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DAVID S. MASON

## The Polish Party in Crisis, 1980–1982

Over the last three years, the Polish United Workers' Party has suffered a major crisis, the most substantial crisis of any Communist party in any Communist party state. The disintegration of the party was at least partly responsible for both the development of Solidarity in the summer of 1980 and the imposition of martial law in December 1981. The lack of trust in the party and its authoritarian and unrepresentative character led the workers to demand an institution more responsive to their own needs. But the growth of Solidarity during 1981 and the continuing disintegration and fragmentation of the party led the military to preempt the leading role of the party in 1982.

The collapse of the party in 1980 and 1981 was due to a number of factors.<sup>1</sup> The party leadership had to bear the burden of the economic failures of the late 1970s and the consequent decline in the standard of living. The party itself had grown rapidly in size during that period, even though the influence of ordinary party members and local party organizations declined in the face of increasing tendencies toward centralization in the second half of the decade. This development led to problems of morale even within the party and to the growth of horizontal barriers between the membership and its leaders. The population at large was increasingly annoyed and disgusted with the failure of the party to improve the economic situation and to allow a more honest and open discussion of Poland's problems. The dissatisfaction was compounded by the widespread perception that the elite was increasingly looking after its own interests only and that benefits and privileges were accruing only to those in power.

By the spring of 1981, however, the "renewal" movement that was sweeping the country had begun to penetrate the party, leading it to embark on house-cleaning and reforms of its own. Much of this initiative came from the rank and file of the party, while there was some resistance on the part of the leadership. The changes that did occur were extensive enough to worry the Soviet party leadership, which issued a number of warnings to its Polish counterpart. As the party became less hierarchical and less disciplined, as party members continued to join Solidarity, and as Solidarity continued to mount its challenge to the centralized Polish political system, the regime apparently feared a total collapse of the party—a collapse creating a vacuum that only Solidarity or the army could fill.

In this paper I shall examine membership and policies of the party during 1980–1982, the attitudes of the public toward the party and its role in society, and the opinions of party members themselves. Survey research conducted by Polish institutions during this period, or conducted earlier and distributed during

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The author thanks the International Research and Exchanges Board (IREX) for supporting research in Poland in 1982 that contributed to this article. This study is part of a larger work in progress, *Public Opinion and Political Change in Poland, 1980–1982*.

1. For an excellent treatment of party developments leading up to 1980, see Jack Bielasiak, "The Party: Permanent Crisis," in Abraham Brumberg, ed., *Poland: Genesis of a Revolution* (New York: Vintage, 1983), pp. 10–25.

1980–1982, furnishes much of the data on which this study is based. Some of the material is remarkably candid and provides an unusually detailed picture of the membership, attitudes, and role of a ruling Communist party.

A major and long-term problem for the Polish United Workers' Party, as for all ruling Communist parties, is that of maintaining the elite and leading role of the party while simultaneously keeping the party reasonably representative of the population.<sup>2</sup> For the Polish party, it has been particularly difficult to limit the proportion of white-collar workers, who have dominated both membership rolls and leadership positions. In 1974, for example, "mental workers" made up 42 percent of the party membership but only 22 percent of the work force. While 49 percent of all engineers, 45 percent of technicians, and 70 percent of teachers were party members or candidate members, only about 18 percent of blue-collar workers were members of the workers' party. Furthermore, representation of blue-collar workers in other institutions, including workers' councils, was also weak. A Polish sociologist noted in 1975:

The degree of organization and social activation of workers is quite low, relative both to the postulated model of the working class in socialist society and to the size and economic role of that class.<sup>3</sup>

The problem posed by the lack of institutionalized mechanisms for the expression of workers' grievances was once again dramatized in the riots of the summer of 1976. One of the responses of the regime to these events was a sustained campaign to increase the number of workers and young people in the party. Party membership rolls expanded at an unprecedented rate in the late 1970s.<sup>4</sup> By the end of 1979, members and candidates of the party constituted almost 12 percent of the adult population and over 20 percent of those employed in the socialized sector of the economy. These percentages were the highest in the history of the party. The large membership tended to jeopardize the party's elite image and "leading role," but the expansion had increased the representation of young people, women, and blue-collar workers in the ranks of the party, making it as representative in these categories as it had ever been. Blue-collar workers, for example, constituted 46.2 percent of the party in 1979, compared to 41.8 percent in 1975.<sup>5</sup>

Despite these improvements, the party was still highly unrepresentative of the population in several respects. While more blue-collar workers had joined the party, this group was still not well represented in leadership positions. Even though blue-collar workers constituted almost half of the party membership, they held only 10 percent of the central party leadership positions, and only 3 percent of the discussants at Central Committee plenary sessions came from their ranks.<sup>6</sup>

2. Darrell Hammer, "The Dilemma of Party Growth," *Problems of Communism*, 20, no. 4 (July-August 1971):16–21.

3. Jerzy Drążkiewicz, "Udział klasy robotniczej w aktywności społecznej," in Jan Malanowski, ed., *Nierówności społeczne w Polsce w świetle badań empirycznych* (Warsaw, 1975), p. 21.

4. David S. Mason, "Membership of the Polish United Workers' Party," *The Polish Review*, 27, nos. 3–4 (1982): 138–53.

5. *Życie Partii*, February 1980.

