



**For eighteen months Poland has been in a state of deep crisis. And the outcome remains as uncertain as ever. Will we see further progress towards new forms of socialist democracy or a drastic, even catastrophic, retreat to authoritarianism?**



Monty Johnstone and Andreas Westphal

## The Polish Crisis: is there a way out ?

The struggles of the Polish workers in the summer of 1980 ushered in a new and stormy period in their country's history. The *denouement* of this tense drama cannot yet be foreseen, though the elements of conflict and the principal characters with all their contradictory traits are already clearly established and a number of possible scenarios suggest themselves.

August 1980 brought to the surface a long-smouldering structural crisis, in which political and economic elements are inextricably linked. The absence of democratic political structures had had disastrous effects on the economy which it will take many years to overcome.

The Gdansk Agreement of August 31, 1980 recognised the establishment of 'new self-governing trade unions' as 'authentic representatives of the working class.' The formation and legal registration of Solidarity, with its 9.5 million members — followed by that of Rural Solidarity to represent three million private farmers — represents something qualitatively new and without precedent in any socialist country.

Poland is today experiencing a crisis of hegemony. The Polish United Workers' Party, recognised in the constitution as the 'leading political force in society in the construction of socialism', has committed itself to work for democratic renewal but is unable effectively to lead the people because it does not enjoy their confidence. The decisive forces in Solidarity and the Catholic Church, which do enjoy such confidence, do not aspire to become political parties taking over the leadership of the government from the PUWP. As the economic crisis becomes ever more acute, frustration grows and reckless local actions are undertaken, which both the Church and Solidarity leadership deplore but are unable adequately

to control. In such a situation the only hope for Poland would seem to lie in a historical compromise concluded between the PUWP, Solidarity and the Catholic Church to tackle the crisis on the basis of genuine socialist democracy and along lines that can win the active support of the majority of the people.

### THE PARTY — RULE WITHOUT HEGEMONY

Unlike in Czechoslovakia in 1968, the initiative for long overdue reforms came from outside the Party. 'It was only the mass protest of the working class', acknowledged the Programme Provisions for the Ninth Extraordinary PUWP Congress in July, 'which sparked off the process of transformation.'<sup>2</sup>

The 1980 strikes had a deep effect on the Party, 46% of whose three million members are workers, over a quarter of them employed in 168 of the largest factories. The debates before and during its recent congress were critical and self-critical, hard-hitting and conducted extremely democratically, refuting those who saw the Party purely as a bureaucratic apparatus incapable of change. A new central committee of 200 members, elected by a free vote, contained only 18 former members, and only four out of fifteen members of the old Political Bureau were re-elected, though changes in the Party apparatus have been much less drastic.

However the high hopes placed in the outcome of the congress have not so far been realised. It has been unable to capture the initiative among the working people, but has appeared confused and divided in face of a situation for which it was totally unprepared. At no stage has it introduced far-reaching and coherent proposals for reforming the old power structure, as the Czechoslovak Communist Party did in its Action Programme of April 1968.

Although the majority of the Party and its leadership supports 'the line of dialogue and agreement' proclaimed by Prime Minister

Jaruzelski at its congress, there is a conservative minority working against it. Their view has been expressed frankly and forcibly by Albin Siwak, a member of the Party's Political Bureau, who said on September 14: 'I do not believe in the policy of agreement (with Solidarity) and nobody will ever be able to persuade me from thinking so.'<sup>3</sup> This statement, like others of the same type, was widely publicised by the Soviet news agency Tass. Such publicity for dissident members of the Party leadership attacking its democratically adopted policies encourages them to count on support from the USSR and other Warsaw Pact neighbours in their efforts to reverse the process of democratisation and national conciliation. It undermines the unity of the Party at a time of great difficulty.

Constant Soviet pressure and fears of possible military intervention, as in Czechoslovakia in 1968, have clearly inhibited the Polish Party leaders. Attempting to respond to the contradictory pressures from that quarter as from the Polish workers, they have all too often found themselves satisfying neither.

