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Research

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### POLAND BEFORE THE SIXTH PARTY CONGRESS

Summary: This paper examines Edward Gierek's first year in office, dealing with both domestic and foreign policies. Special attention is devoted to the situation in the party on the eve of the Sixth Congress of the PUWP.

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The Sixth Congress of the Polish United Workers' Party (PUWP) will open on December 6, nearly one year after the workers' demonstrations that led to the downfall of the Gomulka regime and Edward Gierek's assumption of the post of PUWP first secretary. As the rationale for convening the congress almost one year earlier than stipulated by the statutes, the leadership has pointed to the necessity of elaborating "a long-range program for the country's socioeconomic development" and of approving a revised five-year (1971-1975) plan, which is said to incorporate "the fundamental idea that the highest goal of socialism lies in the constant satisfaction of the material and spiritual needs of the people on the basis of dynamic economic development." (1)

Urgent as such moves may be, the primary motivation for the decision to hold the sixth congress at this time appears to be political in nature. In the first place, it demonstrates the leadership's confidence in the success of its "consolidation" policies, a signal that is directed not only toward the beleaguered rank and file of the PUWP, but also to Poland's "fraternal allies," particularly the USSR. In a more substantive sense, this forum of the party's highest-ranking body has been convoked in order to legitimize the rule of Gierek and his closest associates and, in more specific terms, to preside over the reconstruction of "leading party organs." In this regard, the election of a new Central

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(1) See Politburo member and CC Secretary Edward Babiuch's interview in the East German weekly publication Horizont (No.45, November 1971).

Committee to replace the one voted in at the fifth congress in November 1968 will be of crucial importance. Similarly, changes in both the Politburo and the CC secretariat -- augmenting those already made at the seventh plenum (December 20) and at several subsequent CC sessions -- are to be expected.

Viewed from this perspective, the sixth congress might rightfully be termed a decisive "turning point," one that will formally inaugurate the "Gierek era." For the 58-year-old former party leader in Silesia, the past year has been a traumatic one in which he has had to deal with an enraged working class, alienated and frustrated intellectuals and youth, dissident and disillusioned elements within the PUPP, an entrenched party and administrative apparatus intent on protecting its vested interests, and the accumulated effect of outdated and irrational economic priorities and structures. Moreover, he has had to do so under the wary eye of Moscow, whose initial interest in a return to stability in Poland was soon supplanted by concern lest any process of "renewal" overstep certain political and ideological bounds.

It is perhaps too early to speak of a success or failure in any or all of these areas. The legacy of the Gomulka years was such that the replacement of the system of rule associated with his name, as well as the reversal of certain policy decisions, could, in the best of cases, only be a long-term proposition. Gierek's intentions on this score are still unclear, but the holding of the sixth congress -- at which genuine workers will be represented in far greater numbers than ever before and at which CPSU leader Leonid Brezhnev will be present (his first visit to Poland since Gomulka's removal) -- does reflect the extent of "normalization" registered under the new first secretary. It also provides a convenient peg for an interim assessment of the specifics of that "normalization."

#### Domestic Policy.

Given the critical economic situation and its close connection with the crisis of last December, the Gierek leadership has devoted much of its attention to this vital sphere. Initially, a number of ameliorative measures (affecting minimum wages, pensions, family allowances, and sundry social benefits) were taken in order to satisfy in part immediate economic grievances. Moreover, the new regime was later compelled by renewed outbreaks of labor unrest (in January and February) to scrap a controversial wage incentive system and to rescind the price increases that had originally sparked the workers' rebellion in December. Since the latter decision was taken (February 15) there has been no major disturbance, although isolated strikes -- over such issues as the distribution of bonuses and working conditions -- were reported in the press until midsummer. The end of such stoppages has not, however, seen

any let-up on the workers' part in pressing demands for the further improvement of working and living conditions. Although the leadership has shown a certain sensitivity to such grievances and has encouraged the relevant officials to deal with these issues on the local level, it has been far less responsive to the pervasive appeals for the invigoration of both the trade unions and workers' self-government organizations as representatives of labor's interests. The future role of these two bodies, which are mentioned in equivocal terms in the precongress Guidelines, (2) will in large measure depend on various legislation that is presently being prepared -- e.g., a new labor code and a trade union law.

