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Nomenklatura and Free Elections: A Polish Experiment, 1980-81

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According to the statutes of ruling Communist parties, all party offices are elective and party officials are elected by their respective party organizations. However, there is an unwritten rule that party officials are nominated by a party organ; for this purpose, the organ is allowed to run a list of offices under its jurisdiction and a list of persons eligible for those offices. This rule is known as the nomenklatura principle. It has led observers to ask whether the election principle can be reconciled with the nomenklatura one. This contradiction is normally resolved by the wide-spread practice of the party organization unanimously approving the candidates recommended by the party organ.

In Poland a very interesting experiment took place in 1980-81. There were free elections of party officials at all levels, from secretaries of basic organizations (the party cells) to the First Secretary of the Central Committee. The party leadership did not want free elections. When Stanisław Kania came to power, the new leaders pledged themselves to convoke an extraordinary party congress as early as possible. To hold a party congress, however, they had to elect delegates and party authorities. They could not do so without free elections, as they had always done in the past, because of the few vocal groups in the lower echelons of the party who strongly called for free elections. In addition, the party leadership felt increasingly challenged by the Solidarity union to show democratic legitimation. Thus, the pressure of events inside as well as outside the party propelled the leadership toward free elections. In the end it adopted them as official policy to be applied throughout the party.

How was the basic conflict between the two principles solved? What happened to the nomenklatura system? Did free elections help the party to overcome the political crisis and reestablish its position? These are the questions which this paper seeks to address.¹

The introduction of free elections was not a simple matter, as there were many obstacles to overcome. The development of events which looks rather chaotic may, however, be broken down into four phases: from September to December 1980, from January to April 1981, from May to June 1981, and finally the 9th Extraordinary Party Congress itself, held in Warsaw on 14-20 July 1981.

1. Leadership Shake-up by the Nomenklatura Method in September-December 1980

A large-scale turnover in the party leadership at all levels took place immediately following Edward Gierek's demise in August/September 1980. This leadership change followed the old pattern of nomenklatura nomination.

It is Gierek who established the rule that party members who have risen to high positions in the party hierarchy are allowed to retire with honor and to continue enjoying the privileges befitting their nomenklatura status, even when they are losers in a power struggle.² When Gierek's power position was shaken as a result of the workers' revolt on the Baltic Coast, some of his political rivals like Stefan Olszowski and

Tadeusz Grabski were quietly rehabilitated and called back. It is, however, Stanisław Kania, one of Gierek's associates in the Politburo, whom the party oligarchy chose to be Gierek's successor. At the Central Committee (CC) plenum of 7 September he was elected unanimously on the recommendation of Henryk Jabłoński who acted in the name of the Politburo.³ The new First Secretary recommended the nomination of replacements for Gierek's colleagues in top party offices. The recommendation was approved again almost unanimously. One of the new men, Mieczysław Moczar, was a long-standing political rival of Gierek.

Gierek and his colleagues were allowed to retire with honor with the exception of some exposed figures like Maciej Szczepański, former President of the Radio-Television Committee. Most of the ex-leaders could enjoy the nomenklatura privileges provided for them by the State Council decree of 1972,⁴ at least until June 1981.

The election of voivodship first secretaries repeated the pattern of leadership change at the top. Of the 49 voivodship first secretaries, 32 were replaced between September 1980 and April 1981.⁵ The voivodship election process took place as follows⁶: An extraordinary plenum of the voivodship party committee was called. The plenum was attended by a representative of the central party organ, usually Zdzisław Kurowski, CC secretary for organizational questions. The incumbent requested the plenum to release him from his office. Then the representative of the central party organ took the floor, thanked the outgoing first secretary for his 'long-standing valuable service to the party,' and proceeded to suggest to the plenum a successor, who was then unanimously approved.

Of the cases investigated, there was one which did not conform to this pattern: Voivodship Kielce. When the incumbent requested the plenum to dismiss him, the plenum refused and voted him back into office. The background to this situation is unclear.

It is interesting to note that in most cases, at the suggestion of the newly-elected first secretary, a couple of workers and peasants were coopted into the party committee and often elected to the party executive. In April 1981, two workers were elected to the Politburo. This does not conform completely to the pattern of nomenklatura nomination. This is, however, still not an election, rather a selection. The workers or peasants who found their way into the party committee or executive were people picked by the leadership. They were not elected to responsible positions because they enjoyed the confidence of their constituency.

At the lowest level of the party hierarchy, there were isolated cases where new first secretaries were spontaneously elected without waiting for instructions from above. The party organization of the "Towimor" marine engineering factory in Torun elected Zbigniew Iwanow, a 32-year-old strike leader in August, as their new first secretary. He became later leader of the horizontal structures and was expelled from the party as early as the end of November 1980.⁷

According to the CC report at the 9th party congress, the personnel shake-up between September 1980 and June 1981 involved 25% of the nomenklatura positions.⁸ It is not clear how many of these positions were party ones and how many changes belong to the first phase. One can assume that there occurred little in the first phase.

