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X/9 P -- KANIA INTERVENES AGAIN IN POLISH PARTY ELECTIONS

Munich, 26 June 1981 (RAD/de Weydenthal)

First Secretary Stanislaw Kania has again directly intervened in the work of voivodship party electoral conferences to ensure their compliance with the political preferences of, and the procedural directives issued by, the central leadership. On June 25 Kania personally supported the re-election of Andrzej Zabinski as the first secretary of the Katowice Voivodship organization. He also called upon the delegates to the conference of that organization to include in the list of candidates for election as congressional delegates seven highly ranked party activists, who had not received mandates as delegates to the conference but had been recommended by the Politburo for the congressional election. In another case, on the previous day, Kania had appealed to the conference in Poznan to accept as candidates for election as congressional delegates four party activists from Warsaw. Kania's actions were reminiscent of his earlier intervention in the work of the Torun city electoral conference on June 4, when he sent a letter to the delegates urging them to abandon procedural disputes in the name of preserving "the unity and organizational cohesion of the party." (1)

Kania's intervention on behalf of Zabinski's re-election is particularly significant. Zabinski, whose career in the official youth movement and the party has lasted almost two decades, was elected a CC Secretary in February 1980; he advanced to full membership of the Politburo in August of that year. Since 19 September 1980 Zabinski has been first secretary of the Katowice Voivodship organization, his election to that position being strongly supported by Kania himself.

During his several months as head of the largest and most important voivodship organization, Zabinski has acquired a reputation as an outspoken conservative party official. He has openly criticized the public activities of the Solidarity labor movement, obliquely asserting that the workers' organization should concentrate on problems related to factory matters. (2) He has also been widely reported by Solidarity's internal bulletins as having presented, in a speech to a group of police officials in Katowice, an outline of a strategy aimed at the gradual destruction of the labor movement in its current form and its eventual reconstitution as an instrument of party policy toward the workers. (3) There is no firm evidence, of course, that Zabinski's pronouncements reflected the political preference of the leadership in general. By the same token, however, there has been no indication that Zabinski suffered any rebuff from other party leaders or officials after his views had been made public.

- (1) The text of Kania's letter was published in Nowosci (Torun), 5-7 June 1981.
- (2) See an interview with Zabinski in Polityka, 31 January 1981.
- (3) The text of Zabinski's speech was originally published in Wolny Zwiaskowiec, 5 March 1981. Wolny Zwiaskowiec is a bulletin published by the Solidarity chapter in the Katowice mine.

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There is also some ground to suspect that Zabinski was involved in both the organization and, indirectly, the activities of a firmly orthodox group of communist activists that became known under the name of the "Katowice Forum." In May this group issued a long manifesto that strongly criticized the political situation in the country and condemned the party's inaction in dealing with both the social ferment and reformists within the communist organization. The "Katowice Forum" eventually suspended its activities, but that occurred only after its appeals had received considerable publicity in the country as well as in the foreign press. Zabinski was not a member of the group; however, its leaders said in several interviews that the voivodship party committee headed by Zabinski had "provided the group with a place to meet," facilitated its publishing work, and kept abreast with its activities. Indeed, Zabinski was reported to have attended one of the meetings of the group, in December 1980, before it adopted the name for its organizational structure. (4)

By contrast, Zabinski's performance as an organizer of party work in the crucially important industrial district of Silesia has hardly been successful. Coal production is down, Solidarity has flourished in the region, and there has been considerable ferment in various local party bodies supervised by the voivodship committee. Yet, despite Zabinski's apparent failure to provide firm control over the rank-and-file and his alleged political conservatism, Kania strongly supported his re-election. Telling the delegates to the conference that he had personally "proposed Zabinski for the job of first secretary of the Katowice Voivodship committee" in September 1980, Kania said that "we have no reason to conclude that it was a mistake." (5) He then recommended Zabinski for re-election, and the conference duly complied.