The Party and its congress set the task of winning back the support which it recognised it had lost among the working people and particularly among youth. But three months after the congress, in his last Central Committee report as First Secretary, Kania was forced to acknowledge that 'lack of confidence is paralysing the Party from within, and no one can believe in a party which doesn't believe in itself.' Zofia Grzyb, a sub-forewoman in a leather plant and member of the Party's Political Bureau, told the Central Committee that the Party was 'disintegrating', adding pathetically: 'I am a worker, so I am incapable of proposing solutions.'<sup>4</sup>

Many in Poland feel that the figure of 60% expressing lack of confidence in the Party in a public opinion poll published on 14 June in the Warsaw weekly, *Kulisy*, would today be an underestimation. There is widespread resentment that a professedly democratic party, recognising its unpopularity, should insist on a privileged 'historical' and constitutional right to control the state and the media in the assumed interest of the working class but against its actual wishes. The *nomenklatura* system, whereby appointments to a wide range of posts in the state and society can only be filled by people approved by the Party committees at the corresponding levels, is particularly strongly contested, including by many members of the Party.

Socialist leadership, based on Marxist analysis, was never more needed than in the tense, anarchic and confused situation in Poland today. The kind of leadership required can however only be achieved by a continuous process of discussion and conviction, in which above all communist democratic credentials have to be established among a population whose lived experiences have filled them with distrust and even hostility.

That is not to say that, in Poland's complex national and international situation, the Party is called upon suddenly to abandon all its positions of control. What however seems to be increasingly accepted at different levels in the Party itself is that it should operate in genuinely pluralistic structures, seeking to win the people's support, whilst committing itself at the end of the day to submit to the democratically expressed wishes of society. Such a view was publicly voiced by Central Committee member Walerian Solinski in September in an interview with the Warsaw youth paper *Sztandar Młodych*, in which he stated that the Party must if necessary be ready to give up power for a time and become an opposition party. This is in keeping with Lenin's insistence in 1918 on the superiority of the Soviet multi-party system established by the October Revolution on the grounds that 'if the working people are dissatisfied with their party they can elect other delegates, hand power to another party and change the government without any revolution at all.'<sup>5</sup>

A gradual dismantling of the structures through which the PUWP has exercised its leading role by administrative and coercive means

would force it to reorient itself to working to lead the people politically and ideologically in new and more effective ways. Readiness to accept such a perspective with the undoubtedly long, difficult and painstaking work entailed would not only help to win back respect for the Party. It would also open up far better possibilities for its co-operation with Solidarity, which the public opinion poll cited above showed to enjoy the support of 90% of the population.

## SOLIDARITY'S DIFFERENT ROLES

With the development of Solidarity, the PUWP can now no longer exercise power at all levels of society in the way it did before. Every decision on Poland's social development has to involve Solidarity. How should its role in society be seen? On the one hand, the Party reproaches Solidarity for not being purely a trade union, for improperly assuming political functions. On the other hand, it is reproached for narrowly pursuing sectional economic interests in opposition to the wider social interest. Yet to work out a programme in the national interest entails Solidarity's involvement in politics. This contradiction has led it to call itself in its programme resolution an 'organisation with a dual character: both a trade union and a wider social movement.'<sup>6</sup>

In practice Solidarity has more than two functions. Firstly, it is a trade union which represents the direct economic interests of the members, for whom it has achieved a 28% increase in money wages since August 1980. On June 15, Walesa said: 'Even in Poland in the present situation, it is not up to a trade union to work out programmes — that is the government's job. We can only take up positions on the programmes that they propose.'<sup>7</sup> In relation to unemploy-

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ment inevitably resulting from rationalisation and reduction of capacity, this means that the government is required to find ways to redeploy the excess labour force without Solidarity involving itself in how this can best be achieved. Generally this would imply that Solidarity was not in business to develop ideas on how to overcome the national crisis, but only to represent sectional interests in negotiations with the government.

Secondly, Solidarity is a movement which, in fact, has a socialist function. It has developed the idea of self-management, and wants the means of production, which were previously at the state's disposal, to be brought under genuine social control. This can only be seen as a progressive development of socialist society.

Thirdly, Solidarity is a political movement, which advocates a fundamental change in Poland's political system. 'We will seek to ensure that the Sejm (Parliament) regains its role as the supreme power in the state and that the amended electoral rules, which enable all political parties, social organisations and groups of citizens freely to put forward their candidates, restore the Sejm's universally recognised character of representation.' (Solidarity's Programme Resolu-

<sup>1</sup> *Morning Star*, 5 September 1980

<sup>2</sup> *Programme Provisions of the 9th Extraordinary Congress of the Polish United Workers' Party, Information Bulletin of CC of PUWP* (Warsaw, 1981), p2.

<sup>3</sup> *Morning Star*, 16 September 1981

<sup>4</sup> *Le Monde*, (Paris), 18-19 October 1981

<sup>5</sup> V.I. Lenin, *Collected Works* (Moscow/London, 1964) Volume 26, p498.

