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PRIME MINISTER'S VISIT: GENERAL IMPRESSIONS

SUMMARY

1. THE PRIME MINISTER VISITED POLAND FROM 2 TO 4 NOVEMBER. SHE HAD NINETY MINUTES OF TALKS WITH PRIME MINISTER RAKOWSKI (HER OFFICIAL HOST) AND TWO SESSIONS WITH GENERAL JARUZELSKI (NEARLY THREE HOURS ON 3 NOVEMBER, FORTY-FIVE MINUTES ON 4 NOVEMBER) WHO ALSO MADE AN UNANNOUNCED APPEARANCE AT THE AIRPORT TO SAY FAREWELL TO HER. THE OFFICIAL PART OF HER PROGRAMME INCLUDED WREATH-LAYING AT THE TOMB OF THE UNKNOWN SOLDIER AT WARSAW, AT WESTERPLATTE IN GDANSK AND AT A NEW MEMORIAL TO AN RAF CREW IN WARSAW. IN THE PRIVATE PROGRAMME SHE SAW CARDINAL GLEMP AND TWO GROUPS OF REPRESENTATIVES OF UNOFFICIAL OPINION IN WARSAW, WHILE IN GDANSK SHE MET WALESA AND HIS SENIOR ADVISERS AND LAID FLOWERS ON THE MEMORIAL TO SHIPYARD WORKERS SHOT IN THE 1970 RIOTS. SHE ALSO GAVE AN INTERVIEW TO POLISH TV AND A PRESS CONFERENCE AS WELL AS SEEING BRITISH TV. DETAILED RECORDS OF THE VARIOUS MEETINGS HAVE EITHER ALREADY BEEN DESPATCHED OR WILL FOLLOW. THIS TELEGRAM CONTAINS A GENERAL ACCOUNT OF THE VISIT WITH SOME IMPRESSIONS.

DETAIL

2. THE VISIT, THE FIRST EVER BY A BRITISH PRIME MINISTER, WAS SUCCESSFUL AND GAVE HER EXTENSIVE OPPORTUNITIES:

- A) TO PUT THE CASE FOR THE LINK BETWEEN POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC REFORM SEMICOLON
- B) TO GAUGE THE PRIORITIES OF THE POLISH LEADERSHIP AND THE PROSPECTS FOR REFORM SEMICOLON
- C) TO SEE THE STRENGTH OF THE FORCES RALLIED UNDER THE BANNER OF SOLIDARITY SEMICOLON
- D) TO URGE THE NEED FOR GOVERNMENT AND SOLIDARITY TO TALK ON A BASIS OF FAIRNESS AND GOOD FAITH.

3. THERE WAS MASSIVE COVERAGE IN THE POLISH MEDIA BOTH BEFORE AND DURING THE VISIT. THIS REFLECTED GENUINE POLISH PLEASURE AND INTEREST IN HAVING THE PRIME MINISTER HERE. FOR THE LEADERSHIP IT

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WAS ALSO HOW THEY TRIED TO USE HER AUTHORITY FOR THEIR OWN ENDS. POLISH MEDIA TREATMENT THUS PLAYED UP THE ECONOMIC CONTEXT OF HER MESSAGE WHILE SUPPRESSING THE POLITICAL. A SIMILAR DISTORTION MEANT THAT THE PRIVATE PROGRAMME WAS VIRTUALLY IGNORED BY POLISH TV AND PRESS: THERE HAVE BEEN ONLY THE BRIEFEST OF REFERENCES IN THE NEWSPAPERS (THOUGH IN THEMSELVES THESE REPRESENT A BREAK THROUGH) TO THE MEETING WITH WALESA AND THE LAYING OF FLOWERS AT THE SHIPYARD WORKERS' MEMORIAL. THE SITUATION WAS FURTHER POINTED UP WHEN, VIRTUALLY ON THE EVE OF THE VISIT, THE GOVERNMENT ANNOUNCED THE EARLY LIQUIDATION OF THE LENIN SHIPYARD IN GDANSK, THE BIRTHPLACE OF SOLIDARITY, AND ATTEMPTED TO PORTRAY AS AN ECONOMIC DECISION WHICH WAS CRUCIALLY POLITICAL. THIS WAS A BLATANT ATTEMPT TO WRONG-FOOT THE PRIME MINISTER BY FORCING HER IN A DELICATE SITUATION TO CHOOSE BETWEEN THE ECONOMIC AND THE POLITICAL CONTEXT OF HER MESSAGE.

