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POLAND'S PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS:
SETTING THE SCENE

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SUMMARY

POLAND'S FIRST FULLY-DEMOCRATIC PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS SINCE BEFORE WORLD WAR II WILL TAKE PLACE ON OCTOBER 27. THE POST-SOLIDARITY PARTIES COLLECTIVELY FACE A CHALLENGE: HOLDING TOGETHER VIA DEMOCRATIC MEANS A MANDATE FOR ECONOMIC REFORM DURING A PERIOD OF PROLONGED ECONOMIC HARDSHIP FOR A SIGNIFICANT PORTION OF THE POPULATION. THE POLITICAL CLASSES IN POLAND ARE APPREHENSIVE; SOME VERY MUCH SO, THOUGH A FEW ARE QUIETLY CONFIDENT. (Pol.)

IT IS ALREADY CLEAR NO SINGLE PARTY WILL COME CLOSE TO OBTAINING A PARLIAMENTARY MAJORITY. GIVEN THIS, THERE ARE SEVERAL POSSIBLE OUTCOMES FOR OCTOBER 27. THE ELECTIONS COULD END IN FAILURE FOR SOLIDARITY AND EVEN FOR THE DEMOCRATIC PROCESS: A PARLIAMENT PARALYZED BY 10 OR 12 SQUABBLING GROUPS, WITH SOLIDARITY PARTIES BARELY OR NOT EVEN REACHING A MAJORITY. THE BEST CASE SCENARIO, IN CONTRAST, WOULD PRODUCE A PARLIAMENT IN WHICH 2 OR 3 POST-SOLIDARITY PARTIES FINISH SUFFICIENTLY WELL TO FORM A STABLE COALITION GOVERNMENT. A MIDDLING OUTCOME WOULD RESULT IN A PARLIAMENT IN WHICH ALL OR NEARLY ALL THE WIDELY DIFFERING POST-SOLIDARITY FORCES TOGETHER UNITE AND MANAGE TO FORM A GOVERNMENT. GIVEN THE SHARP POLICY DIFFERENCES WITHIN THE SOLIDARITY CAMP, HOWEVER, THAT GOVERNMENT WOULD HAVE A DIFFICULT TIME PURSUING A CONSISTENT COURSE OF REFORM.

MOST RECENT POLLS SUGGEST AN RESULT SOMEWHERE BETWEEN THE BEST CASE AND THE MIDDLING OUTCOME. THIS IS LIABLE TO CHANGE, HOWEVER, BECAUSE THE PUBLIC CAMPAIGN HAS SCARCELY BEGUN; THE POST-SOLIDARITY PARTIES ARE CONSERVING THEIR SLENDER RESOURCES UNTIL ELECTION DAY IS CLOSER. IT IS POSSIBLE THAT ONCE THE CAMPAIGN BEGINS IN EARNEST, DECLARED VOTER TURNOUT (FOR WHICH CURRENT ESTIMATES VARY WIDELY, THOUGH TENDING TOWARD THE LOW SIDE) COULD RISE.

MOST RECENT SURVEYS GIVE THE CENTER-LEFT DEMOCRATIC UNION PARTY (UNIA) A GOOD LEAD OVER ITS RIVALS WITH 20 PERCENT OF THE VOTE. PRIME MINISTER BIELECKI'S LIBERAL-DEMOCRATIC CONGRESS PARTY (KLD) IS CURRENTLY PROJECTED TO FINISH STRONGLY, SOMEWHERE IN THE MID-TEENS. THUS, UNIA AND KLD APPEAR LIKELY TO BE MAJOR BUILDING BLOCKS OF THE NEXT COALITION GOVERNMENT. THE SOLIDARITY-BASED PEASANT ALLIANCE (PL) HAS LATELY SCORED WELL IN POLLS AND COULD

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ALSO BE A COMPONENT OF THE NEXT GOVERNMENT. THE CENTER-RIGHT CENTER ALLIANCE PARTY (CENTRUM) AT PRESENT FARES POORLY IN MOST SURVEYS. THE RENEGADE POPULIST-NATIONALIST "X" PARTY WILL EVIDENTLY BE LESS OF A FACTOR IN THE ELECTIONS THAN MANY HAD FEARED. BECAUSE IT WAS FOUND TO HAVE SUBMITTED FRAUDULENT NOMINATING PETITIONS, "X" HAS BEEN DISQUALIFIED FROM NATIONWIDE COMPETITION AND WILL BE ABLE TO RUN CANDIDATES IN ONLY 4 OF POLAND'S 49 PROVINCES.

THE ELECTION WILL AT BEST GIVE THE WINNER A DUBIOUS REWARD: THE CHANCE TO WRESTLE WITH DAUNTING ECONOMIC PROBLEMS FOR WHICH NO QUICK SOLUTION IS IN SIGHT. BUT UNLIKE ITS PREDECESSORS, THE NEXT GOVERNMENT SHOULD HAVE THE IMPORTANT ASSET OF AN ELECTORAL PICTURE OF HOW BROAD THE BASE FOR REFORM ACTUALLY IS. END SUMMARY.

DISCUSSION

ON SUNDAY, OCTOBER 27 POLAND WILL HOLD ITS FIRST FULLY-DEMOCRATIC PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS SINCE BEFORE WORLD WAR II. UNLIKE IN THE HISTORY-MAKING JUNE 1989 ELECTIONS, WHERE, AS AGREED IN THE ROUND-TABLE ACCORDS, 65 PERCENT OF THE SEATS IN THE LOWER HOUSE WERE RESERVED FOR THE COMMUNISTS AND THEIR ALLIED PARTIES, ALL 460 SEJM (LOWER HOUSE) AND 100 SENATE (UPPER HOUSE) SEATS WILL BE UP FOR GRABS THIS TIME. THIS CABLE REVIEWS THE BACKGROUND AND THE PRINCIPAL ISSUES AT STAKE, AND OFFERS PRELIMINARY ASSESSMENTS OF THE CHANCES OF SOME OF THE MAJOR PARTIES.

A FREELY-ELECTED PARLIAMENT: THE FIRST SHALL BE LAST

POLAND, WHICH IN MANY WAYS LED EASTERN EUROPE'S POLITICAL REVOLUTIONS, IS AMONG THE LAST TO REACH THE INSTITUTION-BUILDING STEP OF FREE PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS. THE SOLIDARITY-ORIGIN GOVERNMENTS WHICH HAVE HELD POWER SINCE AUGUST 1989 GAVE HIGHEST PRIORITY TO THE COUNTRY'S ECONOMIC TRANSFORMATION, USING THEIR HONEYMOON TO MAKE DIFFICULT ECONOMIC CHOICES. POLITICAL TRANSFORMATION VIA ELECTIONS TOOK PLACE AT THE BOTTOM (LOCAL ELECTIONS IN MAY 1990) AND AT THE TOP (THE BITTER PRESIDENTIAL CAMPAIGN OF THE LATE FALL 1990). BUT PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS WERE DELAYED, PUSHED ASIDE FIRST BY THE TURMOIL OVER THE PRESIDENTIAL CAMPAIGN AND, FOLLOWING LECH WALESZA'S ELECTION, BY PARTISAN POLITICS. THE POLITICAL COALITION THAT ELECTED WALESZA, GROUPED AROUND THE CENTER-RIGHT CENTER ALLIANCE PARTY (CENTRUM OR PC) COUNTED ON EARLY PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS IN THE WAKE OF MOMENTUM FOLLOWING THE WALESZA VICTORY. BUT WRANGLING OVER THE ELECTORAL LAW CAUSED THESE TO BE PUT BACK UNTIL THE FALL. IN THE MEANTIME, THE UP-FRONT COSTS OF ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL TRANSFORMATION MOUNTED; THE NATIONAL MOOD, WHILE A PATCHWORK, HAS ON BALANCE SLOWLY SOURED; AND THUS THE POLITICAL MANDATE THE ELECTORATE BESTOWED ON SOLIDARITY IN 1989 HAS STEADILY FRAYED.

