

RADIO FREE EUROPE *Research*

RAD Background Report/346
(Poland)
22 December 1981

POLISH PARTY CALLS FOR SPECIAL POWERS FOR GOVERNMENT (1)

By J. B. de Weydenthal

Summary: The Polish party's Central Committee called for contingency legislation providing the government with extraordinary powers to deal with social and economic problems. This call came at the conclusion of a committee session held on November 27 and 28, after the participants in the meeting had heard official reports that both economic conditions and the situation in the party were rapidly deteriorating. This paper contains summaries of the reports as well as of the declaration on extraordinary powers.

+ + +

The Central Committee of the PUWP met on November 27 and 28 to discuss "the tasks faced by the party in its efforts to overcome the crisis and to implement economic reforms as well as in the work on the introduction of the 1982 socioeconomic plan." (2) Although the program for the meeting appeared to have been heavily weighted on the side of economics, the main emphasis of the discussions was on political matters, particularly on the issue of the so-called "front of national accord."

Problem of National Accord

It has been obvious for some time that no changes or improvements can be introduced in the country's economic and administrative system unless they are accepted by the population and approved by various public organizations. To create the institutional basis for such approval, the party leadership has proposed the establishment of a "front of national accord," an umbrella coalition of numerous existing and recognized bodies, such as political parties, labor unions, professional associations, and the Catholic Church. The conceptual foundation upon which that front would operate, party spokesmen have argued, would be the acceptance by all participants of the

- (1) This paper was written before the announcement of a state of emergency in Poland and has not been amended accordingly.
- (2) Radio Warsaw, 26 November 1981.

socialist system in Poland as well as the constitution. In practical terms this would guarantee that the communist party, which claims to embody socialist ideology and is formally recognized by the constitution as the "leading" political force, preserved a dominant position in relation to other participants in the front.

The party's concept of the front has met with neither uniform nor enthusiastic approval from the public. Although the idea has been embraced by the United Peasant Party and the Democratic Party, the two political organizations that have traditionally supported the PUPP, and has been fully accepted by minor labor unions and some social associations, serious misgivings have been expressed by others. Some Catholic groups, for example Pax, have called for the establishment of a true coalition government, claiming that nothing short of a sweeping change in the means and methods of government, something that does not appear to have been envisaged in the concept of the front, would provide grounds for improvement. (3) Solidarity, the largest social organization in the country and the only institutionalized movement that enjoys explicit support from all sectors of the public, has proposed the creation of a separate body, the Social Council for the Economy, which would act independently of the government in ensuring that economic policies could be accepted by the population. Furthermore, Solidarity has proposed that basic methods of government, particularly in the area of elections to policy-making bodies, be changed so that the public would acquire new opportunities to participate in politics. The Church has not expressed any clearly discernible opinion on the front. Its direct participation in such an institution is not regarded as likely since the Church has always described its role in public life in moral and spiritual rather than political terms.

Even so, the Church's leadership, the episcopate, meeting on November 26, the day before the CC plenum, declared that there was an urgent need for some form of national accord on crucial issues of Poland's public life:

Such a national accord should be achieved through both the specific solution of separate problems and the establishment of new and indispensable structures that would make it possible to concentrate the efforts of all citizens /on improving the situation/ and would ensure that mistakes would not be repeated in the future. (4)

There is little doubt that both the political establishment and the population have taken note of this message.

Additional problems for the party, problems that have undermined the prospects of eventual public acceptance of the front even more, emerged when it became clear that membership in that institution would be open to many organizations, even though some of them did not appear to have any major significance in politics or any discernible public

(3) See, for example, an interview with Pax's leader, Ryszard Reiff, published in Kierunki, 1 November 1981; also a declaration of the group's leadership as printed in Slowo Powszechne, 5 November 1981.

(4) Radio Warsaw, 27 November 1981.

support. Indeed, Solidarity, while supporting the idea of national accord, indicated that any such institution should consist of only those groups that command the respect and recognition of the whole of society. This, by implication, would reduce the front to representatives of the Church, if any were prepared to take part in it, and Solidarity, in addition to the party as the formal ruling organization.

Tense Situation

To complicate matters even further, the political situation in the country has deteriorated recently as new conflicts have emerged and tension has increased. Mass protests have effectively paralyzed Polish universities and colleges, most of which have joined the strike action against what is commonly perceived as the government's hesitation to adopt new educational policies. Conducted by Solidarity units at universities as well as by activists of the Independent Students' Association, the strike was prompted by a conflict at the Radom Engineering College, where a large group of students and faculty members opposed the appointment of the school president. Other protests involved teachers and students in secondary schools in Lublin; peasants demanding the implementation of earlier agreements between Rural Solidarity and the government as well as a change in official agricultural policies; and workers in Radom demanding the transfer of a newly constructed building from the police to the health service. In all those cases, negotiations have started between the protesters and the authorities. There is no sign yet, however, of any resolution of the conflicts.

