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S I T U A T I O N R E P O R T

* Katowice, Poznan, and Gdansk Party Secretaries' Speeches

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Edward Gierek, Politburo member and First Party Secretary of the Katowice voivodship, delivered a speech, on March 14, at what Radio Warsaw called a "big manifestation of the Communists of Katowice and of the coal basin." Over 100 thousand "inhabitants of Silesia and of the Basin" took part in the manifestation. Trybuna Robotnicza (March 15), the Katowice Party daily, reported instead that it was a "meeting of over 100 thousand Party members of Katowice and of the towns of the coal basin with the Executive of the Voivodship Committee" (emphasis supplied). Trybuna Robotnicza further reported that these Party members were taking part in the rally to manifest -- "on behalf of all the working people, of all the society of the industrialized Katowice voivodship" -- their full support for the PUWP and its CC "headed by Comrade Wladyslaw Gomulka."

These semantical points were also reflected in the opening paragraph of Gierek's speech, in which he greeted the participants of this "meeting of Communists" as representatives of the "powerful 270 thousand-strong Party organization, and also as representatives of the nearly four million inhabitants of Silesia and the Basin." (The coal basin is composed of Silesia and Dabrowa Gornicza Basin, in the past two competing social and economic units, hence the careful distinction.)

While, on the face of it, Gierek's speech contained several assurances of loyalty to the Party and to "Comrade Wieslaw" (Gomulka's underground pseudonym), he did not miss a unique opportunity to stress the importance of Silesia -- inter

18 March 1968

alia, to Gomulka himself. Thus he stressed that in the immediate post-war period it was Silesia and the Basin which demonstrated "unusual sacrifice and readiness to help the motherland," and that it was exactly the industrial capital of Silesia and the Basin, "saved [from destruction] by the brotherly Soviet Army," that had become "an invaluable treasure for the devastated country." It was Silesia, Gierek continued, which supplied coal and building material, as well as expert workers for the reconstruction of Warsaw. True enough, Gierek admitted, the Silesians love their province but this love does not weaken their love to the capital, to Warsaw.

Gierek devoted a large part of his speech to describing the present economic significance of Silesia for the whole of Poland. "One may feel that this is bragging. No, comrades, we are not from the category of people who cock our noses, bragging is not part of the character of a Communist," Gierek stated. This may be interpreted as a response to Gomulka's warning of three years ago not to become "dizzy with success" (cf. Polish Situation Report, Radio Free Europe Research, 1 February 1965).

Only after stressing the power he represents did Gierek pass on to the events in Warsaw, which he blamed on the "relatively small group of trouble makers and political adventurers." In his analysis of the causes of the riots he followed one made earlier by the press, repeating all the accusations (including names) against the "ringleaders" of the "conspiracy." He further blamed "all sorts of revisionists" for bringing about "many economic difficulties which we had to overcome in the last few years." These "revisionists," Gierek continued, "would like to see Poland capitalistic." (The question arises whether this passage contains criticism of theoretical revisionists, including university professors, or whether Gierek meant some of his Politburo colleagues or central planners, with whom he is known to have been feuding in the past over the allotment of investments for Silesia.)

Gierek revealed that his Militia stopped (on this very day of March 14) a car bringing from Warsaw a group of students who wanted to "stir the silent Silesian waters." In this connection, he warned "different relics of the old system, revisionists, Zionists, servants of imperialism," that "Silesian waters never were and never will be water for their mills. If some try to turn back the main stream of our life from the road that was chosen by the nation then this Silesian water will break their bones..." He also threatened -- as Premier Jozef Cyraniwicz did after the June 1956 riots in Poznan -- "to cut off the arm raised against our beloved motherland."

18 March 1968

Gierek's pledge did not wait long for a test. Next day, on March 15, his police had to use water hoses and clubs "against crowds demonstrating angrily in the center of Katowice," Hugh McIlvanney, an eyewitness of the event, reported for the London Observer (March 16). McIlvanney did not say whether any bones were broken, but he reported that the police meant business and managed to disperse the demonstration, in which about 10,000 people took part (In the meantime, the Katowice riots were confirmed by other agency reports from Warsaw, basing their stories on eyewitnesses' accounts.)

It remains an open question whether Gierek was acting as a spokesman for the Politburo on March 14, or whether his remarks should be considered an autonomous move. The latter interpretation seems, at this point, to be more likely; this suggestion has found at least some confirmation in Radio Warsaw reports on the speech on March 15 and 16. In the reports of these dates references to Gierek's Politburo membership were omitted, a rather unique procedure. Furthermore, it should also be kept in mind that "Silesia's acceptable economic results" (which Gierek did not fail to stress) contribute to a "consolidation of his reputation as a man who is the opposite of the incompetent central authorities" (cf. Antoni Marek, "Edward Gierek -- Opinions and Facts," Radio Free Europe Research, 3 April 1967). But if Gierek can be counted on to continue to play a major role in a post-Gomulka succession struggle (which may now be underway under Gomulka's nominal leadership), he had disappointed any hopes that, as an economic "rationalizer," he might have become a focus of efforts to oppose the present regime campaign, carried on in Gomulka's name, against former "liberal" Communist leaders, "Zionists," and intellectuals.

Two days after Gierek's "expose," Jan Szydlak and Stanislaw Kociolek, First Party Secretaries of the Poznan and Gdansk voivodships respectively, delivered their speeches condemning the "ringleaders" of the students' demonstrations and supporting the Party CC and "its First Secretary Wladyslaw Gomulka." Szydlak, known to be a "Gierek man," said: "Like the Communists of Silesia, we declare: he who aims against Poland aims against socialism and he who aims against socialism aims against the independent life of the whole nation."

The Poznan meeting took place on one of Poznan's squares. According to Radio Warsaw (March 16), "many thousands of Party members of Poznan and the Party activ from the whole voivodship" took part in the meeting. Western agencies reported that "only about 10,000 people were on hand despite workers being trucked from outlying districts" (UPI, March 16). These sources also reported that during the meeting the Poznan students were "bottled up" by the police in the dormitory area of their university, apparently lest they mingle with the crowd and "disturb" the orderly meeting of the Communists.

Kociolek spoke in Gdansk (not in an open square but in the shipyards) to the "workers' activ" (Radio Warsaw, March 16). His speech followed the lines of the official press campaign. Like Gierek and Szydlak, Kociolek cited a list of names of the "trouble makers" and

18 March 1968

"ringleaders." It is rather significant that these speakers, as well as the press, singled out for particular attention two names of former politicians who are believed to have lost any political influence: Stefan Staszewski and Roman Zambrowski (according to the latest reports from Warsaw, Zambrowski, former Politburo member, has been expelled from the Party). Staszewski was First Secretary of the Metropolitan Party Committee in 1956 and it was he who introduced Gomulka to the "people of Warsaw" when he returned to power in October 1956. It seems to be the aim of the present campaign to oust from their jobs such formerly influential politicians and, at the same time, to compromise any members of the top leadership who might oppose -- or refuse to endorse fully -- the present anti-"Zionist" and anti-intellectual campaign.

Note: The Congress of the Polish Journalists' Association and the situation in Poland's schools of higher learning, as well as mounting support for the students' cause, will be dealt with in tomorrow's Situation Report.