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● Poland/24
25 March 1968

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Polish Delegation to the Dresden Meeting

Four Politburo members, First Party Secretary Wladyslaw Gomulka, Premier Jozef Cyrankiewicz, Planning Commission Chairman Stefan Jedrychowski, and Katowice Voivodship Party First Secretary Edward Gierek, represented Poland at the Dresden meeting on March 23. Radio Warsaw revealed in the morning (07:00 hours) newscast of March 24. The meeting, the broadcast continued, was one of the "representatives of the leaderships of Communist and workers' Parties and governments of the six socialist countries: Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, the German Democratic Republic, Poland, Hungary and the Soviet Union." Radio Warsaw presented a summary of the official communique and referred listeners to the full text published in the press.

While Poland was not the only country to send more than three key representatives (the Party leader, the premier, and the chief planner), the inclusion of Gierek is quite significant. At least officially it can be explained by the fact that defense problems were also discussed and Gierek is chairman of the Sejm defense committee. However, the recent events in Poland and the role Gierek played in them (cf. Polish Situation Reports/20 and 22, Radio Free Europe Research, March 19 and 21 respectively) may offer food for speculation about what Reuter (March 24) called "signs" that his influence "is increasing."

This point is the more important as both the official press and Western news agency reports contain a wealth of quite clear indications that the internal power struggle within the Polish Party is far from being over and that the riotous events of the last two weeks -- as well as the preceding intellectual turmoil -- may have been cleverly exploited by the hard line faction.

There are also signs -- either read between the lines of the official press or easily deduced from the dispatches of Western correspondents in Poland -- that some of the recent events might have been engineered by the faction interested in fishing in troubled waters. (For instance, Gomulka quoted in his March 19 speech several slogans which could hardly have originated with the demonstrating students, like "Beat the PUWP!" "Down with Communism!" "Down with the Soviet Union!" These slogans which, according to Gomulka, appeared on leaflets and posters, could also hardly have originated with the alleged "inspirators" of the riots, either discredited politicians or "Zionists." Even allowing for a degree of genuine spontaneity in the origin of such slogans, their quantity and provocative content makes one wonder whether all were genuine.)

Against this background, the present role of Gierek is an element both to watch and to reckon with. The vital question of whose side he is on remains open. On the face of it, it might seem that he has shifted all the weight of his influence to support Gomulka. But it should not be forgotten that his speech was sharper than that of Gomulka (of the Politburo?) and that it was his name that was chanted (along with that of Gomulka) in the Warsaw Palace of Culture and Sciences. Was there a faction among the audience trying to boost him? These are the questions which -- for the time being -- must remain unanswered.

Another important element of the Dresden meeting is the fact, reported in the official communique, that "views and mutual information were exchanged on the situation in socialist countries" (plural). It is known from the communique that Alexander Dubcek briefed the meeting on the events in his country. No mention is made in the communique of a similar report by Gomulka. However, not only the plural used in the communique but above all the situation both in Czechoslovakia and in Poland may indicate that Gomulka briefed his discussion partners on what happened in his country. Gomulka's need to have the student sit-in at the Warsaw Polytechnic Institute terminated before the Dresden meeting may well be one of the reasons for the Polish regime's insistence on its end in the early hours of March 23.

Reaction to Czechoslovak Events

Realizing that it would be impossible to cut off the Poles completely from the news of such importance as the fall of President Novotny and that it might have come as a shock to unprepared Polish public opinion, Polish information media bowed to the inevitable and in anticipation of the things to come, announced without delay the motion presented by a National Assembly deputy Chotar to put on the agenda of the Czechoslovak Assembly session the issue of a vote of confidence in the President (cf. Polish SR/22, RFER, March 21).

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On the following day, March 21, Radio Warsaw in its 06:30 broadcast reported briefly that the above-mentioned motion had reached the Presidium of the Czechoslovak National Assembly.

Following this line, Radio Warsaw broadcast in its 12:06 program "From the Country and from the World," on March 22, a short dispatch from Prague by Czeslaw Berenda, containing the news of Antonin Novotny's resignation from the post of President of the Republic (Novotny's resignation was announced by Czechoslovak radio stations at 10:00 hours on that day (cf. Czechoslovak SR, RFER, March 22). Berenda admitted that the resignation had followed "numerous demands" to that effect; having stated that Novotny had motivated his request by the poor state of his health, Berenda concluded: "Comrade Novotny has been pensioned off."

Quoting Ceteka, Radio Warsaw broadcast on the same day (15:00) a somewhat different version of the reasons for Novotny's fall.

While Berenda's dispatch tried to convey the impression that Novotny had resigned, more or less, on his own initiative, this broadcast stated that "the Presidium of the Czechoslovak Communist Party recommended ("zalecilo") resignation to Antonin Novotny" and that Novotny "accepted this recommendation."

For the third time on the same day, Radio Warsaw presented still another version of the reasons for Novotny's fall. It stated (in the 17:55 newscast) that Novotny "decided to resign after having carefully considered the issue and after having taken into consideration the actual internal situation." No word about President Novotny's state of health was mentioned this time.

For a second time on the same day, Radio Warsaw broadcast Berenda's correspondence from Prague. The second dispatch was much more detailed than the first one, broadcast at 12:06 hours, and it amply quoted Novotny's letter to the National Assembly, which said, i.e.:

"I would like to inform you ... that I have taken this decision after careful consideration proceeding from the present situation in this country and ... also to help the further development of socialist society."

Berenda also described the events that followed Novotny's resignation (the role played by Bohuslav Lastovicka, taking over the functions of the President by Premier Josef Lenart, and special editions of Rude Pravo and other leading Czechoslovak dailies announcing Novotny's resignation). He also referred to the communique of the Czechoslovak Communist Party of the same

day (March 22). It is very interesting to note that not in this dispatch, but in his next one (Radio Warsaw, March 23, 21:00 hours), Berenda stressed that, according to the above-mentioned communique and Dubcek's Brno speech, "the changes which are taking place in Czechoslovakia do not lead toward reducing the leading role of the Party." (Emphasis supplied).

East-West Contacts

Polish scientists are participating in the 6th International Congress of Programmed Instruction and Teaching Machines, which opened in Munich on March 24, it was reported locally on March 23.

A Polish jazz band participated in the 7th Austrian Amateur Jazz Festival, which was held on March 23 and 24 in Vienna's Konzerthaus, an RFE Special reported from Vienna.

"Polimex," the Polish foreign trade enterprise, has signed a contract with a British firm to erect a six million dollar polythene plant at Plock, near Warsaw, an RFE Special from London reported on March 21.

The Polish Days opened in Helsinki on March 22, an RFE Special reported from Helsinki. The Days will continue until April 5.

The theater group of Lublin, which was scheduled to perform at the Drama Festival (cf. Polish SR/22, RFER, March 21) sent a telegram to Parma to say that it would not come, an RFE Special from Rome reported on March 23.

Poland is represented at the International Film Festival in Vienna, Radio Warsaw reported on March 23.