TITLE: The Rebirth of Pluralism in Poland and The Czech and Slovak Federal Republic

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COUNCIL CONTRACT NUMBER: 800-02

DATE: October 1990

The work leading to this report was supported by funds provided by the National Council for Soviet and East European Research. The analysis and interpretations contained in the report are those of the author.
NOTE

This Report supplements that of Charles Gati entitled "THE BLOC THAT FAILED: Soviet-East European Relations in Transition", and the textbook bearing the same title published by Indiana University Press in May 1990. It is one of a series of lectures given during the summer of 1990, all of which, together with the textbook and a course given at Georgetown University, were funded by the Council to strengthen East European studies.

The Report consists of an interpretive review of the political composition of Poland and Czechoslovakia at the end of 1990. For Poland it describes six main loci of power and influence: the government and parliament; the Solidarity Citizens Committees; the labor unions; the Church; the reform communists; and the extra-parliamentary political groups. For Czechoslovakia it concentrates on the political parties. For both it alerts the reader to trends and potential developments to watch for, but it is at a level of generality which, although perceptive, will contain little new information for the specialist who follows events in those two countries on a daily basis.
THE REBIRTH OF PLURALISM IN POLAND AND
THE CZECH AND SLOVAK FEDERAL REPUBLIC

by Janusz Bugajski

Although political freedoms have been won and the Communist Parties ousted from power in the northern part of Eastern Europe, the hard work of economic reconstruction and political stabilization is in its early stages. While each country is moving in a similar direction the speed of pluralization and marketization will vary as power is redistributed and new political institutions, parties, and programs are established. Each country will draw upon a diverse combination of Western democratic procedures, its own non-Communist traditions and current social constituencies. For the foreseeable future each government will be preoccupied with economic reform, seeking to balance reform with social peace and political stability. It remains to be seen whether sufficient political maturity and successful institution building and social participation will ensure a flowering of democracy. Or alternatively whether instability leads to an authoritarian turnaround in order to subdue disruptive political strife. This paper examines the progress of pluralism in two countries where the progress of political reform is relatively far advanced -- Poland and the Czech and Slovak Federal Republic.
Poland

With the disappearance of the common enemy of Communism Polish politics is splintering and assuming increasing complexity. The divisions are not simply programmatic and ideological but are based on strategic, tactical, and personal disputes within the emerging political elite. In the absence of entrenched democratic institutions, fully legitimate governing bodies, or mass based political parties, Poland's young democracy will be racked by power struggles until the next national elections. Last June's parliamentary ballot was essentially a referendum against the Communist system rather than a distinct choice between specific platforms. The formation of parties, coalitions, and programs will now accelerate; but the process will not be smooth given the grave economic climate and the profound alienation and cynicism of much of the population.

Prime Minister Tadeusz Mazowiecki's government is preoccupied with balancing economic reform with social tranquility. Conflicts could easily erupt from fast rising unemployment, material inequalities, and falling living standards. These in turn could be manipulated by radical groups as witnessed during the Slupsk railway strike in May. A major point of dispute in Warsaw revolves around how to ensure stability in the midst of structural reform. Mazowiecki's cabinet and advisors are wary of political acceleration in order to avoid damaging divisions and party battles. But Walesa's
entourage argue the exact opposite: that without speedy constitutional changes, early parliamentary and presidential elections, and the encouragement of political pluralism, the public will have little stake in the system and will not collaborate in the government's economic reforms.

The local elections underscored these strategic disputes and gave ammunition to both sides -- the political gradualists and the accelerators. For the proponents of speedier political reform, the disappointingly low turnout of under 43% was caused by a troubling combination of factors: general confusion about the political programs on offer; the lack of clear choices unlike in last year's ballot; ignorance about the role of local government which was poorly explained by the media; the lingering Communist heritage of public uninvolvement in local affairs; widespread frustration with economic conditions; and a protest boycott against falling living standards. For the gradualists the elections demonstrated the continuing importance of the Solidarity Citizens Committees, which received nearly 80% of the vote, and the marginal impact of newly formed parties, even though their combined vote increased since last year. The ballot underscored the importance of non-political affiliations as many councillors were elected simply because they were better known whichever organization they represented.

