

POLAND

31 December, 1982

POLAND: ANNUAL REVIEW FOR 1982

*Her Majesty's Ambassador at Warsaw to the
Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs*

SUMMARY

1982 was a grim year of martial law. The Army's discipline and bearing has been impressive. The challenge to the system from underground Solidarity was weak. The country has slowly returned to a more normal appearance. But there has been no popular acceptance of the régime (paragraphs 1-3).

2. It was General Jaruzelski's year. A stiff, uncharismatic but resolute figure. His relations with the Soviet Union are unclear but he has preserved a degree of stability for which they should be grateful. The other most important figure is the Pope. The Church's reputation in the country is high, though there has been some criticism of Archbishop Glemp (paragraphs 4 and 5).

3. The Party has had a very bad year. It is too early yet to say how, when and even whether it will recover. The authorities have tried to drive a wedge between the workers and intellectuals. The robustness of the intelligentsia has been impressive. But the process of accommodation with the régime may now be starting (paragraphs 6 and 7).

4. Relations with the West have been poor and with the US bad. With the East, the Soviet Union has helped economically, Poland's other neighbours less so. The economic situation is still poor with a massive drop in living standards. There have been some improvements in the supply situation. But the underlying problem of how to tackle economic reform and how to motivate an alienated population remains (paragraphs 8 and 9).

5. It has been a rotten year for the Polish people. There are a few bright spots ahead like the Pope's visit, and a wobbly evolution in a more liberal direction will probably take place. It is in the West's interests to encourage this (paragraph 10).

6. The West faces the dilemma of what standards to use in its relations with Poland. The NATO criteria were fine for 1982 and have preserved Western unity. Shall we need different ones for 1983? The West may need to show more carrot. It is important in Poland's complex political situation to avoid excessive simplification (paragraph 11).

(Confidential)

Sir,

Warsaw,
31 December, 1982.

Poland is like a kaleidoscope. It can be shaken up. New patterns form. But the pieces, colours and limits are the same. In 1980-81 the Polish people tried to break out of what seemed to be their pre-destined limits. Looking back now over the great sweep and tumult of the last two years, one can see that most observers and certainly most Poles exaggerated the strength and cohesion of Solidarity and under-estimated the strength and resolution of the Government. Many began to believe that the kaleidoscope had perhaps been broken and that the restraints of history and geography would somehow be swept away. 1982 was the grim year which showed the Polish people that no such escape was possible and that they were back inside their mirror-like prison. But the pieces have still not settled down and there is uncertainty what the future shape of Poland will be within the kaleidoscope. There may still be something to save from the wreck of 1980 and 1981 but no one now labours under the illusion that changes for the better will be easy, quick or dramatic.

2. 1982 was the year of martial law. At the beginning of the year Poland was a country to all appearances at war. Tanks clanked through the streets, troops were at every crossing in the capital and at key points throughout the country, there was curfew at night, telephones were cut, travel inside the country was strictly controlled and hundreds of people were clapped into gaol. The enemy was not entirely clear. In one sense, it was the challenge to the established order of a socialist state. At moments the enemy seemed to be the Polish people. As time passed, the authorities refined their propaganda and castigated the "extremists" of Solidarity as the true enemy who had led millions of good Polish workers and intellectuals astray. The régime also blamed the West, particularly the US, for stirring up underground activity and for helping to sustain the demonstrations and popular eruptions of 1981.

3. Gradually, after the first two or three months, Poland began to return in some respects to a more normal appearance. The Army, impressive in its discipline and bearing, returned to its barracks and left the maintenance of public order increasingly to the militia. But even during the early days of martial law, the military were rarely brought into direct conflict with strikers. This largely conscript Army was not tested to the ultimate point of loyalty but I think most observers were impressed by its readiness to obey orders and if necessary to act against Solidarity or popular demonstration. One sensed, however, that the authorities were anxious to keep the reputation of the Army as a guarantor of Polish independence immaculate, free from the dubious and devious considerations of day-to-day security. As the year wore on, the authorities claimed to have defeated "the enemy" or at least to have made him toothless. There were eruptions of popular discontent in May, August and in October which caused the authorities some anxiety. But with hindsight, it is easy to see now that the challenge to the system in 1982 was weak. Underground Solidarity was able to call out hundreds of people but the demonstrations inflicted little physical, political or economic damage on the authorities and came to appear increasingly futile. The authorities retained the full panoply of intimidation, including dismissal, withdrawal of ration cards, threats and at times the use of force. Despite the occasional brutality and death, martial law in Poland could not be called a harsh or cruel régime by comparison with most other examples we have seen in recent years. By the end of the year underground Solidarity had almost thrown in the sponge. This did not and does not mean that General Jaruzelski and his

supporters have won popular acceptance. The people and the intelligentsia, by and large, have no faith or liking for their rulers. For good reason. These rulers have shown determination, but little imagination. Yet to be fair to the General, he has pursued a kind of shuffling moderate course, lifting constraints gradually throughout the year, maintaining those that are necessary to keep the work force at work, and trying, almost pathetically at times, to improve the image of Poland's military rule.