THE BACKGROUND: NOT MUCH GOOD NEWS IN ECONOMICS ...

OUR READERS ARE FAMILIAR WITH THE GENERAL OUTLINES OF THE POLISH

ECONOMIC SITUATION AND ITS POLITICAL CONSEQUENCES. THERE IS ECONOMIC GOOD NEWS TO REPORT, WITH INFLATION DOWN FOR NOW (VIRTUALLY UNMEASURABLE IN JULY AND AUGUST); A SWIFTLY GROWING PRIVATE SECTOR; AND, IN SOME OF THE LARGER CITIES AND TOWNS, VISIBLE ECONOMIC DYNAMISM IN THE FORM OF NEW SHOPS, SERVICES, CARS. BUT FOR A SIGNIFICANT PORTION OF THE POLISH POPULATION (ESPECIALLY WORKERS IN FAILING STATE ENTERPRISES, FARMERS, AND PERSONS ON FIXED INCOMES), THE COUNTRY'S ECONOMIC RESTRUCTURING HAS BROUGHT DIRECTLY-FELT HARDSHIP, FOR WHICH NO QUICK END IS IN SIGHT. A SENSE OF DISLOCATION AND UNCERTAINTY IS VERY REAL, THOUGH THERE ARE ALSO POCKETS OF SUCCESS. CONSEQUENTLY, SOME VOTERS WILL GO TO THE POLLS TO REGISTER THEIR DISSATISFACTION AND CAST A PROTEST VOTE AGAINST THE ECONOMIC POLICIES THAT SOLIDARITY-ORIGIN GOVERNMENTS HAVE PURSUED SINCE 1989. THE SIZE OF THIS OPPOSITION VOTE AND THE FORM IT TAKES IS ONE BIG ELECTORAL RIDDLE.

... AND AN ELECTORATE WEARY OF POLITICS

SURVEYS INDICATE A SLOW BUT STEADY EROSION OF PUBLIC CONFIDENCE IN POLITICAL INSTITUTIONS AND INTEREST IN POLITICAL ACTIVITY. FOR THE DECADES OF COMMUNIST RULE, NORMAL POLITICS WAS ABSENT; THE HEROIC DISSIDENT POLITICS THAT SUBSTITUTED FOR IT WERE BUILT UPON MORAL CATEGORIES AND IT WAS ON THAT BASIS THAT SOLIDARITY TRIUMPHED IN 1989. THE DEMOCRATIC, ORDINARY, PARTISAN POLITICS THAT FOLLOWED HAS LEFT MANY WITH A SENSE OF LET-DOWN. SOLIDARITY'S ORIGINAL LEADERS UNDERSTOOD THEIR MOVEMENT'S ORIGINAL MORAL MANDATE WOULD HAVE TO BE SUBSUMED INTO FAMILIAR WESTERN POLITICAL CATEGORIES. THAT PROCESS HAS BEGUN, BUT THE PROBLEM HAS BEEN THE LAG TIME BETWEEN THE DECLINE OF THE OLD MANDATE AND THE RISE OF THE MODERN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL INSTITUTIONS TO CONSTITUTE THE NEW POLITICAL BASE FOR THE COUNTRY. THESE ELECTIONS FALL AT A LOW POINT OF THAT PROCESS: WHERE SOLIDARITY NUMBERED IN THE MILLIONS IN ITS HEROIC EARLY YEARS, CURRENT POLITICAL PARTIES NUMBER, AT BEST, AT A FEW SCORE THOUSAND PERSONS.

MOREOVER, THE OCTOBER 27 PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS WILL BE THE FOURTH MAJOR VOTE FOR POLES IN LITTLE MORE THAN TWO-AND-A-HALF YEARS. THE NOVELTY OF EXERCISING ONE'S DEMOCRATIC MANDATE HAS LONG SINCE WORN OFF FOR MANY AVERAGE CITIZENS. THE CAMPAIGN HAS GOTTEN OFF TO A LACKLUSTER START ANYWAY, WITH THE PARTIES SAVING THEIR MEAGER RESOURCES FOR THE FINISH. MANY ANTICIPATE LOW TURNOUT FOR THE PARLIAMENTARY VOTE. A RECENT POLL INDICATED THAT APPROXIMATELY 25 PERCENT OF THE ELECTORATE IN GDANSK INTENDED TO VOTE ON OCTOBER 27, A STRIKINGLY LOW NUMBER GIVEN THAT CITY'S HISTORY OF POLITICAL ACTIVISM. OPINIONS DIFFER AS TO WHETHER A LOW TURNOUT WOULD HELP OR HURT THE MAINSTREAM POST-SOLIDARITY PARTIES. BUT THERE IS WIDE AGREEMENT THAT A PARLIAMENT ELECTED WITH A MANDATE WELL BELOW HALF THE ELIGIBLE POPULATION WOULD BE LESS ABLE TO SUSTAIN DIFFICULT POLICIES.

COMPLICATED VOTING FOR A BEWILDERING CHOICE OF PARTIES

THERE IS A MIND-BOGGLING NUMBER OF COMPETITORS FOR THE 460 SEJM AND 100 SENATE SEATS: ON SEPTEMBER 3 THE STATE ELECTORAL COMMISSION (PKW) REPORTED THAT 7328 PERSONS HAD FILED PAPERS TO RUN FOR THE FORMER, AND 607 TO RUN FOR THE LATTER. THE PKW FURTHER ANNOUNCED THAT 29 ELECTION COMMITTEES HAD GATHERED ENOUGH NOMINATING PETITION SIGNATURES TO QUALIFY TO COMPETE NATIONWIDE (THIS NUMBER IS BEING WHITTLED DOWN SOMEWHAT AS THE PKW DISCOVERS DISQUALIFYING ERRORS OR FALSIFICATIONS IN THE ELECTION COMMITTEES' PAPERWORK; MORE ON THAT BELOW). THERE ARE ALSO NUMEROUS COMMITTEES REGISTERED IN JUST ONE OR TWO DISTRICTS TO RUN "FAVORITE SONS" AND "FAVORITE DAUGHTERS." THIS CAN LEAD TO A BEWILDERING SURFEIT OF ELECTORAL CHOICES: FOR THE 10 SEJM SEATS FROM LUBLIN THERE ARE 70 GROUPS FIELDING APPROXIMATELY 700 CANDIDATES. TO HELP COUNTERACT PROBLEMS OF PARTY IDENTIFICATION, EACH NATIONWIDE ELECTION COMMITTEE WAS ASSIGNED A PARTY NUMBER AT RANDOM, AND THE GROUPS ARE EMPHASIZING THESE LIST NUMBERS -- "VOTE LIST 54" -- IN THEIR INCIPIENT CAMPAIGN PUBLICITY.

