distrust is, of course, well founded. After seven months of existence and more than four months since its formal recognition as part of the institutional system, no lasting place has been provided by the authorities for the workers' organization in the operations of the political system; nor have the authorities' promises to the unions been fulfilled, promises that would provide the unions with access to the mass media, guarantee security for their activists and members, and legally ensure the freedom of their operations. Increasingly frustrated by the authorities' lack of action and alarmed by the recent instances of officially sanctioned violence against some Solidarity members, the unions' activists appear more determined than ever to ensure that none of their achievements be lost and all of them be formally recognized and accepted.

The attacks on and criticism of some labor leaders, particularly Lech Walesa, can also be understood. The new workers' organization, which was founded on explicitly democratic principles and was perceived by many as an embodiment of the populist dreams within the large sectors of the working population, has always been seen by its members and activists as the only element in Poland in which decisions are made openly and approved by all. This explains the sensitivity of Solidarity's activists to the possible dangers of internal centralization and bureaucratization. It also explains their apprehension about the increasingly important role played by Lech Walesa himself in the operations of the movement. Because he is seen by the public as the personification of the movement and its achievements, some of his associates in the commission appear to be increasingly concerned about the possibility that any momentary weakness on Walesa's part could damage the interests of the entire organization.

Those fears were clearly magnified when Walesa, without any previous consultation with the local branches or even the members of the National Coordinating Commission, made a decision to suspend the general strike. This was admitted by Bogdan Lis, who said that this lack of consultation had contributed to "internal tension" in

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(8) Reuter, 31 March 1981.

(9) Ibid.

(10) Radio Warsaw, 1 April 1981.



the Solidarity leadership. (11) The existence of tension was subsequently demonstrated through a public release on April 9 of an "open letter to Lech Walesa" from Andrzej Gwiazda, in which the Deputy Chairman of Solidarity's National Coordinating Commission called for internal democracy within the workers' organization and "the right for each union member to criticize the leadership." (12) Walesa responded with an "open letter" of his own, in which he defended his role as Solidarity's leader, and called for speedy elections to the unions' leadership so "our union will be headed by people enjoying the confidence of workers and having a sense of responsibility toward those who elected them." (13)

Another indication of the existing ferment within the commission, largely caused by strong disappointment with the result of the recent talks with the government, was the resignation of Solidarity's main press spokesman. The spokesman, Karol Modzelewski from Wroclaw, submitted his resignation as a result of apparent incompatibility between "his own views and those taken by the commission." (14) No details on what had been the source of that incompatibility were provided. Modzelewski remained a member of the commission itself. The position of Solidarity press spokesman was subsequently taken over by Janusz Onyszkiewicz from the Warsaw (Mazowsze) branch of the union.

In related development, several Western press agencies have reported an apparent attempt by the local chapter of Solidarity in the Gdansk shipyard to dismiss the well-known labor activist Anna Walentynowicz from its executive presidium. Nothing is known yet about the reasons for that action, although some reports implied that a few workers in the Gdansk shipyard "accused Walentynowicz of trying to undermine the authority of Lech Walesa [the chairman of the Gdansk branch]." (15) It is difficult to ascertain whether that attempt could be related to the discussion at the commission's meeting. It is clear, however, that Walesa himself was not involved in the incident. Indeed, he was reported to have rushed from the NCC's session to meet with the Gdansk activists and prevent the implementation of their decision. Anna Walentynowicz has been one of the most popular, but also outspoken, labor activists in Poland. It was the dismissal of Walentynowicz from her job as a crane operator in the Gdansk shipyard that sparked the outbreak of massive strikes in August 1980. Ever since, she has been deeply involved in Solidarity's activities in Gdansk as well as in propagating the organization's work through numerous appearances throughout the entire country.

All those developments have been indicative of political divisiveness within the organization. There has never been any doubt that there are different tendencies dividing Solidarity. One could argue that there is a group of more radically inclined activists in the union movement, who would like to speed up the process of change in the system to ensure the full and unconstrained operation of the

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(11) Ibid., 31 March 1981.

(12) UPI, 9 April 1981.

(13) Glos Pracy, 13 April 1981.

(14) AP and Reuter, 1 April 1981; and AFP, 2 April 1981.

(15) AFP, 1 April 1981; and UPI, 2 April 1981.