4. 1982 was the year of General Jaruzelski. He dominated the Polish scene from beginning to end. Dominated is a curious word to use of so uncharismatic a figure. But his resolution is greater than his personality, and his character and will are stronger than his political inventiveness. I think he is probably a man devoted to his country's well-being. But this devotion is conditioned by his Communist upbringing and by his addiction to the military virtues of discipline, law and order. He has managed to hold together his motley crew of Generals and civilian Ministers. He makes endless appeals to Polish patriotism and has encouraged the setting up of the Patriotic Movement for National Rebirth (PRON) in an effort to generate support from outside the discredited Party. He has shown an essential grasp of Polish realities by his overtures to the Church, wary and hesitating though these have been. It is difficult to know what his relations really are with the Soviet Union or how much he is their instrument and how much an independent agent. Those who have known him for some time—few claim to know him well—believe that he has deep down a normal Polish distaste for taking orders from his Soviet masters. Despite rumours that relations between Jaruzelski and the present Soviet leaders are cool, I think the Soviet Union has good grounds to be grateful to Jaruzelski. He has preserved a degree of stability in Poland and he has engineered a Polish solution, at least for the time being.

5. The other most important figure in Poland has been the Pope. His shadow looms over every decision of importance. When Archbishop Glemp came back from Rome on 8 October and met Jaruzelski a few days later, he clearly brought back the outlines of a possible uneasy pact between Church and State. This included the visit of the Pope, the call by the Church for hard work and social tranquillity in Poland, the freeing by the authorities of Wałęsa and most of the internees and the suspension or lifting of martial law. The cautious approach of Primate Glemp was not to the taste of all the Polish clergy, especially the younger ones who were closer to the every-day afflictions of the people. The Church's reputation remains high with the people. It has continued to distribute most of the humanitarian relief aid provided from the West and the churches are packed. It has taken a very robust attitude to the suspension of martial law which crowned the last month of the year. It has criticised the authorities vigorously for the constraints which still lie on the Polish workers, on their right of movement and on the excessive powers of the managements. In some respects, the Church can be said to exercise more influence now, with its Polish Pope, and Solidarity squashed but its ideals remembered, and with an unpopular and discredited régime, than at any time in its long history.

6. It has been a bad year for the Party. Membership has fallen. Many of its functions have been taken over by the Army. Its credibility with the people is abysmally low. There are those who think it will never recover and that power

will permanently shift to the Government, to the State authorities, reinforced by a larger Army involvement than is normal in most Communist States. I believe it is too early yet to reach this conclusion. The resuscitation of the Party will be an important object of Poland's neighbours. The hard-line cockroaches are still in the woodwork, though at the regional rather than at the national level. They may be for the time being thoroughly demoralised, but there will be strong forces both internally and externally intent on seeing that they come out and reassert themselves.

7. One of the significant achievements of Solidarity was the link it established between workers and intellectuals. It has been an objective of the régime to drive a wedge between them. Most of the intellectuals detained under martial law have now been released. But during the year, the authorities have moved their own place-men into key positions in the universities and polytechnics. There has been much opposition from actors, writers and film makers and their unions have been abolished or suspended. There is a vigorous censorship of films and plays. I have been impressed by the courage of many of these intellectuals, but I suspect that the process of accommodation is now beginning to pick up pace if only because artists have to make their living like others and there is not much alternative to going along with some of the requirements of the régime.

8. Relations with the West have been poor and in the case of the US bad for most of the year. The Polish authorities, however, have shown a lively sensitivity to the criteria formulated by NATO and I believe that the unity of the West in regard to Poland has had an important impact on the way policy has been formulated here. The West has a rôle to play in the evolution of events in Poland. While I believe that some of the actions of the US have been ill-judged, and some of the statements extreme, I think that the Alliance convoy has moved in good discipline, with the rather absurd exception of Greece, and that this has weighed with the Polish leadership at every turn over the last year. On the Falklands, the Poles were even-handed in their press coverage—more than I would have expected. We received many expressions of support from people who seemed pleased that Britain was thumping a military dictatorship. As for Poland's relations with the East, I think Jaruzelski has earned a grudging though wavering respect from his neighbours. The Soviet Union has been helpful economically; Poland's other allies much less so.

