

Is there any way out of Poland's chaos?

by Frank Hahn

After almost two years, on Sept. 19 Poland will elect a new parliament; but anyone who harbors hopes that these elections will bring political stability is in for a big disappointment. It is true that the currently prevailing political chaos, with almost 20 different parties represented in the parliament, will be unscrambled somewhat because there is a requirement that parties win an 8% minimum vote in order to have parliamentary representation. But if the current poll results are reliable and the formerly communist SLD party wins the greatest number of seats, then we can already imagine the astonished, helpless faces of the western commentators and politicians as they announce the news. Of course, no one should overlook the fact that a significantly greater danger is posed by the probable second-strongest party, Bronislaw Geremek's Democratic Union, which over the past few years has ruined the country through free-market economic policies and the "shock therapy" of George Soros and his ilk. Indeed, power- and money-hungry super-speculator Soros is now describing the great "heroes" of Solidarity, such as Geremek and Adam Michnik, as his very best friends in Poland.

And so, it looks as if this land is faced with a deadly choice between Scylla and Charybdis — between becoming a vassal to Anglo-American financial interests, or else returning to Russian vassalage.

Voices of economic sanity

Fortunately, however, things are not quite as simple as that, since political processes in both Moscow and Washington are currently in tremendous flux, and their outcome is uncertain. Poland's fate will be determined largely by what happens elsewhere — unless, that is, other voices begin to grow perceptibly louder at home.

Such voices are definitely present, and here we would like to cite one of them as representative of other similar programmatic statements: the electoral program of the Solidarity 80 party, which is running jointly with the Movement for the Republic (RDR) of former Prime Minister Jan Olszewski. This alliance has become the home of the old resistance fighters of the 1980s who refused to go along with President Lech Walesa's decision to subjugate the nation under the yoke of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank.

The alliance identifies the previous governments of Tadeusz Mazowiecki, Jan Bielecki, and Hanna Suchocka

as its political opponents, since they were instrumental in handing the country over to the IMF and the World Bank. It proposes a marked turnabout in monetary policy in order to get Poland out of its deep economic depression: The Polish National Bank should make low-interest credits available for building up industry, agriculture, and infrastructure. Furthermore, Poland should unlink itself from its current tutelage under foreign financial circles. The alliance demands the development of Poland's domestic market along with certain measures to protect it, as well as legislative measures against speculation and the revocation of banking secrecy laws, in order to protect the country "from the machinations of international gangsters and national financial speculators."

The alliance sharply rejects privatization as it is currently being practiced. According to its program, "Privatization is an instrument for destroying the economy. . . . It is being carried out for purely ideological motives — similar to the way collectivization was carried out in the People's Republic of Poland in the 1940s and 1950s." Instead it demands the modernization of factories and better training of employees — all of which presumes that ownership of productive assets remain within the country, and that such assets are not thrown away and given over to international corporations or to speculators.

Modernizing Poland's defense industry

It is truly remarkable to find an electoral platform of a trade union-based movement making a passionate plea for maintaining and modernizing the defense industry. By selling off highly specialized plants, the program argues, previous governments have seriously endangered Poland's sovereignty and defense capability, at a time when the threat of military conflict is growing throughout Europe. The platform demands that "the defense industry be treated as an especially important branch of the national economy." It also explicitly calls for top-notch training of "cadres" in industry and in the Army, and the "commencement of an export-oriented policy in the armaments sector."

Lest anyone wrinkle their nose at this "anti-pacifist" attitude, consider the following: Just as in Russia, Poland's scientific-technological intelligentsia has been heavily involved in the armaments industry. Destroying this capacity would be a devastating blow to the country's future. Were the West intelligent enough to take up Russia's Strategic Defense Initiative proposal of April 1993, this would give a tremendous boost to the most highly qualified sectors of Polish industry. The fact that this programmatic point is mentioned, shows that there are circles within Polish society who want to use the connection between science and industry in order to solve the economic crisis. The fact that these happen to be trade union circles, is an encouraging sign. Indeed, the spiritual basis for the alliance's entire program has been taken from the two papal encyclicals, *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* and *Centesimus Annus*.