6. George Kolankiewicz, "The Politics of 'Socialist Renewal,'" in Jean Woodall, ed., *Policy and Politics in Contemporary Poland: Reform, Failure, Crisis* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1982), p. 59.

Peasants made up about one-third of the work force but less than 10 percent of the party membership. This fact was of less interest to urban residents than the perception—largely based on fact—that the party was dominated by highly educated white-collar workers with high incomes. Official party statistics showed that 12 percent of party members had a higher education, compared to just 7 percent of the work force. But a sample of working males in the city of Łódź showed that 30 percent of party members had a higher education compared to 11 percent of nonmembers. In fact, over half of those with a complete higher education were party members.<sup>7</sup> While the party considered it important to attract the “best” people to the organization, including the best educated, the less well-educated blue-collar workers were irritated by this kind of differentiation.

The expansion and diversification of the party did not solve the problems of credibility and representation for the regime. If anything, the image of the party as being made up of “opportunists” was reinforced in the late 1970s. Furthermore, the failure of the regime to allow decentralization of power and decision making even within the party was an obstacle to people’s confidence in the party and detrimental to morale within the organization. Public assessment of the party remained highly negative.

The party had never been very popular in Poland, but the lack of confidence in the organization was not publicly affirmed until spring 1981, when the press briefly referred to an official public opinion poll on confidence in institutions.<sup>8</sup> Of fifteen institutions, including the government, the militia, and the old trade unions, the Polish United Workers’ Party ranked last. While this poll showed 32 percent of the population expressing confidence in the party, a similar survey conducted by Solidarity among its own members in November 1981 also showed the party in last place, with a confidence rating of 7 percent.<sup>9</sup> This very low level of support for the “leading” organization was derived from a number of complaints Poles had about the party and about those in power. They included the widespread feeling that those in policy making and managerial positions were incompetent, that they abused their power by attaching extravagant privileges to their positions, that the party and the elite closed off access to decision making for people who were not members of the party and ruled by compulsion rather than consensus, and that the party had forsaken its own stated ideals of socialism and egalitarianism. These were wide-ranging issues that called into question the role of the party in Polish society.

The sense that the party and its leadership were incompetent was not always as strong as it had become by 1980. During the first half of the 1970s, for example, there were some positive evaluations of the Gierek leadership. An

7. From a survey of 1000 adult males in the city of Łódź in the fall of 1980, conducted by the Institute of Sociology of the University of Warsaw and the Institute of Philosophy and Sociology of the Polish Academy of Sciences (hereafter *Łódź 1980*).

8. The survey, “Społeczne zaufanie do instytucji politycznych, społecznych i administracyjnych,” was conducted in May 1981 by the Center for Public Research of Polish Radio and Television (Ośrodek Badania Opinii Publicznej).

9. Solidarity’s poll, among its own members, was conducted by the Center for Social Research (Ośrodek Badań Społecznych) of Solidarity’s Mazowsze region: “Członkowie Związku o błędach krajowych władz Związku” (Warsaw: November 1981). For results of these two polls, see David S. Mason, “Solidarity, the Regime and the Public,” *Soviet Studies*, 35, no. 4 (October 1983): 538.

official poll from 1975 showed that almost 85 percent of the people believed that “in the last several years society had confidence in the leadership of the country.”<sup>10</sup> Over 90 percent of this sample believed the developments in the country since 1970 had been “quick,” and the most frequently mentioned reason for these developments was “the new leadership of the party and the country.” Even taking into consideration the official nature of this poll and the atmosphere in which it was conducted, the results are markedly different from answers to similar questions in 1981, which showed 30 percent or fewer expressing trust in the government and the party.<sup>11</sup> This decline in confidence in the late 1970s was due in large part to the decline in the economy and the standard of living during that period and to the simultaneous burgeoning of Poland’s foreign debt. Many Poles wondered where the money had gone and assumed that it had been either wasted or appropriated by the elite, an assumption that contributed to the widespread belief that the economic and political leadership was incompetent. A poll conducted among a small (330) sample of men in Warsaw in the summer of 1979, for example, showed that only 20 percent thought “ability” played a decisive role in helping people reach high positions in Polish society. As the researchers pointed out, a similar question asked in the United States showed 70 percent assigning a decisive role to ability.<sup>12</sup>

The popular perception of incompetence in the leadership of the party and the country was aggravated by the widespread belief that the elite was unjustly benefiting from its positions of power. The issue of privilege has always been a sensitive one in Poland, a society that values highly the principle of egalitarianism. Unequal distribution of wealth and power is seen as contradictory to the basic principles of socialist society. This issue has always been discussed in Poland, though largely in private. In the period between 1979 and 1981, however, it was treated more directly and openly in both the official and the unofficial press. The result was an increase in popular frustration.

In the unofficial “Report on the State of the Republic” by the “Experience and the Future” study group, the issues which most clearly stood out in their description of society were “the social structure, its hierarchical character, anti-egalitarian tendencies, and the emergence of a system of privileges that conflicts with the sense of social justice so deeply rooted, thanks to socialist ideology, in our society.”<sup>13</sup> There was a widespread perception in Polish society at the end of the 1970s that social inequalities had increased over the past decade. But as one analyst of official public opinion data pointed out, “the present egalitarianism” was directed not so much against differences in earnings as “mainly against the economic position and life style of the leadership apparatus.” Most people, he pointed out, believe

it is unfair that high positions are linked with privileges and they demand that incomes be reduced, and that the availability of goods in short supply,

10. Zbigniew Sufin, ed., *Spółczesność polskie w drugiej połowie lat siedemdziesiątych: raporty z badań* (Warsaw: Instytut Podstawowych Problemów Marksizmu-Leninizmu, 1981), p. 21.