<sup>6</sup> *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 9 October 1981.

<sup>7</sup> Walesa interview, *Spiegel* (Hamburg), 15 June 1981

tion, Thesis 22/2)<sup>8</sup>. To that extent, as Solidarity draws up programmes for altering the political system and political perspectives for social reform, it competes with the PUWP for the *de facto* leading role in society. That is certainly not to say that it is in fact assuming the role of a political party, or that it aspires to change into a political party. Walesa's declaration that "We are not aiming to take over power" was not merely tactical. It expressed the fact that Solidarity, due to the innumerable ideological currents within it (including a million members of the PUWP) would be in no position to form a viable political party which could take over government, without splitting itself in the process. The political role of Solidarity consists in its using its power to bring about a change in the political system, abolishing the monopoly of power enjoyed by the leadership of the PUWP.

Fourthly, Solidarity is a civil rights movement, which stands for the full realisation of rights guaranteed by the Polish constitution and the final act of the Helsinki agreement, which had been gravely violated.

Solidarity necessarily acquires these functions because of its position in society. Thus, to demand that Solidarity limit itself to a non-political role is to ignore the internal dynamics of the situation. The system whereby power is concentrated in one party cannot accommodate the diverse political currents which have developed in Poland and have taken shape more clearly since August 1980. All the time it remains impossible to settle these differences openly within the political framework, Solidarity will assume the role of an outlet for those forces opposed to the Party. This situation clearly demonstrates the need for changes in the political system if the superimposition of these functions onto a trade union is to be ended. Solutions to the crisis in Polish society can only come through compromises between the Party and Solidarity. The question here is, what are the conditions within Solidarity for such a course?

### THE TRENDS WITHIN SOLIDARITY

Solidarity advocates the retention of social ownership of the larger enterprises, and the continuance of Poland's international commitments. It thus has common ground with the PUWP which makes it difficult for its external and internal enemies to campaign against it under the universal banner of defending socialism, and thus justify repressive measures against it. The attempt at the Solidarity congress by Rulewski, chairman of Bydgoszcz region and the best-known exponent of Solidarity's 'radical' wing, to remove the passage from the appendix to Solidarity's statutes which recognises Poland's international commitments was defeated, despite its considerable support.

There are various reactionary forces in and around Solidarity, which, besides wanting to abrogate Poland's international commitments, also have anti-semitic and nationalist tendencies, like, for example, the illegal Confederation for Independent Poland (KPN). However, their influence in Solidarity is limited, and represents no adequate reason for accepting the arguments of conservative forces in the Party and the Soviet Union against collaboration with Solidarity.

The main issue within Solidarity of how far agreement can be reached with the government and the Party can be observed in the arguments in the second part of Solidarity's congress about the compromises on self-management, which the leadership, largely on Walesa's initiative, had worked out with the government. (See, below, the section on economic reform.) Rulewski's comment was: 'Our union should not compromise' but should start 'smashing the country's totalitarian system'.<sup>10</sup> This demagogic statement implies a perspective of strikes and other mass actions to change the political system. Above all, it is the representatives of the 'radical' wing who



promote this line. Those who favour compromise comprise, besides Walesa, the majority of members of KOR/KSS.<sup>11</sup> The latter has now declared its dissolution on the grounds that Solidarity has taken over its function of defending civil rights. The Church, although it has in no way developed into a socialist force, advocates a gradual evolution of Polish society on the basis of co-operation between all the forces in society. Thus Walesa can count on all the church-oriented currents in Solidarity.

Much argument arises from the fact that the leadership has to convince the much more radical regional organisations if the results of negotiations with the government are to be accepted. The tendency towards sectionalism, and the pursuit of exclusively regional interests (eg strikes over disagreements with local officials, against the line of the leadership) strengthens the position of the 'radicals' in the national leadership. All the same, the tireless opposition of Walesa and his allies to strikes because of their current exceedingly damaging economic effects is winning much support. The formula adopted in Solidarity's programme resolution, to use strikes 'only as the final form of protest'<sup>2</sup> is an expression of growing awareness of the need to negotiate with the authorities. Although, all in all, it is impossible to hazard a guess as to whether or not this willingness to negotiate will continue, it is significant and encouraging that the elections for the post of chairman gave Walesa 55.2% of the votes, a clear majority over the combined votes of his three 'radical' opponents. The earlier view that Solidarity merely has to react to the government's economic proposals now seems to have been abandoned. The still incomplete appendix to Solidarity's programme resolution, which contains three separate proposals for economic reform, clearly arose from the need to develop its own proposals for reform to put to the government.