With regard to economic policy itself, the "concepts" of the former leadership have been rejected, and henceforth economic development is to be "harmonious," i.e., to provide for a proportional improvement in the population's living standard. Toward this end, the five-year economic plan has been revised. As discussed at the 10th CC plenum in June, the draft includes such positive features as a shift of investment and production priorities toward consumer goods output, a sizable growth in real incomes, an expanded housing construction program, and support for the service industries. In emphasizing the importance of satisfying consumption and social needs rather than the fulfillment of quantitative targets, the new plan contains the seeds of a qualitatively new economic philosophy or, as was claimed by Zygie Gospodarcze (3), a significant change in "the whole logic of planning."

Admirable as such a change may be, the crucial question revolves around the implementation of the socioeconomic program and the means by which the goals of that program can be achieved. As Politburo member and CC secretary Jan Szydlak recently asserted: "The present policy is no different from the previous one, in that the size of the proverbial slice of bread to which everyone is entitled through the distribution of the national income cannot be determined by the subjective will of the party and government alone. Miracles are out of the question." (4) According to various members of the leadership, the "slice" is to be increased through such means as enhanced labor productivity, better use of fixed assets, a more profitable return on investments, more rational foreign

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(2) See Michael Costello, "The PUWP Guidelines and the Precongress Discussion," Polish Background Report/25, Radio Free Europe Research (EERA), 30 November 1971.

(3) 4 July 1971.

(4) Trybuna Ludu, 14 October 1971.



trade, scientific-technical progress, and the modernization and reform of the economic system. The latter problem is being examined by a special committee of experts, which will present a report on its findings to date at the sixth congress. Unfortunately, the work of this group has been shrouded in near-total secrecy, thus hindering a full assessment of the scope and direction of contemplated reforms. (5)

Although considerable caution has been displayed on the issues of institutional and systemic reform, one area in which ideological dogmas have been subordinated to the regime's pragmatic inclination to produce results is agricultural policy. In addition to raising purchase prices for meat and milk products, the leadership has sponsored a legislative program including the abolition (as of January 1) of the system of compulsory deliveries, changes in the tax laws to facilitate the expansion of private holdings, and the introduction of a social health insurance plan for the peasants. Clearly, the intent of these measures is to end recurrent food shortages by enhancing the profitability of private farming, but, in so doing, the regime has also provided the peasants with both an incentive and a sense of security denied them by Gomulka. In a major policy pronouncement initiating the precongress campaign, (6) Gierek noted that the leadership "will support the development of both socialist farms . . . and economically effective peasant farms . . ." without paying lip service to the eventual "socialist transformation of the countryside."

Such concessions to gain the active support of the farm community have been accompanied by conciliatory gestures toward the population at large. These have resulted not only from the leadership's initial attempt to gain the nation's confidence and restore the party's authority, but also from the recognition that even a limited "renewal," particularly in the economic sense, will depend on the participation and involvement of that vast majority of Poles who are not members of the PUWP and/or are members of the Catholic Church. In keeping with Gierek's appeal for the co-operation of the entire society, an eminent scientist without party affiliation has been elected chairman of the Front of National Unity, and "nonparty members" have been urged to participate in the precongress campaign.

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(5) For an initial impression, based on the scanty treatment accorded to the reform in the Guidelines, see Harry Trend, "Economic Reform as Discussed in the Guidelines for the Polish Congress," Polish BR/22, RFER (EERA), 28 October 1971.

(6) Trybuna Ludu, 10 September 1971.