A similar lack of discernible progress affected the conduct of talks between Solidarity and the government on ways of easing the country's social and economic difficulties. At the conclusion of the November 26 session, both sides were reported to have explained their views on their respective proposals for the establishment of "social" bodies to act on the economy: the government defended its concept of a "mixed commission" of all labor unions that would provide the government with advice on its policies; Solidarity argued for the need to create a "Social Council for the Economy" that would act independently of the government and evaluate the formulation and the implementation of policies. No agreement was reached and each side said that the proposal of the other seemed "vague . . . too general . . . and inconclusive." (5)

In a separate, but potentially related development, a major conflict broke out between Solidarity activists and the police in Chorzow, a large mining town in Silesia. The conflict started with an incident in which a group of Solidarity members who had been involved in putting up posters about the movement's demands was accused of manhandling a local railroad official who had tried to interfere with their work. The posters were said to have called for the official acceptance of Solidarity's demands for access to the broadcasting media. The incident prompted the intervention of the police, as a result of which several Solidarity members were said to have been beaten up (one was sent to hospital) and about 20 were detained. This, in turn, led to the declaration of a strike alert in

a number of Chorzow factories. All of the arrested Solidarity members were released on November 27. The Chorzow incident was the second time within little more than month that local Silesian Solidarity activists had clashed with the police. The first incident of that sort occurred in Katowice on October 20.

Although those conflicts might appear to be separate and localized, no one could deny that they both contributed to the increase of tension in the country and deepened the already existing gap between the authorities and the public. More immediately important, they made the elusive concept of national accord and cooperation even more difficult to attain and implement. Indeed, in the eyes of many, mere assurances and appeals for a common effort in improving the conditions of life (on November 25 alone, two members of the party's Politburo, Kazimierz Barcikowski and Hieronim Kubiak, delivered speeches in support of the front of national accord) would mean little if they were not matched with major efforts to change the realities of public life.

This seemed particularly obvious since the public is clearly aware that a policy of toughness continues to have influential proponents in the party leadership. A senior Politburo member, Stefan Olszowski, for example, warned about the possibility of "bloodshed" in case of a potential "confrontation" between the authorities and various "political reactionaries and counterrevolutionaries." (6) Olszowski's warning appeared in an interview published on the eve of the CC plenum in the party's official daily, Trybuna Ludu. Decrying the recent proliferation of strikes and protests (Olszowski mentioned strikes by peasants, students, and pupils), he alleged that they were "politically motivated" and aimed to undermine the "idea of the front of national accord."

Having defended the concept of the front, which should "embrace the representatives of all genuine political and social forces," and having stressed that the party "attaches great importance to that idea," Olszowski charged that its opponents were "recruited from groups that remain hostile to socialism." He went on to say that "there is an alternative to social accord: confrontation, which is desired neither by the party, nor by the state, nor by Polish society." Olszowski also said that the party would not back down from its principles and proclaimed that "let no one entertain the illusion that he is able to destroy socialism in Poland; that is simply unrealistic."

Coming on the heels of an intervention by the police to prevent the establishment of a network of discussion clubs within Solidarity (an action that apparently failed) and the mounting press propaganda campaign against some Solidarity activists, (7) Olszowski's pronouncements would seem to be an indication of a major effort by some major forces associated with the party leadership to constrain the movement's activities. Whether that effort will succeed is far from clear. Indeed, if one were to reach back to some recent examples of political tension and conflict between the two sides, the impression is that party criticism of the union tends to reinforce rather than weaken its public support.

(6) Trybuna Ludu, 26 November 1981.

(7) See J. B. de Weydenthal, "Movement of Discussion Clubs Emerges in Poland," RAD Background Report/332 (Poland), Radio Free Europe Research, 3 December 1981.