11. Mason, “Solidarity, the Regime and the Public.”

12. Magdalena Gadomska, “Świadomość nierówności,” *Przegląd Techniczny*, May 24, 1981, pp. 19–21.

13. *Poland Today: The State of the Republic*, comp. by the “Experience and the Future Discussion Group” (White Plains, N.Y.: Sharpe, 1981), p. 57.

such as housing and automobiles, access to special shops, private clubs, clinics, and so forth, for persons in high positions be restricted.<sup>14</sup>

All of these issues and complaints were to become strong elements in the appeal of Solidarity and its program. The preliminary program for Solidarity, drawn up by a group of advisers for the organization in the spring of 1981, demanded that restrictions be placed on the privileges of the elite and that the costs of economic recovery and reform be borne “particularly by people enjoying privileges linked with the exercise of power.”<sup>15</sup> The restrictions on privileges were especially directed at those in “the power apparatus” and included limitations on apartments, office automobiles, and special health services and required disclosure of incomes and property.

It should be emphasized here that the concern over privilege was not directed at the party membership at large but rather at those in positions of power. Considerable concern with elite privilege existed even within the party. A party report on letters addressed to the Central Committee by rank-and-file party members mentioned numerous letters advocating “the liquidation of commercial stores and other special stores” and “stores in the militia, the army and the committees of the PUWP.”<sup>16</sup> The reference to the committees of the party suggests that there was concern with privilege not just in the central bureaucracy but at lower levels as well. Here, as elsewhere, we see that Polish society in 1980–1981 was divided not so much between party members and nonmembers but rather between those in positions of power (at all levels) and the rest of the people, whether party members or not.

While the issues of competence and privilege were sensitive and inflammatory ones, questions about the role of the PUWP in Polish society were potentially much more dangerous and destabilizing. The issues raised in this context included overcentralization of power and lack of democracy within the party and the excessive control and dominance of the party in societal decision making. These kinds of criticism were voiced both by the public and by rank-and-file party members during 1980 and 1981. Kurczewski’s analysis of an official poll by the Center for Public Opinion Research of Polish Radio and Television in 1980 concluded that the leadership should be rotated and “the principles of selection and promotion be democratized” within the party.<sup>17</sup> The “Experience and the Future” group also argued in favor of limiting the terms of office of the top leadership levels of the party.<sup>18</sup>

Perhaps the most systematic criticism of party organization and leadership came from within the party. The suggestion most frequently made in letters to the Central Committee was that the terms of office for party leaders should be limited. But the writers also called for more information within the party, secret elections, changes in party nominating procedures, and open sessions of the

14. Jacek Kurczewski, “W oczach opinii publicznej,” *Kultura* (Warsaw), March 21, 1981, p. 9.

15. “The Directions of the Operations of Solidarity in the Current Situation of the Country,” *Głos Pracy*, April 14, 1981; translated in Radio Free Europe Research, Background Report no. 210 (July 22, 1981).

16. Zbigniew Sufin, ed., *Diagnozy społeczne w okresie narastającego kryzysu* (Warsaw: Instytut Podstawowych Problemów Marksizmu-Leninizmu, 1981), p. 221.

17. Kurczewski, “W oczach.”

18. *Poland Today*, p. 173.

Central Committee and lower level committees.<sup>19</sup> These criticisms were accompanied by complaints about the increasing centralization of power in the hands of members of the central party apparatus. Centralization took two forms: the arrogation of decision making authority by the party from the state and other institutions, and the concentration of power within the party from the periphery to the center. A Polish sociologist pointed out that this “absurd” process of centralization had reduced the significance of local party committees “almost to zero” in the late 1970s.<sup>20</sup> Solidarity asserted in its program that the method of governing based on the domination of the central party-state institutions “had led the country to ruin.”<sup>21</sup>

Many of these issues were summed up in a set of recommendations issued to the Central Committee of the party by a group of experts attached to the party’s Institute of the Basic Problems of Marxism-Leninism. The report, delivered in October 1980, defined the main characteristic of the crisis as a lack of confidence in the governing of society and suggested a number of changes, including decentralization of state and party authority, greater intra-party democracy and egalitarianism, the widening of “social participation” in decision making and increased autonomy for other institutions, and an improvement of the electoral procedures of the party, including the nomination of two candidates for each leadership position.<sup>22</sup> As will be seen below, many of these changes were made during 1981.

These criticisms and recommendations reflected a deeper sense that the population had little opportunity to voice its opinions or participate in decision making. The popular feeling of alienation from politics had increased dramatically during the late 1970s. In 1976 only 41 percent of a sample of males in the city of Łódź cited the degree of “participation in governing” as a source of tension and conflict in society. By 1980, 80 percent cited this factor.<sup>23</sup> Solidarity’s preliminary program hammered at the idea that the loss of democratic institutions was the root cause of the crisis: “The bureaucratic system of governing the state and managing the economy has helped establish a closed group of rulers who are not subject to control by the governed.”<sup>24</sup>

The popular frustration with the role of the party and the centralization of power was especially apparent in two national surveys conducted by the Academy of Sciences at the end of 1980 and the end of 1981, entitled *Polacy '80* and *Polacy '81*.<sup>25</sup> In the *Polacy '80* survey, over 92 percent agreed with the proposition that there should be “increased control of society over the authorities.” That this was not to be accomplished through the party was evident from the response to another question about “strengthening the role of the party in the administration

19. Sufin, *Diagnozy*, pp. 209–30.

20. Jacek Tarkowski, “Władze terenowe po reformie,” in Jerzy Wiatr, ed., *Władza lokalna u progu kryzysu* (Warsaw: 1983), pp. 23–76.