As for the powerful Catholic Church, the regime quickly expressed a desire for a "full normalization" of relations, and followed this up with a genuine concession -- transferring ownership rights to Church property in the former German territories to the episcopate. Although considerable differences of interpretation remain between the Church and the state on the subject of "normalization," the leadership has not withdrawn its initiative. Indeed, the intention to "continue to aim at complete normalization of relations with the Catholic Church" is reiterated in the PUWP Guidelines, as is the party's "appreciation and recognition" of "the quality of work and creative activities" of "citizen believers." (7) Even more sensational in this regard was Gierek's statement in late September to a group of prominent journalists, (8) in which he bluntly referred to the "second-class" status accorded Catholics and signaled a change in policy:

There are cases where a man is a believer and, because of that, among other reasons, cannot be promoted in the government or economic hierarchy. I think that if he is really an honest man and moreover possesses good professional qualifications, then the question of whether he is a convinced Marxist should carry less weight than consideration of whether he is useful in his place of work and whether, given the proper chance, he could be more useful still.

The leadership's appeal to the nation has taken other forms as well. The decision to rebuild the royal castle, announced personally by Gierek, was the most obvious nod to national sentiment. Of more practical importance was the recent signing of an agreement with the Fiat company of Turin, under which Poland has purchased a license for the mass production (150,000 per year starting in 1975) of a medium-priced popular car. In addition, there have been signs of a more tolerant attitude toward intellectuals, as reflected by the appearance in print of several distinguished writers silenced by Gomulka. Moreover, the man identified with the anti-intellectual policies of the Gomulka era, Minister of Culture Lucjan Motyka, was removed from his post at a Sejm session in late October. The regime's failure to date to appoint a replacement for Motyka

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(7) See Costello, op. cit.

(8) Gierek's statement was published in the November issue of Prasa Polska, the publication of the Union of Polish Journalists.

may be indicative of disagreement over a suitable choice and/or continuing discussion in the leadership over cultural policy in general.

In his initial statements to the nation, Gierek committed the leadership to a "dialogue" with the people and to policies that would be "clear and understandable to all." Some changes in information policy have been forthcoming -- e.g., the appointment of a government spokesman in March and the inauguration of "Citizens' Tribune," a televised series of question-and-answer sessions with prominent leaders, in June. Public interest in the latter was such that similar sessions were subsequently held at the local level, involving regional party and economic officials. In addition, for the first time in PZP history brief communiqués have been issued on the activities of the Politburo and the CC secretariat, which, in accordance with the "new style," are convening regularly. For his part, Gierek has made a fetish of "dialogue," visiting almost all of Poland's 17 voivodships on one or more occasions and encouraging his associates to do likewise.

The importance of such initiatives has been diluted, however, by the regime's essentially conservative approach to the role of the press. Although there has been a visible increase in discussion and criticism in the media, both have been confined within limits acceptable to the leadership. As is reflected in the Guidelines, the press, radio, and television are viewed as "instruments for the implementation of the party's program." Exposure of "negative facts and shortcomings in socioeconomic life" is to take place only within "the field of criticism extended by the party." This is not an extensive "field." In his report to a meeting of the journalists' association in June, Stanislaw Mojkowski noted that the "political crisis" in the party had gravely affected the work of the media, but apologetically claimed: "Come hell or high water, we were always with the party, we tried to embody its teaching reasonably in life." (9) Such an attitude will hardly serve to restore the credibility of the press. Nor has the regime followed through on its promise to supply the population with "frank and open" information. Important party documents, e.g., the eighth plenum materials, have been suppressed, and reports on such important events as CC sessions and negotiations with the Soviet leadership have been no fuller than in past years.

Even greater contradictions have surfaced in the official attitude toward the nation's youth. In his speech to the eighth

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(9) Prasa Polska, July 1971.



plenum, (10) Ryszard Frelek cited "the problem of the younger generation" as the "key" issue. Referring to the March 1968 student revolt and to the December 1970 workers' demonstrations, he noted: "These two dates have only one point in common: in both cases, young people appeared in the streets. In March exclusively -- in December mainly. This is a matter for deep thought." Frelek's feelings were apparently shared by important members of the leadership, for, at the eighth plenum, Gierek indicated that a special CC session devoted to youth would be held in the near future. A distinguished committee of experts was appointed for the express purpose of proposing reforms in the educational system. Moreover, both the new five-year plan and the Guidelines included specific indications of concern for the younger generation, e.g., assurances of full employment, increased housing possibilities, better living standards, etc. Gierek has also met with representatives of the student community; although stressing that the solution of various academic problems will take time, he assured his audience that "there are no problems on which it will not be possible to find a common language with the party and government leadership." (11)

