

# RADIO FREE EUROPE *Research*

## EAST EUROPE

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### REFORM OF POLAND'S RURAL ADMINISTRATION

Summary: Reform of the basic units of state administration in the rural areas -- the people's councils -- is to take place in Poland with effect from 1 January 1973. The reform will create 2,381 "parishes" in place of the existing 4,313 rural communities. These parishes, officially represented by their parish people's councils, will in practice be administered by "parish chiefs" (naczelnik) who will be given considerable powers, and by appropriate administrative staffs. Members of the parish people's councils will not be allowed to hold administrative positions and this will result in a division between the local legislative and executive authorities. The parish chief, who will be required to possess a high school diploma, will be in charge of the socialized sector of the local economy. The parishes will receive powers appropriate to the first rung of the administrative ladder. The network of party organizations in the rural areas will be reorganized accordingly. The outlines of the plan for reform envisage the emergence at a later date of independent economic microregions, which may create a basis for the future decentralization of management.

In comparison to the limited reforms introduced in the economic field, this local government reform is unexpectedly far-reaching, and its practical effects could turn out to be even broader than they appear.

at present. It is likely that this reform will be followed by further measures designed to create a uniform system at all levels of local government.

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### Introduction

The reform of the basic unit of rural government was approved by the sixth plenum of the PUWP CC on 27 September 1972 (1) and is one of the most important developments in postwar Poland. It is the most significant reform in the system of state administration since 1950, when the communist authorities abandoned the traditional system of rural administration and government dating from before the war in favor of people's councils at three levels which, it was argued, was the only correct practical application of Lenin's dictum: "All power to the soviets." That change, made more than two decades ago, must be recalled since it is necessary to appreciate the importance of a defined system of power to Lenin's doctrines. In these days the state, as a tangible form of the "dictatorship of the proletariat," and its main executive attracted the attention of a whole galaxy of official ideologists and definitions of its essence and forms were elevated to the rank of dogma and guarded with the same zeal as the privileges of those who represented the state. This was natural, because a total subordination of the state to the interests of a comparatively small ruling clique which lacked the support of the community was essential to the survival of that leadership. The liquidation of certain members of similar ruling cliques by their own state apparatus (e.g., the purges and political murders in the last years of the Stalinist era) confirmed this general rule.

Although these statements may sound like truisms, it is

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(1) See Polish Situation Report/37, Radio Free Europe Research (EERA), 5 October 1972, Item 1.

necessary to recall the general climate of the immediate postwar years in order to appreciate the scale of the transformation that has taken place in this particular sphere in the last two decades. Before going any further, one should note that the origins of the present reform are rooted in practice. A few ideological embellishments cannot alter the fact that the reform is giving legal form to the sum of practical experience over the past few years.

### Historical Retrospect

The system of rural government in the first postwar years did not differ greatly from the traditional methods used in Poland between the two world wars. A voivode was in charge of a voivodship, a starosta of a district, and a wojt of a parish. At each level there were councils with consultatory and advisory powers. Although in the early 1930s their powers were severely curtailed, these councils continued to exist as partly symbolical representatives of self-government until the last years of the independent Polish Republic. After World War II the communist regime retained the outer forms of this traditional system but altered the real character of the agencies involved. In time it gradually broadened the powers of the self-government agencies while simultaneously reducing those of the state administration. The underlying intention was not so much to create strong administrative units of self-government as to reduce the independence of local state administrators (particularly the starostas and wojts, of whom the former originated mainly from the ranks of the nonparty intelligentsia and the latter from those of the richer farmers). Lacking adequate administrative cadres, the party preferred to leave administrative posts in the hands of professionals (who were often hostile to the political system) and to control -- or in practice, sometimes paralyze -- their activities by using party members stuffed into the corresponding levels of the people's councils. This dual approach ultimately led to an undermining of the prestige of authority in the rural areas and to party careerists controlling affairs, often against the interests of the party as a whole.

In 1950, after the first phase of the action against all kinds of political deviation was complete and the Stalinist

system had been consolidated in the countries of the Soviet bloc, the Polish authorities decided to reform the system of rural government. This was only a part of a larger pattern: similar reforms were introduced either earlier or later in other countries of the bloc. The bill of 20 March 1950 (2) abolished the voivodes, starostas, and wojts and transferred their functions to the presidiums of voivodship, district, and parish people's councils, or -- to be more exact -- to the chairmen of these presidiums. In this manner the powers of the self-government agencies and those of the local administrators were fused together. The presidiums (whose members became paid officials) were given the help of the clerical staffs belonging to the former administrative offices at voivodship, district, and parish level. Council members at all levels were to be "elected by the local population" (Article 2 of the bill), and the State Council was given the task of supervising the local councils' activities.