21. “Program NSZZ Solidarność,” *Tygodnik Solidarność*, October 16, 1981.

22. Sufin, *Diagnozy*.

23. *Łódź 1980*, and similar survey conducted in the same city in 1976 (hereafter *Łódź 1976*). See n. 7.

24. “Directions of the Operations of Solidarity.”

25. *Polacy '80* was a national representative sample of about 2500 Poles, conducted in November and December of 1980 and reported in *Polacy '80: wyniki badań ankietowych* (Warsaw: Polska Akademia Nauk, Instytut Filozofii i Socjologii, 1981). *Polacy '81* was a similar survey conducted at the end of 1981 and reported in an in-house publication: *Polacy '81* (Warsaw: IFIS PAN).



of power.” In 1980 only 33 percent agreed with this proposition and 56 percent disagreed; by the end of 1981 only 20 percent favored strengthening the party. When the question was reversed in 1981—whether the role of the party should be limited—60 percent favored the idea, while only 20 percent opposed it. Even 46 percent of party members favored limiting the role of the party.<sup>26</sup>

In trying to determine the types of authority relationships desired by the population, the researchers for *Polacy '81* asked if the respondents favored a centralized or a decentralized system, with or without the party playing a leading role. Although there was a considerable division on both issues, by far the largest proportion of respondents favored a decentralized system without a leading role for the party and “based on the participation of various social forces,” as the statement was phrased. There was stronger support for a decentralized system (44.4 percent) than for a centralized one (32.8 percent). But the really astounding result of this question concerned the leading role of the party. Only 24.5 percent favored such a role, while a clear majority (52.7 percent) opted for a system without a leading role for the party.<sup>27</sup> This result testifies to the thorough disillusionment of Polish society with the PUWP. In Poland, as in all Communist states, the leading role of the party has been the *sine qua non* of the political system. This principle is incorporated in the Polish Constitution and even in the Gdańsk Agreements of 1980. It was the basis on which the Soviet Union intervened in Hungary in 1956 and in Czechoslovakia in 1968. Yet by the end of 1981 the Polish party was so discredited that the majority of Poles was apparently willing to revise that fundamental component of the political system.

Frustration with the PUWP did not, however, translate into a wish to constitute any new political parties. In the *Polacy '81* survey only 25 percent favored constituting some “new political parties besides the PUWP, the Social Democratic Party and the United Peasant Party” (these are the two satellite parties of the PUWP, which are allied with the PUWP in the Front of National Unity and which have some seats in the Polish parliament but exert little independent political influence). Opposition to the creation of a new political party was fairly uniform across the political spectrum. Seventy-seven percent of party members were opposed to the idea (although 24 percent favored it!), as were 69 percent of Solidarity members. There was also little support for the proposition that Solidarity should create a political party to operate alongside the union. Only 20 percent of the overall sample and 23 percent of Solidarity members favored this idea.

The population thus did not favor the elimination of the PUWP, or even its replacement by other parties. It wanted a more pluralistic society, in which “society exercises more control over the authorities” and in which there is more room for political participation and political maneuver by other groups, including the existing noncommunist parties and the trade unions. As Solidarity’s program put it: “The state must serve man, and not rule over him; the state organization must serve society and should not be identified with a single political party.”<sup>28</sup> Poles opposed the monopolistic control of power by the party, not the party itself.

26. *Polacy '81*.

27. *Ibid.*

28. “Program NSZZ Solidarność.”

These increasingly vigorous and open challenges to the party could not help but affect the members of that besieged organization. Between August 1980 and December 1981, there were unprecedented changes in party membership and party leadership. Between the end of 1980 and the end of 1981, over 400,000 members left the party. This was by far the largest number of defections in one year in the history of the party, and, with 13 percent of the total party membership, the largest percentage decline except for the year 1958. In February 1982 the official press admitted that the party had lost almost a half million members since July 1981. It is evident that most of those who left were blue-collar workers, since the working-class component of the party had declined from 46.2 percent at the end of 1979 to 42.7 percent in early 1982.<sup>29</sup>

Many of those who left the party joined Solidarity, but there were probably even more party members who stayed in the party *and* joined Solidarity. Estimates of the number of party members in Solidarity range up to 1.7 million of the party's three million members.<sup>30</sup> This figure is probably too high. In two separate survey research polls at the end of 1980, 35 percent of party members admitted to membership in Solidarity.<sup>31</sup> This is a remarkably high percentage in itself, however, and is close to the percentage of the general population in Solidarity (37 percent). An even greater number of party members supported Solidarity, even if they did not join the organization. In the *Polacy '80* survey, 45 percent of party members expressed "decisive support" for the activities of Solidarity. Dual membership in Solidarity and the party was especially prevalent among skilled blue- and white-collar workers, as is apparent from table 1.