In contrast to these positive statements and indications of concern, several developments have suggested a certain amount of continuity with regard to the orthodox youth policies of the former leadership. Regarding priorities, the special CC plenum on youth has now been postponed until sometime after the congress. More concretely, the regime has continued to utilize political trials as means of attempting to intimidate youth. In particular, harsh sentences were handed out in June and October to a number of leaders and participants in the youth group Ruch, for actions in 1970 protesting against Gomulka's rule. Moreover, in one of the "Citizens' Tribune" programs, the Politburo member and CC secretary in charge of youth affairs, Stefan Olszowski, asserted that a merger of the existing youth organizations "could strengthen the representation of young people." (12) Numerous

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(10) As published in a special issue of Nowe Drogi (undated). For a translation, see Polish Press Survey No. 2317, RFER (EERA), 10 August 1971.

(11) See the report on the meeting in the student paper itd, 14 October 1971.

(12) Olszowski appeared on Polish television on September 17.

demands have been made for the renovation of these various organizations, but Olszowski's proposal -- envisioning a return to the pre-1956 Stalinist model -- appears directed less toward the former goal than toward facilitating official control over such institutions. The "integration" of the latter has been discussed during the pre-congress campaign, and the resolution of this issue, as well as the broader question of the leadership's intentions vis-à-vis the younger generation, may become clearer at the sixth congress.

The performance of the government and of the Sejm has been a subject of extensive discussion in the past year. In addition to personnel changes in the Council of Ministers (involving to date the chairman, three of the six deputy chairmen, eight of the 23 ministers and a larger percentage of deputy ministers, and the complete overhaul of the Planning Commission), the government is henceforth to confine its attention to "questions of essential significance for the state," particularly in the sphere of economic policies and their social repercussions. Greater authority is to be vested in the People's Councils, which, according to the Guidelines, will facilitate their "main role as local officials responsible for the harmonious development of a given region. . . ." These officials are also to be held more accountable for their actions, and, as is attested by the growing number of reports regarding the removal of local personnel, many of them have already been found wanting.

Within the framework of increased emphasis on "socialist democracy," the authority and control function of the Sejm have received particular attention. Certain changes in the work of this "representative" institution have been made. For example, more sessions have been held and the number of interpellations from the floor has increased spectacularly. Moreover, the Sejm was recently given the opportunity to discuss the draft of the five-year plan before its formal presentation for approval. (13) These and other positive initiatives notwithstanding, there has as yet been slight indication that the party intends to weaken its own position in favor of a more effective and representative parliamentary system.

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(13) For additional details, see Polish Situation Report/49, RFER (EERA), 26 November 1971, Item 3.



## Foreign Policy

The return to a normal schedule of activity in the international area has provided one further sign of the regime's satisfaction with the pace of consolidation at home. Although much of this activity has been economic in nature -- closely related to the improvement of the domestic situation -- the leadership has also resumed its diplomatic offensive in support of such goals as the preparation of a European security conference. These initiatives aside, the most important developments in the foreign policy field have been in the spheres of relations with the USSR, the apparent rebirth of the "iron triangle," and the relationship with the FRG.

At the eighth plenum Gierek posited the following "truth": "Poland can develop only as a socialist state, inseparably united with the Soviet Union and with our neighbors and allies." In the aftermath of the December upheaval, the leadership quickly gave the assurance that the demonstrations had not been directed against "our international alliances," and that Poland's role and position in the bloc were not in the least weakened in December. Subsequently, it has sought to identify the "renewal" process in Poland with "the new stage of socioeconomic development" that "most fraternal countries are now entering." As Gierek noted in early November: "The tasks which face us and the problems which we want to solve coincide with the policy lines of the majority of fraternal socialist countries. Our tasks are no different from those of our friends; on the contrary, they are quite similar." (14) Such statements, as well as the regular citations of the resolutions of the 24th CPSU Congress, are clearly intended to convey the impression that the Polish "renewal" contains no ideological deviations.