While the 1950 legislation reflected the trends and general political climate of that period, there was no similar justification for the bill passed by the Sejm in 1954 which created rural community people's councils. (3) It lacked theoretical justification and even -- as transpired later -- common sense. The bill was originally designed to speed up the process of collectivization of the private farms, but preparation of the draft took so long that when the bill was finally passed, the collectivization project had already lost its impetus, and only two years later (in 1956) the whole system of collective farms collapsed. Between 1950 and 1953 collective farms were being created at an average rate of 1,850 per year, but in 1954 the number fell to 1,550 and in 1955 to 468. (4) In place of about 2,500 parishes, the bill created 8,790 rural communities with people's councils and the average area within the jurisdiction of the lowest administrative units became correspondingly smaller. The statute reduced the

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(2) Dziennik Ustaw No.14, 13 April 1950.

(3) Ibid., No.43, 29 September 1954.

(4) Rocznik Statystyczny 1965, Warsaw.

powers of these units, transferring them to the district people's councils. As a result, a reform which was supposed to give "power to the people" in fact conferred on the district authorities the right to interfere directly in village affairs.

Two characteristic developments which followed after the reform was in force were a further reduction of the powers of the rural people's councils and a drop in the number of rural communities (especially after 1958). In fact, between 1954 and the present time the over-all number of the latter fell by about a half, from 8,780 to 4,313. As land consolidation progressed, the powers of the rural communities were steadily reduced, and in the end an absurd situation arose in which even a proposed site for erecting a toilet had to be approved by the district planning office, and a village dance could not be held without the permission of the appropriate section of the district office. (5)

Even these examples do not yet give the full picture of what happened to the "power of the people" under this system. Every villager knew that candidates for all the more important positions in the people's councils were selected by higher authority, but not everyone was aware of the fact that the district councils, officially and with the blessing of the law, could select the village community presidiums from among the elected council members and that the presidium chairman could be appointed from outside, "although he was not even a councilor or a person elected by the people" (6) -- this in spite of the fact that Para. 11 of the statute stated that: "Rural community people's councils will select the members of the presidium from among the elected councilors." The interference of higher authorities could have been partly excused if it had at least resulted in the selection of candidates with better professional qualifications, but this seldom happened. For example, in the district of Przeworsk only

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(5) Rada Narodowa, 27 July and 16 October 1972.

(6) Ibid., 2 October 1971 and 4 March 1972.

five of the 16 chairman have (or had) a secondary education while the others had merely completed primary school -- or sometimes not even that. Officially the qualifications required of presidium secretaries (who are responsible for the formal and legal sectors of administration) were primary education and three years' practice in state administration. (7) In view of this, it is hardly surprising that the statute of 1963 treated the district (and not the rural community) as the basic unit of rural government in the system of people's councils. As a result of their gradual degradation, the rural communities employed 58 per cent of the total number of officials working for the people's councils at all levels, but the budgets of these councils accounted for only 7.4 per cent of the state outlay on rural administration. (8)

The abolition of parishes and creation of rural communities was not followed -- fortunately -- by a corresponding reorganization of the network of service and trade agencies operating in the rural areas. The activities of such institutions as parish co-operatives of the "Peasant's Mutual Aid" type (a monopolistic supply organization in rural areas), the State Agricultural Machine Centers, the savings-and-loans co-operatives, and the dairy co-operatives have not been adjusted to the new administrative divisions. The name "parish co-operative," indeed, has remained in use till today as the only vestige of the old organizational system. All this, however, created a complicated situation in which a farmer had to deal with offices or institutions located as a rule in two or three different places. Moreover, his nearest and most immediate unit of administration -- the rural people's council -- had little power, and he often had to contact the district council directly. Thus, only in theory was the authority to which he could turn to at hand; in practice it was far away and "high."

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(7) Ibid., 4 March and 29 July 1972.

(8) Polityka-Statystyka, March 1971.