As the table shows, three quarters of all skilled workers, party members and nonmembers alike, belonged to Solidarity at the end of 1981. There were also extremely high rates of Solidarity membership among specialists and the "leadership cadre," including most party members in these categories.

There are several possible explanations of why so many party members, particularly those in prestige and leadership positions, joined Solidarity. First of all, the appeal of Solidarity was so widespread that it cut across the lines of the "establishment" to include many supporters of the regime. Most rank-and-file

Table 1. *Party Members in Solidarity, by Occupational Groups (percentage)*

<i>Occupational Groups</i>	Percent in Solidarity among:	
	<i>Party Members</i>	<i>Nonmembers</i>
Specialists with higher education and leadership cadre	55.0	69.5
Middle cadre and specialists	64.7	71.8
Office workers and administration	33.3	61.2
Skilled workers	76.0	77.6
Farmers and farm workers	15.8	20.0

Source: *Polacy '81*.

29. *Rzeczpospolita*, February 9, 1982.

30. *Christian Science Monitor*, January 28, 1981.

31. *Polacy '80* and *Łódź 1980*.

party members supported the existence and goals of Solidarity and may have seen in it a potential means to loosen the hierarchical controls within the party. As Solidarity adviser Jadwiga Staniszkis has pointed out, the antihierarchical, antiinstitutional and egalitarian attitudes of Solidarity found support in the party as well and fostered genuine common interests between the “renewal” movement in the party and the membership of Solidarity.<sup>32</sup>

Second, it might be expected that party members would be attracted to Solidarity simply because of their political activism. Party members are joiners and activists and are more likely to have definite opinions on public issues. Solidarity provided a new channel for their activities, and a more productive one. That PUWP members played an active and leading role in Solidarity is evident from data on party membership among the factory commissions of Solidarity. In five of the six regions (*województwo*s) for which membership was reported, party members constituted at least 20 percent of the Solidarity factory commissions.<sup>33</sup> This overlapping membership of Solidarity and the party extended to the very top of the political system: at the Ninth Congress of the party in July 1981, 20 percent of the delegates were also Solidarity members.

The changes in the party also affected the professional apparatus. In the eighteen months after August 1980, 53 percent of party workers, the professional staff of the organization, left the party “for various reasons.” In the preliminary elections leading up to the Ninth Congress, there was “an almost complete turnover in the leadership cadre of the party.” Eighty percent of the regional party committees were new, as were 65 percent of the village, town, and factory committees and 50 percent of the first secretaries of the primary party organizations.<sup>34</sup> Many of these newly elected local leaders were young people, often with short party membership records.

The turnover in the professional ranks was bound to affect the leadership as well. When the party congress elected a new Central Committee in July, 91 percent of the winners were new to the position. Of the fifteen Politburo members elected at the congress, only four were holdovers. This was the most rapid and thorough change in the party leadership of any Communist party state. It reflected fundamental changes and strains within the organization and had both positive and negative consequences. The “renewal” and rejuvenation of the party raised the possibility of changes in policy as well, and perhaps of a more accommodating stance toward Solidarity. But it also caused concern and fear in the Soviet Union that the Polish party might be losing its “leading role.”

The PUWP made substantial efforts to clean house during 1981 and to join the “renewal” that was occurring throughout Polish society. These efforts included crackdowns on corruption and illegality within the party, restrictions on privileges, provisions for more openness within the organization, and reforms in party election rules. The desire for renewal was not unanimous, however. The

32. Jadwiga Staniszkis, “The Evolution of Forms of Working-Class Protest in Poland,” *Soviet Studies*, 33, no. 2 (April 1981): 229.

33. “Informator Biuletynu MKZ. NSZZ Solidarność” (East-Central Regional Organization of Solidarity, Lublin), January 30, 1981.

34. *Rzeczpospolita*, February 25, 1982.

changes elicited widespread and lively debate within the party and led to deep divisions between “liberals” and conservatives.<sup>35</sup>

The concern about corruption within the party, and particularly the fact that the population perceived the party as being corrupt, led the Central Committee to adopt a resolution in March which instructed “central and local party auditing commissions to accelerate work on the definition of political responsibility of party members guilty of violations of law and of moral principles” and called on state and judicial organs to do likewise.<sup>36</sup> The party also proceeded to conduct “individual talks” with members and to dismiss many from the rolls. Compared to the mass defections from party ranks during 1981, however, the number of those purged was relatively small.

There were also efforts to defuse accusations that party officials received extraordinarily high pay and fringe benefits. A remarkable article that appeared in the party monthly, entitled “On the budget, wages and property of the party,” contended that party salaries were lower than those for equivalent positions in the state administration and economy and that “party workers may not have any other sources of income, and do not receive any bonuses or periodic awards.”<sup>37</sup> In an attempt to alleviate concerns about the salaries of party officials the article listed the wages for members of the Politburo and for secretaries of the Central Committee (25,930 zlotys) and for other party professionals down to the district level. The Politburo salary figure, if it can be believed, is 3.5 times the average national wage, which is within the maximum wage differential that most Poles consider acceptable.