The attitude of the USSR is obviously crucial here, and the Polish regime has shown itself to be sensitive to Moscow's interests, political and other. Gierek has proceeded cautiously, presumably co-ordinating most of his major initiatives with the Soviet leadership. Since assuming the post of first secretary, he has been in the USSR on at least six occasions, most recently on November 10. (15) And he has, on occasion, displayed a deference to the USSR and the CPSU that equals, if it does not

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(14) Trybuna Ludu, 3 November 1971.

(15) See Polish SR/48, RFER (EERA), 18 November 1971, Item 1.

exceed, that shown by his predecessor. Such an approach has been in large measure dictated by the bleak reality of Poland's economic situation. However, it has also reflected Gierek's awareness of the dynamics of political power in Eastern Europe and Soviet concern that rejuvenation in Poland should proceed along defined lines. Thus, the PUWP leader has assiduously sought to convince Moscow that, although certain aspects of Polish policy might diverge from the Soviet experience, he is a firm "internationalist" and, perhaps as important, the only man who can ensure the type of stability in Poland that Moscow is so obviously interested in. For its part, the Soviet leadership has thus far provided the Polish regime with much-needed credits, consumer goods, and grain supplies. It has, however, been less forthcoming on the subject of a thorough and effective economic reform in Poland, which might subsequently obviate the need for lump-sum Soviet aid but could contain unacceptable political tenets. The nature of Brezhnev's endorsement of Gierek and company at the sixth congress may offer some clues to the Soviet attitude in this regard.

One of the most interesting developments of the past year has been the marked improvement of relations with Czechoslovakia and East Germany. In referring to co-operation with its allies, the Polish leadership has adopted the practice of mentioning the USSR, then Czechoslovakia and East Germany, and finally "other fraternal countries." This practice, plus the marked increase in exchanges of high-level delegations -- SED leader Honecker and CPCS leader Husak have been the only heads of East European parties to visit Poland -- revive memories of the "iron triangle" that was formed in the late 1960s. Reflecting the conservative inclinations of the respective party leaders at that time -- Gomulka, Novotny, and Ulbricht -- the "northern tier" grouping was essentially a defensive alliance based on common opposition to the Ostpolitik of the FRG. Although successful in temporarily halting the latter's thrust, the grouping broke apart in 1968-1969 as the result of the course of developments in Czechoslovakia, personal differences between Gomulka and Ulbricht, and Polish pique that its political support for the GDR was not being compensated for by adequate economic assistance.

Poland's present rationale in resurrecting the "triangle" appears to be motivated primarily by economic considerations. Although a noted observer (16) of Polish affairs has viewed the move as one means of obtaining "a certain autonomy" for Poland, the Gierek leadership has placed the initiative in the broad

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(16) Bernard Margueritte, in Le Monde, 24-25 October 1971.

regional context of "securing the best bilateral relations with all our neighbors," including the USSR. It would seem that Warsaw's interest in improving its relationship with Prague and East Berlin, at least at this point, is conditioned by the needs of the domestic economy and the assistance which these two states may be able to offer. To date there has been no indication on the Polish side of any intention once again to subjugate its interests in Bonn to those of Czechoslovakia or East Germany. While expressing formal support for the latter's positions vis-à-vis the FRG, Poland has continued to advance its own aims in direct negotiations with Bonn. The Polish-West German relationship has not been without strain -- particularly over the delay in ratifying the Warsaw treaty and the resettlement issue -- but periodic political negotiations have taken place, and the Poles have strongly indicated that increased economic co-operation is not dependent on formal approval of the treaty.

