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SPECIAL ANALYSIS

POLAND: Prospects for Solidarity

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Solidarity is thoroughly suppressed as an independent national trade union, but it remains active at the local level. Those leaders still at large are having some success establishing an underground organization, and they remain confident that they eventually will be able to force the regime to come to terms with them. Although most Solidarity leaders urge only passive resistance, the more aggressive activities of a minority of young militants and the consequent police repression could cause scattered violence. [REDACTED]

The Solidarity leaders who have avoided internment have not yet tried to rebuild a nationwide organization, and they are still uncertain about what activities they can and should undertake. The relaxation of most travel restrictions allows some contact among different regions, but the need to rely on couriers makes most communication slow. The regime's apparently close monitoring of long-distance telex and telephone service and its refusal to allow automatic placement of calls has inhibited contacts. [REDACTED]

Many of those involved in organizing efforts are largely second- and third-echelon leaders who do not know their counterparts in other regions. This is making reestablishment of a national organization difficult. [REDACTED]

Concerned about infiltration by the police, union leaders are restricting their organizing activities to tightly knit, independent cells. The concern for security was demonstrated late last month when the nine Solidarity national leaders still at liberty sent representatives to a meeting of an Interfactory Coordinating Commission, rather than attend themselves. [REDACTED]

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The gradual release of interned Solidarity activists and supporters--3,600 of the more than 6,000 interned are still being held--probably has been a mixed blessing. Although those released may bring new life to opposition groups, they are being closely watched and could inadvertently lead the police to underground organizations. Some internees--threatened with arrest and trial if they become reinvolved in Solidarity activities--have decided to avoid the fray, and a few are considering the regime's offer to emigrate.

Differences Over Tactics

Most underground activists--including Zbigniew Bujak, the senior Solidarity leader still free--seem sobered by the experience of martial law and caution against encouraging violence and bloodshed. These moderates foresee a prolonged struggle--using leaflets, silent marches, short strikes, and passive resistance--to keep the spirit of Solidarity alive and to impress the regime that the union is still a force to be reckoned with. As with the intellectual dissidents in the late 1970s, Solidarity leaders at a minimum want to prepare the organization to become more active again should circumstances become more favorable.

A small number of union activists and supporters advocate violence as the only way to force the regime to negotiate with Solidarity leader Walesa. Such acts could provoke the insecure regime to new repression, which would in turn increase public anger. Some students now appear particularly militant, making the universities a source of tension.

The strength of groups intent on violent resistance is difficult to gauge, in part because the secret police may have organized some in order to flush out Solidarity militants and to entrap any Western government or private groups supporting them.

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Regime Intentions

The government appears to be ostentatiously ignoring the union that once claimed the allegiance of almost one-third of the population. Few, if any, in the regime want to accord the union leaders the status of negotiating partners. The delay in passing a trade union bill and the recent attacks on Solidarity by the most conservative media, however, suggest some differences over what tactics to pursue against Solidarity.

The authorities are trying to lay the groundwork for a new, officially sponsored network of compliant unions, organized by craft rather than on geographical lines. These unions are unlikely to gain worker support and will not stimulate greater productivity.

The martial law regime may be frustrated by its failure to gain Walesa's cooperation, but it seems content to keep him isolated and to try to bring him around by showing that it has firm control. The Minister for Trade Union Affairs, who has been in frequent contact with Solidarity leaders, calls Poland an "ammunition dump" and Walesa a "detonator" which will have to be kept apart.

Outlook

Although Solidarity is no longer the principal driving force in politics, its broadly supported demands for reform will continue to influence policy debates between moderates in the regime who believe some accommodation is necessary and hardliners who support strict controls from above. Solidarity will continue to make only limited headway in reestablishing a nationwide organization, because police surveillance and fear of police infiltration will tend to prevent the organization from coordinating above the local or regional level.

In the coming months Solidarity will remain a conspiratorial organization capable of causing problems for the government but not strong enough to force its will on the authorities. The principal danger to the regime in the near future is that public discontent with economic conditions may lead to spontaneous outbursts.

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