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Your reference

Our reference

Date 10 March 1981

Dear Glen

REG. P. A.
ACTION SLIP
N°3208/81

P. A. Sub - Registry
File N°19-10-01 (Poland)

I enclose a UK assessment on Poland entitled "A Broader View".

I am copying this letter and enclosure to colleagues on the Political Committee and to the Representative of the International Military Staff.

Yours sincerely,

Peter Ricketts

RR. R T Fell

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POLAND: A BROADER VIEW

1. This Note considers the aims and attitudes of the leading players in the present crisis in Poland. The crisis was sparked off by de facto increases in meat prices in July 1980, but was the result of deep underlying dissatisfaction with not only economic deficiencies but also the autocratic style of Party leadership, leading to a widening gulf between leaders and led, and restrictions on personal liberty and freedom of expression.

The leadership

2. Faced with a spontaneous rejection by the workers of its policies, the Party first had to take steps to restore calm - which it did by signing the Gdansk and other agreements - and to regain public confidence. Leaders associated with the economic disaster were ousted, including the Prime Minister in August and the Party First Secretary in September. The new men were by and large those who has opposed the policies of Gierek and his associates. Kania himself has been a consistent opponent of the use of force against strikers, which had led to trouble in 1970 and 1976.

3. The new leadership was faced with appalling problems: economic chaos, a huge foreign debt, a workforce with endless grievances and a new-found will to pursue them, total distrust from those outside the Party and divisions within its own ranks. The leadership has adopted an overall policy of "renewal" involving a certain amount of democratisation within the Party and a greater degree of decentralisation within economic and to some extent political decision-making, with greater emphasis on the consumer. With this policy it has attempted to gain the confidence of the public at large, though the latter have remained sceptical about the genuineness of the leadership's commitment to a more open system of government.

4. The regime has also had to contend with an independent trade union organisation which willy-nilly has increasingly taken on the character of political opposition. In dealing with Solidarnosc Party and government leaders have been operating throughout from a position of weakness. They have tried time and again to avoid making concessions which would undermine their own authority and give rise to concern in Moscow; but have backed

down in the face of union strength. Their first priority has been to avoid a general strike since they would then have to declare a state of emergency which would create a dangerous situation possibly leading to Soviet intervention. However this grudging approach has only increased the distrust of the workers, reinforcing the belief that the regime would give nothing away, would try to claw back what had already been conceded, and would try to weaken the union if pressure were reduced. The new government under Jaruzelski has initiated a kind of institutionalised dialogue with the unions, evidently calculating that only regular consultation could avert the threat of constant strikes. This is probably a tactical move, in that the leadership's long-term aim will be to tame Solidarnosc rather than give it any permanent independent role in the country's political life.

5. The policies of the new Party leadership are not supported throughout the Party. There are almost certainly some in the leadership who favour a tougher approach to the unions, the detention of dissidents, and tighter Party control as the only way of restoring stability in Poland. There are Party conservatives and dogmatists in the apparat who fear for their position and privileges - though a great many of these have already been weeded out. And there are many, especially among the rank and file, who are pressing for real democracy within the Party and the liberalisation of society as a whole.

The Military and Security Authorities

6. Although current Party policy is to solve the crisis by political means, there are contingency plans for the use of force if necessary. The attitudes of the military and security forces are therefore important.

7. The Polish armed forces enjoy considerable prestige among the population at large, due to history and tradition. It is widely believed that both the army and Defence Minister Jaruzelski are opposed to the use of force against strikers and demonstrators. It is likely that a large sector of the officer corps and regular army is loyal to the Party and in the last resort might be used to maintain law and order in support of police and security forces. It is

unlikely that much trust can be put in the conscripts. It is difficult to assess what the reaction of the armed forces would be to Soviet military intervention. The Russians apparently assume that the senior Polish commanders would collaborate with them in this situation. There would be resistance at lower levels but its scale and effectiveness are impossible to foresee; it is doubtful however whether organised resistance would occur above battalion level. The use of East German troops would increase Polish resistance, and their use is likely to be ruled out for this reason.

8. The security services and the police can probably be relied on if called on to maintain law and order but the reliability of the police in face of a Soviet invasion is questionable.

Solidarnosc

9. The independent trade union movement Solidarnosc grew out of inter-factory negotiating committees modelled on those which sprang up on the coast in August. Originally, it was intended to be purely a regional organisation, but the collapse of the official trade union organisation, the emergence of a leader of national appeal, and the need for an overall negotiating body led to the establishment of a loosely-organised National Consultative Committee. The union is now estimated to have some 8-10 million members, including perhaps half the members of the Party.

10. In spite of the existence of this umbrella body, Solidarnosc still lacks a solid organisational structure, or firm central control over the organisation's activities (though the establishment of a 10-man presidium in mid-February could help in this). Much of Solidarnosc's activity is the result of independent local initiative. This not only provides ammunition for critics of the union, who claim that it is producing anarchy, but also makes it difficult for the union's national leadership to present a united front to the authorities.

11. Although many of Solidarnosc's demands are political in nature it has no coherent programme for political change (although this may not be true of some of its militants and dissident advisers). Although the strikers' original demands were mainly in areas traditionally covered by trade unions, the union later found it necessary to put forward political demands. It had

to do this both in order to preserve its own position and because in the course of the crisis it had developed spontaneously into a channel for expressing political and socio-economic grievances and aspirations. The regime's practice of making previously unthinkable concessions in the face of union pressure has also encouraged union leaders to revise their ideas of what might be attainable.