#### The Party Before the Congress

At the eighth plenum Gierek asserted that "the nation's guarantees for the future boil down to this: that the party fulfill its function of a guiding force in accordance with Marxist-Leninist ideology." Despite considerable emphasis on such matters as the separation of party and state functions and the effective introduction of "democratic centralism" in the PUWP and "socialist democracy" throughout society, the leadership has countered the argument for institutional guarantees with the thesis that the party's "correct line" was distorted by a small clique in the former regime. Similarly it is asserted that various party, government, and economic organizations possessed sufficient authority and rights but were prevented from exercising them owing to the arbitrary actions of Gomulka and his closest associates. Such an interpretation, as well as the oft-repeated assertion that the PUWP had itself found the strength to overcome the December crisis, is intended to serve the dual purpose of bolstering the confidence of the rank and file and restoring popular trust in the party. Thus a few high-level scapegoats have been found responsible for past "mistakes," and the former leadership's "autocratic" methods of rule, as well as certain policies, repudiated, while the party as a whole, whose "activists and members were acting in the best of faith," (17) has been absolved of responsibility for the past crisis.

This attitude is not simply a result of the leadership's feeling that the time is not ripe for innovations, or of sensitivity

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(17) Olszowski statement over Radio Warsaw on February 6.



to Moscow's concern regarding any diminution of the PUWP's "leading role." Rather, it would seem to reflect Gierek's orthodox concept of the party's role and his conviction that the proper functioning of the institutions and processes at hand is a sufficient guarantee in itself. Thus he has muffled earlier demands for the reform of party and state organizations -- e.g., the rotation of high-ranking officials -- and has committed himself thus far to "making the system work better." This type of effort is no substitute for the fundamental change that is required, but even the limited "renewal" program has run into considerable opposition in the party apparat, particularly at the middle levels.

Having skillfully brought about the political demise of his prominent rival in the leadership, Mieczyslaw Moczar, during the summer months, (18) Gierek has subsequently moved to weaken the resistance of the entrenched bureaucrats in the PUWP organization. Eschewing an outright confrontation with this powerful group, he has gradually secured the replacement of more than half the voivodship first secretaries. The "individual talks" conducted with approximately half the PUWP's 2,300,000 members during the summer resulted in the ouster from the party of about 100,000 people, many of whom were not attuned to the policies of the new leader. Moreover, Gierek has sought to increase the number of workers in the party and in its major bodies -- an act that has been explained in doctrinal terms, but presumably reflects Gierek's opinion that he can deal with this group in easier fashion than with the apparatchiki. The same phenomenon has also been reflected in the election of delegates to the congress, genuine workers being represented in far greater numbers.

Despite the first secretary's efforts to date, many elements in the party apparat have been unwilling or unable to accept the new demands that have been placed upon them. In certain cases, a question of age and talent is involved, but, on the whole, the failure of the "renewal" process to permeate down to the middle and lower echelons of the apparat has been due to the determined resistance of these officials, based on hardline philosophies and/or the defense of vested interests. Of late, the leadership has expressed increasing concern over this opposition, Gierek himself (19) observing that the party "will have

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(18) See Michael Costello, "The Political Fortunes of Mieczyslaw Moczar," Polish BR/15, RPER (EERA), 2 June 1971.

(19) At his meeting with the journalists in late September, Prasa Polska, November 1971.

to part company" with those who do not "keep pace in sufficient degree with what is happening 'on the bottom' and what is going on 'at the top.'" In preparing for the congress, he has studiously avoided a major conflict with these people, being careful neither to provoke them nor to provide any cause that might serve to unify what is basically a rather homogeneous group. If the congress should go according to plan, Gierek would then be in a position of strength, which would either force those bureaucrats with a "wait-and-see" attitude to gravitate to his side or enable him to pursue a more aggressive cadre policy.

All of this remains to be seen. Some observers have indicated that Gierek may have miscalculated in convening the congress at such an early date; that the conservative forces have been able to elect a considerable number of delegates;(20) and that the workers may prove to be an ineffectual ally. But in view of the political acumen demonstrated by the first secretary in his first year in office, the possibility of miscalculation would seem remote. The elaboration of any effective "action program" will in large measure depend on the election of the "leading party bodies." There is little to suggest that the outcome of the latter will be anything less than a major victory for Gierek -- one that should subsequently lead to a more precise outline of the specifics of "renewal."

Michael Costello

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(20) For example Bernhard Heimrich in the Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, 1 December 1971.