THE MEANS FOR REGISTERING A CHOICE IS OF NECESSITY COMPLICATED. VOTERS WILL RECEIVE SEPARATE CARDS -- BOOKLETS, REALLY -- FOR VOTING FOR LOCAL AND NATIONAL LISTS. SOME PARTY ACTIVISTS HAVE PREDICTED TO US THAT SOME PEOPLE WILL UNINTENTIONALLY INVALIDATE THEIR VOTES BY MARKING THE BALLOTS THE WRONG WAY; OTHERS PREDICT THAT THE CONFUSING VOTING PROCEDURE WILL CAUSE SOME PEOPLE TO STAY HOME ALTOGETHER.

AT STAKE: THE MANDATE FOR REFORM

AT STAKE AND AT RISK IS THE SAME BASIC CHALLENGE AROUND WHICH MOST OF POLAND'S DOMESTIC POLITICS HAVE REVOLVED SINCE THE BEGINNING OF 1990: HOLDING TOGETHER THROUGH DEMOCRATIC MEANS A SUFFICIENT PUBLIC MANDATE TO PERMIT A CONSISTENT COURSE OF POLITICAL AND, ESPECIALLY, ECONOMIC REFORM. THIS REQUIRES A STABLE GOVERNMENT SURE OF ITS BASE. GIVEN ALL THE ABOVE DISADVANTAGES, THE MAIN POST-SOLIDARITY PARTIES FEEL THEY ARE FIGHTING AN UPHILL BATTLE IN THIS CONTEST. THROUGHOUT THE SUMMER AND FALL POLLS HAVE CONSISTENTLY INDICATED THAT NO/NO PARTY WILL OBTAIN A CLEAR PARLIAMENTARY MAJORITY IN THE OCTOBER 27. INDEED, ACCORDING TO THOSE SURVEYS NO TWO PARTIES PUT TOGETHER HAVE EVEN CROSSED THE 50 PERCENT THRESHOLD (THOUGH IN SOME POLLS SOME COMBINATIONS COME CLOSE; MORE ON THAT BELOW). CONSEQUENTLY, THE NEXT GOVERNMENT OF POLAND WILL HAVE TO BE A COALITION GOVERNMENT.

A NIGHTMARE OF SQUABBLING LITTLE FACTIONS

WHERE WILL THAT POLITICAL MAJORITY COME FROM? LEADERS FROM THE MAJOR POST-SOLIDARITY PARTIES -- CENTRUM, FORMER PRIME MINISTER TADEUSZ MAZOWIECKI'S CENTER-LEFT DEMOCRATIC UNION PARTY (UNIA OR UD), PRIME MINISTER JAN KRZYSZTOF BIELECKI'S FREE-MARKET LIBERAL-DEMOCRATIC CONGRESS (LIBERALS OR KLD), SOLIDARITY-ORIGIN PEASANT REPRESENTATIVES (THE PEASANT ALLIANCE, OR PL) -- HAVE SHARED WITH

US THEIR NIGHTMARE OUTCOME FOR OCTOBER 27: A VOTE WHICH SENDS 10 OR SO WIDELY-DISPARATE GROUPS TO PARLIAMENT, ALL SMALL, ALL SURROUNDED BY EVEN SMALLER LOCAL AND SPLINTER FRACTIONS. SUCH A SEJM WOULD PIT AGAINST EACH OTHER THE MAINSTREAM POST-SOLIDARITY PARTIES, PARTIES FROM THE LEFT AND RIGHT EXTREMES OF THE SOLIDARITY CAMP, ORGANIZATIONS FROM OUTSIDE THE SOLIDARITY SPECTRUM (SOME OF WHICH, SUCH AS THE POST-COMMUNISTS OR POPULIST-NATIONALISTS ON THE MODEL OF STAN TYMINSKI'S "X" PARTY, ARE ACTIVELY HOSTILE TO REFORM), AND NUMEROUS DEPUTIES NOT AFFILIATED WITH ANY PARTY AND THUS NOT/NOT ACCOUNTABLE TO ANY LARGER STRUCTURE. IN THIS SCENARIO, VIRTUALLY ALL POST-SOLIDARITY GROUPS WOULD HAVE TO COME TOGETHER TO FORM A SCANT-MAJORITY GOVERNMENT, POSSIBLY EVEN REACHING OUTSIDE TO THE MORE PRO-REFORM PARTIES OF THE OLD REGIME. THE NEW GOVERNMENT WOULD THUS BE HOSTAGE TO THE DEMANDS OF ANY GROUP PREPARED TO BOLT THE FOLD AND BRING THE GOVERNMENT DOWN. GIVEN THE WIDE DIFFERENCES OF ECONOMIC POLICY OPINION WHICH EXIST EVEN AMONG THE POST-SOLIDARITY PARTIES, IT WOULD BE EXTREMELY DIFFICULT FOR THAT GOVERNMENT TO TAKE CONSISTENT, DECISIVE STEPS IN ECONOMIC REFORM. PRESIDENT WALESZA HAS SAID CONFIDENTIALLY THAT IN THE EVENT OF A SHATTERED PARLIAMENT, HE WOULD CONSIDER FORCING NEW PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS SOON, TRYING TO RESHUFFLE THE DECK.

THE BEST-CASE SCENARIO: 2 OR 3 STRONG PARTNERS ...

LATEST POLLS SHOW THE ABOVE OUTCOME POSSIBLE BUT, FORTUNATELY, NOT LIKELY. THE LEADERS OF THE THREE BIGGEST POST-SOLIDARITY PARTIES -- UNIA, KLD AND CENTRUM -- HOPE THAT TWO OF THEIR GROUPS WILL RECEIVE ENOUGH VOTES THAT THEY CAN FORM A STABLE GOVERNMENT IF JOINED BY A THIRD PARTNER. THAT PARTNER COULD BE EITHER THE SOLIDARITY UNION (WHICH HAS DECLARED IT WILL NOT/NOT TAKE PART IN ANY FUTURE GOVERNMENT, BUT MAY LEND A PARLIAMENTARY BASE TO ONE), THE SOLIDARITY-BASED PEASANT COALITION PL, OR ONE OF THE SMALL POST-SOLIDARITY CENTRIST PARTIES (SUCH AS THE CHRISTIAN-DEMOCRATIC PARTY (PCHD)). AT A SEPTEMBER 10 LUNCH, REPRESENTATIVES OF KLD, CENTRUM AND UNIA ALMOST SHEEPISHLY ACKNOWLEDGED TO US THAT "INFORMAL DISCUSSIONS" ALONG THESE LINES TAKE PLACE ALL THE TIME BETWEEN THE LEADERSHIPS OF THEIR RESPECTIVE PARTIES, EVEN IF THIS FACT IS NOT/NOT EMPHASIZED TO THE RANK-AND-FILE.

