

POLAND
30 December, 1981

POLAND: ANNUAL REVIEW FOR 1981

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

SUMMARY

A year of tumult that ended in disaster (paragraph 2).

2. Solidarity wrested many concessions from the Government in the early part of the year. Jaruzelski and Kania seemed to be as good a leadership as Poland could hope for, despite the appalling problems they faced. Very few Poles feared Soviet intervention (paragraphs 3 and 4).

3. Soviet pressure seemed to threaten Kania in June, but he survived until the autumn. Jaruzelski then became First Secretary as well as Prime Minister. His reputation reassured many (paragraph 5).

4. In the late summer Solidarity began to become a political opposition. Its statements took on an air of unreality. The underlying distrust felt by the Government grew. Solidarity would have none of the proposed new Front of National Understanding (paragraphs 6 and 7).

5. Events moved fast in November. The Government used force to break up a sit-in at the Fire School in Warsaw. Solidarity responded with radical declarations at Radom and Gdansk. Martial law was declared on 13 December (paragraph 8).

6. Soviet pressure and the country's drift into anarchy probably caused martial law. There are many unanswered questions for the future. But Poland faces a dark, hard winter. The clamps will not be lifted soon (paragraphs 9-11).

(Confidential)
My Lord,

Warsaw,
30 December, 1981.

La force du peuple est très grande et très courte

I regret that owing to my illness and absence from the Embassy this Annual Review will be sketchier and more impressionistic than I would have wished.

2. The year has been one of tumult, marked by continuous crises, strikes, economic failure and finally disaster, with the *odnowa* ground under the heel of military rule. Looking back over most of the year, I am struck initially by

the success and strength of Solidarity. Unlike most of my staff, who had been here during the great days of August 1980, I was doubtful of Solidarity's capacity to resist and to hold together. More cynically perhaps, I believed that all great movements of resistance have their high peak and then fade into fractionalism and dispute. This happened—but not as extensively or as quickly as I had feared. And the flames of resistance, passive or otherwise, are by no means quenched.

3. But this is to anticipate. In the early part of the year Solidarity was riding high. It had wrested free Saturdays from the Government, forced recognition of rural Solidarity, brought Poland in March to the verge of a national strike when a few of its members, including a notable extremist, Rulewski, were roughed up by the militia at Bydgoszcz, drove the Government and Party, already affected by the general spirit of the *odnowa*, into public admission of their faults, into concessions, changes and promises of reform of a sweeping character, particularly those related to workers' self-management. Early in the year, the crisis brought General Jaruzelski to the forefront as Prime Minister, a stiff-backed Polish soldier with a reputation for intellectual ability, for close but not subservient links with the Soviet Union and for a moderate, non-confrontational approach similar to that of Kania. Kania, weaving and bobbing, like some ageing but still crafty boxer, seemed to enjoy a certain measure of confidence inside the Party and even outside; and in those early months he probably seemed to the Soviet Union about as good a First Secretary as they could hope to have. But the general picture was sombre: the Government was in retreat, the Party visibly disintegrating, and the Soviet Union seemingly impotent, grinding its teeth, menacing, condemning, and in the early summer mounting manoeuvres on a large scale in an effort to bring further pressure on the Party, and on the people, but failing to affect the course of events in Poland. Add to this an appalling economic situation, strikes, falling production, huge debts and the inability of the Government to produce any answers except of a long-term and theoretical nature.

4. Yet very few Poles, whether they were in the Party or members of Solidarity, believed that there was much danger of direct Soviet intervention. Very few Poles, even within the Party, seemed to believe that it was possible to turn back the *odnowa*, to return to pre-Gdansk days.