The burning question before the next elections is whether
pluralism will be actively promoted by the government or whether the authorities will try to preserve some artificial political unity. At present there are six main loci of power and influence whose interactions will determine the shape of Polish politics, the pace of pluralism, and the degree of stability. They are: the government and parliament; the Solidarity Citizens Committees; the labor unions; the Church; the reform Communists; and the extra-parliamentary political groups. The coalition government is kept afloat by the authority and prestige of Solidarity but does not benefit from a full mandate from society. It was created after quasi-democratic elections; 65% of the parliamentary deputies and several key ministers and President Jaruzelski himself are not only devoid of public support but are the objects of outright hostility. The round-table agreements with the Communists are now widely considered an anachronism. There are fears that Communists are hanging on to positions to which they have no right, and that the gradual evolution toward democracy has turned into a crawl. Activists in various political groups and Walesa himself think that other East European states have proceeded much further in their political housecleaning and that Poland should not fall behind its neighbors. Although Mazowiecki is widely respected and reasonably popular his position is not entrenched and support may crumble if economic belt-tightening embitters wide sectors of society for a prolonged period. He does not have the full confidence of the Church or the charismatic authority of Walesa
among the workers, and is criticized for failing to present an inspiring vision of a future Poland.

In parliament various caucuses have formed as centers of influence over government decisions; the most significant is the OKP (Citizens Parliamentary Committee) which includes many of Solidarity's leading intellectual advisers. The OKP has been attacked by non-parliamentary union and political activists for being too leftist, self-serving, and cliquish. OKP leaders have avoided creating or supporting any political party and are criticized for slowing down pluralism by trying to maintain an illusory social unity. Some people around Walesa have accused the OKP of trying to form a new nomenklatura based on personal connections while illegally appropriating the Solidarity symbol. Much of this dispute boils down to the question of timing and tactics rather than some political conspiracy. Many OKP people contend that full pluralism is premature and could be extremely disruptive if it does not develop naturally from the grass roots. Others think it must be resolutely stimulated from the top through appropriate legislation and funding.

The Citizens Committees "Next to the Chairman of Solidarity" (KOs) have a loose regional and national structure and were established in the absence of strong political parties to electorally defeat the Communists. They are now embroiled in internal struggles and are perceived by some as obstructing the
process of pluralization they were supposed to promote. Walesa has unilaterally made several personnel changes in the KO leadership, and is accused by his parliamentary opponents of acting like a dictator. Walesa in turn points out that these same deputies were eagerly lining up before last year's elections to take pictures with him in order to gain national recognition.

The conflict between Mazowiecki and Walesa has been overblown by some commentators; indeed at critical times such as the railway strike Walesa has given full support to the government. A sharper conflict exists between Walesa's advisers, associated with the Tygodnik Solidarnosc weekly, and the OKP group and their daily mouthpiece Gazeta Wyborcza. This has been visible in numerous editorial and tactical disputes, such as Walesa's insistence that Poland should stand on a right leg as well as a left; the declaration of a "permanent political war;" and accusations that the OKP is manipulating the political process.

The Citizens Committees could experience further rifts as they affiliate people with diverse political backgrounds. The Committee umbrella is likely to shrink in the future as some parties gain strength and leave the shelter, while their most competent activists are soaked into the local government structure. The leadership may be faced with a choice whether to maintain the loosely structured coalition or form a distinctive and smaller political party. Some pro-Mazowiecki activists are trying to forge a tighter Committee federation and a non-party
bloc of cooperation with the government. Walesa's people oppose such a move, arguing that instead of encouraging pluralism it will lead to further conflicts, alienate the public, and strengthen the position of leftist intellectuals.

As a labor union, Solidarity has only regained about one third of its pre-martial law numbers, or two to three million members. The union is trying to rebuild but is primarily held together by its powerful symbolism and the personality of Walesa. It continues to command wide respect not so much as a trade union but as a mass movement which broke the Communist stranglehold. Solidarity does not have a clear and singular political profile; even while its leaders in principle support the government's economic program, as trade unionists they criticize specific policy moves. In the present political climate Solidarity cannot assume a purely union role as the government needs it to resolve various labor disputes. On the other hand, it cannot be a purely political movement because of its breadth and national character. Conceivably some political parties may evolve out of Solidarity; if Walesa becomes head of state a pro-presidential Solidarity Party cannot be discounted which could presage a wholesale fracturing of the union.