The party leadership also tried to encourage freer discussion within the party, although within strictly defined limits. At the plenum of March 1981, for example, a Central Committee resolution approved of the “lively and often controversial discussion” taking place within the party, adding, however, that discussion should remain within the framework of democratic centralism, and should not degenerate into “ideological pluralism.” At the same plenum criticism of the rigidity and lack of responsiveness to initiatives “from below” on the part of the leadership was voiced frequently and openly.<sup>38</sup> By the summer of 1981, at the June plenum of the Central Committee, the “renewal” movement had become so pervasive that First Secretary Kania virtually begged the party to retain the leadership. Party leaders, he said, “would be interested” in ensuring that the present members of the Politburo and the Central Committee secretaries take part in the forthcoming congress as *delegates*!<sup>39</sup> The possibility that they might not was an indication of the reluctance of many local party organizations to grant central party officials safe constituencies for the congress elections. It illustrates once again the increasingly wide gulf between the grass roots and the leadership of the PUWP. Kania’s concern was due in part to the extensive changes in party leadership at all levels that resulted from the new election rules passed by the Central Committee in April. Delegates to the congress were to be elected at

35. For a thorough discussion of internal party debates on the renewal, see George Sanford, *Polish Communism in Crisis* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1983).

36. Radio Free Europe Research Reports, April 13, 1981.

37. *Życie Partii*, April 1981.

38. Radio Free Europe Research Reports, April 13, 1981.

39. *Ibid.*, June 19, 1981.

provincial, plant, university, and military party conferences. Nominations would be made by special electoral commissions. But a crucial difference in the new rules was that there could be an unlimited number of nominations from the floor of the conferences and that the voting would be by secret ballot. In the past, the maximum number of nominations permitted from the floor was 15 percent of the available seats. The "provisional" electoral rules adopted in December 1980 had allowed for 50 percent, but in response to widespread criticism the limitation was dropped altogether. Furthermore, the provision for unlimited nominations had already been adopted by some regional and local party organizations.

Another major accommodation the party had made was in its attitude toward religious believers within party ranks. Officially the "scientific" and atheistic worldview of a Marxist-Leninist party was inconsistent with religious belief. In practice, that inconsistency has been overlooked in a society that is overwhelmingly Catholic. By 1981 even most party members professed to be believers (80 percent) and 27 percent called themselves "practicing" Catholics.<sup>40</sup> The party finally recognized this fact officially when the program of the Ninth Party Congress acknowledged that "religious believers can join the party if they wish to and be politically active in keeping with its program."<sup>41</sup> This stand was reaffirmed, though modified somewhat, in an article on "Believers in the Party" in *Życie Partii*.<sup>42</sup> The article asserted that the PUWP was primarily a political party and not connected with people's world view (a remarkable statement in itself). Believers could join the party, and the party recognized religion as a private matter. But the party should strive to change the world view of religious members in the direction of materialism.

These changes in party policy were criticized both inside and outside the country. In May 1981 a party "discussion forum" in Katowice adopted a declaration accusing the Kania leadership of having lost its "ideological and political compass in the struggle for socialism . . . under the pressure of alien ideological influences, supported by right-wing opportunism and liberalism of the bourgeois type." The statement expressed alarm over increased tendencies within the party of "Trotskyite-Zionist views, nationalism, agrarianism, clericalism and anti-Sovietism."<sup>43</sup> It was not clear how large this group was, or even who was in it, and the declaration was rejected by official party bodies. But the fact that the statement appeared in an official publication suggested that these conservative views had at least some support.

Conservative elements in the party received support from a powerful outside voice in early June 1981, when Soviet party leader Brezhnev addressed a sharply worded letter to the members of the Polish Central Committee, criticizing the party leadership for its "constant concessions" and its inability to cope with

40. These figures were derived from the *Polacy '80* survey but were not published in Poland. There were claims in the official press, however, that "two-thirds" of party members were believers, and a lively debate over the meaning of these claims ensued.

41. The party's program adopted at the Ninth Congress is translated in Roman Stefanowski, comp., *Poland: A Chronology of Events February-July 1981* (Munich: Radio Free Europe, 1982), pp. 171-86.

42. *Życie Partii*, September 2, 1981.

43. The Katowice forum statement appeared in the official *Sztandar Młodych*, May 29-30, 1981; Radio Free Europe Research, June 11, 1981.

“counterrevolutionary forces” within Polish society.<sup>44</sup> Brezhnev also expressed concern about the upcoming Polish party congress and the failure of the party leadership to defend its “experienced cadre” in the preparatory electoral conferences. He asserted that the Soviet Union was the only guarantor of Poland’s sovereignty and reminded the party of its responsibility to the entire socialist community for the preservation of party rule. The language of the letter was pointedly similar to that of messages conveyed to the Czechoslovak leadership in the spring of 1968. The letter must have encouraged conservatives at the Central Committee plenum a few days later, where there were appeals for the Politburo to show some “muscle” against the forces of counterrevolution and Solidarity’s “march toward power.” In his speech to the plenum, Kania said that the accusations in Brezhnev’s letter were “fully justified” and pledged efforts to meet the criticisms while maintaining the commitment to socialist renewal.<sup>45</sup>

By 1981 there were no major differences in outlook between members of the PUWP and the rest of society. Most of the views of society reflected in public opinion polls were similar to those held by members of the party. Table 2, drawn from the *Polacy '81* survey, shows the responses to selected questions by party members and nonmembers. On some of the major issues of 1981, a majority of party members agreed with the majority view of nonmembers. It is clear from these data that party members by no means followed a hard line on these issues. Eighty percent favored access to radio and television for Solidarity, and almost half of all party members even favored limiting the role of the party in Polish society!