Kania's insistence that the voivodship conferences, in Katowice and in Poznan, agree to include some officials recommended by the Politburo in the list of candidates for delegates to the forthcoming congress, even though they had not been elected as delegates to the conferences themselves, represents a qualitatively different issue. The issue is whether the Politburo has the right to present its own candidates for congressional elections. The Politburo asserted this right following the publication of electoral instructions in April. This assertion has been criticized by many reformers within the party. The difference between these views has led to periodic procedural challenges at several party conferences, for example, in Szczecin (Barcikowski), Torun, Lublin, and elsewhere. In all cases, however, the Politburo's views appear to have eventually prevailed. This is also what happened in Katowice where, following Kania's direct appeal, the conference included the names of such party luminaries as Minister of Mining Mieczyslaw Glanowski, the former minister Kazimierz Kakol, and a Deputy Minister of Internal Affairs, Adam Krzysztowski, in the list of candidates.

(4) See Glos Wybrzeza (Gdansk), 1 June 1981.

(5) Radio Warsaw, 25 June 1981.

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The Poznan episode, although essentially similar to the earlier challenges by the reformers, has developed into a true conflict between the delegates and a representative of the central leadership. Apparently, a majority of the delegates refused to accept the candidates recommended by the leadership, arguing that "only activists nominated by local party bodies were eligible to stand as congress delegates." This position was apparently strongly opposed by Politburo member Tadeusz Grabski, who was attending the meeting. After a reportedly acrimonious debate, Grabski appears to have failed to convince the delegates and was forced to appeal to Kania for support. (6) Kania obliged, and, following his telephone appeal to the conference to change its position, the delegates compromised by accepting the leadership's candidates as an exception from the still maintained rule that only delegates from the region could present themselves for election to the congress.

If nothing else, the operational pattern emerging from these two recent episodes in the current electoral campaign for the forthcoming special party congress has once again confirmed the popularity of the CC First Secretary within the organization. After having suffered a series of political adversities during recent months, adversities mostly resulting from broad social movements of self-organization as well as from internal divisiveness in the party, Kania has finally succeeded in establishing his personal authority within the party. Indeed, ever since the last CC plenum in early June, the plenum that featured an abortive attempt to introduce changes in the composition of the Politburo, Kania has emerged as perhaps the only party leader in the country capable of commanding respect and support from party bodies throughout the country.

Clearly, consequent to the increase in Kania's personal popularity there has been an equally obvious decline in the political standing of his real or presumed opponents. The conferences in Katowice and in Poznan provided ample evidence of this. Indeed, one might wonder whether Zabinski could have secured his re-election by himself, without Kania's support. With that support, Zabinski was able to garner 332 of 491 valid votes. For an ambitious politician, who had been used to unanimous approval of his candidacy in the past, it must have been both a sobering and a humbling result. Even more humbling must have been the Poznan development for Tadeusz Grabski. A man who only three weeks ago had felt himself sufficiently powerful to criticize the performance of the top party leader and lecture the Central Committee on the need for a change in official policies proved unable to convince the delegates to a local conference to accept his arguments. Moreover, he was reportedly exposed to sharp criticism for his own views on the country's politics and on internal party matters. Here, it should be noted that Grabski has not yet been elected a congressional delegate. He might presumably secure a mandate for himself at some of the forthcoming voivodship conferences, perhaps in Konin where he once occupied the position of first secretary, but the time left to do so is short since the electoral campaign is scheduled to end in June.

(6) AP, Reuter, and Radio Warsaw, 25 June 1981.

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Finally, a word of caution is in order here. The potential clarification of power relations within the party's hierarchy should not be taken as necessarily suggesting that some form of settlement of internal party differences is about to emerge. The recurrent challenges to central directives at various regional conferences imply the continuing existence of political ferment within the organization. Indeed, one might speculate that while the delegate body to the congress could eventually correspond to the leadership's preferences, and there are strong indications that this will be the case, there is also little doubt that those preferences have already been profoundly adjusted to fit the new realities within the party itself. And then, one must also remember that the delegates, whoever they are, constitute only a miniscule fraction of the membership. In view of the internal ferment and reformist movements within the party so evident in recent months, there is a strong probability that the membership at large will continue to assert its pressure on the authorities in the future. This is a prospect that both the congressional delegates and the current leaders must bear in mind while putting the finishing touches to preparations for the national congress and the party program that this congress is supposed to outline.

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