

POLAND

After agreement was reached in Gdansk last summer between the Polish government and the striking workers it seemed possible that the immediate crisis could be over. There was talk inside Poland of a 'social contract' between the government and the new trade unions. Solidarity would agree to cooperate in solving the immediate economic problems in exchange for full recognition, consultation on major issues and credible promises of social benefits in the future. There would be more participation but much of the political structure would remain unchanged.

It has not worked out like this. Mistrust towards the authorities is as great as ever. The mass of the people, having been given for so long an optimistic picture of the economic situation, apparently now refuse to believe that the government is not exaggerating the difficulties in an effort to control unrest. They certainly show no willingness to accept lower living standards. Working class militancy has remained the underlying

raised further, wider issues (such as the role of the security forces or the proposed new farmers' union). They have also been taking local initiatives to secure the removal of corrupt or repressive local officials. It appears that, as their members have gained more self confidence, so they have become a movement with wider aims than was initially intended. Despite repeated accusations, no evidence has been produced that this reflects the activities of 'enemies of socialism'. It rather appears that, with such a backlog of discontent at repressive and authoritarian rule and no obvious reason to trust the present leadership, a democratisation process can hardly remain restricted to the initial issue of independent trade unions. People will inevitably take the opportunity to raise the issues that concern them and militancy is encouraged by the fact that industrial action has proved successful. Walesa, although nervous of this development, has accepted that Solidarity is being pushed into assuming a wider role because the regime seems unable to sort out its faults on its own.

has insisted that the timing of any changes must be decided by the leadership. In practice, however, his speeches have remained at the level of generalisations. The party leadership has not presented definite proposals or taken genuine initiatives which might start to win back public confidence. It generally appears to be reacting to events and resisting pressure for change whenever possible. As an example, Kania has argued that there is no need for a new farmers' union. He believes that they are adequately represented already. A willingness to accept permanent and fundamental change in the political structure would imply allowing the farmers themselves to decide.

Moreover, a major theme in his speeches has been the accusation that dissident groups and other unnamed 'anti-socialist elements' are the root of the continuing political tension. The obvious implication of this is that major political reforms would not be the key to solving the current crisis.

Nevertheless, he acknowledges Solidarity as a fact of life and insists that a political solution must be found to the current difficulties. He, and governments which follow the same line, have therefore had little option but to make concessions when a general strike is threatened. His leadership has therefore appeared at times to be weak and indecisive.

He has even made important concessions to 'reformers' within the party who have become more active following the rise of Solidarity. The leading proponent of their approach is said to be Deputy Prime Minister Rakowski. As the editor of the party's weekly journal *Polityka*, he often published articles stressing the urgency of political reform as the key to solving the crisis. Following the breakdown of the three month strike free period, its main article was not concerned with attacking Solidarity. Instead, it concentrated on the need for economic and political reforms which, it argued, had been promised too often before but ended up nowhere because their implementation had always been left to those 'most directly interested in sabotaging them'. It concluded that 'the reforming forces in the party always lost, they were weak and represented only intellectual proposals, now they are supported by the organised working class'.

There has also been a great deal of activity 'from below' leading to the removal of unpopular officials. Basic organisations have even formed 'horizontal links' in various parts of the country in preparation for the forthcoming congress. An example of this was the recent conference of 500 party militants. Despite initial reluctance, the



feature of the situation.

So what are the obstacles to political stability and hence to economic recovery?

The leadership of the Polish United Workers Party has been placing the principal blame on Solidarity. They have been accused of converting themselves into an opposition political party. This, however, cannot explain most of the major conflicts as these have generally been related, in one way or another, to the question of full recognition of Solidarity's existence. Nevertheless, during confrontations the unions do seem to have

There certainly has been indecisiveness from the party leadership. Rather than taking the initiative, Kania appears to be performing a balancing act trying to keep happy those who want change while not seriously threatening those who believe they can still run the country as if Solidarity did not exist. Of course, a very important factor in this caution is the attitude of the Soviet Union and other Warsaw Pact powers and the possibility of an intervention. Kania has talked of the need to correct past mistakes and he has been extremely critical of Gierek's policies, but he

leadership has conceded to the pressure for delegates to be elected by secret ballot. This could be the prelude to broader changes within the party.

It is, however, still unclear what political reforms might be acceptable. Full recognition of independent mass organisations and of the real autonomy of the existing non-communist parties, a genuine choice in parliamentary elections and a clearer separation of the party and the government have been advocated. Also, within the party there could be rotation of top officials and all posts could be elected by secret ballot. The present leadership, however, is firmly opposed to any changes that would seriously weaken their position of power or allow their right to govern to be subject directly to popular approval. In this they can expect solid agreement from the leaders of other Warsaw Pact countries.

The party leadership therefore faces a very difficult task. Most of its members have no desire to lead a movement for fundamental political reform, which anyway would be unacceptable elsewhere in Eastern Europe, but without taking some initiatives the party has little chance of winning widespread public confidence.