A remarkable degree of support by party members for the actions and programs of Solidarity is evident in other issues, too. Only 21 percent of party members “decisively opposed” strikes as a form of protest (compared to 13 percent of nonmembers). When asked about participation in acts of protest, party members more frequently admitted to such acts (21.6 percent) than did the overall sample (18.4 percent). When asked who was responsible for the gov-

Table 2. *Public Opinion of Party Members and Nonmembers on Major Issues in 1981 (percentage)*

<i>Issue</i>	<i>Party Members</i>	<i>Nonmembers</i>
Support Guaranteeing Solidarity Access to Mass Media	79.8	93.5
Support Limiting the Role of the Party in the Administration of Power	46.0	62.0
Support for the Development of Private Agriculture	56.2	74.9
Oppose Temporary Increase in the Powers of the Militia and the Security Forces	53.5	64.5

Source: *Polacy '81*.

44. “List Komitetu Centralnego KPZR do Komitetu Centralnego PZPR,” *Nowe Drogi*, July 1981, pp. 29–32.

45. Radio Free Europe Research, June 19, 1981.

ernmental and political crisis, party members rarely blamed Solidarity (see table 3), even though they were also less likely than nonmembers to assign primary responsibility to the government. Furthermore, they overwhelmingly opposed hard-line emergency measures to cope with the crisis at the end of 1981.<sup>46</sup>

If there had earlier been a division between party membership and society, this division largely disappeared by the middle of 1981. The division became one between society, including most party members, on the one hand and the state and party leadership on the other. Many party members had joined Solidarity, and most of them sympathized with its goals. As Alain Touraine's groups concluded from their interviews with Solidarity activists, "ordinary members of the Party are closer to members of Solidarity than they are to their own leaders."<sup>47</sup> The party had joined the process of renewal, but the process was being blocked at the top.

In the course of 1981 the authorities became increasingly isolated even from the party membership. In October Kania was replaced as first party secretary by Premier General Jaruzelski, marking a further diminution of authority for the party. Even Lech Wałęsa recognized the dangers posed by the weakening of the party. In an interview with Western reporters just before the imposition of martial law, he pledged to help the party if it started to discredit itself or collapse:

There are no other realities here. We cannot overthrow the party. We cannot take the power away from it. We have to preserve it. At the same time, tame it and let it eat with us, so that it will relish what we create.<sup>48</sup>

But it was too late even for Wałęsa to help the party. In the face of accelerating demands from Solidarity and the accelerating disintegration of the party, Jaruzelski was faced with considerable pressure from hard-liners in the bureaucracy. There is even some speculation that party bureaucrats attempted to seize power in March and again in December. According to a Western observer, "the day before martial law was imposed, Jaruzelski sent the entire apparatus of the Polish Central Committee into the provinces, trapping them there in order to prevent a concerted response."<sup>49</sup> Jaruzelski claimed that the army had taken control to

Table 3. *Opinion on Responsibility for Crisis, by Party Membership (percentage)*

<i>Who's Responsible?</i>	<i>Party Members</i>	<i>Nonmembers</i>
Government	25.5	41.7
Solidarity	8.7	2.4
Both	47.1	38.9
Someone else	4.4	6.1
Difficult to say	14.6	10.9

Source: *Polacy '81*.

46. *Polacy '81*.

47. Alain Touraine, *Solidarity: The Analysis of a Social Movement* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1983), p. 59.

48. *Washington Post*, January 10, 1982.

49. Richard Spielman, "Crisis in Poland," *Foreign Policy*, no. 49 (Winter 1982-83): 32.

reestablish order and stability and to prevent the total collapse of the party, which he said was threatened with “physical liquidation.” In the months following the imposition of martial law, the regime made efforts to restore the legitimacy and reputation of the party. There were extensive purges of party functionaries at all levels in an apparent effort to “trim both wings” of the party. According to Jaruzelski, the changes in the party cadres in the two months after martial law were the most extensive in the history of the party.<sup>50</sup> The party was also trying to attract back many of those members who had turned in their party cards after August 1980. But these efforts faced a contrary tendency: tens of thousands of party members who had stayed in the organization during the Solidarity era turned in their cards in protest of the imposition of martial law. Membership continued to decline during 1982.

The role of the party in Polish society was another issue that elicited lively and open debate during 1982. In a discussion of the relationship between the unions and the party, *Trybuna Ludu* (the party daily) declared that “it is the party, or rather political parties, and not the trade union movement, which are the instruments representing the interests of various classes and nation-wide interests.”<sup>51</sup> But by the spring the line had softened somewhat, partially perhaps because of the regime’s lack of success in resuscitating the party. In discussions about the creation of a “Front of National Understanding” (*Front Porozumienia Narodowego*), which was presumably to play a political role, it was stressed that the front should include people who were not members of the party and even those who “do not like socialism.”<sup>52</sup> The front “should enable all social organizations in favor of the political and social system in Poland to participate in political decision making.”<sup>53</sup> Despite this rhetoric, the martial law regime was unsuccessful in transforming the party, the front, or any other official organizations into legitimate representative bodies. By the end of 1982, the regime still faced a dilemma. Martial law was suspended and formal power returned to the party and state offices. But the reputation and membership of the party remained at low levels. By imposing martial law, the army had provided a crutch to the injured party. But the party was still not able to walk without at least leaning on the army.

