

# Discussion

## Poland

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The year long ferment in Poland and the means and policies pursued to realise a stable, prosperous, socialist Poland are obviously of crucial importance to the Polish people. But not only for the Polish people. They are of great significance to every communist and socialist. They are bound to have a profound impact on all Communist Parties, both with regard to their own understanding of problems and the potentialities of consolidating socialism.

I therefore eagerly turned to Martin Myant's Focus item headed 'Poland', in the May issue of *Marxism Today*. Unfortunately I found it disappointing for several reasons.

I did not expect a full analysis, if for no other reason than the limited space allotted to a Focus theme. But at least a minimum analysis is essential to understanding any problem. Yes, there is an attempt at some analysis, but unfortunately the analytical element is superficial and can in no way explain the development of the crisis. That is why the author expected'. . . the immediate crisis could be over' once the Gdansk agreement was signed and was surprised that 'it had not worked out like this'.

The superficiality of the mini-analysis is that it begins with the Gdansk strike, and fails to relate it to a process of problems going back to before 1956 through 1970, 1976 and culminating in 1980. Only by ignoring the past was it possible to see the Gdansk events as a purely trade union economic strike which meant that once it had been settled by concessions to the workers' demands 'the crisis could be over'.

### Support for the movement

Second and more seriously, the piece contains a series of inaccuracies, particularly about the attitude of the Polish Communist Party's leadership over the recent period. It contains distortions of facts which are easily verifiable.

It is on the record that very soon after the Gdansk events those members of the Party leadership who failed to recognise and accept their responsibility for what occurred, were removed. It was also recognised that what

had occurred was a genuine internal and, to a considerable degree, spontaneous revolt of the Polish masses against the malpractices and undemocratic and authoritarian methods of the Communist Party. The revolt was not against socialism or the close relationships with the USSR and Poland's socialist neighbours.

I have read no speech by Kania, Jaruzelski or any other current member of the Communist Party's Political Bureau which has not stressed that this was a genuine mass movement of the Polish people, including Solidarity, and also expressed sympathetic understanding of why the movement developed and its major demands. They have also emphasised the absolute need for ending the past practices and methods, not only in state institutions, but above all in the Party itself, describing this necessary process as 'renewal'.

Of course in the speeches references are to be found to the fact that anti-Soviet elements at home and abroad are seeking to take advantage of the crisis to provoke maximum confrontation in the hope of turning the movement against socialism and the USSR. It would be strange indeed if that were not the case. But this in no way (they made it clear) basically changed the genuine character of the movement.

I have heard four Polish representatives from the current leadership in Havana, Prague and twice in Sofia at international gatherings, speaking to a not always sympathetic audience. Yet all of them stressed precisely the fact of the genuinely spontaneous and understandable eruption of the movement of discontent, and minimised as of not great significance the existence of indigenous and foreign provocative elements in it.

Martin Myant, however, in his piece turns the views of the current leadership on its head by selecting from the statements the secondary elements and ignoring the major and basic characterisation of the mass movement. This is misleading and harmful. It plays into the hands of those who argue that Poland faces a foreign-inspired and

manipulated crisis, mainly an antisocialist movement, which they claim has been admitted by the leadership, and therefore it is beyond the ability of the Poles to solve the problem themselves.

### Leadership as well as responsiveness

It is also in my view wrong to criticise the present leadership on the ground that it has reacted only to pressures from below for reforms.

Some of the proposals to be put to the 9th Special Congress, for ensuring a democratic Congress through secret voting for delegates, as well as for the democratisation of the Party came from the leadership as far back as March. These include a secret ballot for the Central Committee, the rotating of the leading positions so that no one holds a special position for more than two terms of office, that no leading Party official should simultaneously hold a government office as well, devolution of power from the centre, and changes in relationship between the Party and the government, as well as of the Party with the other two political parties.

Undoubtedly some of these reforms were proposed as a consequence of pressure from below, but surely positive reaction by a leadership to pressure from below, far from being wrong or a sign of weakness, is basic to the concept of democracy and should be welcomed.

There is ample evidence that, in the main, the current leadership is united on the main



proposition of no return to the previous status quo and the urgent need for 'renewal'. The most recent evidence of this is the leadership's unanimous condemnation of the 'Katowice Forum', which precisely sought a programme of return to past methods. This is also borne out by the fact that in the recent period those who are resisting change, whether at home or abroad, have started criticising the entire leadership without singling out individuals, and are indeed turning their fire against the whole of the Polish Communist Party.

Martin Myant also criticises the Polish leadership for its slowness in initiating and

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introducing these and other reforms.

This, in my view too, is doing less than justice to them. It is not evidence of resistance to reforms, as suggested by the author. It seems to me he underestimates the difficulties and complexity of the situation. Part of the complexity arises from differences

that do exist within the leadership, but these differences are not on the basic issue of the need of 'renewal', but rather on the pace of 'renewal'. There are some who seek immediate, wholesale introduction of reforms; others who are afraid in the present situation of moving too fast; while the third

and dominant group adopt a midway position. I repeat that in my view, the differences are about the rate of change and not change itself. It is to resolve these differences and at the same time endorse the need for change that the special 9th Congress has been called. O