... AND A DIVIDED OPPOSITION

A FUTURE CABINET COMMITTED TO A FREE-MARKET ECONOMIC PROGRAM -- EITHER A CONTINUATION OF THE CURRENT "BALCEROWICZ PROGRAM" OR A CLOSE VARIATION ON IT -- WILL BE CHALLENGED FROM RIGHT AND LEFT. THE IDEAL COMPLEMENT TO THE SCENARIO OF A COMPARATIVELY STABLE REFORM GOVERNMENT BUILT AROUND 2 OR 3 STRONG PILLARS WOULD BE AN "OPPOSITION" SPLIT INTO A MULTITUDE OF IRRECONCILABLE GROUPS. BASED ON THE POLLS, IT APPEARS THAT THIS WILL BE THE CASE; THAT THE LEFT WILL BE SPLIT INTO POST-SOLIDARITY AND POST-COMMUNIST GROUPS AND THE RIGHT INTO A MYRIAD OF ANGRY BUT SMALL PARTIES. THE SOCIAL-DEMOCRATIC LEFT WILL HAVE OPPORTUNITIES TO JOIN FORCES WITH THE NATIONALIST RIGHT AND WE HAVE ALREADY SEEN PARALLEL

POLITICAL MOVEMENT DIRECTED AGAINST THE BIELECKI GOVERNMENT'S ECONOMIC POLICIES. THE QUESTION REMAINS HOW POTENT THIS WOULD BE. A SOLIDARITY HERITAGE DOES NOT GUARANTEE THAT SOME SEJM DEPUTIES WILL NOT CROSS THE AISLE TO VOTE AGAINST A SOLIDARITY-ORIGIN GOVERNMENT, ESPECIALLY FROM TIME TO TIME. BUT IT HARD TO IMAGINE SOLIDARITY VETERANS OF THE LEFT, SUCH AS ZBIGNIEW BUJAK OR RYSZARD BUGAJ, WILL COLLABORATE IN A STRATEGIC WAY WITH THEIR OLD ADVERSARIES. THUS, WITH A FRAGMENTED PARLIAMENTARY OPPOSITION, THE POLISH THIRD REPUBLIC IS NOT/NOT LIKELY TO RESEMBLE THE FRENCH FOURTH REPUBLIC, WHERE UNSTABLE GOVERNING COALITIONS FACED STRONG, DISCIPLINED OPPOSITIONS.

THE PARTIES: UNIA: CALLING THE SHOTS OR RIDING FOR A FALL?

AT AROUND 20 PERCENT POPULARITY, THE CURRENT LEADER OF THE PACK IS FORMER PREMIER TADEUSZ MAZOWIECKI'S DEMOCRATIC UNION PARTY, WHICH IS ITSELF A COALITION OF A CENTER-LEFT MAJORITY AND A STRONG FREE-MARKET, CENTER- RIGHT FRACTION. AFTER MAZOWIECKI'S DEBACLE IN THE PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS, THE PARTY'S LEADERS CLAIMED THEIR BASE (MAZOWIECKI'S 18 PERCENT SHOWING) WOULD HOLD TOGETHER WHILE OTHER ELECTORATES SAGGED OR DISSOLVED. THAT HOPEFUL PREDICTION HAS BEEN BORNE OUT; UNIA'S BASE OF MIDDLE-CLASS, URBAN PROFESSIONALS AND MANY ELDERLY PEOPLE HAS PROVEN STABLE AND LOYAL. UNIA HAS POSITIONED ITSELF CLOSE, BUT NOT TOO CLOSE, TO BALCEROWICZ AND HIS CONTROVERSIAL ECONOMIC PROGRAMS: SINCE THE SPRING, UNIA HAS BALANCED A CALL FOR MAINTAINING THE THRUST OF THE CURRENT GOP'S ECONOMIC PROGRAMS WITH CALLS FOR CORRECTIONS. UNIA ENJOYS THE ADVANTAGE OF BEING THE PARTY OF THE BULK OF THE FAMOUS SOLIDARITY INTELLECTUALS, WELL KNOWN AND, IN THE MAIN, VERY WELL LIKED.

SO FAR, UNIA IS THE HANDS-DOWN WINNER IN THE CAMPAIGN. WHILE SOME PARTIES HAVE YET TO HANG A SINGLE HANDBILL, UD HAS ALREADY PUT OUT TWO SERIES OF ATTRACTIVELY-DESIGNED AND WELL-PRINTED POSTERS, AND CAMPAIGN WORKERS SELLING UNIA BUMPER STICKERS, TEE SHIRTS, PLASTIC BAGS, AND KEY CHAINS CAN BE FOUND AROUND WARSAW EVERY WEEKEND. UNIA INCLUDES SOME OF THE MOST POPULAR POLITICIANS IN POLAND, AS WAS VIVIDLY DEMONSTRATED ON SEPTEMBER 22, WHEN A BOOK-SIGNING SESSION BY UNIA VICE CHAIRMAN JACEK KURON STRETCHED INTO SEVEN HOURS AND DREW THOUSANDS OF PEOPLE, WHO WAITED IN A THREE-HOUR LINE TO GET THE SOLIDARITY VETERAN'S AUTOGRAPH.

WHILE PUBLICLY REMAINING CAUTIOUS, UNIA'S LEADERS HAVE TOLD US THEY EXPECT UNIA WILL TAKE THE LEAD IN FORMING POLAND'S NEXT GOVERNMENT, MOST PROBABLY IN ALLIANCE WITH KLD. THAT GOVERNMENT WOULD NOT/NOT NECESSARILY FEATURE AN UNIA PRIME MINISTER; PREMIER BIELECKI REMAINS THE FIRST CHOICE OF PRESIDENT WALESZA, ACCORDING TO PRESIDENTIAL STAFF, AND IS WIDELY REGARDED IN WARSAW POLITICAL CIRCLES AS THE CURRENT ODDS-ON FAVORITE TO SUCCEED HIMSELF. SENIOR UNIA ACTIVIST HENRYK WUJEC TOLD US THAT WALESZA'S PREFERENCE WOULD SAVE UNIA THE PROBLEM OF CHOOSING FROM AMONG ITS STARS: MAZOWIECKI, KURON, OR PARLIAMENTARY CAUCUS CHAIRMAN BRONISLAW GEREMEK.

GIVEN THE PREVAILING ATMOSPHERE OF APPREHENSION, WE USUALLY WELCOME UNIA'S CONFIDENCE. YET, IN FEW CONVERSATIONS WITH US, OPTIMISM HAS SHADED INTO OVER-CONFIDENCE, AND A TEMPTATION TO SPEAK SOMEWHAT PATRONIZINGLY ABOUT OTHER PARTIES, INCLUDING POTENTIAL COALITION PARTNERS. MOREOVER, THE GLOATING TONE SOME UNIA ACTIVISTS DISPLAY WHEN DISCUSSING CENTRUM'S CURRENT POOR SHOWING POINTS TO UD'S POTENTIAL ACHILLES HEEL: THE PARTY ALREADY LOST ONE ELECTION IN PART BECAUSE IT DISMISSIVELY UNDERESTIMATED ITS COMPETITION.

