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### EAST EUROPEAN MEDIA AND THE POLISH WORKERS' SATURDAY ISSUE

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**Summary and Introduction:** The controversy over working hours that culminated in Solidarity's call for workers to stay away from the job last Saturday represented the first major issue of the new year in Poland and was the first really new sensitive challenge for East European media in their coverage of Polish events in some time. All in all, however, the various countries' handling of this delicate matter only reflected the familiar patterns of recent months. The Czechoslovaks, for example, were the most actively vociferous verbal participants in the unfolding events, taking a clearly partisan stand that was quick to condemn Solidarity for its "irresponsibility" and to praise the Polish authorities for (at last) seeming to take a firm stand. The Hungarian media, in contrast, avoided any independent commentary of their own on the issue. Their coverage relied heavily on official Polish reports and thus clearly conveyed the impression that Solidarity was in the wrong, but they at least projected a relatively clear picture of the essentials of the disagreement between the new unions and the government. In keeping with their usual extremely cautious approach on Polish developments, the Bulgarian media offered only a very sketchy picture, but still enough to suggest what was at stake. The Rumanians, again not uncharacteristically, avoided the workweek issue entirely. Perhaps the only departure from the usual East European pattern is that the East Germans, traditionally the front-runners along with the Czechoslovaks in criticizing Polish developments, do not appear thus far (as far as can be judged) to have paid any significant attention to this issue.

The package that follows examines the treatment of the Polish workweek controversy in Czechoslovakia, Bulgaria, and Hungary.

Czechoslovakia

Events in Poland are closely watched, even if not always fully reported, by the Czechoslovak media. The most active correspondents are Jan Lipavsky (Radio France), Frantisek Sojka (radio), and Richard Pokorny (television). They all reported on the controversy over whether all Saturdays should be free at once as Solidarity demanded with reference to the Gdansk agreement or whether the changeover to a five-day week should be gradual with two free Saturdays each month to start with as the Polish government stipulated. Even before the somewhat tentative test of strength on January 10, the Czechoslovak media paid attention to the problem.

Richard Pokorny pointed out in reference to Polish Deputy Prime Minister Mieczyslaw Jagielski's television speech on January 8 that Poland must have a well-working economy like Czechoslovakia before it can afford an immediate cut in the work-week. (1)

A day later, when it became clear that this time the Polish leadership was not going to give in to Solidarity's demand, Frantisek Sojka patted the Warsaw government on the back for its stand, saying that

Without wishing to draw premature conclusions . . . the fact that the state power, the agencies of state power, have decided to adopt a more resolute and firmer attitude than before toward all these anarchic and demagogic tendencies represents a positive development. I would add that this is one of the first good pieces of news to emerge from Poland in a long time. (2)

The Czechoslovak commentators have also suggested that the resistance of the Polish leaders to "the unrealistic and demagogic" demands met with a positive response from the Polish population. Richard Pokornysaid on this score:

As soon as free Saturdays began to be discussed, in September 1980, I was surprised -- and not only I -- by the spontaneous response from all over the country. The response had one common denominator: why free Saturdays when it is necessary to work and when we have been holding a debate for half a year? This was coming not only from individuals; I was able to see in many enterprises this was the view of at least half of the working people. In my view, public opinion is on the side of the government. (3)

(1) Czechoslovak Television, 8 January 1981, 1930 hours.

(2) Ibid., 9 January 1981, 2215 hours.

(3) Ibid., 8 January 1981, 2150 hours.

There was also emphasis on Solidarity's alleged sudden and unilateral declaration of work-free Saturdays, which the Czechoslovak commentators compared unfavorably with the Polish government's readiness to continue negotiating.

From among the conflicting claims about how many workers actually stayed away on January 10, the Czechoslovak media reported and endorsed the Polish government's version that about 65 per cent allegedly turned up for work. The retail trade network, public transport, and central offices and services were said to have functioned normally. Some factories allegedly began work a little late but then continued without interruption. There were regional differences; Katowice, Cracow, Wroclaw, and other voivodships, for example, had a larger proportion of factories working than did Warsaw, Elblag, Piotrkow, and Lodz. (4)

The Czechoslovak media, nonetheless, did not see the confrontation as a clear-cut victory for the government. Some workers were said to have fallen victim to agitation by Solidarity and to the threatening practices of the new labor union militants. These practices included the alleged compilation of blacklists, threats of expulsion from the union, and even physical interference. (5) The purported tough stand on the free Saturdays issue by Solidarity stewards was interpreted as an intention to create new sources of social tension rather than to solve a genuine issue.

Apparently not all Solidarity leaders were considered to be bad. Some of them (unspecified) were said to have supported the government rather than the Odsiek headquarters of their movement. (6) This statement is in line with previous intimations of conflict within Solidarity. A recent authoritative article struck the same note when it drew a distinction between "the working class core in the trade union group of the so-called Solidarity" group and "its invisible quarters (*skrytka*) into which forces with sinister antisocialist intentions have insinuated and camouflaged themselves." (7)

Fokorey paraphrased an article in *Goienski Mielonci* to tell his audience that Solidarity was good at organizing demonstrations, occupying premises, and enforcing personnel changes, but had yet to issue an appeal for calm and honest work. Without such an appeal not much could be achieved, except perhaps tightening the noose around the Polish neck. (8)

- (4) Frantisek Sojka on Radio Hvezda, 10 January 1981, 2100 hours. There was no mention of the coastal areas other than Elblag.
- (5) Jan Lipovsky in *Nada Prasp*, 12 January 1981, p. 3; Sojka, *Radio Prasp*, 12 January 1981, 1830 hours.
- (6) *Ceteka* (in English), 12 January 1981.
- (7) "An Urgent Word Spoken at the Right Time," an editorial in the party fortnightly *Elvot Strany* No. 1, 1981, pp. 3-6.
- (8) Czechoslovak Television, 12 January 1981, 2155 hours.

