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RECORD OF A CONVERSATION BETWEEN THE PRIME MINISTER AND THE  
DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER OF POLAND, MR. HENRYK KISIEL, AT  
10 DOWNING STREET ON 9 DECEMBER 1980 AT 1230 HOURS

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Present:

Prime Minister	Mr. Kisiel
Mr. M.O'D.B. Alexander	H.E. Mr. Bisztyga
	Mr. Kucharski

The Situation in Poland

After an exchange of courtesies, during which Mr. Kisiel conveyed to the Prime Minister his own Prime Minister's warmest regards, Mr. Kisiel said that Poland was living through difficult times. He himself had been a member of the Polish Government for a long time and had been aware for a considerable period that the situation in the country was bad politically as well as economically. The previous leadership had ignored the development of a new spirit among the workers. Last summer's rebellion had been carried out by a new generation whose mentality was quite different from their predecessors. They believed that they owned the means of production and they wanted a say in how they were to be used. The technocratic and bureaucratic methods of the past would work no longer. The new generation could not simply be told what to do.

Unfortunately no serious effort had been made to prepare the ground for the take-over of power by this new generation. It was not the first time that a Polish Government had been faced with a crisis from which they had to draw conclusions. The methods used in 1956 and 1970 could not be used again. They had been too painful. Too much blood had been spilled. This time the problem had to be solved by argument and persuasion. Authoritarianism was out. Democratisation was not a gesture it was the right of the people. The discussions in August had led to the conclusion that this was the only path. The previous leadership had been too conscious of their own past experience and had therefore had to be changed. Of the fifteen members of the Politburo in August, only four now remained. This was the first step towards a restoration of trust between the Government and the population. Without that trust nothing could be done.

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/ The workers



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The workers, for their part, had set up Solidarity. It was not easy for the Government to find a way from their former methods to new methods in which the workers would have confidence. Hence the various changes of course in recent months. But for the moment the situation, though tense, was characterised by stability, quietness and a "tendency to order". There was also considerable anxiety about possible unpleasant developments. The population were tired and worried about "what might happen tomorrow". Some of those involved in recent developments had unrealistic hopes. These could, if not controlled, lead to unpleasant confrontations. The Government were very patient. They had enough patience to calm down the hotheads of the younger generation. It was not excluded that there were some forces who might not have a positive attitude to recent changes. There were some "cold political players" who did not realise the dangers to which their activities could lead. They were steering young people into dangerous situations. They could not be treated as "good Poles".

It was to try to contain this situation that more and more open discussions were taking place between the Government and Solidarity. The hope was to create confidence that the Government would not try to revert to the previous situation. The fact was that there was no way back for the Government. They had burnt the bridges joining them to the past. Admitting this frankly had made it easier for the two sides to get on. In Walesa's words: "a Pole with a Pole will always find a solution". Failure to do so in this instance would lead to grave dangers for the future of the country.

The Polish Government were aware of Poland's special place in Europe. Their friends to the East and to the West wished Poland well but were uneasy about the future. The Polish Government understood this. But they needed a little more time and patience from their friends. They had to have time for the new way to be developed. They had to give proper weight to the role and influence of the church. They had to give room for a new generation who wished to create their own future.

/ The Prime Minister

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The Prime Minister said that, as someone looking at the situation from the outside, she was conscious of having witnessed a change/<sup>of a kind</sup> that had not occurred in a socialist state in the last 60 years. This was not a case of the traditional replacement of the old generation by the new within the same system. A new group of people were asking for power on their own terms. They wanted to exercise it independently of the Government. New centres of power and influence were being formed. The task of the Government was to be to regulate democratically other centres of power. This, for a Communist Government, was, of course, an absolutely fundamental change. The new situation imposed tremendous responsibilities both on the Government and on the emerging centre of power. The price of power was responsibility. It would require time for the new leaders to acquire the wisdom to exercise their power properly.

The Prime Minister said that the present developments were very exciting for someone who believed, as she did, in liberty. The socialist system had succeeded in supressing the human spirit for a surprisingly long time. But she had always been confident that eventually there would be a break through. Of course others were aware of the significance of what was happening and were wondering whether they could allow it to go on. Afghanistan had at least served to alert the rest of the world to the willingness of the Soviet Union to impose a system on people who did not wish it. The British people were watching events with close attention and great goodwill. Their interest in Poland was qualitively different from their interest in other countries. There was a large Polish minority here and we had, after all, gone to war over Poland in 1939. Everyone here knew what was at stake.

Mr. Kisiel said that he agreed with the Prime Minister's analysis of the situation in Poland. The fundamental desire was the desire to govern one's own future. The greatest fault of leadership in Poland in recent years had been to concentrate on centralising rather than de-centralising authority. The leadership had lost its feel for the wishes of the Polish people.

/ The Prime Minister

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The Prime Minister said that she wished the Poles well and hoped they would find a way through the present crisis. If they did so, the whole world would benefit. Western governments, strongly though they felt, had been careful to be restrained in their reaction. But they were also being vigilant. Mr. Kisiel said that the Polish Government had been conscious of the wisdom and patience of Western governments. They knew that the West wished them well.

As regards the attitudes of the Soviet Government, Mr. Kisiel said he thought there had been a development in recent months. When he had visited Moscow in September he had thought that there was not a full understanding. But he believed that Soviet visitors to Poland such as Mr. Baibakov, whom he had himself entertained, had learnt a lot. So had President Brezhnev from his discussions with Mr. Kania. The Polish leadership had returned from their visit to Moscow last week in a more relaxed frame of mind. The Prime Minister urged Mr. Kisiel not to relax and to remember Czechoslovakia. Mr. Kisiel said that the Polish Government was indeed alert. He exemplified the speed with which they had rebutted the Tass communique the previous day. The Poles felt that they were a little different from the other Eastern European states and had the right to create their own path to socialism. He hoped that when Mr. Brezhnev returned from Delhi, it would be possible to make further progress towards resolving the outstanding problems.

At the end of the discussion, the Prime Minister said that she hoped Mr. Kisiel would feel free to come to see her whenever he was in London. The discussion ended at 1310.

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