### THE ECONOMIC CRISIS

Poland's balance of payments situation is becoming increasingly serious, production has fallen alarmingly and a number of enterprises face collapse through lack of energy and materials. The country faces the winter with a precarious food and fuel situation, and interminable queues for short-supply consumer goods of every kind add to the hardship of daily life. The causes of this catastrophic situation do not lie primarily in the strikes that have affected the country since August 1980, but in longstanding undemocratic structures of political power and economic management. The programme provisions for the PUWP congress wrote: 'Many of the profound perturbations were undoubtedly caused by incompetent

steering of the development processes by economic managements at various levels, especially the top level, who had been arbitrarily selected in violation of democratic principles and criteria of professional ability. The procedure of decision-making was highly erroneous and in some cases culpable. A decisive influence on important state decisions was exerted by various ministries and regional pressure groups often using erroneously prepared scientific studies, and by cliques."<sup>3</sup>

Gierek's failed economic strategy resulted in a negative growth rate for 1979 now assessed at -2.3%. It had attempted through investments, particularly in Western technology, financed by credits, to bring about such a great increase in productive capacity that, after a few years, by exporting lucrative industrial products to the West, the debts could be paid off. Twenty seven billion dollars in foreign debts were incurred and in 1980 81.8% of exports were absorbed by debt service. The overcentralised structures for the planning and management of industry favoured grossly misplaced investment decisions and hampered the efficient use of the imported equipment and the linking of production to the needs of society. In addition the planned increases in exports coincided in the mid-70s with the deep economic crisis in the capitalist states.

### The development of agriculture

Wrong political priorities and the absence of structures through which they could be contested and corrected also seriously harmed agriculture. In 1980 the negative rates of gross agricultural output, which had pertained every year since 1975, except for 1977 and 1978, escalated to -10.7%. Officially the PUWP was committed both to the expansion of the socialised sector of agriculture and to helping the private farms achieve greater efficiency. The latter today comprise 75% of all agricultural land, half of which belongs to small peasants with less than eight acres. In practice a stop-go policy was pursued with regard to help to improve individual peasant production, for which no secure long term prospects of development was ever opened up.<sup>14</sup> Preference was given to state farms in the supply of machinery, fertilisers and spare parts. About two-thirds of invest-

## The causes of this catastrophic situation lie in long-standing undemocratic structures of political power and economic mismanagement

ment funds, two-thirds of fertilisers and one tractor for fifty acres were granted to the socialised sector, whilst in the private sector there was one for every hundred acres.

Despite these less favourable conditions, productivity in the socialised sector is or lower than in the private one. In the former, lower net yields (value of output minus production costs) are obtained, which is primarily due to a disproportionate increase in capital outlay and overheads (machinery, repair and servicing departments etc) and their inefficient organisation. A further problem is that the state farms do not have proper economic links with the private farms in their region, as their production targets are laid down solely by the central planning authorities. A division of labour needs to be worked out between the private and socialised sectors, in which Rural Solidarity's participation is crucial.

A reason for the disruption of the supply of goods from the countryside to the town is to be found in the inability of the peasants to buy agricultural investment goods in the towns. Alongside measures for the development of the socialised sector, there is a need much more consistently to seek effective methods of increasing production in the private sector, which the PUWP now recognises

as 'a durable element of our national economy'.<sup>15</sup> This urgently requires the provision of credits for its modernisation and the conversion of part of the investment goods industry to small scale technology that can be used on the private farms, whilst seeking to win conviction in the longer term for the advantages of voluntarily developing and extending forms of co-operation.

### Arguments about economic reform

Since August 1980 seven different economic reform projects have been submitted. The most important, because politically the most influential, is the second project of the Party-Government Commission for Economic Reform, issued in July, and the various Solidarity drafts. Solidarity's views are decisively influenced by the 'Network' (*Stec*), which links Solidarity committees in the 17 largest factories and which worked out a detailed draft law on self-management.

The Party-Government project envisages getting rid of price subsidies which lead to distortions in the structure of production and have entailed such absurdities as the feeding of bread to cattle and the fixing of a price for steel lower than the energy costs involved in its production. Along with this, excessive purchasing power would be reduced.