5. There were widespread demands within the Party for a more democratic and open system which culminated in the elections to the Ninth Party Congress in June. In the same month, Soviet pressure reached a peak when the Soviet Central Committee sent a letter to the Polish Central Committee severely criticising the handling of the crisis by the Polish leadership. The letter may also have been intended to affect the course of the elections and to prevent the Congress from taking too reformist a turn. It seemed indeed as if Kania was on the skids. I remember at the Queen's Birthday Party rumours were circulating among my guests that Kania and Jaruzelski would fall that very day, under pressure from the Soviet Union, that Olszowski and the hard-liners like Grabski would take over and that a harsher rule would be introduced, more closely in tune with the Soviet Union, less open to reform than Kania and his main supporters seemed to be. Even Mr. Czyrek told me that he thought Kania's chances of survival were uncertain. Yet Kania fought back, re-established his authority within the Party, outflanked the hard-line opposition, publicly renewed his commitment to reform, and seemed ready to pursue the winding path of negotiations with Solidarity. His apotheosis came at the Ninth Congress when with new and more democratic voting procedures, he was re-elected First Secretary by a seemingly

reformed and more representative Central Committee. But his days were already numbered. He seemed to lose his way and grasp of the situation. He was engulfed by more strikes, hunger marches and the success of Solidarity's National Congress at Gdansk. His speeches became increasingly indecisive and he lost completely the trust of the Soviet Union. At the IV Plenum of the Central Committee in October, he compounded his weaknesses by tactical errors and was deposed, in a comparatively gentlemanly fashion, and Jaruzelski became supreme overlord, First Secretary, Prime Minister and Minister of Defence. He brought with him the prestige, authority and the support of the Army. Yet he proclaimed himself in favour of the *odnowa* while strongly criticising Solidarity; his reputation as a patriotic but moderately-minded soldier seemed to reassure many people who had otherwise lost confidence in the whole system; and he seemed ready to talk to the Church and to Solidarity.

6. It was in the late summer that Solidarity began to take on overtly the shape of a political opposition, no longer confining its activities to trade union matters and reform. The kernel of such political ambition had been there from the beginning, but with the first national Congress at Gdansk, at which Wałęsa was elected President, the militants and extremists increased their influence in the governing body and their political demands were spelt out with greater clarity. The appeal to trade unions in other East European countries was probably an error derived from confusion in the procedures of the Congress. But it further embittered relations between Solidarity and the Government. The demands for free elections at the regional level, for the creation of a Social and Economic Council to monitor the work of the Government, for workers' self-management, with vast powers to the workers and little to the Central Government, drove home the increasingly intransigent nature of Solidarity's objectives. And as we saw at the Anglo-Polish Round Table in November, there was a growing reluctance among the Solidarity representatives to acknowledge the leading rôle of the Party or indeed the authority of the Government which they claimed had totally forfeited the confidence of the people. There was at times an air of Bakunin-like unreality about some of the statements of Solidarity and I remember Mr. Peter Shore and Mr. Mark Bonham-Carter commenting on this to me. The Declaration of the Gdansk Congress was anathema to the Party and, despite continuing negotiations, the underlying distrust between Solidarity and the Government was fuelled almost daily by statements on both sides. It may well have been about this time that the leadership of the Party came to the conclusion that the only answer to the growing anarchy was the use of force and that Jaruzelski would be the right man to apply it.

7. It is certain that contingency plans had been laid much earlier in the year. But even Rakowski, who was close to Jaruzelski and who on more than one occasion told me that it all might end badly with the Government obliged to resort to force, claimed that this would be a disastrous policy and should be avoided if possible. He claimed also that Wałęsa was no longer in control and that the militants in Solidarity wished to change the whole system in Poland, which was unrealistic and unacceptable to her allies. All this time the Church was particularly active, and the new Primæ, Archbishop Glemp, conscious that he lacked the immense prestige and authority of his predecessor, Cardinal Wyszyński, nevertheless threw his weight behind Wałęsa and the moderates in Solidarity. Indeed, he identified the Church more closely with Solidarity than Cardinal Wyszyński would have done. For a short period the horizon lightened when Glemp was instrumental in arranging a meeting between himself, Wałęsa and General Jaruzelski. It seemed that there might be a faint possibility of patching

together a tattered national consensus, including the moderate elements of Solidarity, supported by the Church, certain independent Catholics and the Government and the Party, in the shape of a National Front of Understanding. But the militants in Solidarity would have none of this and even the moderates were suspicious and saw the possibility of a return to the mistakes of the 1950s. They saw it as a trap to draw Solidarity into underwriting Government policies, into propping up a crumbling Party, a trap designed to divide Solidarity, to absorb and dilute it. The position of the militants was even more extreme and could be summed up as follows. "We have pushed this rotten system into concession after concession. Why should we join some fake coalition of forces in which Solidarity would be out-manœuvred. Let us give the whole system a further push. Let us go for free elections and a new pluralistic Poland." I believe that this may have been a major error, that even if there were elements of charade about the National Front, Solidarity would have been well advised to go in at this point and work within the system. But the forces of immoderation within Solidarity were probably now too strong, too convinced of the need for intransigence to pay heed to the prudent counsels of the Church and some of the well-disposed independents. Wałęsa could do nothing. At the Radom Conference in early December he was out-voted by the militants. When Lord Trefgarne saw him about this time, he said he needed more concessions from the Government before Solidarity could contemplate joining the process of a National Front.