The lack of synchronization between the local economic organizations and the local governmental units also demonstrated how unreal were the latter's powers of co-ordination. In practice the task of controlling these organizations fell on the shoulders of the district agencies, but control of this sort did not prevent duplication and waste.

Plainly, the reform of 1954 was ill-advised from the beginning and in practice jeopardized the efficient functioning of rural administration.

It created, too, an excessive number of "weak" rural communities. The local governmental structure was unsuited to the transformations which were taking place in the rural areas -- the considerable increase in agricultural production, the expansion of culture, education, health services, etc. -- and even hampered these developments. (9) One should add that the system was applying the brakes to the process of urbanization (owing to the lack of clearly defined economic centers). During the two decades between 1950 and 1970 the number living in small towns and settlements (up to 5,000 inhabitants) increased by only 3 per cent, while the urban population (above 200,000 inhabitants) rose by 115 per cent. (10)

#### Details of the Reform

Before the sixth plenum of the PUWP CC, the press published enough information to provide the general outlines of the extent of the projected reform. A comparison of those earlier items of information with the published materials from the sixth plenum (11) shows that the final draft of the reform

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(9) Zycie Warszawy, 29 September 1972.

(10) Rocznik Statystyczny 1971, Warsaw.

(11) Speeches made by Premier Piotr Jaroszewicz, Politburo member and CC Secretary Edward Babiuch, and CC First Secretary Edward Gierek; and parts of the discussion published in Trybuna Ludu on September 28.

presented to the CC was being amended up to the last moment -- and not merely on points of detail.

The speech made at the plenum by Piotr Jaroszewicz and an interview given by candidate Politburo member and CC Secretary Kazimierz Barcikowski (12) provided the following outline of the new structure and form of the lowest level of rural government:

The existing 4,313 rural communities will be replaced on 1 January 1973 by 2,381 parishes (according to initial estimates based on the proposals of the voivodship people's councils). This will mean a return to the old name of "parish" and to the number of basic rural governmental units existing before 1954. The average parish area will be generally twice as large as that of the rural community, and its average population will correspondingly increase to about 7,000. There will be three types of parish: the first and most frequent type will be one whose area consists mainly of individual farms; the second will be one in which state farms are in the majority; and the third one whose area consists of nonagricultural land (suburban areas, health resorts, etc.). The reform will apply also to small towns of less than 5,000 inhabitants, which under the new system will be fused into one government unit with the nearest rural parish. This move is designed to facilitate the integration of neighboring villages and small towns into naturally bounded economic microregions equipped with all locally needed economic, social, and cultural services. Such an integration is also meant to encourage the development of towns at some unspecified future date. The reform foresees a liquidation of the so-called "settlements" (small agglomerations of less than 2,000 inhabitants) which have certain features of nonagricultural conglomerations and which (with only a few exceptions) will be treated as villages.

The reorganization of rural administration will render unnecessary about 2,000 buildings, of which around 10 per cent were rented and will revert to their owners. The others will

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(12) Zycie Partii No.8, September 1972.

be used to house health centers, schools, libraries, cultural centers, post offices, etc.. Some of them will be converted into houses for parish clerks or school teachers.

The new parish councils will consist of about 50 councilors (as compared with the present 27 in a rural community), including at least one representative of each village. The council is expected to foster the collaboration of local self-government co-operatives and social organizations and to encourage voluntary civic pledges among the local inhabitants. The parish councils will take over from the district councils the funds which support such activities. Jaroszewicz said:

As a local agency of the state's authority, the people's council will strive to ensure the general socialist, economic, and sociocultural development of the parish, overseeing and controlling the work of administration. Its main duty will be to combine the interests of the parish with those of the state as a whole.

With this in view, the councils will also be empowered to co-ordinate the activities of units not directly subordinate to them. Thus, the parish councils and their presidiums will no longer have executive managerial duties but will concentrate on co-ordinating, organizing, and controlling others. Each council will have four commissions: the first for agriculture; the second for problems of supply, budgeting, planning, building, and communication; the third for cultural and educational matters; and the fourth for questions of law and public order.

The essence of the reform, however, lies not in the reduction of the number of units but in the return to a system of division of responsibilities between executive and representative authorities, a separation which was abandoned in 1950. In addition to the parish council and its honorary elected chairman, there will be a parish office

representing the state administration and headed by a chief (naczelnik), appointed by the chairman of the voivodship people's council.. This "parish chief" will be responsible for the execution of the resolutions of the parish people's council and will at the same time be subordinate to the people's council on the next higher level (i.e., the district). This arrangement will make the parish chief directly responsible to the district rather than the parish council and may lead to considerable friction and frustration at the local level.