4. THIS CHALLENGE WAS MET BY THE PRIME MINISTER'S SPEECH AT GENERAL JARUZELSKI'S DINNER. THE SPEECH, PUBLISHED IN FULL IN THE POLISH PRESS, SET OUT STRONGLY THE VIEW THAT FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION AND ASSOCIATION, THE RIGHT TO FORM FREE AND INDEPENDENT TRADE UNIONS AND A REAL DIALOGUE BETWEEN GOVERNMENT AND REPRESENTATIVES OF ALL SECTIONS OF SOCIETY, INCLUDING SOLIDARITY, REPRESENTED THE ONLY WAY TO ACHIEVE A SUCCESSFUL SOLUTION TO THE POLISH PROBLEMS. IN GDANSK WALESA AND HIS SENIOR SOLIDARITY COLLEAGUES, EXPRESSING PLEASURE AT THE CONTENTS OF HER SPEECH, EXPLAINED WHY THEY DOUBTED THE GENUINENESS OF THE GOVERNMENT'S OFFER OF ROUND TABLE DISCUSSIONS. THEY BASED THEIR MISTRUST ON PAST EXPERIENCE, FEAR THAT THEY WOULD BE DRAWN INTO AN ENDLESS SERIES OF FRUITLESS DISCUSSIONS AND THE BAD FAITH IMPLICIT IN THE ANNOUNCEMENT OF THE CLOSURE OF THE SHIPYARD BEFORE THE ROUND TABLE COULD BEGIN. THIS WAS WHY THE LEGALISATION OF SOLIDARITY - PUTTING IT BEYOND THE REACH OF ARBITRARY DECISIONS BY A PARTY OF GOVERNMENT - WAS TO THEM ESSENTIAL IF THE GOVERNMENT WAS TO PROVE ITS GOOD FAITH. NEVERTHELESS, WALESA SEEMED NOT TO EXCLUDE AGREEMENT TO ROUND TABLE TALKS IF SOLIDARITY COULD PARTICIPATE AS OF RIGHT AND NOT ON A BASIS DETERMINED BY THE GOVERNMENT. THE PRIME MINISTER SAID THAT PROVIDED THE OFFER OF ROUND TABLE TALKS WAS IN GOOD FAITH, THERE COULD BE ADVANTAGE IN GETTING A PROCESS OF DIALOGUE UNDER WAY.

5. THE SENSE OF MODERATION AND REASONABLENESS GIVEN BY WALESA IN HIS PRIVATE MEETING WITH THE PRIME MINISTER AND OVER LUNCH WITH HIM AND HIS COLLEAGUES WAS POWERFULLY REINFORCED BY CROWDS OF PEOPLE OF ALL AGES PRESENT AND CHEERING WHEN THE PRIME MINISTER

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LAIID FLOWERS AT THE SHIPYARD WORKERS' MEMORIAL IN GDANSK AND EARLIER ON FATHER POPIELUSZKO'S GRAVE IN WARSAW, AND IN ST BRYGIDA'S CHURCH IN GDANSK. THESE WERE PEOPLE OF ALL AGES, ORDERLY, GOOD HUMOURED, CHANTING SOLIDARITY SLOGANS AND SINGING A PATRIOTIC HYMN. I BELIEVE THE PRIME MINISTER WAS GREATLY IMPRESSED BY THIS ABUNDANT PROOF OF WIDE SUPPORT FOR SOLIDARITY'S ASPIRATIONS AS A FORCE THAT COULD NOT BE DENIED. BUT WHEN SHE RELAYED HER IMPRESSIONS TO JARUZELSKI IN THEIR FINAL MEETING IN WARSAW HE COUNTERED WITH A TOUGH ATTACK ON SOLIDARITY. IN 1981 THEIR ACTIONS HAD LED TO TENSION THAT HAD BEEN DANGEROUS NOT TO JUST POLAND ALONE. HE SAW SOLIDARITY AS A SOURCE OF POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC INSTABILITY IN POLAND. POLISH OPINION POLLS INDICATED SUPPORT FOR THE GOVERNMENT'S EMPHASIS ON ECONOMIC REFORM AS THE WAY AHEAD. RATHER CHILLINGLY, RAKOWSKI HAD EARLIER TOLD ME IN PRIVATE CONVERSATION OVER LUNCH THAT HE HATED EVERYONE IN POLAND WHO THOUGHT THINGS COULD BE CHANGED BY POLITICAL METHODS.

