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POLISH VIEWS ON WEST GERMANY

In two recent statements (1), Wladislaw Gomulka has restated in harsh terms the Polish Communist criticism of West Germany's new Ostpolitik. In his Pravda article, he warned:

Until the Government of the FRG gives up its hegemonistic pretensions to represent all of Germany, until it gives up its aggressive intentions to liquidate the GDR and revise its borders, until it normalizes its relations with the second sovereign German state in the spirit of the recent proposal of the Chairman of the Council of Ministers of the GDR, Willy Stoph, in his letter to Chancellor Kiesinger, the slogan of the "new Eastern policy" will remain an empty phrase.

In his Olsztyn speech, in deprecating the significance of the West German offer to exchange declarations of renunciation of force with Poland, he was equally emphatic in linking the interests of Poland with those of the GDR:

Even under the condition that the Bonn government abandoned its territorial claims against Poland and recognized its Oder-Neisse border as inviolable, [exchanging such declarations] would be of real importance only if the Bonn government abandoned its pretensions to represent all of Germany and recognized the real fact of the existence of two sovereign German states, the GDR and the GFR, whose governments should reach mutual agreement and renounce the use of force in their relations.

He further declared, in Pravda, that the division of Germany "does not contradict the interest of any European nation" and that the consolidation of the GDR was "an important international duty of every socialist state and every revolutionary party."

(1) Speech in Olsztyn, Radio Warsaw, 28 October; Pravda, 29 October.

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Indeed, this was more than a restatement; more unambiguously than heretofore, Gomulka has made it clear that, of the three Polish preconditions for normalization of relations with West Germany -- recognition of the Oder-Neisse, renunciation of atomic weapons, recognition of the GDR -- it is the third condition which is in fact considered in Warsaw to be the most important.

On the other hand, Gomulka's Olsztyn speech also contained a positive evaluation of the attitude of West German society towards Poland and the GDR which is unprecedented since at least the announcement of Bonn's new Ostpolitik last December. Replying to Kiesinger's alleged fears that a bolder Eastern policy would cause a rightist reaction in West Germany (as reported by Stern and officially denied (2)), the Polish leader declared:

We must doubt whether in reality the majority of West German society considers as correct the policy of revisionism and revenge, the policy of preparing war and betting on war. We believe, rather, that those who conduct that policy attempt to hide behind the back of the majority of West German society.

This statement was not the first suggesting that, while the [still undifferentiated] Bonn Government was pursuing a policy of "revenge," it was confronted by serious opposition to that policy within West Germany. Since early October, Polish press commentaries have been making the same point. Several examples follow:

We are convinced that the majority of the Germans in the GFR have no doubt that Poland's border on the Oder-Neisse...is final and not subject to revision." (Trybuna Ludu, 4 October) All emphasis supplied

[The 'party of recognition' in West Germany] is not yet organized, their voices do not resound loudly enough for the time being, they are merely a shadow party, but they are there. And the very fact of their existence is an alarm signal for Kiesinger. ("The GFR Shadow Party," Zolnierz Wolnosci, 24 October)

The Kiesinger-Brandt Government, disregarding the views of the so-called extra-parliamentary opposition, which is becoming louder and louder, and the feelings prevailing in local social democratic organizations, particular trade unions (e.g., I.G. Metall) and among a part of the Evangelical clergy and students, continues to uphold its Ostpolitik" (Trybuna Ludu, 30 October)

These statements may seem innocuous, but in comparison with the public Polish Communist propaganda line on West Germany in 1967, they represent a definite change. Before October 1967, the emphasis was on the right-radicalization of West German society (the implication was: Bonn is Weimar); while statements of dissenters such as Karl Jaspers were quoted, opposition within West Germany to Bonn's policy was ignored or when mentioned at all, dismissed as insignificant. Thus Sztandar Mlodych (7 March) wrote; "...chances of creating an atmosphere in which an exchange of business-like arguments [with individual West Germans] would be possible are rather limited," and

Trybuna Ludu (19 April) saw a group of dissident Free Democrats as having "noble" intentions but "very small" influence.

Polish attacks on West German society as a whole were carried to the extreme in Andrzej Brycht's "Report from Munich" which appeared in serial form in Kultura in the spring (and was recently reissued in book form by PAX). Brycht's emotional anti-German polemic earned him the support of Minister of the Interior Moczar and was still publicly defended over Radio Warsaw on 28 October, the day of Gomulka's Olsztyn speech. The language of that defense, by Wojciech Gielzynski, was characteristic of the "Report": "With real brutality [Brycht] told off the public and the fancy intellectuals and the smart-alec youth and the honest impartial experts...: Gentlemen, attention, we are lethargic. The beast is alive, prospers, charges!" But the main effect of Brycht's "Report" seems to have been quite the opposite: a reaction against its crude Germanophobism.(3) It seems legitimate to speculate that this reaction may have affected the regime's propaganda line, forcing it to seek a more credible position in its attempt to justify its argument that it is the only possible guarantor of Polish independence in the face of the German threat. Continued refusal elsewhere in East Europe fully to endorse the Polish regime's premises in responding to Bonn's Ostpolitik could have also induced Gomulka to make this modification. The desire to expand trade with West Germany, and current bilateral negotiations on this score, could also have been a contributing factor. This desire seems to have been responsible for the official Polish cooperation in the organization of the "Polish Economic Days" which began in Hamburg on 30 October, in contrast to the total non-cooperation in the cultural "Polish Days" marked in Hamburg last April, (4) and for the reported upgrading in the diplomatic prerogatives enjoyed by Bonn's foreign trade mission in Warsaw.(5)

There is still no unified Polish Communist position on West Germany; the defense of Brycht cited above also took Polish propaganda media to task for devoting too much attention to "positive" developments in West Germany. But this view is now confronted by a more rational appraisal which may have become the authoritative, predominant one. This limited and still disputed reevaluation of West Germany notwithstanding, Polish Communist criticism of the Bonn Government, as pointed out above, has, if anything, become harsher. Nevertheless, the potential flexibility of the Polish position has increased. The long-term implications of this development should not be ignored.

A. Ross Johnson

(3) See Stehle, in Die Zeit, 13 October.

(4) RFE Special, 30 October.

(5) Die Welt, 9 September.