According to Jaroszewicz: "The parish chief will be the central figure in solving the problems of its development and in satisfying the needs of its population." He will control agricultural services, prepare the drafts of economic plans and budgets, ensure that the people of the parish "discharge their duties," undertake "moves designed to strengthen and preserve public order," supervise the activities of organizational units subordinated to the parish council, and take charge of the registry. His other powers stem from the fact that, as head of a basic administrative unit, he will have the powers (formerly reserved for district level) to regulate the individual affairs of the inhabitants in matters of agricultural production, private building and housing, health and social services, roads and communications, licenses for conducting private trade and operating private workshops and service agencies for the needs of the local population, etc.

The district people's councils, whose powers will diminish accordingly, will act more as supervisory and co-ordinating agencies to which citizens can appeal against the decisions of lower-level authorities. All told, the district councils will hand over to the parish authorities about 140 responsibilities of various kinds. (13) The speakers at the CC plenum put much stress on the powers of a parish chief in maintaining public order, a sphere in which he has the help of the units of the People's Militia. Another important change is the creation in the parishes of bodies of citizens

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(13) Radio Warsaw, 30 September 1972.

having jurisdiction over minor offenses, which up to now have existed only at district level.

Funds controlled by the parish council and the parish chief (in practice mainly by the latter, although in some instances he has to have prior authorization by the council) will increase twofold in comparison with the present system.

At present, about 40 per cent of local expenditure is covered by funds at the disposal of the districts, 39 per cent by those of the voivodships, and only 8 per cent by those of the rural communities:

But even this small contribution from the rural communities has often been only theoretical. Let us, for example, consider teachers' salaries: all decisions and calculations concerning the payment of teachers have been made by the districts, while the rural communities have only paid out the money. (14)

It is expected that after the reform the parishes' direct income will on average cover about 80 per cent of their spending. They will obtain their funds from land taxes, from taxes paid by tradesmen, from their share of the taxes paid by the co-operatives and other local enterprises, from rural community funds, and from the support fund for voluntary civic pledges. The parish councils will be allowed to organize their own enterprises under the direct supervision of the parish chief and draw profits from them. The authorities are now studying the possibility of opening in each parish a co-operative of Agricultural Circles, which would consist of several local agencies and provide most of the services connected with agriculture. As has already been noted, the parishes will also have certain powers of co-ordination with regard to economic and

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(14) Jozef Pinkowski, first deputy chairman of the Planning Commission, in his article entitled "Certain Aspects of the Reform of the Rural Communities" (Nowe Drogi, September 1972).

other units which are not directly subordinate to them. Individual units and organizations will not be permitted to change their plans without first consulting the parish chief.

Certain changes are also foreseen in the structure of primary education, designed to establish in each parish a well-equipped primary school, which will co-ordinate the work of other schools in its area. It is expected that in time each of these parish schools will provide a foundation on which to establish a complete secondary school.

#### Personnel Qualifications

The qualifications required of candidates for the post of parish chief are important. Jaroszewicz said:

They must have higher education in agronomy or economics and also some experience in field work. The requirement for higher education can in some exceptional cases be waived, but a candidate must then have at least a secondary education combined with a long and successful career in the economic field. Similar high standards will be required of parish officials, and particularly of the parish secretary.

These stipulations seem to be startlingly higher when compared with the average qualifications of existing rural people's council officials, and if they are adhered to, large-scale replacement of the present personnel will be necessary.

In fact, the problem of professional qualifications must have caused some dissension with the CC itself. Wladyslaw Machejek, former CC candidate member and currently a member of the party's Central Review Commission, wrote in the Cracow weekly of which he is editor-in-chief:

I would not dispense with the services of many wojts -- men of practical experience -- who have in effect received their secondary, or even higher, education in the school

of everyday life during 15 or 20 years of pioneering work. Such men should not become the victims of a hastily introduced reform. (15)

In the discussion which followed Jaroszewicz's speech at the CC plenum, Mieczyslaw Rog-Swiostek (CC candidate member and editor-in-chief of Chlopska Droga) said:

We should not dispense lightly with the services of many individuals who -- although they have no diplomas, and are perhaps unlikely ever to acquire them -- have nevertheless, through the hard and difficult work they have done during our social revolution, gained a great asset in the form of valuable social and administrative experience tested by practical experience.