The CC Plenum

Chaired by Wojciech Jaruzelski, First Secretary of the Central Committee as well as Prime Minister, the plenum featured two major reports: one on the economy and the other on the situation in the party. They were followed by a debate, most of which was conducted in several discussion groups. The plenum concluded with the adoption of a programmatic resolution that outlined the political tasks to be undertaken by the party in the months ahead.

a. The Economic Report. Delivered on behalf of the Politburo by CC Secretary Marian Wozniak, the report provided no new information on the economic situation, merely confirming the widely recognized difficulties, such as the declining productivity in industry (by 13% compared with 1980), the continuing problems in agriculture, the shortages of consumer goods, and the growing inflation. Wozniak warned that the national income in 1981 was likely to fall by some 15% compared with 1980, an estimate that had been advanced before by several economists, and observed that the entire economic system had been severely undermined by labor troubles, black marketeering, and organizational disorder. Wozniak put the blame for the situation on social activism, in general, and on Solidarity's actions, in particular. "There is no doubt," he said that

the principal source of the prolonged and catastrophic economic crisis in Poland is, above all, the social and political struggles. Destructive criticism of the government, of each of its initiatives, serves to implement the blockade, programmed by the extremist forces within Solidarity, of all the authorities' activities . . . strike terror systematically weakens the power of the state and ruins the nation . . . there is still no possibility of implementing the government program to overcome the crisis and to stabilize the economy. (8)

Then, turning to the more immediate concerns of economic policy-making, Wozniak outlined three different versions of a proposed plan for 1982 which varied according to the levels of coal production achieved. Wozniak told the Central Committee that the final choice in formulating the plan would be determined by the future situation in the coal industry, but he also warned that the actual implementation of the planning directives, once they were decided, would depend on "reaching the conditions of social peace, and those conditions have not yet been achieved."

Wozniak assured the CC that the work on preparing the plan would be conducted within a broad programmatic framework of future economic "reforms." In this context, he said that a comprehensive program of reform, to be designed and initiated by the party, would gradually be introduced from the beginning of 1982. Wozniak stopped short, however, of revealing any specific measures for changing the economy.

(8) Trybuna Ludu, 28-29 November 1981.

Indeed, by pointing to several legislative initiatives to be undertaken by the government, he implied that the "reforms" would consist, at least in the near future, of steps aimed at streamlining the "operational processes" rather than any significant institutional alterations within the system. Here, it is important to note that institutional, or "structural," changes have long been regarded by many economists as indispensable for any significant reform of the economic system; they have also been regarded as fundamental in various economic initiatives by Solidarity, which has, in addition, argued for broad public participation in economic decision-making. Wozniak ignored that point altogether, appealing instead for the greater involvement of party bodies and administrative units in both the preparation and the eventual implementation of the leadership's economic proposals.

b. The Situation in the Party. While Wozniak's report provided no ground for optimism about the immediate economic future, the official assessment of the political situation appeared even worse. Presented by Deputy Politburo Member and CC Secretary Wlodzimierz Mokrzyszczak, the report on current party activities painted a grim picture of organizational disarray, ideological disillusionment, and political troubles. Concentrating on the party's work since the October CC plenum, which marked the replacement of Stanislaw Kania by Wojciech Jaruzelski as head of the communist organization, Mokrzyszczak said that the main emphasis had been on political and ideological consideration of the party, expansion of its propaganda activity, the development of effective measures to combat anarchy as well as antisocialist and anti-Soviet trends, and the enhancement of its operational effectiveness, particularly in the area of economic management. He then noted that while "some degree of success" had been registered, particularly through the mobilization of security organs toward greater efforts to "combat hostile propaganda" as well as the expansion of direct contacts between central and local party bodies, "the positive processes have failed to become generalized and the political struggle against the party has recently sharpened." (9)

Complaining that "some" party bodies had proved ill-equipped to deal with the current difficulties, Mokrzyszczak said that

the main source of weakness among some party bodies is their political and ideological emasculation. There have been serious problems in maintaining political and organizational discipline as well as instances of faulty interpretation of the principle of democratic centralism. This resulted in the internal disintegration of some sectors of the party's ranks. Certain party bodies and their leaderships have become incapable of active party work. No attention has been paid to the dangerous activities of opponents of socialism and there has been the tendency to accept the possibility of conducting party work on bases that have differed from those of Marxist-Leninist principles and major statutory regulations.

(9) Ibid.

More important still, Mokrzyszczak plainly admitted that the party had continued to be divided into factional groups and torn by contradictory tendencies. Indicating that "the main task remains to struggle for the unity and consolidation of the party," he warned that "we must not waste energy on internal quarrels." Then, expanding on that theme, Mokrzyszczak said,

Struggling for the party's unity, it is necessary to reject the illusory slogans of public solidarity and to give a decisive rebuff to all rightist, opportunist, revisionist, as well as sectarian and conservative views within the party. The party suffers from all attempts to establish informal organizational structures, those that are not defined in the statutes. There is a need for greater activism by the party as a whole, all its bodies and units, on the basis of Marxist-Leninist principles.

