

September 05, 1981

SPECIAL ANALYSES

POLAND: Solidarity's First National Congress
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The congress is a small but important step in the gradual transformation of a revolutionary social movement into a more coherent organization. Although it will not change the heterogeneous nature of the 10-million-member union, the congress will help create greater consensus on union goals and a firmer institutional base from which to press for reforms. Solidarity's lack of coordination between national and regional leaders will persist, however, and the country's economic problems will cast a shadow over the gathering. The delegates probably will advocate a far-reaching form of worker self-management as a solution to the crisis. Solidarity leader Walesa will be reaffirmed as the union's chief spokesman despite some criticism of his leadership. [REDACTED]

The first session opens today, as more than 900 delegates gather in Gdansk for three days of debate on organizational and substantive issues. A second session at the end of September will elect union officials and adopt formal policies. Between the two sessions, working groups will draft recommendations on organizational and substantive problems. [REDACTED]

Union activists are likely to do a great deal of electioneering. The leadership wants this period to be one of relative calm, but militants may try to work for favorite candidates or causes by pressing disputes with the regime. [REDACTED]

The Issues

The most controversial organizational issue will be the authority of the national union leadership in Gdansk. Walesa has previously criticized excessive centralization, but he now believes that the center needs more power to focus union strength on key issues and to prevent local

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concerns from dissipating the union's strength. He and his adherents believe that unsanctioned local strikes provide the government an opportunity to divide Solidarity. [REDACTED]

Strong regional bosses such as Zbigniew Bujak, the militant head of the Warsaw chapter, are not willing to relinquish their authority to the center, arguing that the regional organizations are closer to workers and can be more responsive to their needs. The congress will not resolve this debate. The national leadership may be given additional power, but the regional chiefs will retain considerable influence and the union's behavior will continue to be erratic. [REDACTED]

The delegates will be asked to adopt official positions on numerous issues, ranging from the need for more hospitals to whether the union should create a political party. Walesa will try to steer a middle course but may have trouble reining in the militants. Although the union seems prepared to push especially hard for a far-reaching system of worker self-management, there is growing pressure from local activists who want to assert the authority of the workers in the factory without waiting for a union-government accord. [REDACTED]

The congress will for the first time elect the union's national leadership. The current leadership includes many of the strong regional leaders, and most will probably be returned to office. [REDACTED]

There are no serious challengers to Walesa, who is still seen by most Poles as the embodiment of Solidarity, but he probably will be criticized as too autocratic and too willing to compromise with the regime. Some also dislike his close ties with the Church and his reliance on Catholic advisers. Several regional leaders are especially unhappy about his habit of bypassing them and appealing directly to workers. [REDACTED]

Both the Church and the government would like the moderates in the union to have the upper hand. They have little ability to influence events directly, although influential members such as Walesa are willing to listen

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to Church advice. The close ties between the Church and Solidarity will be symbolized by the celebration of an opening mass for the congress by Archbishop Glomp. [REDACTED]

Soviet Concern

Soviet leaders are worried that the congress will make Solidarity institutionally more capable of challenging the authority of the Communist Party. The Soviet trade union newspaper *Trud*, for example, on Wednesday attacked Solidarity's proposed charter, contending that the union has transformed itself into an opposition force and that its "extremist wing" aspires to destroy "socialism" in Poland and seize power. The Soviets will be quick to note any signs that Solidarity is moving in this direction and to demand that Polish leaders oppose such trends firmly. [REDACTED]

Moscow still hopes that Solidarity's political influence will gradually be reduced and that the regime will eventually get control of the union. The Soviets have tried to avoid alienating Solidarity's rank and file by focusing its harshest criticism on "extremist" leaders, and they have refrained from attacking Walesa by name. This restraint suggests that the USSR is resigned to the continued existence of Solidarity and sees Walesa as a moderating figure. [REDACTED]

Outlook

The congress will not change the dynamics of the Polish "revolution from below." The union may come out of its month-long introspection with a better sense of mission, but it will still face a government intent on preserving its own prerogatives and treating Solidarity as an adversary to tame. The pattern of alternating periods of tension and relaxation established over the past year probably will continue to dominate politics in Poland. [REDACTED]