12. Little is known of the complexion of Solidarnosc's leadership. Walesa himself usually takes a moderate line, but regards himself primarily as spokesman for the consensus in the union leadership. Latterly there has been a perceptible trend towards realism and discretion among Solidarnosc's leaders; but they still have to take into account grass-roots radicalism and the need to respond vigorously to any move by the authorities which threatens the union's position. The union appears ready to give Jaruzelski's policy of negotiation a chance but has made it clear that its own attitude will depend on that of the authorities.

The Dissidents

13. In the first phase of strikes from July to mid-August the dissident organisation KOR played an important role as a source of information and channel of communication both internally and to the West. Individual intellectuals helped to draft the Gdansk and other agreements, acted as advisers to the various strike committees and even took part in negotiations with government delegations. However, the impetus for the strikes came from the workers themselves.

14. The dissidents are likely to try to preserve their position in Solidarnosc while keeping a low profile. They are no doubt aware that the authorities are constantly looking for an opportunity to compromise them in the eyes of the workers and they may not be confident that the workers will continue to support them. The authorities would like to drive a wedge between the workers and the dissident advisers, but it seems unlikely that they can do this without the risk of confrontation with Solidarnosc, especially since some KOR members are now employed in Solidarnosc organisations.

The Church

15. The Episcopate and Cardinal Wyszynski have played a discreet and moderating role throughout the crisis. Clearly the Church regards a secure, stable and independent Poland as indispensable for the preservation of its own authority and influence. There are probably divided opinions within the Episcopate and possibly pressure for a more militant line from some of the clergy. The hierarchy's policy has on more than one occasion led to misunderstandings with Solidarnosc and to public criticism for leaning too far towards the authorities. The meeting between the Pope and Walesa, and the latter's meeting with Cardinal Wyszynski, have corrected earlier misunderstandings. The Church's role has given satisfaction, publicly expressed, to the Polish Party and incurred no criticism from the East Europeans or the Russians.

16. In spite of the Church's good relationship with the authorities, it was the striking workers and not the Episcopate that wrung concessions from the regime on behalf of the Church. The Church as well as the Party has an interest in ensuring that the strength of Catholic feeling among the workers does not manifest itself too radically. It is worth noting that the Church has not, since the early stages of the crisis, exerted a determining influence on the course of events, though it could play a more prominent role in the future.

The Soviet Attitude

17. The Russians have watched the development of the crisis in Poland with profound alarm and a good deal of perplexity. It presents them not only with an immediate threat to their political and military interests in the form of instability in a neighbour and a member of the Warsaw Pact but also with a longer-term challenge to the Communist system. A party which is supposed to embody the will of the working class has been shown to have failed utterly to do so. The creation of independent trade unions in Poland offends Communist orthodoxy even more than private agriculture and a strong church. A supposedly all-powerful party has been shown to be weak in the face of a massive assertion of the popular will. The Polish example could tempt workers in other Communist countries and is a cause for serious anxiety in the East European capitals as well as in Moscow.

18. The Russians have nevertheless acted with realism and restraint. They recognise the very high political, military and economic costs of intervention and the risks inherent in the use of force by the Polish authorities, and evidently decided at the outset to give the Poles considerable leeway to try to solve the crisis by political means. It is likely that the Soviet leaders feel they can tolerate ideological concessions so long as these do not threaten the existence of the regime. They would however react very differently to a threat to what they regard as essential Soviet interests in a country of crucial strategic importance: the regime's loyalty to the Soviet Union and the Warsaw Pact, the maintenance of essential communication links, and reasonable domestic stability.

19. As the situation continued to deteriorate in Poland the Russians came very close to a decision to use military force. By the beginning of December contingency military preparations for a large scale invasion were well advanced. At the Warsaw Pact Summit Meeting in Moscow on 4-5 December the Polish leaders came under considerable pressure from their allies, with the East Germans and Czechoslovaks apparently arguing in favour of intervention. But the Soviet leadership decided to give Kania another chance to put his own house in order. Soviet military preparations and the Warsaw Pact meeting had a temporary sobering effect in Poland. But Moscow's confidence in the ability of the Polish leadership to control the situation must have begun to fade when further unrest and strikes following the Christmas lull brought new concessions from the authorities.

20. It is assumed that the Polish authorities inform the Russians in advance of important decisions. But while the Russians no doubt reserve the right of veto, for instance on changes of senior personnel, it is unlikely that they have been dictating tactics to the Polish leadership. On the one hand they recognise the risks of trying to exercise remote control in such a

complex and delicate situation; and on the other they no doubt prefer to leave responsibility for embarrassing concessions and possible mistakes in the hands of the Poles. They seem generally to have acquiesced in the Polish handling of the situation without endorsing it. In public Soviet leaders have been remarkably reticent throughout the crisis and have involved themselves directly as little as possible, while the media have provided a critical commentary on developments in Poland.

Outlook

21. Jaruzelski's appointment has led to at least a temporary calm in Poland. There seems to be a widespread belief in the country that the current leadership is the last which will attempt to govern through a process of conciliation and negotiation. If the country descends towards anarchy again the Polish authorities are likely to adopt tougher measures. Solidarnosc is prepared for the moment to work for stability and economic recovery but will revert to strike action if the regime fails to negotiate seriously on issues important to the union or directly threatens its interests. The indications are that the Russians may be prepared to sit out a long-term political struggle. But a sharp deterioration in the situation, or even an unpredictable shift in what may be a delicate balance of opinion in Moscow, could precipitate intervention.