KLD: HOW LONG ARE BIELECKI'S COATTAILS?

LEADERS OF THE LIBERAL-DEMOCRATIC CONGRESS CLAIM A RANGE OF ADVANTAGES FOR THEIR PARTY: KLD IS PRAGMATIC, A WELCOME ALTERNATIVE FOR POLES WHO BELIEVE OTHER PARTIES SQUANDER TOO MUCH ENERGY ON IDEOLOGICAL QUESTIONS. KLD LIKES TO CALL ITSELF THE PARTY OF ENTREPRENEURS AND ITS POLITICAL PROFILE IS MODERN, SECULAR AND PRO-BUSINESS. IT IS A YOUNG PARTY: IT CLAIMS THE YOUNGEST MEDIAN AGE FOR ITS PARLIAMENTARY CANDIDATES. PART OF KLD'S APPEAL IS GENERATIONAL: IT IS A POST-SOLIDARITY PARTY LED BY A POST-SOLIDARITY GENERATION, A PLACE WHERE ONE IS NOT/NOT OVERSHADOWED BY THE HEROES OF THE SOLIDARITY MOVEMENT. 18. KLD'S LEADERS ACKNOWLEDGE ITS STRONGEST SELLING POINT CAN BE EXPRESSED IN THREE WORDS: JAN KRZYSZTOF BIELECKI. PARTY SECRETARY PAWEL PISKORSKI TOLD US KLD INTENDS TO BUILD MUCH OF ITS ELECTION CAMPAIGN AROUND THE PREMIER AND HIS LEADERSHIP RECORD. THE MOST RECENT POLLS, WHICH GIVE LIBERALS ABOUT 12 PERCENT OF THE VOTE, WERE CONDUCTED BEFORE THE AUGUST 31 VOTE IN WHICH THE PREMIER STARED DOWN A NO CONFIDENCE MOTION, BEFORE THE PRIME MINISTER'S SUCCESSFUL SEPTEMBER 10-11 VISIT TO WASHINGTON, AND BEFORE THE SEPTEMBER 14 VOTE IN WHICH THE SEJM REJECTED THE GOVERNMENT'S REQUEST FOR SPECIAL POWERS TO RESOLVE CERTAIN ECONOMIC ISSUES BY DECREE. THE FIRST TWO ITEMS ENHANCED BIELECKI'S POLITICAL STATURE; THE THIRD PERHAPS DIMINISHED IT SLIGHTLY, BUT ALSO GAVE BIELECKI A CONVENIENT FOE -- THE "CONTRACT" SEJM, IN WHICH POST-COMMUNISTS AND THEIR ERSTWHILE COALITION PARTNERS ARE STILL NUMERICALLY DOMINANT -- AGAINST WHICH TO RUN.

KLD'S STRONG REPUTATION WILL BE TESTED AGAINST THE DECIDEDLY MIXED FEELINGS POLES HAVE ABOUT THE BIELECKI GOVERNMENT'S ECONOMIC POLICIES TO DATE. DEPUTY PREMIER LESZEK BALCEROWICZ, WHILE NOT A KLD MEMBER, IS ASSOCIATED WITH KLD, WHICH BACKS THE PUREST "LIBERAL" LINE OF ANY MAJOR PARTY, AND BALCEROWICZ IS A LIGHTNING ROD. THE LIBERALS HAVE STATED THEY WILL KEEP THE CONTROVERSIAL DEPUTY PREMIER AND FINANCE MINISTER ON IN THE NEXT KLD GOVERNMENT; WHETHER THEY DO DEPENDS ON THE NATURE OF THE COALITION AND THE OPPOSITION AND WILL BE DECIDED IN THE FIERCE AND STRESSFUL BARGAINING THAT FOLLOWS THE OCTOBER 27 ELECTIONS.

KLD CAREFULLY DOWNPLAYS ITS CHANCES IN THE UPCOMING ELECTIONS. A SEJM CANDIDATE IN SIEDLCE, TOLD US HIS PARTY WOULD DO WELL IF IT WON EVEN ONE OF THE 10 SEATS UP GRABS IN THE DISTRICT. BUT THIS WAS ALL RIGHT, HE AVERRED, BECAUSE KLD WAS LESS INTERESTED IN

WINNING THE NEXT ELECTIONS THAN IN BUILDING UP THE PARTY TO RUN WELL IN THE ELECTIONS AFTER THAT. A KLD SPOKESMAN AND SEJM CANDIDATE FROM SIEDLCE TOLD US SOCIOLOGICAL SURVEYS INDICATE THAT HIS PARTY AND UNIA DRAW ON ESSENTIALLY THE SAME ELECTORATE; HOW MANY SUCH VOTERS ARE OUT THERE?, HE ASKED RHETORICALLY. NEVERTHELESS, IT SEEMS CERTAIN THAT KLD WILL BE ONE OF THE MAJOR BUILDING BLOCKS OF THE POST-ELECTION GOVERNMENT, ESPECIALLY SINCE THE LIBERALS CAN COOPERATE MORE EASILY WITH CENTRUM OR UNIA THAN EITHER OF THOSE PARTIES CAN WITH EACH OTHER.

CENTRUM: PREPARING FOR A FUTURE IN OPPOSITION?

THE CENTER-RIGHT CENTER ALLIANCE LEADERSHIP CLAIMS, WITH SOME JUSTICE, THAT THE PARTY THAT MOVED POLISH POLITICS BEYOND THE WARSAW SALONS. CENTRUM'S GREATEST TRIUMPH WAS ITS LEADERSHIP ROLE IN LECH WALESZA'S PRESIDENTIAL CAMPAIGN. FOLLOWING THAT EFFORT, CENTRUM'S LEADERS WERE GIVEN SENIOR PRESIDENTIAL STAFF JOBS AND CENTRUM APPEARED TO MANY TO BE THE PARTY OF POLAND'S FUTURE. A HIGH-RANKING CENTRUM OFFICIAL TOLD US RECENTLY THAT CENTRUM'S MISSION WAS TO CAPTURE THE INEVITABLE SENSE OF POPULAR FRUSTRATION WITH REFORM AND KEEP THAT ANGRY ELECTORATE WITHIN A BROAD SOLIDARITY FOLD. TO DO SO, HE SAID, CENTRUM WOULD HAVE TO COME UP WITH CREDIBLE ALTERNATIVES TO BALCEROWICZ, OR ELSE THE ALTERNATIVES WOULD BE OFFERED BY A POST-COMMUNIST PARTY, OR BY STAN TYMINSKI'S "X."