The events of 1980 and 1981 marked a fundamental turning point both for Poland and the other European Communist states. For the first time in the postwar history of this region, virtually the entire population united to demand a qualitative transformation of the system. Most basic was the demand for a broadening of the base for participation in economic and political decision making and for restrictions on the decision making prerogatives of the party elite. Support for this demand was widespread even among the party membership, which also suffered from the centralization of power.

The need for political decentralization in the Communist states and its benefits have long been recognized by Western political scientists. As David Lane has put it, “the rigid centralised political system devised to implement rapid

50. *Rzeczpospolita*, February 25, 1982.

51. *Trybuna Ludu*, February 19, 1982.

52. *Życie Warszawy*, April 6, 1982.

53. *Ibid.*, April 14, 1982.



industrialisation now becomes redundant when its major task has been completed. It comes into conflict with participant-oriented groups.”<sup>54</sup> By 1981 the imperative for such change was being openly discussed in the Polish press: “In a word, an escape from the crisis demands changes in the political system, changes of a qualitative character, such that the system would rely not on methods of compulsion, but on methods which in effect lead to the desired integration of society.”<sup>55</sup> Poland was moving from a “subject political culture” to a “participant” one. Solidarity was the main vehicle for this movement, and the central party bureaucracy was the main obstacle. While many elective party posts fell into the hands of reformers during 1981, the central administrative staff—largely appointed—remained intact. This group was the most threatened by the challenges posed by Solidarity. In retreat, the central party organization relied increasingly on power to maintain its position. In the past the party had been able to derive some legitimacy from socialist ideology. As the ideological legitimacy of the party waned, power became the overriding motivation for the bureaucracy, further exacerbating the tensions between the rulers and the ruled. The elite increasingly depended on “exclusionary closure” to maintain itself.<sup>56</sup> But in doing so it became further removed and alienated from society.

Solidarity tried—unsuccessfully—to reform the Polish political system from the “outside.” In order to reform the system, it was necessary to penetrate and reform the party. There was considerable success in this regard; many party members joined Solidarity or sympathized with it. The grass roots of the party initiated significant changes in the rules, structure, membership, and leadership of the organization. Even the central party leadership tried to adapt to the new environment by encouraging initiatives, democratization, and decentralization at the lower levels. But by the end of 1981, the process of renewal was caught on the horns of a dilemma: the reform was too slow for many members of Solidarity and too fast for the party bureaucracy (and the Soviet leadership). Many members of Solidarity believed that the union was making too many compromises and that the only way to move ahead was to continue the pressure on party and government.<sup>57</sup> This group constituted only about a third of the membership (and leadership) of Solidarity, but it was a vocal minority. The regime targeted its criticisms on these “radicals” and identified them as the dominant force within the movement. The appeals of this group for new elections to the Sejm and a referendum on the party triggered the declaration of martial law.

Many Poles were equally dissatisfied with the pace of change within the party. “For Poles of the 1970s, the present party would have been the realization of their most ardent aspirations,” but for Poles in late 1981, “the party is still not democratic enough, not sufficiently humble, too sure of itself, too ready to usurp power and therefore untrustworthy.”<sup>58</sup> The party had undergone the most

54. David Lane, *The Socialist Industrial State* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview, 1976), p. 81.

55. Witold Morawski, “O źródłach i naturze kryzysu 1980–1981 w Polsce,” *Literatura*, September 24, 1981, p. 6.

56. Frank Parkin, *Marxism and Class Theory: A Bourgeois Critique* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1979).

57. David S. Mason, “Solidarity and Public Opinion.” Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Association for the Advancement of Slavic Studies, Washington, D.C., October 1982.

58. Andrzej Szczypiorski, *The Polish Ordeal: The View from Within* (London: Croom Helm, 1982), p. 146.

substantial changes in its history, indeed in the history of any Communist party. Yet the population remained critical of its concentration of power and privilege.

The party bureaucracy saw its position as dire, and this perception was reinforced by the continuing demands of the more radical Solidarity supporters. The regime—in contrast to Solidarity—defined renewal as “a process of social adjustment articulated and implemented ‘from above.’”<sup>59</sup> But this concept conflicted with what was happening both in society and in the party itself, where most of the changes were generated from below. The party leadership was put in an unusual and uncomfortable position: for the first time in its history, the PUWP was not the primary agent for initiating social and economic reforms. At the same time, the Soviet leadership was issuing dark warnings about the necessity of maintaining the leading role of the party. The imposition of martial law probably reflected a combination of two interests among the elite: to maintain itself in power and to avoid the possibility of Soviet intervention.

During 1981 the Polish United Workers' Party had attempted to adapt to the renewal that was sweeping the country. It became less hierarchical, more representative, more democratic, and more reformist. It effected significant changes in its own membership, leadership, organization, and processes. But the party, like Solidarity, exceeded the boundaries of the possible in the Poland of 1981. The changes that occurred in the party threatened its “leading role,” the *sine qua non* of Communist rule in Eastern Europe. While most party members were willing to adapt the party to Solidarity's Poland, much of the entrenched party and government bureaucracy was not. And those elements found powerful support both within the country and without. Contrary to the expectations of most Poles, the democratization of the party was not a sufficient guarantee of the process of renewal.

59. Jack Bielasiak, “The Evolution of Crises in Poland,” in Jack Bielasiak and Maurice Simon, eds., *Polish Politics: Edge of the Abyss* (New York: Praeger, forthcoming).