Jaroszewicz, however, does not appear to envisage concessions of this order: the authorities, he said, have already selected some prospective candidates for the posts of parish chiefs:

Nearly half of them have higher education, and many of those who have only secondary education have already enrolled for further study.

For example, in Wroclaw Voivodship, 58 per cent of the 317 candidates for posts as parish chiefs or secretaries have certificates of higher education, while the remainder have a secondary education combined with many years of experience in a professional career. (16) According to Barcikowski, (17) more than 70 per cent of the officials working for the rural communities possess only primary education, a state of affairs which reflects their very low wages. The reform will therefore introduce a much higher scale of salaries.

To sum up, although the reformed people's councils will

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(15) Zycie Literackie, 20 August 1972.

(16) Radio Warsaw, 29 September 1972.

(17) Zycie Partii No.8, September 1972.

employ more or less the same number of personnel, they will be able to re-engage only about half the officials currently employed by the rural communities. Some of those who will lose their jobs will be retrained for another profession, others will be retired, and "a large number," according to Babiuch, "will go back to work at their farms."

A radical purge among the lower administrative officials is to be expected and, indeed, has already started. Candidates selected for the future post of parish chief are already making use of the extensive powers given them by the voivodship people's councils.

The problem of the redundant officials was raised repeatedly during the discussion at the CC plenum, most speakers trying to ensure that they should not be given too harsh a deal. It was suggested that by way of "moral compensation," they should be offered positions in various types of local social organizations. The party bosses, with their closer connections with the central authorities, have shown much less concern, however: Piotr Karpiuk, recently appointed first secretary of the PUWP Voivodship Committee in Lublin and formerly chairman of the state Price Commission, said:

One should not -- out of a misconceived concern for peace and alleged unfairness to individual members of the present rural apparatus -- yield to compromises which could jeopardize the implementation of the resolutions passed by the sixth party congress.

One should also note the opinion on this subject voiced by Radio Warsaw in a commentary broadcast on September 28:

We find it hard to sympathize with certain individuals who protest, often in a very extreme form, against the loss of jobs in the rural administration. Obviously, those who know how to work will always find jobs.

### Other Difficulties

There are, however, other problems. As Jaroszewicz put it:

There are difficulties of a psychological nature, stemming from a sporadic but genuine conservative outlook, or from the reluctance of those concerned to conform to the new rules. . . . An effort should be made to ensure that it should not take too long to learn the new rules. Time is a particularly expensive commodity nowadays.

In many rural areas the local inhabitants are sending in petitions asking for changes in the prospective seat of their parish or in its boundaries. This has been reported by the voivodship party first secretaries from Katowice ("we have received many petitions"), from Kielce ("we have received over 60 petitions concerning 40 localities"), and from Lodz ("on the whole, the people say that the reform is justified and the only protests we receive concern the prospective location of some parish seats"). But according to Barcikowski, (18) "sporadic feelings of uncertainty and wait-and-see attitudes are rife among the apparat of the rural community councils." Thus it appears that, in spite of general acceptance of the reform, its full implementation will necessitate the overcoming of formidable resistance on the part of the members of the local party apparat and the administration.

### Plenum Speeches

In his speech at the CC plenum, Babiuch concentrated on the role of the party in connection with the reform and its practical introduction. Prior to the creation of parishes, the party will make some structural changes in its rural organizations, and the authorities have already trained 2,300 party activists who are to become parish secretaries. The average PUWP parish committee will consist of more than 200 members. Party members living in rural areas and working in

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(18) Ibid.

industry will belong to the rural party organizations, and there will be some changes in the powers of the district and parish party committees. Babiuch announced that the present people's councils' tenure of office will be extended by a few months, so that "the new people's councils and organs of rural administration will begin their terms of office with the benefit of some experience." It is therefore expected that the next elections to the councils will take place around the turn of 1973. (19)

Babiuch stressed the central party authorities' insistence on rigid adherence to the professional standards required of leading parish officials. An all-out effort should be made to ensure that these requirements are respected and consistently adhered to: "We must be prepared for some local manifestations of dissatisfaction."

