

November 25, 1980

**Record of a Meeting between CPCz CC General
Secretary Gustáv Husák and HSWP CC First
Secretary János Kádár in Bratislava, (excerpt from
Kádár)**

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Summary:

Excerpts from a discussion between Czechoslovak leader Husak and Hungarian leader Kadar on the situation in Poland. Janos Kadar suggests that the source of the crisis rests with mistakes made by the Polish leadership regarding economic policies. However, he still supports Polish leader Gierek, and believes that he should not have been removed from his position of responsibility.

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25 November 1980.

[...] Comrade Kádár laid out the position of the HPR [Hungarian People's Republic] on the developments in Poland. A serious, dangerous situation has emerged here, one which represents a serious problem. It concerns a socialist state which is a member of the Warsaw Pact. Its geographic location places it in a zone of great importance.

[Kádár continued:] One of the sources of this crisis is the economic situation. Our Polish Comrades have themselves spoken of the excessive tempo of economic development. Lacking the necessary base they set an economic tempo which they could not maintain, a statement which also holds true with regard to the increases in wages and debt. The steep rise in wages was impossible to cover with goods, and the rapidly rising level of indebtedness was not covered either by corresponding production nor, particularly, by funds from exports. The poorly resolved agricultural issue is also a serious problem.

The second source of this crisis can be found in the mistakes of the leadership. The information [we have] received is almost unbelievable to us. A serious situation already existed in the PPR [Polish People's Republic] in 1956. Serious tremors occurred in 1970, 1976, and now once again. It is not our role to evaluate the level of their work. The present leadership says that they had drawn apart from the masses and from reality. In our opinion there also was a large degree of carelessness on the part of the leadership. I [Kádár] spoke with Comrade [Leonid I.] Brezhnev in the summer, at the end of July in the Crimea, just before the arrival of Polish party leader Comrade Edward Gierek.⁵⁴ Comrade Brezhnev was disturbed by the strikes taking place in Poland. I mentioned that Poland reminded me of a drunk who staggers from side to side, but thanks to the grip of his guardian angel doesn't actually fall. It seemed to me that the Polish leaders were thinking in a similar manner. They were very careless. Comrade Gierek arrived in the Crimea and in his discussions understated the seriousness of the situation. It was noted by our Hungarian comrades, on holiday in the USSR at the time, that the Polish leadership was calmly continuing their holidays while the situation in Poland was developing along very unfavorable lines.

In conversations with our Polish comrades we [Hungarians] pointed out the need to consider that neither the West, nor the Church nor any other anti-socialist force had yet decided on a full overthrow of the socialist system, but that if they wished, there was indeed an opportunity to do so. We regard the situation in Poland as very serious; the crisis is still a long way from being over.

Comrade Kádár recently spoke of the developments in Poland during the visit of the British Foreign Secretary [Lord Carrington], whom he cautioned that the situation had not yet climaxed, and warned that it would not be in the interest of Great Britain to attempt a reversal of relations. Responding to the Foreign Secretary's question, Comrade Kádár had stated that an attempt of that sort would be a threat to the entire policy of détente. He spoke of the Polish situation during his discussions with Yugoslav representatives as well. In answer to their question about the possibility of external assistance to Poland, Kádár responded that Yugoslavia would also have to help to prevent such assistance from becoming necessary.

The situation in Poland is exceptionally important, not just for the Polish People's Republic and the socialist community, but for all European states. The Hungarian People's Republic does not have any special concerns about these developments as there have not yet been any noticeable effects of the Polish events on Hungarian political life. The HPR long ago solved the problems which have led to the Polish crisis. They do not fully understand the situation in Poland and are disturbed by various reports that workers and in some places even "free elections" are implementing things which are taken for granted in the HPR.

They do not understand the approach of the Polish leadership in increasing prices in 1976. This serious action was taken without any preparations, and even the members of the Central Committee and the Government Presidium were not informed. In this situation it is obvious that Communists could not defend the implementation of the policy. The consequences of this step were not fully thought through and the whole approach was very lightly and carelessly conceived.

The opinions of the HPR were explained in detail to Comrade Demichev on his recent visit to Hungary.

Comrade Emil Wojtaszek,⁵⁵ who has kept the Hungarian leadership informed of the Polish situation expressed thanks for the help provided by the HPR to the Polish leadership. I [Kádár] told him that there was no need to mention solidarity, as we regard it as a given. We are also prepared to give immediate assistance. They do not have great means, but are prepared to give everything which is available. They can rush some deliveries etc. At the same time, I cautioned them that if these were ongoing deliveries within the framework of economic cooperation then it is necessary for both sides to act as partners for if the PPR does not deliver coal, honey, sulfur, etc. as agreed upon then we can not produce. Then, understandably, we cannot help you.

The HPR does not wish to interfere in the internal affairs of Poland. They [the Hungarian leaders] have, however, pointed out in conversations that as long as the leadership is not united it cannot handle the situation. To achieve unity one condition must be met: a clear, concrete platform must be developed. So long as such a platform does not exist it is impossible to speak of unity among the leadership or within the party itself. Were Hungary to find itself in such a situation we would not count the number of party members. We would attempt to set forward a clear platform and then count the number of people who could support that platform. There is not much point in talking about 3 million Communists if you do not know how they will react in a particular conflict situation. It is more important to have perhaps fewer people, but know that they will act resolutely for a commonly-accepted platform. We have clearly told our Polish comrades that the basic condition is to clarify the situation and develop a clear, concrete platform for resolving it in a socialist manner and on a socialist basis. In this manner a basis can be built for effective solidarity and assistance from the states of the socialist community.

In a conversation with Comrade Brezhnev three days before Comrade Gierek stepped down, I [Janos Kadar] stated that the situation was so unclear that from the outside it was impossible to reasonably suggest an appropriate solution. As long as possible act reasonably the HPR will support them in full. However, in the midst of a critical situation the Polish leadership let a man fall whom the Hungarian party believed to be a reliable and strong worker. In such a situation it is difficult from the outside to take a firm position. The basic assumption is that the Polish leadership must develop a clear platform.

It is necessary to ask where these developments may lead. During the meeting between representatives of these [Hungarian and Polish] Ministries of the Interior, the Polish representative informed the meeting that the Politburo had long since decided that there was no longer anywhere to retreat to, and that it was thus necessary to take things firmly in hand and, if necessary, use administrative restrictions. This is indeed the correct position and was discussed at an internal meeting. They should, however, say so openly, including in the Central Committee. In that forum it needs to be firmly said that things can progress only within definite limits. At the present time it seems that there is complete confusion in Poland. Many people reject contemporary politics, yet many Poles support socialism. There are many wholesome forces who are aware of how serious and dangerous a situation has been created. [...]