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WOOLING THE CATHOLICS IN POLAND

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According to recent Western press reports, the authorities' efforts to persuade well-known Catholic intellectuals to join a "social consultative council," a body that is apparently intended to act as a kind of institutional bridge between the government and its critics and is eventually to be attached to the Council of State (a sort of collective presidency), have reached "a stalemate."¹ These efforts have taken the form of recurring talks between high-ranking party officials, including Politburo member Kazimierz Barcikowski and CC Secretary Stanislaw Ciosek, and selected Catholics, such as former Solidarity advisers Krzysztof Sliwinski and Andrzej Wielowiejski; the editor of Cracow's *Tygodnik Powszechny*, Jerzy Turowicz; and others. The stumbling block appears to be the ambiguity of the authorities' concept of what role the council is to play in politics.

In particular, the authorities have reportedly never made clear whether the council would be able to initiate legislation or make public its criticism of official actions; nor have they explained the criteria for the appointment or election of the council's members, merely suggesting that known members of the opposition (Solidarity leaders, for example) would not be considered for membership under any circumstances. Finally and most important, the authorities even failed to clarify what they mean by "consultation."

All this strongly suggests that the establishment of the council may be regarded by the authorities more as a tactic to split and weaken those groups that have been critical of official policies than a move to involve them in the officially sanctioned political process. It is important to remember, for example, that the initial proposal to establish "a social consultative council" was made by General Wojciech Jaruzelski in a speech to the Sejm on 30 October 1981.² That council was to be attached to the Prime Minister's office (Jaruzelski was himself Prime Minister), but its functions and role within the

system of government were left undefined. Indeed, the only thing that was clear about Jaruzelski's proposed council was that it would be controlled by the authorities and used to blunt and eventually reverse the prevailing trends toward public self-determination. There is no reason to assume that the motivation behind the current plans to set up a "social consultative council" is different.

The authorities' reasons for trying to persuade Catholic intellectuals to join the council are transparent. Relatively well-organized and easily identifiable (there are Clubs of the Catholic Intelligentsia in many parts of the country), these intellectuals enjoy considerable public prestige and wield a degree of influence within the Church itself. There is no doubt that many of them are either critical of at least some government policies and methods or maintain contacts with the government's critics. Indeed, Catholic churches often provide the setting for the "parallel culture" (cultural and educational activities that are not controlled by the government); events organized by the Catholic Church offer opportunities for the opposition to make its presence known; and the Catholic press remains the only outlet to which many critics of the government can contribute with some degree of autonomy from official supervision. Anything that could make such contacts more difficult or such activities more restrained would be in the government's interest.

Moreover, the authorities find it convenient to deal with lay Catholics rather than Church officials. The religious leaders have persistently refused to be drawn into open politics. Even so, it is rumored in Poland that some members of the Church hierarchy would support the "loosening" of ties between the Church, which they see as an institution with basically long-term moral and spiritual responsibilities, and the opposition, which they regard as being preoccupied with current political issues. Furthermore, it has also been reported that some high-ranking Church officials view a degree of cooperation between the authorities and the Church as desirable for the specific interests of both sides (political stability for the authorities and operational benefits for the Church) and also a way of helping resolve various current problems, such as the government's delays in granting building permits for churches and the Pope's visit. There is reason to believe that some Church officials might actually be willing to support the establishment of a "consultative council," even if it were to be largely controlled by the authorities.

This attitude is apparently not shared by those Catholic intellectuals who were reported to have taken part in the talks about the council. Their reluctance to join the council could well derive from their past experience with the government as well as an unwillingness to undermine recent efforts by Solidarity leaders to revive the union as an openly operating organization (Solidarity recently set up a council to coordinate

its efforts to gain legal recognition). The most important obstacle to their accepting the authorities' offers, however, seems to be the government's refusal to recognize the public's right to be involved in politics without government interference. So long as the authorities fail to acknowledge this right, no lasting improvement is likely in relations between the public and the political establishment. The current stalemate over the issue of the council is only an illustration of that state of affairs.

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- 1 Jackson Diehl in *The Washington Post*, 22 October 1986; and Roger Boyes in *The Times*, 29 October 1986.
- 2 Text in *Trybuna Ludu*, 31 October 1981.

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