CENTRUM, CALLING ITSELF THE PARTY OF THE AVERAGE MAN, HAS BROADENED ITS BASE STILL FURTHER BY BRINGING INTO AN ELECTORAL COALITION THE FORMER SOLIDARITY POLITICAL ARM OF 1989, THE CITIZENS' COMMITTEE (KO), AND FORMER PSL LEADER AND PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE ROMAN BARTOSZCZE'S TINY "PATRIMONY" (OJCOWIZNA) PEASANT GROUP TOGETHER TO FORM THE CENTER CITIZENS' ALLIANCE (POC, IN ITS POLISH ABBREVIATION). MOREOVER, AS A CENTRUM LEADER TOLD US, THE SOLIDARITY TRADE UNION IS DIRECTLY OR INDIRECTLY HELPING CENTRUM IN MANY REGIONS, AND THIS WILL INCREASE THE PARTY'S ELECTORAL SHOWING. THE ISSUES ON WHICH PC WILL BASE ITS CAMPAIGN -- A "BREAKTHROUGH" GOVERNMENT, THE REPLACEMENT OF BALCEROWICZ, DECOMMUNIZATION, POLAND'S SWIFT ENTRY IN WESTERN SECURITY STRUCTURES -- WILL BE WINNERS, MAZIARSKI AND OTHERS PREDICT, DESPITE THE "DISCRIMINATION" AGAINST CENTRUM IN THE MASS MEDIA. CENTRUM HAS NOT YET BEGUN ITS CAMPAIGN IN EARNEST, MAZIARSKI SAID, BUT WHEN IT DOES, WATCH OUT.

BUT CENTRUM'S SHOWING IN THE POLLS HAS BEEN DISMAL AND, COMBINED WITH HIGH EXPECTATIONS, CENTRUM HAS RECENTLY LOOKED FOOLISH. THE PARTY CONTINUES TO REGISTER IN THE MID-SINGLE DIGITS, BEHIND TYMINSKI'S "X" PARTY AND ONLY SLIGHTLY AHEAD OF THE POLISH PARTY OF FRIENDS OF BEER (A DADA-IST JOKE INITIATIVE WHICH COULD SWIFTLY CEASE TO BE FUNNY IF THE GROUP MAKES IT TO THE SEJM). THOUGH SOME VOTERS HAVE VERY STRONGLY-HELD VIEWS ON THE ISSUES CITED, THOSE QUESTIONS HAVE YET TO SET THE ELECTORATE AS A WHOLE ON FIRE. CENTRUM HAS NO FIGURE WHOSE POPULAR APPROVAL APPROACHES THAT OF BIELECKI OR KURON; INDEED, PARTY LEADER (AND PRESIDENTIAL CHIEF OF STAFF) JAROSLAW KACZYNSKI SCORES SOME OF THE HIGHEST

"NEGATIVES" OF ANY SOLIDARITY-ORIGIN POLITICIAN. CENTRUM'S ANNOUNCEMENT OF ITS CHRISTIAN-DEMOCRATIC IDENTITY AT ITS MARCH 1991 CONGRESS HAS FAILED TO WIN OVER ANY OF POLAND'S OTHER CHRISTIAN DEMOCRATIC GROUPS, WHICH SUSPECT CENTRUM OF USING THE CHRISTIAN DEMOCRACY TITLE AS A CAMPAIGN TOOL. A CENTRUM LEADER TOLD US HE BLAMED CENTRUM'S SHOWING ON ITS FAILURE TO DEFINE ITSELF CLEARLY AS EITHER A GOVERNING PARTY OR PARTY IN OPPOSITION TO BIELECKI; IT TRIED TO BE BOTH, HE ACKNOWLEDGED TO US, AND WAS SEEN BY THE VOTERS AS OPPORTUNISTIC. WALESZA HAS STEADILY WITHDRAWN HIS SUPPORT FROM KACZYNSKI, IN PART BECAUSE OF CENTRUM'S REPEATED CHAMPIONING OF ATTACKS ON BIELECKI AND BALCEROWICZ. WALESZA'S RECENT DECISION TO REMOVE TWO IMPORTANT BRANCHES OF THE PRESIDENTIAL CHANCELLERY FROM KACZYNSKI'S SUPERVISION WAS REGARDED AS A CLEAR SIGN THAT THE PRESIDENT WAS TIRED OF CENTRUM'S EFFORTS TO USE THE BELWEDER (POLISH WHITE HOUSE) POSITION TO ADVANCE PARTISAN ENDS.

WE EXPECT CENTRUM TO FARE BETTER THAN THE 4 PERCENT OF THE VOTE GIVEN IT IN A RECENT POLL. THE PARTY INCLUDES SOME OF POLAND'S SHREWDEST POLITICAL TACTICIANS, AND CENTRUM ACTIVISTS ARE COMMITTED TO WINNING. THIS MAY NOT PROVE ENOUGH, HOWEVER, TO PREVENT PC FROM FINISHING WELL BEHIND SEVERAL OTHER PARTIES ON OCTOBER 27. CENTRUM'S LEADERS APPEAR TO BE MAKING PLANS FOR THAT EVENTUALITY. ON SEPTEMBER 22, AT A CAMPAIGN RALLY, KACZYNSKI LISTED MEMBERS OF A CENTRUM SHADOW CABINET -- IT WAS VERY MUCH THE CABINET HE TRIED TO CONVINCE WALESZA TO NAME LAST DECEMBER, WHEN WALESZA INSTEAD CHOSE BIELECKI AND BALCEROWICZ. ON SEPTEMBER 23 MAZIARSKI TOLD "RZECZPOSPOLITA" THAT CENTRUM WOULD NOT/NOT ENTER ANY GOVERNMENT WITH UNIA UNLESS "DEMOCRACY IN POLAND WERE THREATENED." CENTRUM 1) IS NOT COMFORTABLE IN A BACKSEAT ROLE, AS CLEAR FROM ITS CRITICISM OF THE BIELECKI GOVERNMENT IN WHICH IT HOLDS PORTFOLIOS, AND 2) HAS DEMONSTRATED ITS GREATEST ENERGY WHEN IT GOES ON THE ATTACK. THUS, FOR CENTRUM THE ROLE OF PARLIAMENTARY OPPOSITION -- CAPTURING THE VOTES OF THE FRUSTRATED ELECTORATE BUT ALSO KEEPING THE POST-COMMUNISTS FROM CAPTURING THEM -- MAY BE PREFERABLE TO PLAYING THIRD OR FOURTH FIDDLE IN A KLD/UNIA GOVERNMENT.

PEASANTS: WILD CARD IN THE NEXT SEJM?