2. Free Elections at the Local Level in January-April 1981

The second phase is characterized by some concessions to the election principle. At the CC plenum of December 1980, Kania stated that under certain circumstances the party instance might meet the demand for free elections.⁹ Thus, free elections were

officially admitted, but only as an exception, and then only at the local level. The party leadership was careful not to let them go too far and too fast.

That same month, a draft Provisional Election Ordinance was published in a party journal.¹⁰ Given that it is not the election itself, but the candidate nomination preceding it that is really important in the Communist political system, it is essential to scrutinize the stipulations of the ordinance and to establish how the candidates were chosen and who could exercise influence on the process to see how far the party was willing to go.

It appears from the draft ordinance that a completely free procedure of candidate nomination was not contemplated, rather an awkward attempt to combine the selection principle with the election one. The selection principle was put into practice by an Election Overseeing Committee (Komisja Wyborcza) whose task it was to prepare a 'basic list' (lista podstawowa) of candidates whose number coincided exactly with the number of seats up for election. It is not clear how this body was to be constituted, nor how the list of candidates was to be prepared. It was, however, explicitly stated that 'an authorized representative of the superior party instance' can participate in the work of the committee. If the majority of voters approved the recommendation of the committee, then the result was predetermined as in the past.

The voters were, however, given a wider choice. In addition to the candidates on the basic list, another group of candidates could be nominated from among the electoral assembly. These candidates were called 'candidates from the floor' (kandydaci z sali). There is a limit to the number of free candidates: 50% of all seats. The list of free candidates was called an 'additional list' (lista dodatkowa). By naming the two lists basic and additional, the authorities seemed to suggest which list they expected the voters to favor.

A separate list of free candidates is not new. In the past, the number of free candidates was limited to 15% of all seats. A party member interviewed by the weekly *Polityka* said with resignation: "So, we now have 35% more democracy."¹¹ This difference of 35%, as it turned out later, was not insignificant. When a vote was taken, the two lists were put together to become a new, unified list in alphabetical order, and this was handed over to the voters for a vote.

There were, however, points in the draft Ordinance which left room for election manipulation: first, not only delegates, but also non-delegates could be put up as candidates with the consent of the electoral assembly. Party elections are held in many stages. Only the elections at the lowest level are direct; elections at all higher levels are indirect. Basic organizations, therefore, elect directly their executives as well as the delegates to the election conference at the next level. From the next level on, it is no longer the simple party members but the 'delegates' who vote. The conference of delegates is thus a kind of local party congress. It has two functions: to elect the local party committee and to send delegates to the election conference at the next level. The party committee, formally the highest party authority at that level, is called the *party instance*, in the same way as in hierarchically organized institutions like the Catholic Church or the judiciary. At the top is the party congress which elects the highest party instance, the CC. Theoretically, only delegates have the right to elect and to get elected. But in the past there was a practice where non-delegates were also put up as candidates and elected. These non-delegate candidates were known as 'central candidates' (kandydaci centralni) or 'briefcase candidates' (kandydaci z teczki), because a representative of the central party organ appeared at the local electoral assembly, drew a list of candidates out of his briefcase, and recommended to the disconcerted assembly the election of these candidates.

Secondly, one could raise objections against individual candidates. Whether the candidates in question were included on the final list was decided by open ballot. In this case, voting secrecy could not be guaranteed. It also showed that the party leadership preferred, as in the past, to make the real choice not during the election, but rather during the selection process.

Thirdly, if one wanted to put up additional candidates after the list had been closed, one had to give the names of those on the list to be dropped in favor of those one wanted to add. The deletion of names from the list and the addition of new ones was also decided by open ballot. Again voting secrecy could be violated.

Finally, when voting, one crossed out the names of those one did not want to elect, but one had to leave exactly as many names as there were seats up for election. Ballots with more or fewer names were invalid. We know from the experience in Western countries that with such an election procedure the voters are tempted to cross out known names and to leave unknown ones. This is exactly what happened in Poland.

This procedure was applied to the election of party committee members and to the election of party conference and party congress delegates. A somewhat different procedure was applied to the election of party functionaries. Functionaries were elected by the party committee, not directly by the party conference or party congress. The function of an overseeing committee for the election to the executive or the secretariat was apparently performed by the first secretary, for he was given the right to nominate candidates whose number coincided exactly with that of available posts. Candidates could also be put up from the floor by members of the party committee, but again only up to 50% of available posts. The power of the first secretary as the real decision-maker in personnel policy was unmistakable (See Table 1).

