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Gomulka's Speech

With all the trappings of power, surrounded by all the members of the Politburo and CC Secretariat, as well as by the top representatives of the "allied" parties (United Peasant Party and the Democratic Party), First Party Secretary Wladyslaw Gomulka delivered a major speech in the Warsaw Palace of Culture and Sciences on March 19. It started at 1800 hrs and lasted for more than two hours. According to Radio Warsaw and TV coverage, the speech was delivered during a "meeting" Gomulka held with the "social and political activ of the capital," numbering "close to 3,000 persons," i.e. the full capacity of the congress hall of the Palace. Considering this restriction, one can take for granted that the audience was well selected in advance, which of course did not prevent "various milieus" from being represented, including university professors, "numerous representatives of the youth," and -- last but not least -- "many members of the Citizens' Militia Voluntary Reserve who distinguished themselves by their stand during the difficult days in Warsaw." Some of the posters displayed in the hall read: "In Thee We Trust, Wieslaw!" or "He Who Is For Poland Is For Gomulka!" A four minute chanting of WIE-SLAW, applause, and "Sto lat!" (the Polish "For he is a jolly good fellow") prevented Gomulka from starting his speech.

All this suggested that here was the Number One, the only source of power and authority, who would pass his own judgement and issue his own orders. True enough, Gomulka often used such terms as "our Party" or "we" (meaning the Party), he also (at the end of his speech), "on behalf of the leadership of the Party," greeted "the working class, the intelligentsia, the working and academic youth, the Citizens' Militia, the Polish Army," etc., but there was an unmistakable impression that the speech he delivered was his own, the speech of Gomulka. Yet a different interpretation was

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offered the next day. On March 20, Radio Warsaw reported on a meeting in Warsaw of the "leading Party activ of the Armed Forces of the Polish People's Republic with Politburo member, Defense Minister Marshal Marian Spychalski." The activ, Radio Warsaw continued, expressed "full solidarity of the soldiers of the Polish Army with the report of the Politburo of the CC of the Party delivered during the meeting of the Party activ of the capital by the First Secretary of the CC, Comrade Wladyslaw Gomulka" (emphasis supplied).

While it is self-evident, a matter of routine, that the Party leader speaks on behalf of a top body (the Politburo or Presidium), Spychalski's characterization is significant. While he is known to be totally loyal to Gomulka, it should not be forgotten that he was under attack of "anti-Zionist" Party factions during and after the Israeli-Arab war and that Kazimierz Mijal (the leader of the pro-Chinese "CP of Poland," living in exile) accused him over Radio Tirana of being a "tool of Zionists" (cf. Polish Situation Report, Radio Free Europe Research, 16 October 1967). As a "Politburo report," Gomulka's speech would have greater authority and automatically be binding on all other Party leaders.

Another Politburo member, Edward Gierek, was also involved in a series of still unexplained incidents connected with his earlier speech (cf. Polish SR/20, RFER, March 18) as well as Gomulka's speech. Gierek's Katowice speech was apparently doctored after delivery. The Radio Warsaw version (good reception) did not contain an important passage which later appeared in the printed version of Trybuna Ludu and of the Katowice Trybuna Robotnicza. The passage read: "These Zambrowskis, Staszewskis, Slonimskis and company, people of the kind of Kisielewski, Jasienica, and others..." This insertion is the more significant as Gomulka, in his speech of March 19, did not mention the names of two former outstanding Party leaders, Stefan Staszewski and Roman Zambrowski. What is more, Gomulka warned specifically: "Before any kind of allegation against anybody is raised publicly it must be previously checked with appropriate Party bodies. We shall not go easy with the guilty ones but we should defend the innocent." The second incident involving Gierek was the chanting of his name, along with that of Wieslaw by the participants of the Warsaw rally. According to Western correspondents, it was "WIE-SLAW -- GIE-REK." Zycie Warszawy explained on March 20 that this stressed the unity of Silesia with Warsaw. Considering the persistence of rumors about changes in the top Party leadership and reports of infighting among Party factions, all preceding the recent tumultuous events, one must examine that "unity." In this context, it should not be forgotten that a large portion of Gierek's speech was devoted to boasting about the importance of Silesia to Poland in general and to Warsaw in particular.

There were other unexpected developments during Gomulka's speech. When he first passed to the issue of Zionism, wild shouts from the audience repeatedly prevented him from speaking. He had to plead for calm and "attentive listening to what will be said on this issue from this platform," but it was not immediately effective; the reaction of the audience to the very mention by Gomulka of the word "Jew" was reminiscent of Nazi anti-Semitic rallies. The explanation

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of this reaction may be found in the violent, officially anti-Zionist but unmistakably anti-Semitic campaign conducted by the official press, radio and television, playing on the latent anti-Semitism of a segment of the population. In addition, the anti-Semitic hard-line (or Partisan) faction, many members from which from the middle and lower Party activ must have been present in the hall, might have heavily contributed to the uproar.

Contrary to this reaction, Gomulka was relatively moderate on the issue. He divided the Jews into three categories: Zionists who should leave Poland if they so wish; cosmopolitans who do not feel either Jewish or Polish, whose feelings one cannot help and who may stay in Poland if they wish, but should "avoid the fields of work in which national affirmation is a necessity;" and the third, "the most numerous group of our citizens of Jewish origin, who are imbedded in the soil on which they were born with all the roots and to whom Poland is the only fatherland." Gomulka admitted that the slogan of the fight against Zionism had been misunderstood and confused, and explained that the Party will oppose any phenomena which bear traces of anti-Semitism "with full determination." The Party is against Zionism, i.e. against Jewish nationalism, but it is also against anti-Semitism. "Zionism and anti-Semitism are two sides of the same nationalistic medal," he concluded.