[REDACTED]

Archbishop Glemp seemed ready to encourage participation in the Front, but expressed his fear that there were too many hot heads in Solidarity and that this would in turn provoke the hard-liners in the Party.

8. Events in November moved fast. The Government for the first time used force to disperse a sit-in at the Fire School in Warsaw. It worked smoothly and must have given General Jaruzelski encouragement. The meeting of Solidarity at Radom shortly afterwards was a triumph for the militants. Statements were made which called for a change in the nature of society, cast doubt on the leading rôle of the Party and on Poland's alliances. The declaration issued at the meeting demanded free elections and Solidarity's version of the Trade Union Bill and economic reform "as an absolute minimum". A period of strikes now seemed imminent. A further meeting at Gdansk confirmed the Radom Declaration. When the Government struck on 13 December, it did so in a carefully planned and organised way, arrested most of the leaders of Solidarity, put Wałęsa under house arrest, declared martial law and effectively suspended all normal communications within the country.

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

10. It is possible that the idea of a military take-over had been decided upon much earlier and thereafter it was only a matter of the Government choosing the right moment. This is the conspiracy theory and with it goes the view that the Government were deliberately lulling Solidarity into a false sense of security, provoking it into more and more extremist statements and that the National Front idea was a pure charade. I find this beguiling, but too neat a view. I believe the truth is probably more untidy, more fortuitous, more hedged by hesitations, mistakes and misjudgments. It is true that the options for the Government narrowed as the Party's position deteriorated and as Solidarity's demands grew. The intellectual militants in Solidarity must, I fear, bear a heavy responsibility for their lack of realism and historical perspective, unless we take the view that all was pre-determined. There was much provocation. Solidarity was penetrated by informers and provocateurs. We know little about the inner counsels of the Army, the only part of Polish society, together with the vast security apparatus, which has been inaccessible and which has not leaked away like a sieve. There are countless questions to which we have no answer. For example, how long can the Army usurp the rôle of the Party and how will the return to civilian Party rule be managed? I cannot see an early end to martial law and yet I cannot see how the country can be effectively made to work for long solely by the instruments of force and fear. Fear is now omnipresent and the instruments of intimidation and oppression are extremely powerful. Can the Government hope to get the Polish workers back to productive work unless they negotiate and conciliate? I see no signs at present that this Military Government is open to conciliation.

11. It will be a dark, hard winter for Poland and the Polish people, a disastrous winter economically and it is possible that more blood will flow and more oppressive measures yet will be applied. There may be political trials of leading intellectuals like Kuron and Geremek. There are ugly rumours of anti-semitism. Nor do I see the Army shrinking from its task despite its closeness to the people. It sees its rôle now as a shield against anarchy. The clamps are down and they cannot be lifted soon without the danger of a return to the same freedom-seeking, anarchic, reformist Poland of a few months ago. Neither Jaruzelski nor his Soviet allies would allow that—the more so as Solidarity so far has proved a softer nut to crack than they and many others expected. At the same time, it is important that we do not rush into over-simplification when rightly criticising the oppressive aspects of the present régime. There may still be something of a reformed Poland to be rescued even more from the present wreck. I suggest that it should be an objective of Western diplomacy to keep the door ajar to this possibility, remote though it may seem at the present time.

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

12. I am sending copies of this despatch to the Secretaries of State for Defence and Trade, Her Majesty's Ambassadors at Moscow, East Berlin, Budapest, Bucharest, Sofia, Prague, Belgrade, Washington, Paris, Bonn, Helsinki and Stockholm, and to the UK Permanent Representatives to the North Atlantic Council and the European Communities.

I am Sir

Yours faithfully

C. M. JAMES.