6. THE TALKS WITH RAKOWSKI FOCUSED MAINLY ON ECONOMIC MATTERS. OUTLINING HIS PROGRAMME OF REFORM, RAKOWSKI SAID THAT HE HAD TO EXPECT STRIKES AND DEMONSTRATIONS AS RECONSTRUCTION WENT AHEAD. HE WAS PREPARED TO TOUGH THESE OUT. THE POLISH DEBT PROBLEM WAS MENTIONED ONLY BRIEFLY. RAKOWSKI SPOKE OF THE NEED TO CREATE A BREATHING SPACE FOR THE POLISH ECONOMY TO RESPOND TO HIS NEW MEASURES. OVER LUNCH HE PRESSED HARD FOR HELP OVER RESCHEDULING POLISH DEBT. THE PRIME MINISTER REMINDED HIM OF THE NEED FOR SOUND INVESTMENT AND OF THE IMPORTANCE OF REACHING AGREEMENT WITH THE IMF ON AN ADJUSTMENT PROGRAMME. THE SAME NOTE WAS ALSO STRUCK IN HER SPEECH AT GENERAL JARUZELSKI'S DINNER WHEN, LOOKING FORWARD TO THE DAY WHEN DIALOGUE BETWEEN GOVERNMENT AND SOCIETY HAS CREATED THE CLIMATE FOR RIGHT CHOICES TO BE MADE, SHE SAID THAT POLAND'S FRIENDS WOULD SUPPORT AN IMF PROGRAMME AND BE READY TO RESCHEDULE DEBTS, EXTEND CREDITS AND INVEST IN POLAND.

SOME CONCLUSIONS

7. I BELIEVE THAT THE POLISH AUTHORITIES WERE PLEASED BY THE COURSE OF THE VISIT (THOUGH THEY WILL HAVE DISLIKED HER SPEECH AND THE SOLIDARITY DEMONSTRATIONS). RAKOWSKI AND THE POLISH FOREIGN MINISTER SAID AS MUCH TO ME AT THE AIRPORT ON 4 NOVEMBER. AS USUAL, THEY WILL MAKE SELECTIVE USE OF IT FOR THEIR OWN INTERNAL PURPOSES. ON THE EVIDENCE OF THE VISIT THEY REMAIN CONVINCED THAT THEY CAN MAKE ECONOMIC PROGRESS WITHOUT MAKING SIGNIFICANT POLITICAL OR SOCIAL CONCESSIONS AND THAT NATIONAL RECONCILIATION CAN BE ACHIEVED BY CONSULTATION RATHER THAN BY RE-DEFINING THE LIMITS OF STATE AND

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PARTY POWERS. UNLESS RAKOWSKI'S HONEYMOON PERIOD IS LONGER AND MORE SUCCESSFUL THAN EXPERIENCE SUGGESTS, THIS IS WHERE THE GREATEST RISK TO STABILITY LIES.

8. MEANWHILE, THE PRIME MINISTER HAS NOW EXTENDED THE RANGE OF PEOPLE HERE WHO HAVE HEARD THE MESSAGE OF THE NECESSITY TO LINK POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC REFORM. THERE IS NOW A WIDER BASIS FOR DISCUSSION OF THESE ISSUES BETWEEN BRITAIN AND POLAND. AND UNTIL THE MESSAGE SINKS IN AND IS ACTED ON, THOSE IN SOLIDARITY AND ELSEWHERE PRESSING FOR THAT REFORM WILL BE ENCOURAGED BY HER VISIT AS A POWERFUL DEMONSTRATION OF BRITISH INVESTMENT IN THEIR CAUSE.

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