A combination of central planning with the utilisation of the market mechanism is envisaged. The economy would be divided into two spheres. The first would comprise the social infrastructure, defence, enterprises working for the fulfilment of important international agreements and some other key industries requiring heavy investment, and would continue to come under the direct control of industrial ministries. The second would embrace all other enterprises, which would carry on their activity without direct instructions from central bodies but with regard to market indicators. These enterprises would finance themselves, ie, themselves raise the funds for their reproduction and expansion, as well as deciding on the borrowing needed for this, the scale and assortment of production, links with other enterprises and the diversification of their activity into other branches of the economy. They should 'satisfy social needs at minimum cost' by striving for 'profit maximisation'.<sup>16</sup>

The project is to be introduced progressively. Within three years from the beginning of 1982 the system of central controls will be replaced step by step by economic autonomy. During this transition period the central allocation of goods in short supply will continue.

Solidarity's reform proposals for economic decentralisation and the introduction of market mechanisms only diverge in degree from those of the Party and government. For example, Solidarity stresses the need for the extension of the private sector, which would involve scrapping the ceiling of twenty employees imposed in this sphere.

There are three major questions to which the Party-Government Commission and Solidarity give different answers:

<sup>8</sup> Solidarnosc Programme Resolution of First National Congress, in BBC, *Summary of World Broadcasts*, Part 2 (Eastern Europe), 30 October 1981.

<sup>9</sup> Interview with Walesa, *Marxism Today*, October 1981, p14.

<sup>10</sup> *Sunday Times*, 4 October 1981.

<sup>11</sup> Formed after the 1976 strikes as Workers' Defence Committee (KOR), it changed its name in 1977 to Committee for Social Self-Defence (KSS). Its members have played an active part in the formation and activity of Solidarity, and have been a special target for Soviet attacks.

<sup>12</sup> *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 9 October 1981.

<sup>13</sup> *Programme Provisions*, *op cit*, p3 (Slightly modified translation).

<sup>14</sup> See interview with W. Brus, *Marxism Today*, November 1980, p8.

<sup>15</sup> *Contemporary Poland (Warsaw)*, No4, February 1981, p45.

<sup>16</sup> Quoted by D.M. Nuti, *The Polish Crisis: Economic Factors and Constraints*, in *Socialist Register 1981* (London, 1981), p134. Nuti's extremely well documented essay is essential reading for an understanding of Polish economic developments and debates.



photo: J. Mary/Agfappt

1 What should be the functions of the proposed employees' councils (self-management organs)? Here Solidarity demands that the employees' council should be the effective management or executive of the enterprise. The director should be appointed by the employees' council and should at all times be subject to recall, whereas the original Party-Government draft law on self-management envisaged the appointment of the director by the state with the right of the employees' council to comment on this. After this draft had been rejected by the Sejm in May, a second draft was prepared by a parliamentary commission and represented a substantial compromise with the views of Solidarity. In the sphere of self-financing enterprises the director of the employees' council should be nominated by the employees' council with the state exercising the right of veto. In the defence and socially most important sector the reverse procedure should apply. A joint commission of the state and the employees' councils should decide which enterprises should belong to which sphere. What is in dispute is not the principle of dividing the economy into two spheres, but the question of which specific enterprises should be allocated to which. Solidarity fears that the introduction of self-management and self-financing may be confined to the smaller firms.

After Solidarity's national presidium had approved this new draft, it was approved by the Sejm at the end of September despite strong reservations from the PUPW leadership, and came into force on 1

October. In the second part of the Solidarity congress there was a sharp conflict, in which the Solidarity leadership, and particularly Walesa, were attacked for having betrayed genuine self-management, though the congress did not actually repudiate the compromise reached.

2 Who is to be the owner of the self-managed enterprises? Whereas the Party and government unequivocally regards the state as the owner, with the self-management organs only deriving their authority from it, the point is very unclearly defined by Solidarity: 'The employees enjoy exclusive rights of disposition over the property of the enterprise.'<sup>17</sup> In the Solidarity draft law there is no passage where a limitation of these rights of disposition by overall economic objectives is proposed. It has thereby lent itself to the interpretation that it is favourable to group ownership.

Solidarity leaders argue that their recognition of the need for social ownership of the larger enterprises within the framework of a central state plan refutes such a charge by the PUPW leadership with its imputation of 'anarcho-syndicalist tendencies'. However in the last resort great importance will attach to the behaviour of the employees' councils and the question of how far enterprises exhibit egoistical tendencies and in practice deny the competence of the social planning authorities.

3 What should be the role of the central planning authorities in the economic process and how should they be constituted? There is



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agreement that they should be responsible for (a) laying down the long term perspectives of development of the economy and ascertaining divergences of the actual process from these aims; (b) undertaking measures to correct these divergences, especially those arising from undesirable results of the market mechanism.