Turning to the issue of relations between the party and society, Mokrzyszczak was particularly alarmed by, as he put it, the activities of "some Solidarity bodies, which, implementing the concepts of illegal antisocialist organizations, have stepped up their attacks on the party's work in factories." Here, he reminded his listeners that party bodies and their activities "in workplaces constitute the basis of our party [power] and the source of its strength and leading role." Mokrzyszczak then reiterated the main points of a special statement issued by the CC Secretariat on November 24, which affirmed that both the constitution and various agreements between the authorities and the workers had "recognized the principle of the party's exercising the leading role in the state," and that "any limitation whatsoever of the party's activities constitutes a violation of the binding statutes and should be seen as contravening the law, regardless of who undertakes such an action." (10)

As if to underscore the difficulties experienced by the party, the CC members were said to have been provided with an official report on membership losses during recent months. Prepared by the organizational department of the Central Committee, the report said that during the 15-month period from July 1980 until the end of September 1981 more than 600,000 people had left the party (380,500 were lapsed members or were expelled, 219,800 resigned their membership, while there were only 33,000 new members). The report also noted that the rate of resignations had been particularly high during 1981. At the end of September the party was said to have 2,770,000 members, a figure regarded as inflated by many observers. (11)

Declaration on Special Powers for the Government

Obviously shaken by the reports, the CC adopted, on the recommendation of the leadership, a tough declaration in which it said that

- (10) The CC's statement was broadcast by both Radio Warsaw and Polish Television on 24 November 1981; for details on workers' efforts to remove the party from factories, see Polish Situation Report/21, RFER, 15 December 1981, Item 3.
- (11) Glos Wybrzeza, 18 November 1981.

The Central Committee deems it necessary to equip the government with full rights for effective counteraction to destructive actions that are destroying the country and its economy, and threatening the socialist state, law and order, and public security. Accordingly, the Central Committee directs the party's parliamentary group to initiate immediate measures with regard to the enactment of proposed legislation on extraordinary means of action for the protection of citizens and of the state. (12)

This declaration formed part of a lengthy resolution outlining what the CC regarded as the most pressing tasks for both the party and the government in their efforts to cope with the current political and economic crisis. More specifically, those tasks included

the introduction of economic reforms by 1 January 1982. . . . , the completion, during the first quarter of 1982, of an intraparty discussion on activities related to the implementation of the 1982 economic plan as well as to the introduction of economic reforms and the development of self-management in enterprises , the completion by the government of a comprehensive program to speed up housing construction by June 1982. . . . , the determination, jointly by the Politburo and the government, of measures to streamline coal production by mid-December 1981 , and the preparation by the government of a general program of action that would provide for necessary adjustments of the economy to the needs of agriculture and food production.

This was to be done by the end of January 1982.

In addition, the resolution contained a general assessment of the current political situation in the country with special emphasis on the assertion that "social tension has increased owing to actions by opponents of socialism." Decrying the apparent disregard by various social groups of the repeated appeals for peace and order that had been issued by "the party, the Sejm, and by political associations," the resolution particularly condemned "a mounting campaign against party bodies and party members aimed at removing the party from factories and enterprises." In this context, the resolution declared that "all means that can be used by the state and the party will be applied against the organizers and inspirers of the attempts to remove the party from socialist factories." This warning was coupled with a pledge to continue efforts to "create the front of national accord that, based upon the alliance of workers and peasants and close cooperation with the intelligentsia, . . . should unite all patriotic forces of the nation that recognize the socialist principles of Poland's Constitution."

(12) Radio Warsaw, 29 November 1981.

Before such a front was established, however, the resolution declared that "the struggle against political opponents and against the threat to socialism remains the key task for the entire party, its ideological and propaganda activists, and the mass media, in particular." Accordingly, the CC imposed upon all party bodies "the obligation" to embark on "political and organizational activities to ensure the creation of a patriotic social alliance for the struggle to pull the country out of the deep crisis."

The main attention of both domestic and foreign observers centered, however, on the CC's call for special legislation on new government powers. The issue itself is not new. Prime Minister General Wojciech Jaruzelski, during a Sejm session on October 30, had already formally proposed that the government should be legally provided with the right to use "extraordinary means" to deal with domestic problems. Although he failed then to specify what these means would entail, Jaruzelski told the Sejm that they would be used to protect "the interests of the socialist state and the peaceful existence of our nation." (13) The Sejm responded to Jaruzelski's argument by passing a resolution calling for an immediate end to strikes and warning that unless that call were heeded by the public "it [the Sejm] would examine proposals to provide the government with such legal means as required by the situation." It seems that the CC has now concluded that the time has come for the Sejm to act on that warning.