POLAND'S PEASANTS, A MORE DIVERSE GROUP THAN MANY REALIZE, STILL CONSTITUTE ABOUT ONE THIRD OF THE POPULATION. TWO MAIN PEASANT BLOCS ARE COMPETING IN THE UPCOMING ELECTIONS. ONE, THE POLISH PEASANT PARTY (PSL), IS THE DIRECT SUCCESSOR TO THE COMMUNIST-ALLY UNITED PEASANT PARTY (ZSL), AND RETAINS MANY OF THE SAME FUNCTIONARIES AND RESOURCES IT POSSESSED IN PEOPLE'S POLAND. THE OTHER, THE PEASANT ALLIANCE (PL), STRESSES ITS UNTAINTED, ANTI-COMMUNIST HERITAGE. IT IS COMPRISED OF GABRIEL JANOWSKI'S THE RURAL SOLIDARITY FARMERS' UNION, JOZEF SLISZ'S POLISH PEASANT PARTY-SOLIDARITY (PSL-S), AND A SMALL PEASANT PARTY NAMED AFTER STANISLAW MIKOLAJCZYK, THE PEASANT LEADER WHO DARED TO RUN AGAINST THE COMMUNISTS IN POLAND'S RIGGED 1947 ELECTIONS. SOME PL ACTIVISTS INSIST THE DIFFERENCE IN BACKGROUND CONSTITUTES AN UNBRIDGEABLE CHASM BETWEEN PL AND PSL; OTHERS IN

PL, HOWEVER, NOTE THAT SOME FARMERS' ISSUES MAY TRANSCEND PARTY AFFILIATION. PL'S SOLIDARITY ROOTS MAKE IT POSSIBLE PARTNER IN A POST-SOLIDARITY GOVERNMENT, BUT IT COULD WELL JOIN PSL ON CERTAIN PARLIAMENTARY VOTES.

PRIME MINISTER BIELECKI HIMSELF HAS PREDICTED THAT THE VOTE IN THE POLISH COUNTRYSIDE COULD DECIDE THE OCTOBER 27 ELECTIONS. WHILE CONVENTIONAL WISDOM DECLARES THAT PEASANTS ARE THE MOST ALIENATED PORTION OF THE ELECTORATE, AND WILL THEREFORE STAY HOME, THIS IS DEBATABLE. WE HAVE BEEN TOLD BY SEVERAL SOURCES TO EXPECT A PEASANT TURNOUT OF UP TO 50 PERCENT. IN SIEDLCE PEASANT AND NON-PEASANT CANDIDATES ALIKE TOLD US THAT PSL AND/OR PL WOULD WIN AT LEAST 5 OF THE 10 SEJM SEATS IN THAT DISTRICT. THE RATIO OF PSL TO PL DEPUTIES WILL BE CRUCIAL IN DETERMINING HOW RELIABLE A PARTNER FOR REFORM PEASANTS ARE IN THE NEXT SEJM. IT IS VERY POSSIBLE THAT THE NEXT CABINET WILL PAY FAR GREATER ATTENTION TO FARM ISSUES; THE TRICK MAY BE TO DETERMINE HOW A PRO-PEASANT SET OF INITIATIVES CAN BE CRAFTED THAT DOES NOT UNDERMINE ECONOMIC POLICY IN OTHER AREAS.

CROSS OUT "X"

STAN TYMINSKI TOLD US MONTHS AGO HE WOULD DO WELL IN THE PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS BY RUNNING A POPULIST AND ANTI-SEMITIC CAMPAIGN. "X" -- LED IN LARGE PART BY FORMER COMMUNIST FUNCTIONARIES -- IN FACT STARTED A CAMPAIGN ALONG THOSE LINES. FOR SOLIDARITY VETERANS, IT DEVELOPED INTO A SORT OF METAPHOR FOR ALL THAT WAS FELT TO BE WRONG IN POLAND'S POLITICAL LIFE. BUT "X'S" CHANCES MAY HAVE CRASHED DOWN.

IN ORDER TO QUALIFY TO RUN NATIONWIDE IN THE OCTOBER 27 ELECTIONS, A PARTY MUST HAVE SUBMITTED NOMINATING PETITIONS IN AT LEAST 5 OF POLAND'S 49 PROVINCES. "X" BARELY CLEARED THAT HURDLE, REGISTERING PETITIONS IN WARSAW, TORUN, KIELCE, KOSZALIN, AND OLSZTYN. ON SEPTEMBER 17 THE STATE ELECTORAL COMMISSION (PKW) DECLARED THAT, IN VIEW OF THE NUMEROUS FORGED SIGNATURES FOUND ON "X" PARTY PETITIONS SUBMITTED IN WARSAW (IN ONE PETITION SELECTED AT RANDOM, 52 OUT OF THE 78 SIGNATURES WERE FALSE, THE PARTY COULD NOT/NOT RUN IN THAT PROVINCE. THUS, "X" SLIPPED BELOW THE NECESSARY THRESHOLD. INSTEAD OF BEING ALLOWED TO COMPETE NATIONWIDE, COULD RUN ONLY IN THOSE 4 PROVINCES WHERE THE PARTY'S PAPERWORK APPEARED TO BE IN ORDER.

TYMINSKI CRIED FOUL, AND DECLARED THAT PRESIDENT WALESZA TOLD HIM IN A PHONE CALL FROM CZECHOSLOVAKIA THAT EXCLUDING "X" FROM THE ELECTIONS HARMS POLAND IN WORLD PUBLIC OPINION (A STARTLED WALESZA DENIED EVER MAKING SUCH A CALL). THE "X" PARTY'S LONE SEJM DEPUTY ATTEMPTED TO CONVENE A SPECIAL COMMISSION TO OVERTURN THE PKW'S DECISION, BUT THE MOTION WAS EASILY DEFEATED IN PARLIAMENT (SOME POST-COMMUNISTS AND PSL DEPUTIES VOTED WITH X.) PROFESSOR ANDRZEJ ZOLL, CHAIRMAN OF THE PKW, INDIGNANTLY TOLD THE SEJM THAT "X" HAD NOT/NOT BEEN SINGLED OUT FOR SPECIAL TREATMENT; RATHER, THE PARTY HAD ATTRACTED SCRUTINY TO ITSELF.

SOME HAVE REGRETTED THAT "X" HAS NOW BEEN EXCLUDED FROM NATIONWIDE COMPETITION -- THE PARTY CAN NOW FIELD ONLY 44 CANDIDATES IN 4 PROVINCES. ONE KLD OFFICIAL TOLD US "X" WOULD DO LESS DAMAGE WITHIN THE SEJM, WHERE ITS INCOMPETENCE WOULD QUICKLY BECOME OBVIOUS, THAN IT WILL IN ITS SELF-STYLED MARTYR ROLE OUTSIDE THE PARLIAMENT. A MEMBER OF THE POST-SOLIDARITY SOCIAL DEMOCRATIC "LABOR SOLIDARITY" PARTY PREDICTED TYMINSKI'S WOULD-BE VOTERS WOULD LOOK FOR OTHER DEMAGOGUES, AND PERHAPS FIND THEM AMONG THE POST-COMMUNISTS. UNIA PROPOSED THAT ALL THE PETITIONS OF ALL THE PARTIES BE EXAMINED, BUT THE PKW SAID THAT THIS IS TECHNICALLY IMPOSSIBLE. STILL, WE EXPECT THAT THOSE CONCERNED THAT "X" MIGHT HAVE SUFFERED A POSSIBLE MISCARRIAGE OF JUSTICE ARE FAR OUTNUMBERED BY THOSE RELIEVED TO KNOW THAT, AT THE VERY WORST, "X" HAS NO MORE THAN 44 SHOTS AT GETTING INTO THE NEXT SEJM.