What are contested are above all the extent and form of these responsibilities. How far should the planning organs only have powers to react defensively to market development by correcting distortions, for instance by redeployment measures to absorb unemployment unavoidably arising from rationalisation? Or how far should they be empowered to determine developments positively, for instance by fixing the proportions between branches of the economy and giving priority to certain products particularly important for society? The answers to these questions determine the choice and mode of application of the instruments at the disposal of the planning authorities (credit system, subsidies, differential taxation, etc).

The essential difference lies however in the proposed composition of the central planning body. The Party-Government Commission wants to establish a council, alongside the government and the economic ministries, consisting of the representatives of the three parties of the National Unity Front (see below), the Church and other social organisations, as well as all three trade union groupings (Solidarity, 'branch' unions and autonomous unions). This council would have the right to be consulted and to make proposals on all decisive economic questions, but would have no right of decision.

The Solidarity programme resolution states: 'We think it desirable to examine the need for setting up a self-government body (a

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self-government chamber or a social-economic chamber) at the level of the highest authorities of the state. The task of such a body would be to supervise the implementation of the economic reform programme, economic policy and similar bodies at lower levels.<sup>18</sup> Along with this, Solidarity has been proposing the immediate setting up of a 'Social Council for the National Economy' which would comprise representatives of Solidarity, the PUWP and the other parties, along with the Church and other public organisations. The Council was to be independent of the government and be able to control and veto its economic policy. On November 20, however, Solidarity withdrew this latter demand which was seen as an obstacle to agreement with the government.

A crucial question is whether the PUWP will be prepared to pass over its ultimate control of economic planning to bodies more broadly representative of Polish society. Without this, decisions will not be seen as socially binding by the majority of the population and will not be successfully implemented. Solidarity and the majority of self-management bodies cannot be expected to take over joint responsibility unless they are given equal rights and status in the central planning body.

### THE POLITICAL SYSTEM

The upheavals of 1980, like those of 1956 and 1970, represented the crisis of a certain model of socialism. On each occasion working class discontent, denied adequate channels of expression, had built up and finally burst out in explosions. They brought about changes in the Party leadership, important concessions and a denunciation of bureaucracy and of the autocratic practices of the previous Party secretary. Yet on each occasion, after a certain period, the pendulum

swung back again to the same concentration of power.

The root of the trouble lies not in the character of individuals but in the nature of the power structures inherited from the Stalin period, within which successive Party leaders operated and enjoyed the corrupting fruits of uncontested power. What has been involved in Poland, as in other socialist countries, has been the subordination of all social and political organisations to an unchallengeable and irremovable governing Communist Party. The latter has, by an extension of the same process, been effectively subordinated to the Political Bureau and sometimes, within this, to the First Secretary and a small group around him.

The negative effects of this system in Poland reflected themselves in arbitrariness and growing corruption not only in the political sphere but equally in the economy subordinated to it. Lack of control from below not only deprived the working people of the democratic rights with which socialism promises to provide them in full measure. It also made for economic inefficiency and disregard for economic reality in general and the subordination of consumer interests and social welfare to capital accumulation. It deprived both the political system and the economy of the feedback mechanisms essential for preventing the accumulation of abuses, errors and the corruption that became so rife at all levels.

The Catholic Church, embracing 80% of the population, has in recent years represented an increasingly strong element of pluralism in Poland, although it has been anxious not to play any directly political role. The establishment and legal registration of the 9.5 million-strong Solidarity has however gone far beyond this in its effects on the country's effective power structure. It represents an exceptionally powerful pluralistic phenomenon unique in the socialist countries.

Whilst repudiating allegations of wishing to take power, Solidarity is most certainly an extremely strong pressure group acting on the existing organs of power at all levels and, in practice, introducing elements of dual power into the Polish political system.

While Solidarity's programme resolution speaks of examining the need for setting up a second self-government or social-economic chamber alongside Poland's present single-chamber parliament (the Sejm) to supervise economic policy, 'radical' elements in Solidarity demand such a second chamber, which would be controlled by Solidarity, as a political counterweight or opposition to the PUWP-controlled Sejm. Seen in such a context, it could at best be a recipe for constitutional confusion and deadlock, and at worst a prescription for escalating political confrontation.