For the first time since the intellectual turmoil started over the closure of Dziady, extensive details and a chronology of events (up to March 15) were revealed by Gomulka. The apparent purpose of this long presentation was to show the alleged conspiracy of "a tiny group of reactionary, anti-Soviet individuals;" the dividing line, he stated, is not between the "workers as a class and students as a whole;" the dividing line goes "between socialism and reaction of all shades."

Gomulka's most vicious attack against the representatives of this "reaction" was directed at a number of writers and university professors, several of whom he listed by names. He singled out for particular attention two writers: Pawel Jasienica, former anti-Communist resistance member, against whom an investigation was quashed on 3 May 1949 "for reasons which are known to him," and Stefan Kisielewski, the "Brightly Enlightened" (a malicious reference to the old Polish manner of addressing members of the aristocracy: "Jasnie Oswiecony"), who at the extraordinary meeting of the Warsaw Branch of the Polish Writers' Union used the expression "scandalous dictatorship of ignoramuses in Polish cultural life,"

Gomulka did not hesitate to boast that Poland owed much to precisely those "ignoramuses" who had based their policy on the alliance with the Soviet Union and had thus built "an unshakable fundament of the independence of our country." Had Poland followed the advices of "highly enlightened" Kisielewski, she would be doomed to dependence on "imperialist powers."

Gomulka did not say what sort of punishment would be applied to these "reactionary" individuals. He said, however, that the CC will have to make a thorough analysis of the "shortcomings" of the political and educational work of the Party, particularly among the youth, devoting "particular attention" to the stand and activity of the teaching staff in the schools of higher learning. In this last context, Gomulka referred to a group of "politicos" among the university staff, who "bear particular responsibility for the recent events" (among the names he listed in this connection were those of Wlodzimierz Brus, Leszek Kolakowski, and Zygmunt Bauman).

Against the background of the hysterical campaign preceding his speech, Gomulka sounded relatively conciliatory and paternal on some points (he promised to review students' resolutions passed at "legal" meetings) but unmistakably tough and determined to deal a final blow to what he called "reaction."

Reaction to Czechoslovak Events

Coverage of the developments in Czechoslovakia by Polish information media continues to be cautious and scarce. The issue of Antonin Novotny's fate was tackled by Radio Warsaw on March 20 at 20:00 hours; it broadcast the following news item:

"According to a Ceteka dispatch from Prague, at a session of the Industrial Committee of the National Assembly, deputy Chotar demanded that the Session of the National Assembly be urgently convoked, in order to put on the agenda the issue of a vote of confidence in the President of the State. The motion was adopted by the Committee and was passed on by it to the Presidium of the Assembly, which was already considering this problem independently of the presented motion."

(For the sake of comparison with the original CTK dispatch, see Czechoslovak SR, RFER, March 20). On the same day, Radio Warsaw briefly announced that the head of the Army Political Administration, General Pepich, arrived in Moscow on March 19. He paid a visit to Marshal Grechko, Soviet Defense Minister.

The death of General Vladimir Janko was announced by a PAP communiqué in one sentence (cf. Trybuna Ludu of March 15):

"Tragic Death of CSSR Vice-Minister of Defense.

(Prague (PAP). According to CTK, General Vladimir Janko, CSSR Vice-Minister of Defense, died tragically on Thursday afternoon."

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Poland's leading political and cultural weekly, Polityka, which was already "guilty" on previous occasions of somewhat more liberal treatment of the Czechoslovak developments (see "East European Reaction to Czechoslovak Events," RFER, March 19, pages 31 and 32), devoted in its last issue (March 16), in the column "Socialist Countries," the first three items to the events in Czechoslovakia. It reported on the Presidium of the Prague City Committee of the Communist Party demanding the convocation of the Plenum of the CC of the Party, in order to establish a uniform leadership of the political life of the country; it also reported on articles in "several Czechoslovak dailies" stressing the need for the activation of the National Front; and finally it devoted the third item to the case of General Sejna as follows:

"The Council of Ministers of the CSSR asked the Minister of National Defense and the Minister of Internal Affairs to prepare a detailed report on the case of General J. Sejna, who defected -- with a diplomatic passport in his pocket -- to the US, where he applied for asylum."

(For previous coverage of the case of General Sejna by the Polish press media, see "East European Reaction to Czechoslovak Events," RFER, March 19, page 30).

East-West Contacts

Polish Deputy Foreign Minister, Marian Naszkowski, left Warsaw on March 18 for talks in Oslo and Stockholm, the Polish News Agency PAP reported on the same day.

Poland is represented at the International University Drama Festival in Parma, Italy, an RFE Special from Rome reported on March 18.

The Hino Motor Company, a Japanese motor vehicle manufacturer, will send its managing director to Poland shortly for a two-week visit to step up the current car plant export talks with the Polish Government, Reuter reported from Tokyo on March 18.

Poland is interested in a 50 million dollar plant for manufacturing heavy duty trucks and buses.

A group of specialists from the Swedish firm "Johnson" arrived in Poland at the invitation of the Polish firm "Centromor," Radio Warsaw reported on March 20. According to the same source, another Swedish group of trade specialists arrived in Warsaw on March 18.

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The Polish short-film "Laterna Magica" won the first prize of the Ninth International Film Festival in Mardel Plata, Argentina, Radio Warsaw reported on March 20.