There is still no way of establishing what might be included in the proposed legislation. It is obvious, however, that recent developments in the country, such as the students' or peasants' strikes, have not had any determining impact upon the proposal. That much was confirmed by Jaruzelski himself, who, in the concluding speech to the CC plenum, said that the committee's resolution merely "provided the impetus for [enactment] of the proposal that had been submitted to the Sejm on October 28." (14) But, then, Jaruzelski once again failed to specify the range of measures to be considered by the government in its activities if and when its request should be approved by the Sejm.

Even so, there had been some speculation that the eventual legislation could include the suspension of the right to strike. (15) That might be so. At the same time, strong arguments could be presented against such a possibility. Those arguments are based on both legal and political grounds. Legally, it seems that the right to strike can hardly be suspended since there has been no formal recognition of its rightful existence. It is, of course, true that the right to strike was included in the agreement between the workers and the government concluded in August 1980. That agreement was then, and has always been, subject to legislative approval. This approval, expressed by acceptance of a law on trade unions, has never

(13) For details, see J. B. de Weydenthal, "Polish Authorities Call for End to Strikes," RAD BR/312 (Poland), RFER, 11 November 1981.

(14) Radio Warsaw, 30 November 1981.

(15) Zycie Warszawy, 30 November 1981; UPI, Reuter, and AP, 28 November 1981.

materialized. Indeed, the recent CC resolution called upon the Sejm to "undertake the necessary steps to ensure a speedy definition and passage on the law on trade unions." In the continuing absence of such a law, it is difficult to consider any possibility of suspending one of its future provisions. (16)

Politically, any action by the authorities that could be perceived by the workers as well as other newly organized social groups as restricting their recent achievements was bound to heighten tension and provoke conflicts. This was clearly recognized in Poland and plainly indicated by the Polish press itself. (17) Further tension and conflicts, in turn, would make the government's task of stabilizing the situation still more difficult and, in the case of its failure to control the public, would severely undermine its authority.

Against this background, one might argue that one possible intention behind the legislation on "extraordinary means" is not so much to restrict specific "rights" or "privileges" of the population as to provide the government with a sui generis operational carte blanche in the formulation of policies and the adoption of measures to be determined by the government itself at a time of its own choosing. If that were the case, the government could undertake steps against any strike or protest action on a selective basis without being forced to cope with the mass reactions that would necessarily be provoked by any sweeping change of existing practices. Such steps could be undertaken either through a decree legalizing a specific policy or an executive order dealing with a localized and limited issue. (18)

Furthermore, the adoption of such a "limited" approach to the social conflicts might conceivably be supported by both the Sejm deputies and the public. It has become apparent from the experiences of previous legislative work that while a majority of Sejm deputies would support the government without any reservations, a substantial minority could dissent when asked to ban all strikes. By merely strengthening the government's potential effectiveness and not legislating against strikes, those deputies could be counted on for their support of the official position.

As for the population, there have been numerous reports that strikes as a form of popular protest are viewed by a growing number of people as economically damaging and socially disruptive. But whether this means that the public is ready to abandon its newly earned "right" to protest government policies, or at least some of them, remains a very open question.

(16) This point has been argued by Bernard Margueritte in Le Figaro, 28-29 November 1981.

(17) Zycie Warszawy, 30 November 1981.

(18) This was implicitly suggested by Henry Kamm in The New York Times, 29 November 1981.

There is also the very important political problem of maintaining at least a semblance of stability and order in the country. There is little doubt that the threats and warnings in the CC resolution are indicative of the party leaders' great concern about the political future of the organization. Faced by internal pressures from the rank-and-file membership for the adoption of more effective measures to improve the economy, but also exposed to mounting impatience from workers and peasants as well as students and teachers about the slow introduction of institutional changes in the system, it seems that the party leadership is increasingly being pushed into a situation in which some form of action is necessary to justify its political prerogatives. The declaration on "extraordinary means" could be seen by some as an indication that the party and the government are determined to tackle the problems of economic and political decision-making. Whether they will be able to accomplish this is still difficult to predict. After all, if anything has become clear in Polish politics over the last year or so it is that little can be accomplished unless official measures receive clear acceptance by existing social groups.

- end -