In his closing speech Gierek discussed only a few selected problems. Presenting the rural reform as simply a link in a whole chain of planned changes, he said:

As part of our plans for improving the system of planning, organization, and management, we have worked out an all-embracing concept, whose guidelines were defined by the resolutions of the sixth party congress. We are continuing to work on this concept, simultaneously introducing gradually into practice those improvements and changes for which we are ready. . . . We must, however, avoid undue haste. The loudest advocates of such haste are, as a rule, those who themselves do very little toward improving the standards of their own agencies, but spend all their energies trumpeting abroad their pseudoreformist ideas. We shall pay even less attention to the voices of our opponents, whose intentions stand in direct contradiction to our aims.

It seems that this statement was meant both as a riposte to those who have criticized the regime's delay in introducing extensive economic reforms and as a forecast of further reforms in the regional system (i.e., in the districts and voivodships),

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(19) The elections are to be held after the National Conference meets in January 1973.

something which seems inevitable after the reorganization of the basic units of local government. As if intending to soften the impact of the severe curtailment of the powers of local people's councils, Gierek devoted a considerable part of his speech to discussing their role in the future:

Even the best resolutions and the best instructions issued by self-government bodies cannot be properly carried out without the help of efficient and highly qualified executive bodies. On the other hand, it is perfectly clear that the social value of the functioning of the latter would be lost without the initiatives and supervision of self-government bodies.

Gierek applied the example of the reform in the system of rural government to other social organizations (such as the trade unions, the youth organizations, and -- one supposes -- ZBoWiD):

We are supporting and we shall continue to support their initiatives. But for this very reason we must strengthen the social character of these organizations and oppose all tendencies toward state control or bureaucratization [emphasis added].

#### Other Bloc Countries' Practice Compared

Any discussion of the reform should be complemented by an examination of the situation in the other countries of the Soviet bloc. (20) In general, the Polish reform seems to be the most far-reaching and the one which most radically breaks away from the old fictitious concept of the people's rule.

In all the other countries of the bloc, one can observe a tendency to turn away from the very small administrative unit (the single village) and to replace it with a larger basic unit such as the parish, comprising a dozen or so

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(20) The information that follows is derived from the weekly Rada Narodowa, 8 January, 3 June, and 22 July 1972.

villages and hamlets. The two-level system of people's councils (provinces, and urban or rural parishes), which first appeared in Bulgaria and Rumania, has been introduced more recently in Hungary, although the district offices there have been kept as agencies of the state administration. The USSR, Czechoslovakia, the GDR, and Poland maintain a three-level system of people's councils -- voivodship, district, and parish. There is also a common trend toward extending the powers of local bodies and encouraging the higher regional units to concentrate on supervision and co-ordination. So far, Rumania and Hungary have gone furthest in this direction.

An important point is that in all the countries of the bloc except Poland, the representative bodies elect their own executive organs and make all personal appointments to them. In the USSR, Bulgaria, Rumania, and Hungary, the members of the presidiums are selected from among council members. All the countries observe the principle of double subordination (i.e., to their own council and to the higher organ).

Only in Hungary do administrative bodies exist in parishes directly subordinated to the executive committee. A secretary is responsible for the functioning of his executive committee and in the administrative sphere is simultaneously subordinate to a superior body. From this it can be seen that the current Hungarian system follows the principles of the Polish reform, except that in Hungary the secretary is appointed by the parish council, while in Poland the parish chief (with similar powers) is to be appointed by the chairman of the voivodship council (an organ which is two steps higher). Moreover, in Hungary the regional units of the governmental system have been adjusted to the changes made in the parishes, while in Poland this has yet to be done.

#### Legislative and Other Preparations

A complete set of basic draft bills needed to introduce the reform of rural government and changes in the administrative structure has already been prepared. (21) Work on the draft

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(21) Radio Warsaw, 9 October 1972.

bills concerning the creation of parishes and changes in the people's councils have been completed, and the draft bill which will effect the appropriate changes in the Constitution is ready.

At the same time, the authorities have prepared the four draft decrees. These are the draft decrees to be issued by the Ministers' Council, defining, among other things, the powers of a parish chief, the organization and duties of the parish office, and the rules for and manner of electing the village chiefs and deputy chiefs. Thus, from the legal point of view nothing stands in the way of the reform being approved by the Sejm and coming into force on 1 January 1973.

