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Munich, 17 December 1981 (PAD/de Weydenthal)

Today, December 17, marks the 11th anniversary of the workers' riots in Gdansk, Szczecin, and several other coastal cities. More specifically, it was exactly on 17 December 1970 that the Polish government declared a state of emergency in the country. That step, as well as the news of brutal attacks by police and military troops on workers, led to a nationwide protest movement. The ensuing turmoil contributed to a thorough change in the party and government leadership, forced a change in official policies, and established the workers as a potent, albeit then still unorganized, power in the country's political life.

No one could doubt today that the events of 1970-1971 paved the way for subsequent successful workers' protests against the government and party policies -- for example in 1976 -- and eventually served as a symbolic foundation for the establishment of Solidarity in 1980. That much was fully acknowledged by the organizers of the popular labor movement when they commemorated the struggles of the 1970s by erecting a monument to the workers who had fallen in December 1970. The ceremonial unveiling of the monument took place on 16 December 1980 in Gdansk. It was attended by representatives of all social groups and institutions, including the authorities, the Church, and the Polish Army. Presiding over the ceremony, Solidarity's top leader, Lech Walesa, said that "the monument expresses the right to the recognition of the dignity of man, the right to the sense of sacrifice of those to whom we are now paying homage." (1)

This year, Solidarity had once again been preparing to commemorate the events of 1970 by staging public demonstrations in many cities throughout the country. The decision was taken at the last meeting of the movement's National Commission in Gdansk; it was not to be implemented, however. Today, following last Sunday's announcement by General Wojciech Jaruzelski, the communist party's top leader, of the imposition of the state of emergency, the situation has dramatically changed. Lech Walesa is in detention, Solidarity's leaders are being held in various jails and "isolation" camps, and the army is running the country under the terms of a "state of war."

As if to provide a fitting reminder of the current situation, so different from those of either one or eleven years ago, the newly established Military Council of National Salvation issued a special statement on December 16 reiterating its goals and objectives. They included an affirmation of their resolve "not to return to the methods of government and the forms of social life that prevailed before August 1980." The 21 senior military officers who are

(1) See J. B. de Weydenthal, "Poland Asserts Its Identity," PAD Background Report/313 (Poland), Radio Free Europe Research, 29 December 1980.

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members of the council proclaimed that "there must not and there will not be any retreat from that principle." (2)

At the same time, the council defended the current restrictions on civil liberties "as necessary, since the process of renewal had been undermined by forces that were opposed to socialism and the stability of the state." It then went on to say that "as anarchy is a contradiction to democracy, a decisive clampdown on lawlessness and anarchy is the first condition for resuming again the processes of renewal and reform."

Arguing that the only motivation behind the restrictions was "the welfare of the entire nation," and promising that "once order and legality are attained, reforms will be continued with a view to restructuring the mechanisms of social and political life in a manner that will be even broader and more comprehensive than before," the council declared that it was "determined to act for a radical restoration of the country's life." As if to provide a clue to its methods of implementing that goal, the council cited cases of "isolating" people whom it regarded as responsible for the crisis and of "purging" the apparatus of power of those who were "dishonest or incapable" of dealing with the requirements of the situation.

This affirmation of toughness was combined, however, with an apparently appeasing promise that "the council remains determined to continue the line of accord with every social force that stands for the superior interests of the socialist Polish state."

To convey the impression that the military leaders mean business, the statement was issued against the background of several executive instructions, in which the officers ordered the government to "verify the suitability of administrative personnel at all levels" and called for "a thorough inspection of the activities of those economic bodies that were recently put under direct military control." (3) Furthermore, the council praised the activities of the "military operational groups that have been working throughout the country" and let it be known that "on the basis of their instructions, it [the council] ordered the removal of people who had proved incapable of efficient work from their positions in state administration."

It is still too early to assess the performance of the council in running the country because there is still no precise information about what is happening in Poland. It is clear, however, that until now most of the measures taken by the authorities are basically restrictive rather than creative. The activities of

(2) Radio Warsaw, 16 December 1981.

(3) Ibid.

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various social bodies, such as labor unions, have been "suspended" as have those of several Catholic organizations (Pax, the Christian Social Association, and the Polish Social Catholic Union). Schools and universities are closed, newspapers and periodicals are also closed in the majority of cases, and public meetings have simply been banned. How and with whom agreements could be made to produce even the semblance of an "accord" remains an open question.

Instead, the main emphasis in the authorities' activities seems to be on making arrests. It is still difficult to ascertain the number of people affected by detention, arrest, and "protective internment." The authorities have published partial lists on those detained, but these lists are obviously limited, and, in some cases, inaccurate. (4) There is little doubt, however, that thousands of individuals have been "isolated" from the population and deprived of basic human and civil rights. No specific charges have yet been made against any of the alleged culprits and there are strong reasons to believe that none could or would be preferred. Indeed, the people detained appear to include representatives of all social groups and professions. Among them are Solidarity leaders and activists, including Lech Walesa himself, but also former dissidents, intellectuals, artists, writers, students, workers, peasants, and perhaps even innocent bystanders who happened to cross the lines of the police and military dragnet.