The Church continues to benefit from enormous public authority but has not given unequivocal support either to the government or any political group. The Catholic hierarchy has a
smaller direct role in politics than under Communism when it filled a vacuum created by the ban on free association. But its intervention could again become crucial if there is a new national crisis. The Church as a body will not link itself with any political party even though Christian Democrat groups may seek clerical support, and some priests may back causes espoused by specific political movements, such as religious education in schools. As for the reform Communists (or Social Democrats), now shrunk to a few thousand die-hard members, their public credibility is minimal. The "post-Communists" are not a political threat but they maintain substantial assets and will try to appeal to impoverished workers to regain some impact and may offer deals to various populist groupings.

Several dozen new political factions and parties took part in local elections, ranging from anarchists to monarchists. Their combined vote tally barely reached 10%. Many remain at the slogan stage with little substance to their programs but about a dozen are seeds with the potential to germinate. They can be usefully divided into the center-left and the center-right. The center-left consists of two main trends, the KOR (Workers Defence Committee) heritage and the various Polish Socialist Parties (PPS). Socialism remains a dirty word in Poland and it may take time before a strong socialist movement gains respectability. The former KOR activists, probably for this reason, have avoided forming a distinct party and instead operate
through the OKP and the Solidarity Citizens Committees. Their politics are generally moderate social democrat but are programatically and organizationally very flexible. Outside of some intellectual and student circles they have no sizeable social base and even with substantial funding a new social democrat party would be hard pressed to recruit followers. The PPS has a long and well-respected heritage but is finding enormous difficulty in resurrecting itself and has divided into four small factions. Some unification of the leftist strands will prove a prerequisite for any serious socialist politics.

The center-right is comprised of five main trends: the liberals and conservatives, the Christian Democrats, the independence orientation, the nationalists, and the agrarians. Several parties subscribe to liberalism and conservatism, meaning full support for capitalism with minimal state interference. This is a relatively new phenomenon in Polish politics and most of these groups look to the West for models and inspiration. Some attempts are underway to unite these small parties into an electorally feasible coalition, including the Center Alliance formed by Walesa's close associates who are seeking a stronger presidency and a somewhat weakened legislature. Several parties subscribe to Christian Democracy, including the Christian National Union which has a nationalist stream and the Labor Party whose moderate tone is more attuned with Rome's social teachings. The independence orientation, including the Confederation for an
Independent Poland, is a movement in search of a program beyond the achievement of complete sovereignty. It is liberal-conservative but is highly critical of the current political arrangements. The nationalists have formed a number of small parties with some more extreme and chauvinistic than others. These are by and large Poland-firsters with some racist undertones and a tendency toward demagogoy. Poland's agrarian movement could well become the most significant independent political force if unity can be forged. It has a potentially large base of support if one remembers that 27% of the population are directly engaged in agriculture. The peasants' electoral showing was fairly respectable in rural constituencies and if the three main agrarian groups combine, 20% of the vote is clearly within their reach.

Pluralization will continue in Poland once distinct parties can formulate and present concrete programs and appeal to specific social strata. Many of the smaller parties will coalesce or disappear in a political battle of the fittest. A broad coalition of support for the government could also develop to preserve stability. But citizens committees and pressure groups will continue to have an impact in pragmatically dealing with concrete local problems. There is some danger of polarization and radicalization if the recession continues and there is no relief in sight; nationalist and populist groups could then have some fertile ground for recruitment. The ideal
long-term solution for Poland is the crystallization of two broad parties or coalitions: a center-left and a center-right. This would help subdue the extremes while allowing smaller parties to have an input in decision-making. Poland is likely to stumble toward pluralism and a workable democracy, but its leaders must keep a close eye on economic conditions and the mood of the most deprived sectors of society, otherwise the fragile national consensus could unravel.

Czech and Slovak Federal Republic

The Civic Forum (OF) in the Czech republic and the Public Against Violence (VPN) in Slovakia, which stood at the forefront of the November revolution, overwhelmingly won the recent parliamentary elections. Both organizations were formed by a wide assortment of political and apolitical activists from reform Communists and independent socialists to liberals, conservatives, and Christian democrats. During the first national elections the chief objective of the two groups was to irrevocably break the power of the single-party state and avoid divisions into numerous parties and interest groups. The large 90% turnout on voting day and the comfortable election victories indicated that the basic aims were achieved and that the coalitions benefit from broad public support. However, in the weeks preceding the ballot the process of political differentiation began to gather steam as several parties with clearer programatic profiles began to assert their own identities. The ballot also served to shake out some
of the smaller parties, because of registration stipulations contained in the electoral law and the 5% minimum vote required to win seats in the republic and federal assemblies. As a result fewer parties will now have the opportunity to grow and compete, thus moderating the process of fragmentation and aiding the crystallization of more distinct political parties.