The infrastructure (office buildings, equipment, telecommunications, etc.) and the creation of the economic institutions necessary for the formation of microeconomic units, each gravitating toward its own center, are not so far advanced. Owing to past neglect and lack of investment funds, this will be a prolonged and difficult process.

#### Applying the Reform to Other Levels

But the important point is that, in spite of all the difficulties, the authorities have taken the first step in this direction, and one which is astonishingly logical. It would, of course, be even more consistent to introduce a reform on all levels of regional government (i.e., including district and voivodship), and acceptance of the principle of one-man responsibility (as in the parish) throughout the whole structure would have been preferable, not only to secure uniformity in the structure of management at all levels, but also to derive full benefit from the reform. The present intention is that the parish chief will be controlled by "collective bodies," and this may impair -- and will certainly make more difficult -- efficiency and rapid decision making.

It seems, however, that the next stage of the reform is already on its way. This can be deduced from hints given in the press and from statements made during the discussion at the sixth plenum:

We shall not suffer any serious losses or commit any major errors if we rapidly carry out appropriate adjustments to the structure and activities of the district and voivodship people's councils. (22)

And again:

The only requirement we have to fulfill is to improve the system of work of the councils on the district and voivodship levels. It would also be advisable to make some changes in the central state apparatus. (23)

#### Benefits of the Reform

These problems, of course, are for the future. But even in its present form, restricted to the lowest unit of rural government, the reform can be ranked as the most ambitious measure yet undertaken by the Gierek administration. From the tactical point of view the party leadership has chosen a most opportune moment for publishing the guidelines of the reform. The local governmental apparatus, its reputation darkened by its ineffectiveness in coping with the problems of the recent harvest, has to a large degree lost its self-assurance, and at the same time public opinion has become more conscious of the fact that changes in this sphere are essential.

The immediate results of the reform are likely to be more intervention by the state in the system of self-government bodies, and an ending of the fiction of "people's rule." The new system also contains the potential for a much more efficient regulation of rural affairs -- inter alia, by cutting through the present

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(22) Wit Drapich, chairman of the Voivodship People's Council in Cracow.

(23) Ludwik Drozd, first secretary of the PUWP Voivodship Committee in Wroclaw.

relations between the representative bodies and the people, which are plagued by corruption. The reform may also mean a change for the better in the country's administration as a whole, which is still largely based on the stubborn individual notions of uneducated local bosses. If reform at all levels of administration proved impracticable, the authorities were right in starting from the bottom -- where many of the positive measures initiated by the central authorities have been lost to sight or completely distorted, and where, broadly speaking, public opinion is formed. Perhaps the best grounds for optimism are provided by the high professional qualifications to be required of candidates for the higher-ranking posts in the parish administration. The limitations imposed on the powers of self-government bodies (and, what is more important, awareness of their existence) can largely be made good by the strengthening of the position of the village chief (the only official elected in a truly democratic manner) and of the role of the village meeting.

The high professional qualifications required of parish chiefs and secretaries will diminish the number of United Peasant Party members in the administration, because the UPP has a chronic shortage of young and well-educated members. So far as the interests of the rural inhabitants are concerned, this will be immaterial, or perhaps even a gain. Local officials who belong to the UPP but carry out PUWP policies lack the direct authority and influence enjoyed by their colleagues who are PUWP members, and this has often impaired the efficiency of the local governmental unit. The reform project has been approved by the central authorities of the UPP.

It is hard to overestimate the possible long-term effects of the reform. Concentration in the parishes of managerial powers over the now considerable volume of capital goods, (24)

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(24) From the statement made by Janusz Wiczorek (Zycie Warszawy, 3 October 1972), it can be concluded that the average new parish will control investments in the value of 400 million zloty, and annual investment funds of up to 20 million, as well as other funds provided by the state and local budgets.

the subordination of all economic units which provide services within a particular area to the parish authorities, and extensive powers of co-ordination with regard to other units -- all these things must eventually result in the real economic and administrative integration of the parishes. In time these economic microregions may begin to live a life of their own and become to a large extent independent of outside interference. This would create a material basis for the introduction of a real -- not merely theoretical -- decentralization, because one can truly manage and administer only when one has resources and things to manage. Paradoxically, a reduction in the powers of a self-government that was in fact fictitious may well result in changes which will provide a foundation for genuine self-government based on control of economic potential and a degree of independence.

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