

## Sources of the Polish crisis

As Poland seems to be sinking deeper in turmoil, the question: what has happened to the leader country of change in Central Europe - presses itself on our minds.

The answer must surely begin by pointing out that it is always risky to be a leader, guiding oneself and others across an unmapped territory. Tearing the country from totalitarian grip without violence and by way of a compromise of the "round table" had also a negative side: a clear break with communism was neither made nor felt by the nation.

And then a series of delays, of trains missed, has followed. In June 1989, in the first semi-free elections in East-Central Europe, a large majority of Poles voted to deprive communists of power. However, due mainly to the lack of resolve on that part of the non-communist political elites which had participated in the "round table" talks, the country was saddled with a parliament dominated by communists and their allies and /worse still/ with general Jaruzelski as president. The new government was headed by a non-communist, but politically crucial portfolios were kept by communists even after the break-up of the party. Hungary and Czecho-Slovakia threw off their yoke later, but more decisively - immediately establishing democratic control over the army and police; they also asked the Soviet troops to leave and demanded the dissolution of the Warsaw pact a year earlier than Poland did. And Poland became the LAST country in East-Central Europe to have had fully free parliamentary elections: as late as October 1991.

What we have been experiencing in Poland is democracy without democratic laws and institutions. The country's "constitution", an exercise in communist rhetoric, dates back to 1952; it is fuzzy in defining the division of powers between /and also within/ the legislative and the executive branches of the government: at the time of its writing everything was anyway decided by the Politburo. The president's prerogatives are fairly broad but only vaguely described; his responsibilities are left totally unclear.

Democracy as a system of government has been designed to limit the role of individual psychology in politics. In Poland, a democratic country with weak democratic structures, psychology plays an excessive role in public life, and the actual political system resembles rather a monarchy in a state of disarray.

All that has created an atmosphere of debilitating confusion and, coupled with the delays described above, has resulted in growing frustration and even alienation of the citizenry. Only 42% of the eligible participated in the October elections. The electoral law, which is not only radically proportional but makes electoral alliances almost impossible, produced a desperately splintered parliament, in which the biggest party commands 14% of seats.

For a time, till December 1990, Mr Lech Wałęsa was an ardent proponent of faster and more radical change, both in internal and external policies. Once elected, however, he did nothing to accelerate the expected parliamentary election and prevaricated in proposing an improved electoral law. He has since demonstrated interest in constitutional change mainly as far as it concerns an expansion of presidential powers.

The political class, which is organized along personal rather than programmatic lines, with no real party structures to control errant activists, has lost most of its prestige in the eyes of the public, partly <sup>the</sup> result of the actions of the President, who has demonstrated great skill in undercutting the authority of all other Polish politicians.

Mr Wałęsa remains Poland's cleverest leader, but his success in gaining more and more influence with less and less responsibility has been a tragedy both for himself and for his country. From the status of a national hero he has manoeuvred himself into a position of the shrewdest gambler in a game of which only he himself knows the rules and objectives.

The delays, the weakness of democratic structures, and an entreprising president: all these factors have made the current crisis an almost predetermined occurrence, a natural event. Only a decisive change in these

factors can pull Poland out of that fatal groove. Fortunately, the mood of the people is prevailingly anti-autocratic. And the recent resolution of the Solidarity trade union - which seems to be re-emerging as an essential political force - condemning its first and famous leader for his role in the present crisis, may mark a turning point.

One may only hope that a re-arrangement of forces within the Parliament will persuade the President to play by democratic rules.

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