THE POST-COMMUNISTS: HEAVY BAGGAGE

COMMUNIST SUCCESSOR GROUPS, THOUGH THEY HAVE CRITICIZED THE EXCLUSION OF THE "X" PARTY AS ANOTHER OF THOSE THREATS TO DEMOCRACY TO WHICH THEY LATELY HAVE BECOME SO SENSITIZED, COULD BE A PRIME BENEFICIARY OF THE PKW'S DECISION. RUNNING AS THE LEFT ELECTORAL ALLIANCE (SLD), THEY ARE PREPARED TO OFFER THE CRITICISMS OF THE GOP'S FREE-MARKET LIBERAL POLICIES ON WHICH THE TYMINSKI ELECTORATE FEEDS. WITH THE PASSAGE OF TIME, THE OLD COMMUNIST-SOLIDARITY DIVISION WILL INEVITABLY WEAKEN, AND THERE IS LIKELY TO BE A LEFT IN POLAND. THE POST-COMMUNISTS' ACTIVITY AND AGGRESSIVENESS IN PARLIAMENT HAS GROWN IN THE LATE SUMMER, AS ELECTIONS APPROACHED. THIS WAS EVIDENCED BY THE UNSUCCESSFUL ATTEMPT TO BRING A NO CONFIDENCE VOTE AGAINST THE BIELECKI GOVERNMENT AND THE MORE SUCCESSFUL EFFORTS TO DENY THAT GOVERNMENT SPECIAL ECONOMIC POWERS. THE POST-COMMUNISTS HAVE CLEARLY DECIDED THAT THEY HAVE NOTHING TO GAIN BY CONTINUING TO KEEP A LOW PROFILE. FURTHERMORE, WHILE THE POST-COMMUNISTS' BASE HAS NOT/NOT GROWN -- POST-COMMUNIST CANDIDATE WLODZIMIERZ CIMOSZEWICZ GAINED JUST UNDER 10 PERCENT IN THE PRESIDENTIAL CAMPAIGN -- THE BASES OF MANY OTHER PARTIES' HAVE SHRUNK (VIZ. CENTRUM), AND THUS SLD COULD TAKE ON PROPORTIONATELY GREATER WEIGHT. SO THE POST-COMMUNISTS WILL BE A FACTOR, ALMOST CERTAINLY A MAJOR OPPOSITION PARTY.

BUT THE TIME HAS PROBABLY NOT YET COME FOR THEM TO MOVE BEYOND THIS, IF IT EVER DOES. THE COMMUNIST SUCCESSORS CARRY HEAVY HISTORICAL BAGGAGE, TO WHICH THEY HAVE RECENTLY ADDED. WHETHER OR NOT RECENT PRESS SPECULATION ABOUT PARTY LEADERS' REPORTED COMMUNICATIONS WITH THE PUTSCH LEADERS IN MOSCOW EVER COME TO LIGHT, SOME OF THE PUBLIC AT LARGE WILL ASSUME THE WORST. SLAWOMIR WIATR OF THE SLD ADMITTED TO US RECENTLY THAT HIS PARTY WAS STILL CASTING ABOUT FOR A CAMPAIGN STRATEGY -- ESPECIALLY IN VIEW OF THE MOSCOW EVENTS, WHICH HE SAID THE SLD HAD OPPOSED FROM THE START.

THE TURNOUT: ANY SILVER LINING TO THAT CLOUD?

NO ONE IS PREDICTING A HIGH TURNOUT FOR THE OCTOBER 27 VOTE; RATHER, PEOPLE DISAGREE OVER WHAT CONSTITUTES "LOW." WE HAVE HEARD EXTRAORDINARILY VARIED TURNOUT PREDICTIONS, RANGING FROM ANYWHERE FROM 25 TO 65 PERCENT.

THERE ARE TWO IMPORTANT POINTS TO BEAR IN MIND WHEN CONSIDERING THOSE TURNOUT ESTIMATES. FIRST, FOR MOST VOTERS, THE CAMPAIGN HAS NOT/NOT BEGUN. POSTERS ARE STILL FEW AND FAR BETWEEN. COMPARATIVELY FEW CANDIDATES HAVE HELD RALLIES (JOZEF WODZYNSKI, KLD CANDIDATE IN SIEDLCE, TOLD US HE WOULD PROBABLY NOT HOLD ANY RALLIES, ESPECIALLY AFTER A COMPETITOR FROM ANOTHER POST-SOLIDARITY PARTY DREW PRECISELY 12 PEOPLE TO ONE MEETING. WHEN THAT FEW PEOPLE SHOW UP, THE ONES WHO DO ATTEND FEEL "FOOLISH," WODZYNSKI AVERRED.) THE "ELECTION STUDIO" TELEVISION PROGRAM, BESIDES BEING BORING, IS BROADCAST AT 10:00 PM, AND ONLY DIEHARDS WOULD BOTHER TO WATCH IT. VIRTUALLY ALL THE PARTIES HAVE TOLD US THAT, STRAPPED FOR RESOURCES, THEY INTEND TO MAKE THEIR BIGGEST PRE-ELECTION PUSH IN THE LAST WEEKS OF THE CAMPAIGN. ONCE THIS OCCURS, ESTIMATES OF VOTER TURNOUT MAY RISE.

SECOND, WHILE NO ONE CAN TAKE PRIDE IN A LOW VOTER TURNOUT, THAT RESULT MAY NOT BE ALTOGETHER BAD FOR POLAND. THAT THOSE WHO VOTE FOR THE MAINSTREAM POST-SOLIDARITY PARTIES ON OCTOBER 27 ARE CASTING VOTES "FOR" SOMETHING; THOSE WHO VOTE FOR OTHER PARTIES ARE VOTING "AGAINST." THE FORMER ELECTORATE IS MUCH MORE COMMITTED AND MORE LIKELY TO TURN UP AT THE POLLS. A LOW TURNOUT THEREFORE INCREASES THE RELATIVE STRENGTH OF THE POST-SOLIDARITY PARTIES.

CONCLUSION: TAKING POLAND'S TEMPERATURE

POLAND'S OCTOBER 1991 PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS WILL COMPLETE A TRANSFORMATION TO DEMOCRATICALLY-ELECTED INSTITUTIONS BEGUN WITH THE ROUND-TABLE ELECTIONS OF JUNE 1989, CONTINUED WITH THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ELECTIONS OF MAY 1990 AND THE PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS OF NOVEMBER/ DECEMBER 1990. IN THE TWO YEARS SOLIDARITY-ORIGIN GOVERNMENTS HAVE BEEN IN POWER THERE HAS BEEN VIRTUALLY NONSTOP DEBATE OVER WHAT POLAND'S PUBLIC MOOD REALLY IS/WAS. MANY POLITICAL ACTORS HAVE CLAIMED TO KNOW THIS, BUT NO ONE HAD PROOF. THE OUTCOME OF THE OCTOBER 27 ELECTIONS WILL REPLACE THOSE ASSERTIONS WITH SOME FACTS.