The easy election victor in Bohemia and Moravia was the Civic Forum (receiving 49.5% of the vote), a loose association of political and social activists with a great deal of organizational flexibility exercised by local branches. Its reasons for standing in elections as a bloc are similar to the position of the Citizens Committees in Poland: to guarantee a Communist defeat, avoid the dispersal of democratic forces, and to involve otherwise unaffiliated people in concrete political activities. The Forum will form a clear majority in the new government and its leader Vaclav Havel will be re-elected President. But it may experience internal fissures and external pressures in the midst of some hard economic decisions. Internal divisions could widen between the leadership in parliament and government and the grass roots of the movement. Debates will sharpen over whether to divide into a political and a social movement and indeed on whether to form a political party at all. Pressures from outside will also increase: there are charges that too many former Communists have simply changed their loyalties and been allowed to achieve high positions in the OF, and
accusations that the coalition gave itself an unfair advantage in the elections. In order to place the Forum in perspective and assess the progress of pluralism it is useful to consider the position of other political forces.

Czechoslovakia is now the only country in Central Europe with a Communist Party; in others the reform Communists style themselves as socialists or social democrats. In the elections the Party emerged as the second strongest party at the federal level and in the Czech republic, where it gained over 13% of the vote, but was pushed into fourth place in Slovakia. The reasons for the Party's relative success are the strong Communist tradition in Bohemia, its support among agricultural workers and laborers in some key industries, and its remaining apparatus. But Party membership has plummeted by over 40% to under 1 million since it lost power and could drop much further; its vote in the next elections could fall accordingly. The Communists are trying to revamp their image as a democratic left-wing movement with a forward-looking and young leadership who want to protect the weakest segments of society. But despite the face lift the Party is unlikely to become a credible socialist force and all other parties oppose forming any coalitions with it. On the other hand the country lacks a valid left-wing party as the social democrats and socialists performed poorly in elections. It remains to be seen which group can eventually fill this vacuum. The two former Communist satellites, the centrist Socialist Party and the
Christian-oriented People's Party did not perform well in the ballot and will not have parliamentary seats.

Of the newer parties the Union for a Just Democracy in Moravia and Silesia surprised the pundits and registered over 10% of the vote in the Czech republic. The union is seeking greater self-determination for the two regions but not separation from Bohemia. The Christian Democrats who split from the Forum before the elections only obtained 8% of the vote and did better in Moravia where there are more believers and a sizeable Catholic Slovak minority; but in Bohemia its expansion will have a ceiling. The Social Democrats did not gain any seats and may have achieved better results by remaining within the Forum at least during this first free ballot. But they have a potentially broad constituency among center-left voters if unity can be maintained and if left-leaning Forum members lend their support. But coalitions with either the Communist reformers or Socialists are unlikely at this stage. The Green movement did not do as well as expected in the Czech republic though the party is growing and will be particularly active among young voters and in areas of North Bohemia which have been ravaged by mining and industry. It has links with the OF but there are disputes over the right mix between economic growth and environmental protection. Some liberal-centrist parties formed a coalition Free Bloc for the elections but did poorly, while other moderate conservative groups stayed within the Forum coalition.
The Public Against Violence (VPN), which won the elections in Slovakia with 29.3% of the vote is less of an all-inclusive umbrella group than the OF, as a greater number of distinct parties stood outside the VPN coalition. The VPN is organized along similar lines to the OF and performs similar civic and political functions. It too faces ambiguities and a lack of clarity over its future structure and role. Although it will form a coalition with the Forum at the federal level there are points of friction between the two movements. VPN leaders complain that they receive insufficient technical and financial support and are relegated to the role of a poor relative. VPN could also fracture and the emergence of a centrist-liberal party cannot be discounted. The local elections in November will be an important indicator of the public's political propensities. But VPN fears that it has an insufficient number of activists and limited funds at the local level, while other parties will become more active and could stage more effective campaigns.

The Slovak Communist Party has a similar profile of support as in the Czech lands, among former officials, some industrial workers, and agricultural cooperative workers who were treated reasonably beneficially by the previous regime. But their working class base may continue to shrink and transfer to the Christian Democrats or the nationalists. Its campaign strategy was similar to the Czechs, while additionally stressing that Slovakia would be negatively affected by economic reform and thus
playing on people's fears. The two former Communist satellites, the Democratic and Freedom Parties, have negligible support. Both adopted a moderate centrist position but to no avail as they are too closely associated with the Husak regime and lent little support to the VPN during the November revolution.