Questions arise, in fact, as to the motivation behind the mass arrests. At first glance, it could appear that the authorities are bent on containing the potential or actual activities of anyone who could even vaguely be suspected of opposition to or criticism of the emergency rule. Considering the relatively wide publicity given by the official media to the arrests, it is possible to argue that a major motivation for the action is to instill fear in the public that any move against the authorities would be promptly and severely punished. By contrast, any act of either support or compliance with official policies would be potentially rewarding. In fact that point has already been made in various declarations issued by the authorities, particularly in the initial statement by the military council on December 13.

- (4) The list of people detained that was issued by Radio Warsaw on December 16, for example, contained the name of Mieczyslaw Chojewski, who is currently reported to be in the USA.

Mieczyslaw
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Whether this approach will prove effective, however, is hard to say. It is true that two Solidarity activists, Zdzislaw Rozwalak of the Poznan region and Wojciech Zierke of Slupsk, have already been quoted in the media as having recanted their previous activities and having given their support to the current military rule. (5) These were only isolated cases of compliance, however, and seem basically insignificant in light of the silence of the more than 9,500,000 members of the labor organization.

Indeed, they contrasted sharply with the repeated reports, also provided by the official media, of numerous dismissals of factory managers (including the managers of large plants in Warsaw, Wroclaw, Tarnow, and Gdansk) and administrative officials (several voivods and town officials). No detailed information about these dismissals has yet been provided, but in many cases the radio said that those removed had "failed to fulfill their duties adequately, particularly in the current conditions /of the state of emergency/." (6)

There is, of course, no full and comprehensive information on the general public reaction to the measures. Even so, both the official reports and sporadic dispatches from Western press correspondents seem to indicate that numerous and repeated strikes and industrial protests have been and are taking place throughout the country. In some cases, police and military units have been forced to enter the factories to remove workers. It is not clear whether violence was used, but there are widespread rumors that there might have been some degree of brutality on the part of the police.

It is equally unclear whether those actions will succeed in returning the country to a "normal" state of economic operations and, if so, how much time would be needed to achieve that state. One thing is obvious: after five days of emergency rule, the situation in Poland remains confused and full of doubts and uncertainties.

One important element is a reported statement by Catholic Church leaders in which they expressed strong criticism of current official policies. The statement, which is to be read from Church pulpits on December 20, was said to have decried the situation in which "the entire nation is terrorized by military force." Signed by Poland's Primate, Archbishop Jozef Glemp, the statement expressed clear support for Solidarity, which, "by defending the rights of the workers is indispensable in returning the balance to public life." The statement called for official permission for the "free activity" of Solidarity's leaders and condemned the fact that "numerous activists of the labor movement have been interned. The internments are widespread," the document went on, adding that "they include workers, people of letters, of science, and students." The statement also said that "in numerous enterprises strikes have been proclaimed." (7)

Turning to the Church's role in the present situation, the religious leaders noted that "the Church is jointly responsible /with the state/ for the nation . . . and its mission is to defend human rights and human dignity." They then went on to say that "beginning today,

(5) Radio Warsaw, 16 December 1981.

(6) Ibid., 15 and 16 December 1981.

(7) As quoted in The Washington Post, 17 December 1981.

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the Church must take positive action." This action, which would be based on the principle that "the episcopate will not renounce the rights and achievements of society as a whole -- these are irreversible truths," and the conviction that "the nation will not step backward and cannot give up the democratic renewal that has been announced in the country," concentrated on three aspects:

- a. "The freeing of prisoners. Until their liberation they should have humane conditions of imprisonment, for we know of numerous excesses concerning the imprisonment of certain people. . . .
- b. "The revival of the labor union and, above all, of Solidarity's . . . statutory activity. This implies that the free activity of the chairman and the presidium of the labor movement is permitted."
- c. ". . . all the faithful are to pray for the unity of the nation and peace in the country."

It is clear that this statement was both a strong criticism of the military regime's current policies, as well as the methods of implementation of those policies, and an equally strong endorsement of the recently growing movement of social self-organization, a movement best exemplified by Solidarity itself.

There is no way of predicting the potential impact of that statement on the public or on the political leadership. But it is important to note that the Church has always been perceived by the Polish people and foreign observers as a moral and religious institution commanding widespread respect. It is also important to remember that the Church has been effective in containing social turmoils in past times of crisis, such as 1956 or 1971. Perhaps in recognition of that traditional role, the current military leaders have refrained from any explicit attacks on the Church and even used a sermon by Archbishop Glemp, who appealed for social peace on December 13, in their own appeals for public order.

The episcopate's statement is even more significant when one views it against the recent remarks by Pope John Paul II delivered on December 16 during a general audience at the Vatican. Having expressed his concern about the current situation in Poland, the pope observed that "the Poles, as a nation, have the right to live their own lives and to resolve their own internal problems in the spirit of their own convictions, in conformity with their own culture and national tradition." He then added that

These problems, understandably difficult, cannot be resolved through the use of violence . . . ; it is necessary to return to the road of renewal, built through dialogue and respect of the rights of every man and citizen. This road is not easy for well recognized reasons, but it is not impossible. (8)

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The pope's remarks clearly implied that both criticism of the current policies in Poland and support for social and civil rights have emerged as principles of the Church's policy under the present circumstances. Can the new regime of Poland disregard such considerations, the more so as it is striving to present itself to the nation and the world as an effective manager of Poland's affairs?

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