9. The economic situation began in 1982 at a very low ebb, and the year has seen a gradual improvement in production, led by coal mining. The reasons for this improvement are varied: coercion, militarisation of key enterprises, pay increases for working extra days and a good harvest. But the population's real living standards fell this year by a massive 25 per cent. 1982 can be characterised as a year of consolidation, with the authorities pointing to greater discipline. The problems ahead are immense. How to motivate a disillusioned and apathetic work force and a demoralised management. There are few material benefits which can be offered. Living standards could well decline further. I cannot see any way in which the economic situation can help but remain a destabilising factor in the Polish equation, even if Western Governments moved on the supply of credit and the rescheduling of debts. Private banks reached an agreement with the Polish authorities to reschedule debts and to provide credit. This may help Poland to pursue in 1983 with more consistency than has been possible this year their economic reforms. If Governments are also prepared to advance credit, their long term economic plans will be further facilitated. But while in some respects this evolution is desirable in a larger

political sense in order to make life economically more palatable to the people, I would strike a note of caution. The economic reforms depend on de-centralising decision-making and giving more responsibility to individual enterprises and to individual managers. I am not convinced that the Poles will really be able to do this successfully, whatever may be their technocratic and intellectual skills. It is their capacity to follow things through and keep a sense of practical proportion which is in doubt.

10. Finally and most importantly, it has been a rotten year for the Polish people. Martial law has brought a small improvement in the supply of goods and in the functioning of the essential services. But it offers little in the way of hope and Jaruzelski, in his somewhat Cromwellian utterances, has done little to inspire the people with the notion that Poland has a future. One has the impression that people are tired, and that many have turned their faces to the wall. But the Poles are a remarkably resilient and volatile nation. I expect that we shall see many unexpected twists and turns as the slow process of "normalisation" continues. If living conditions deteriorate, we cannot exclude popular explosions of anger, though the régime has made known its readiness and determination to use force if this should prove necessary. There may be a few bright spots ahead. The Pope's visit is one. Another is the possibility of a gradual reinstatement of trade union activity even if the present proposals are something of a charade. There is the prospect of a continuing if exiguous dialogue between the Church and the régime. As regards martial law, I said in my preliminary assessment that with all its limitations, the present suspension was a significant step in the direction of political developments more acceptable to the West. I am not sure now, looking more carefully at the accompanying legislation which was brought in and approved by the Sejm on 18 December, that the restrictions on workers' rights justify the use of the word "significant". But I believe that a wobbly evolution in the direction of a more liberal system is taking place and that it is in our interests to encourage it in so far as we can. It will help to improve the lot of the people and it opens up again the long term possibilities of a return in Poland to a more varied and pluralistic society. General Jaruzelski will have to take risks if he wishes to solve the economic and social problems of this country. These risks may again provide opportunities for the workers and the people to order their society in a way more compatible to the Polish temperament. But we should all recognise the limits. I return to my original image. The West can and should have the ambition to help shake the Polish kaleidoscope in the hope that a better pattern will emerge. They can do so by a mixture of pressure and persuasion. The pressure of 1982 may need to be mingled with more persuasion in 1983, but step-by-step in time with the régime's own wavering advance.

11. To end on a reflective note. A permanent dilemma faces the West. By what standards do we judge Poland? By the standards of an East European country with a Communist system? By the standards of a country trapped in the East but which would like to be Western? By the standards now of one, now the other, as they suit the interests of the Alliance and as they reflect the state of the West's relations with the Soviet Union? There seems to me no neat answer. Poland has its own specific history and rôle and this should not be confused with the attitudes we take towards smaller, more totalitarian despotisms like Romania. I suggest it is important that we should maintain a degree of flexibility and not impale ourselves on too rigid a set of criteria. The NATO criteria were fine for 1982. We may need to move from them in 1983,

especially if by doing so we can encourage some more liberal movement—slight though this may be—within the present system. Nor should we assume that every change is sham or false. Polish society has its own dynamics and its own particular tolerances. The Church and the Pope's visit may yet prove to be the key factors in Poland's history next year. The West's policy of helping the Polish people, keeping Poland in a state of quiet ferment and maintaining a degree of equilibrium in the European system is a complicated one. It is important that we should pursue it firmly but without falling into excessive simplification.

12. I am sending copies of this despatch to the Secretaries of State for Defence and Trade and to Her Majesty's Ambassadors at Moscow, East Berlin, Budapest, Sofia, Prague, Belgrade, Washington, Paris, Bonn, Helsinki, Stockholm, to the UK Permanent Representatives on the North Atlantic Council, to the European Communities and to the UN and Other International Organisations at Geneva, to the Leader of the CSCE Review Meeting in Madrid.

I am Sir

Yours faithfully

C. M. JAMES.