Of the newer parties the Christian Democratic Movement proved most successful with over 19% of the vote, but this fell short of what Party leaders had forecast. Its shortcomings were put down to the activities and appeal of the Slovak nationalists. It is a right-of-center party with strong support among an older age group and receives unofficial backing from the Catholic Church hierarchy. It estimates its current 20% vote as a solid base on which it can build for the next elections. The Slovak National Party has grown dramatically in recent months and registered almost 14% of the vote; the total could have been even higher if the election campaign had lasted longer. Although its leaders claim that the party simply seeks to defend Slovak identity, its rivals view it as an openly chauvinistic grouping which defines itself primarily in opposition to other ethnic groups - in order of hostility, Czechs, Hungarians, Gypsies, and Jews. Any of these scapegoats could be revived if economic conditions worsen or other Slovak grievances are exasperated. Their base of support is among older people and working class youth susceptible to rousing slogans. The SNS claims 200,000 members, and has the potential for further growth, but it will
remain in competition with the Christian Democrats for a similar constituency.

The Slovak Green Party gained under 4% of the vote and felt the result was somewhat disappointing. The green movement in the republic was actually the precursor of the VPN opposition and many political activists emerged from the environmental campaign. Though they are federated with the Czech greens they maintain a great deal of autonomy. They also have the potential for growth and are looking forward to the local elections to get their message across. They cooperate with VPN but there are points of discord over the economic plans of the new government and they favor stronger legislation to protect the environment from industrial pollution and an uncontrolled free market. The only other notable political organization is the Hungarian-based movement Egyutteles (Coexistence) which gained nearly 9% of the vote and most of the Hungarian vote in Western and Southern Slovakia. It seeks to draw in other minority groups to protect them both against the federal government and the Slovak republican government. Some Slovak parties accuse Egyutteles of seeking territorial autonomy for the Hungarian minority and being in league with the Budapest government. Some Hungarian activists see an independent Slovak government as a potentially more serious threat to the minorities than the preservation of a strong federal arrangement.
Slovakia may undergo greater political polarization than Bohemia and Moravia. The current absence of a strong centrist-liberal stream or a credible left-of-center party could leave the door ajar to populist, nationalist and separatist movements. The evolution of the VPN and its efforts to fill the centrist gap, the degree of Slovak autonomy within the federation, and economic conditions among the masses will be important political barometers in the republic. Slovaks of virtually all shades of political opinion feel that their nation has been ignored, neglected, and overshadowed by the Czechs. Prague is believed to have had a paternalistic attitude toward the republic which must change if equal relations are to prevail. On the economic arena Slovaks complain that their region has been the location of basic industrial production which is highly polluting while the Czechs export finished products, thus exploiting Slovak labor and resources. Too many economic decisions are apparently made in Prague which does not distribute the national wealth equally between the two republics. On the foreign arena, Slovaks feel they are grossly underrepresented in the diplomatic staff and have insufficient recognition in the West.

On the political arena some Slovak leaders are apprehensive about the powers of the presidency and Prague's centralizing trends. VPN people feel that Havel and his advisors will prove much more sensitive to Slovak issues than their predecessors who largely ignored Slovak grievances. Only the SNS has demanded
outright independence for Slovakia; the Christian Democrats are officially for continuing the federation but are seeking eventual confederation with an autonomous Slovak government only coordinating defense and foreign policy with Prague. They want separate Slovak and Czech constitutions on the basis of which a federal constitution could be drawn up. The Communists want to remain in the federation but with more far-reaching administrative decentralization and fewer federal ministries. The VPN moderates also want to keep the federation but with stronger republican and local governments. They argue that full Slovak independence could also mean the break-up of Slovakia as Hungarians will demand autonomy, while the country would become too weak and economically unfeasible. If economic conditions worsen, pressures for separation could build as nationalist groups will claim Czech mismanagement and promise improvements if Slovakia secedes. The Slovaks and the Czechs need to find a positive, workable compromise formula in both the political and economic arenas. Decades of suppressed antagonism have to come to the fore and need to be channeled in a positive direction. There are political forces on both sides that want to make the marriage work, but on the basis of greater equality between spouses, as a divorce would be mutually damaging.

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