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SPECIAL ANALYSIS

POLAND: Pressures for Party Reform

The Polish party seems to be making little headway in resolving the debate about how much to reform its own structure and procedures and how far it should go in redefining its role in Polish society. The party is approaching these complex and sensitive problems cautiously, searching for a course that encompasses sufficient change to placate the population without overstepping the limits in a way that would provoke Moscow. Failure to move far enough will doom any hope the party has of regaining a semblance of trust and confidence from the populace and almost ensure that the confrontation will continue. This would lead to greater isolation of the party from society and to continued internal party dissension. The existence of the new Solidarity union movement ensures that Polish society will keep the pressure on the party to change within definite time limits.

The strongest pressure from within the party for reform, called "socialist renewal" by party leader Kania, comes from younger rank and file members. They want a greater voice in party affairs and an accounting by those responsible for past failures.

The reformers presumably are more willing than the conservatives to liberalize Poland's entire political and economic system. They are convinced, as is Solidarity, that previous failures were due to overcentralized and overbureaucratized controls. They believe that only sweeping institutional changes within and outside the party will guarantee greater grass-roots participation and control.

Within the party, these reform-minded members are seeking a redefinition of the concept of "democratic centralism" to emphasize more democracy and less centralism. They want, for example, to limit the terms of office of all party officials and to elect them secretly.

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Resistance to Change

The most vigorous opposition to change has come from middle and lower level party bureaucrats who are afraid reforms will sweep them from office and deprive them of their special privileges. These bureaucrats are finding it difficult to adjust to the new political situation in which they cannot simply hand down decisions but must consult and negotiate.

The party leadership in Warsaw seems to be caught somewhere in the middle. Kania has repeatedly stated his support for "renewal" but is constantly fighting off demands for changes he personally does not support or believes Moscow would not tolerate. Within the leadership, Stefan Olszowski is developing a reputation as the leader of the conservative forces resisting change.

No member of the leadership appears to be pressing for the far-reaching changes sought by the younger party members, but this does not mean that the leadership is ignoring the pressure from below. In a recent speech to party activists, for example, Politburo member Barcikowski offered to meet the demands for secret elections "halfway" by proposing that there be 50 percent more candidates than positions available in party organs.

The restlessness among party members resulting from the slow pace toward "renewal" has led some local organizations to take matters into their own hands and make changes directly counter to orders from Warsaw.

The Party Congress

The discussion of "renewal" is taking place as the party prepares for a special congress now slated for the end of March or the beginning of April. The pressure from party members for more change than the leadership is willing to accommodate, however, reportedly is prompting the Politburo to consider postponing the congress "for a short period."

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One source has commented that the party has learned from the Czechoslovak experience--where Moscow's decision to intervene was strongly influenced by its fear that an impending Czechoslovak party congress would oust the remaining conservatives from the Politburo--that too much change too quickly will excite the Soviets. A decision on postponement may be taken at the Central Committee plenum, possibly as early as this Thursday. ██████████

A decision to postpone, however, carries certain risks. It would raise the suspicions of the reformers that the leadership only wants to avoid reforms; postponement also would fan the turmoil in the party. ██████████

The Soviet Factor

Moscow's selective coverage of speeches by Polish leaders underscore its concern over the failure of the Polish central leadership to control its rank and file. The Soviets see the lack of a coherent program for meeting the challenge of Solidarity as evidence of Kania's weakness. They may realize that current problems mainly reflect the failures of the previous party leadership, but they will hold Kania accountable. ██████████