Meanwhile the Sejm, which for so long played the role of a rubber stamp to the PUWP and the government, has been exercising more and more legislative initiative, as did the Czechoslovak parliament during the Prague Spring. On more than one occasion the government and the PUWP have been forced to back down and modify their proposals in face of opposition from both backbench Communist members and from the non-Communist parliamentary groups. In October this secured both the retention of concessions made to Solidarity on the self-management bill and the withdrawal — at least for the immediate period ahead — of a proposal for a temporary ban on strikes.

### Parties and elections

Poland has always been, at least nominally, a multi-party state. Two non-Communist parties exist alongside the PUWP, officially

<sup>17</sup> Solidarity's Draft Law on Self-Management Enterprises, in *Forum* (Vienna), September/October 1981, p46.

<sup>18</sup> Solidarity Programme Resolution of First National Congress, in BBC *Summary of World Broadcasts*, Part 2 (Eastern Europe), 30 October 1981.

acknowledging its leadership, which has since 1976 been enshrined in the Constitution. The Sejm, elected in March 1980, comprises 258 PUWP members, 113 from the United Peasant Party, 38 from the Democratic Party and 48 non-party members including three small Catholic groups. The non-Communist groups are now playing an increasingly autonomous role, helping to enrich the hitherto normally dreary and predictable Sejm debates. Outside Parliament the non-Communist parties have more and more been taking independent stands on political issues.

Up till now elections have always been held for both parliamentary and local elections on a single list of the National Unity Front, led by the PUWP and embracing all the above-mentioned parties and groups. There is today widespread agreement not only in Solidarity but among all except the conservative minority in the PUWP on the desirability of changing this thoroughly discredited electoral system. Thus, on 8 October, Hieronim Kubiak, Political Bureau member and Secretary of the Central Committee of the PUWP, said: 'The elaboration of a new pluralist formula for the National Unity Front, of a new method of election and of a reorganisation of the legislative system in the spirit of self-management and the expansion of civil liberties is an important task. Under no circumstances can there be any question of restoring the pre-August 1980 order.'<sup>9</sup> However specific proposals seem to have been put off till nearer March 1984 when the next parliamentary elections are due. It should not prove impossible for Solidarity and the PUWP to negotiate an agreement before then on a new democratic electoral system, which will give the electors a possibility of political choice.

For some time there have been moves in some circles to form new political parties. The idea of a 'Polish Labour Party' (PPS), launched by Jerzy Milewski, a Solidarity expert in Gdansk, has support among some section of Solidarity, whose congress however declined to sponsor it. In Warsaw, Jacek Kuron, a former leader of KOR-KSS, has been involved in forming a 'Club of the self-governing Republic', which has been the subject of police investigations. The attitude of the PUWP leadership to all such attempts is at present very hostile. How much popular support such projects get will depend to no small extent on how far the Peasant and Democratic Parties develop as autonomous organisations and are seen as giving expression to the views of the most important sections of critical non-communist opinion. Should the demand for a 'Labour Party' obtain popular support, it would seem better to allow it to exist freely and legally and to confront its ideas and criticisms in open political debate. An extreme right wing nationalist party like the Confederation of Independent Poland (KPN) might however require a different approach.

One of the most important points in the Gdansk Agreement stipulates: 'The activity of the radio and TV and of the press and publications should serve for the expression of a diversity of ideas, views and opinions. It should be subject to public control.'<sup>20</sup> Very considerable progress has been made since then in that direction. However the insistence of the PUWP on its 'right' to control the media provokes continuous clashes and resentment, as does the persistent refusal to allow Solidarity to publish a daily paper on the spurious grounds of paper shortage, whilst organisations with much less support are allotted paper for theirs. The PUWP's break with the old authoritarian power structures would appear that much more decisive if it were to show itself less reluctant to extend to other popular forces the same democratic rights as Communists everywhere demand for themselves.

### TOWARDS A HISTORIC COMPROMISE?

On the evening of November 4 Lech Walesa, Archbishop Glemp, the Catholic Primate of Poland, and General Jaruzelski met to

discuss the formation of a Front of National Accord. Though at best only the first step in a long process, it could become the symbol of the desire of the three great social forces in Poland to lay a basis for working together for overcoming the crisis and democratising Polish society. This would be the perspective of a genuinely historic compromise.

This scenario would involve Solidarity giving up organising its activities in the expectation of a sharpening of conflict with the government. Instead it would make proposals for social reform which would certainly compete with those of the PUWP. Such competition would however be seen as a necessary part of the working out of a compromise. The Catholic Church, as a conserva-



tive force in many social questions, would co-operate in the development of the socialist system. The PUWP would renounce any attempt to enforce its claim to exercise a leading role by administrative means and constitutionally prescribed privileges. Instead it would struggle on different social and political levels to convince the population of its ideas and be prepared for the period ahead to give up claims to exclusive positions of political power.