It should be added that a five-day workweek has been normal practice in Czechoslovakia since 1968 when the reformists introduced it in connection with the economic reform begun in 1966. (9) Miners and 3-shift workers work 40 hours; industrial 3-shift workers work 41.25 hours; and the rest of the workforce 42.5 hours. Juveniles under 14 work 36 hours. The Labor Code of 1975 stipulates that the workweek must not exceed 46 hours. (10) It is generally believed, and even occasionally admitted, that in Czechoslovakia some 15 per cent of the working time is wasted and possibly even up to 30 per cent in the building trade. (11) Since 1970 the government has annually proclaimed up to four Saturdays or Sundays as working days in order to extend the amount of working time which -- in its view -- has decreased too much. Different dates are selected every year so that the additional work days can be dovetailed with shifts of working time around public holidays.

### Bulgaria

Following the cautious line of matter-of-fact reporting they have adopted the Bulgarian media quoted without comment Warsaw sources as saying that "the Polish government has decided to introduce two nonworking Saturdays a month with the prospect that in the future all Saturdays will be free." (12) The same broadcast added, however, that in spite of that decision "the Solidarity trade union leadership rejected the government's proposal and declared that it is determined to introduce immediately a five-day working week and, in fact, appealed for January 10 to be a nonworking day."

On the following day, January 10, the Bulgarian radioquoted a Pravda lead editorial alleging that "there are still forces trying to destroy the climate of calm and prudence. . . . What we have in mind, principally, are various cases of intentionally organized demonstrative pressure (shovinizh) on the state apparatus in certain regions of the country. . . . These are anarchic actions aimed at (razvurkavaj) the social order."

Pravda First Secretary Stanislaw Kania was quoted as having said that "the process of social renewal in Poland . . . is being threatened by the actions of the inveterate enemies of socialism." (13)

In another news item in the same broadcast, the radio claimed that "the majority of labor collectives in Poland, guided by their feeling of civic responsibility, appeared at their work places. Despite the fact that the Solidarity leadership had proclaimed that day (Saturday, January 10,) a nonworking one." Apparently quoting NAP, the radio added that "the delay and break in rhythm of the working process on January 10 will cause the corresponding economic consequences."

(9) Ordinance of the Ministry of Labor and Social Welfare, No. 43, Collection of Laws, 10 June 1968.

(10) Collection of Laws, 18 June 1973.

(11) Minister of Labor and Social Welfare Michal Stencel, Radio Pravo, 12 November 1980, p. 2.

(12) Radio Sofia, 9 January 1981, 1300 hours.

(13) Ibid., 11 January 1981, 1300 hours.

HUNGARY

In response to the keen interest of the Hungarian public in the political, economic, and social situation in Poland the Hungarian media are supplying regular reports on events there, but continue to abstain from any comment of their own. These reports naturally draw only on official Polish sources and reflect official Polish views, but they do convey the impression that Poland is contending with the major crisis in its postwar history and that a satisfactory solution is by no means imminent.

Official Hungarian reports seem to follow two main lines: first, dwelling on the various issues to be tackled in Poland and, secondly, devoting special attention to the efforts of the Polish party and government to find a place for Solidarity in a new settlement. These reports reflect the official Polish emphasis on the authorities' wish to implement all the agreements reached with Solidarity, as well as their efforts to discredit some aspects of Solidarity's activity.

Coverage of the free Saturdays issue, which came to a head on January 10, did attempt to outline the positions of both Solidarity and the government, but conveyed the clear impression that Solidarity was not abiding by its agreement with the government. It was pointed out with satisfaction that Solidarity had failed to achieve its goal on January 10. The Polish news agency, PAP, was quoted to the effect that some 85 per cent of workers had paid no attention to Solidarity's appeal, (14) and it was claimed that in some places Solidarity activists had tried to send home the workers or listed those who had refused to comply. (15)

The Hungarian media have also picked up a Trybuna Ludu article (January 9) accusing Solidarity of having violated its statutes because some of its members were among the organizers of "anarchistic" actions directed against the local state apparatus in a number of towns, (16) Also covered was a Trybuna Ludu item of January 5 lashing out against such antisocialist groups as KOS and notably its leader, Jacek Kuron, for allegedly pointing out that "we are striving for unity. . . but not with anybody." (17)

Other main topics of Hungarian media coverage of Poland include preparations for the sixth extraordinary congress of the PZPR, which will offer an opportunity to lash out die-hard conservatives and others who are "still sitting on the fence," (18) and plans to give more help in the future to private peasants (the latter in connection with the joint meeting of communist and United Peasant Party officials on January 9).

(14) Radio Budapest reporting from Poland, 10 January 1981.

(15) Ibid.

(16) Hungar Nemzet, 9 January 1981; Radio Budapest, 31 January 1981.

(17) Neparabedezeg, 6 January 1981.

(18) Hungar Nemzet, 8 January 1981.

The present situation in Poland was recently epitomized in the following statement by Radio Budapest's Warsaw correspondent Szabolcs Szilagyi: "the Polish government has to face a very difficult situation because there are still lacking in this country the most important things: social calm, unity, and the active support of the public." (19)

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(19) "168 Hours" program, 10 January 1981.