One can assume that such a historic compromise would have to include agreement at least on the following planes:—

The attainment of a compromise on self-management would have to proceed from the interests of the majority of society, which requires both the renunciation of economic sectionalism as of PUWP domination.

A social control over the media would have to be established, putting an end to their use as an instrument of ideological domination by the PUWP and guaranteeing access to all forces associated with the historic compromise.

Possibilities would have to be created for giving institutional expression to the increasing pluralism that has developed in Polish society. This would entail candidates in local and national elections no longer being only permitted to stand on a single list put forward by the PUWP-controlled National Unity Front. This would not necessarily involve the formation of new parties, but would allow for regional initiatives and would enable Catholic groups and the already existing parties to contest separately if they wished to.



However a second scenario is also possible. Such a historic compromise does not come about. Inside Solidarity those trends which are really committed to seeking such a compromise do not succeed in carrying the day. The PUWP, under pressure from Moscow, shows itself unwilling to give up sufficient of its prerogatives to be able to reach an agreement acceptable to Solidarity. The present political and economic tension becomes even more acute. In such a situation those favouring a return to the old set-up force the PUWP to change its strategy. The inclusive moves towards co-operation with Solidarity are broken off in favour of an authoritarian approach to overcoming the crisis. The PUWP on its own takes charge of the economic reform, and prevents any further discussion on a pluralistic reform of the political system. Such a strategy could certainly

rely on support from a section of the population, which has grown tired after nearly eighteen months of instability and disorder and is fed up with the inability of the Party and Solidarity to work together. This section of the population would be ready to abandon any comprehensive democratisation if the PUWP could convince them that it could at least effectively tackle the economic crisis. Such a solution would not be acceptable to the majority of Solidarity, as the attainment of its basic demands like access to the media, pluralistic reform of the electoral system and democratic participation in central economic planning would be blocked. Solidarity would therefore no doubt adopt a strategy of sharpened confrontation which would only leave the PUWP the option of suppressing the opposition movement, for example by mass arrests of strikers or the imprisonment of representatives of the 'radical' wing of Solidarity.

Already today the importance of the army is increasing significantly, and could become crucial in enforcing authoritarian solutions either on behalf of the party or on its own account. For the first time in a socialist country a general holds the post of first secretary of the Party, along with that of prime minister and minister of defence. Alongside Jaruzelski, three other ministers are generals. At the end of October task forces of about 2000 soldiers were given authority to go into the villages and take action to clear the supply lines and ease the shortages of food and other essentials, thereby taking over responsibilities of the local authorities. They were recalled after a month, but troops have now been sent into the towns for the same purpose. Both actions highlight the image of the army as the most — or perhaps only — efficient part of the state apparatus. At the time of writing the PUWP Central Committee has just approved the drafting of a far-reaching Emergency Powers bill giving the government the right to ban strikes and meetings and extend the jurisdiction of military courts. It also appears to have watered down the idea of the Front of National Accord. All this seems to increase the possibility of this second scenario, which could pave the way for a third and even more disastrous one.

The third scenario is a Soviet intervention, possibly on the invitation of a Polish government under pressure from within and without. Whilst Moscow has tolerated more far-reaching developments in Poland than would have been thought possible in July 1980, this does not mean that there are no limits. From the point of view of the Soviet Union four essential factors militate against an intervention. Firstly, unlike in Czechoslovakia, they would have to reckon with massive resistance in Poland. Secondly, the Soviet Union would create additional problems for its own economy by acquiring responsibility for the Polish economy. Thirdly, as a result of the ever more aggressive concepts of the US government there would be the danger because of Poland of an escalation of the two blocks on the military plane, not in central Europe but somewhere in the world. Fourthly, the growing success of the peace movement in Western Europe would be undone at a stroke.

The connection of developments in Poland with the development of the European Left should be underlined. If the historic compromise that we have discussed can be achieved, it would give an enormous boost to the left forces that stand for a pluralistic socialism in Western Europe. An authoritarian 'solution' or a Soviet intervention would give the right wing ideologists ammunition for attacking socialism as being in principle hostile to democracy. However the success of the West European peace movement in preventing the stationing of NATO medium range missiles could increase the tolerance of the Soviet Union towards pluralistic developments in Poland.

<sup>19</sup> *Le Monde* (Paris), 10 October 1981.

<sup>20</sup> *Morning Star*, 5 September 1980.