Table 1. *Candidate Nomination According to the Provisional Election Ordinance*

Party offices	Maximum number of candidates	Number of candidates nominated by the respective bodies	
		[Basic list]	[Additional list]
1. Conference or congress delegates & committee members	150%	100% by the election overseeing committee	50% by the electoral assembly individually
2. Members of the executive [Politburo] & the secretariat	150%	100% by the first secretary	50% by committee members individually
3. Local first secretaries	2 persons	1 person presumably by a superior party organ	1 person by committee members individually
4. CC First Secretary	2 persons	1 person (It cannot be identified by whom)	1 person by committee members individually

The question of who acts as an overseeing committee for the election of the first secretaries remained unclear. As past practice showed, a representative of the next highest party instance was expected to act in that capacity. In any event, a representative of the superior party instance participated in the session, and the election of func-

tionaries was valid only after having been confirmed by the superior party instance. What about the First Secretary of the CC who has no superior party instance above himself? Apparently there was no overseeing committee for his election, unless he himself acted in that capacity. For the election of the first secretaries at all levels, two candidates, one from above and one from the floor, could be put up. This meant that the voters had, at least theoretically, more choice than elsewhere.

The possibilities Kania offered for free elections were, therefore, not great. There were only a few party organizations which made use of these modest possibilities: until March 1981 only 10% of the party organizations.¹² The election fever was certainly rising, but apparently even at such a late stage only a small number of party organizations were involved.

Voivodship Gdansk was an exception with its liberal leadership with Tadeusz Fiszbach as first secretary. According to a report in *Polityka*, as of March 1981, of the 3,284 basic organizations, 882 wished to hold elections, and 664 did so. The percentage was higher than elsewhere, yet it totaled only 20.4%. Liberal leaders like Tadeusz Fiszbach or Jan Łąbecki were re-elected; a secretary of the voivodship party committee, on the other hand, was not elected.¹³

3. Party Elections in May-June 1981

At the CC plenum of March 1981 the party leadership finally decided to announce general party elections. They took place in May and June 1981. In March, Politburo member Kazimierz Barcikowski had hinted at what the party leadership expected from the elections: the experience in the last months indicated that the new executives formed by free elections were morally stronger, and that this enabled them to carry out more effective and energetic activities.¹⁴

When general elections were announced, a revised Provisional Election Ordinance was published and put into effect.¹⁵ The new Ordinance did incorporate some of the demands of the rank and file for a more democratic procedure. According to the Politburo report, it "removed limitations on candidate nominations from the floor, confirmed the principle of secret ballot, and revised the role of representatives of the party instance at election meetings or conferences."¹⁶ Many controversial points, however, were left for individual decision. For instance, the number of candidates from the floor, the manner of proposing candidates, the treatment of candidates against whom objections were raised, and so forth had to be determined each time. Therefore, the electoral assembly often devoted more time to establishing the election procedures than to the elections themselves.¹⁷ The party leadership called on the local leaders to have personal conversations with individual party members prior to voting, and appealed to the electorate to take into account the socio-professional and generational composition of the party organization.¹⁸ This opened additional possibilities for election fraud. But this kind of appeals did not appear to be very effective.

When the election campaign started, the entire party organization seemed to be engulfed by election fever. Local party organizations and election conferences were enthusiastic about the possibility of electing freely their leaders and jealously defended their newly-acquired rights. Election meetings were better attended than ever before. All the top leaders were sent on an electioneering tour throughout the country. They had to face embarrassing questions from rank and file party members.

It is impossible to make as thoroughgoing an analysis of the elections as is regularly conducted in the West, because no complete data is available. The press covered the party elections in fair detail, but very unevenly. It is, for instance, impossible to

obtain from the press exact information on such simple questions as who ran where and who polled how many votes, not to speak of who represented what political orientation. One can, however, make some general observations on the basis of sporadic information given in the press and from the election results.

First, as a result of the elections, the local party leadership was replaced in an unprecedented scale. The higher the level in the party hierarchy, the higher also was the turnover rate. For executives of the basic organizations, it was about 50%, while that of congress delegates was 91%. There were several voivodship leaderships which were totally replaced. Also many voivodship first secretaries who had only recently been nominated by the nomenklatura method had to quit (See Table 2).

Table 2. *Turnover Rate of Party Organs by Elections*¹⁹

Party organs	Total membership	Turnover rate
Executives of basic organizations	600,000	about 50%
Factory party committees	45,000	60%
Community party committees	2,359	52%
Party congress	1,966	91%
CC	270	90.8%

Secondly, the so-called 'central candidates' fared badly. Tadeusz Grabski, a Politburo hardliner, ran in Poznan as a 'central candidate' for the party congress and was defeated despite Kania's personal intervention. He was elected only after having running again elsewhere. Representatives of the liberal wing who ran as 'central candidates' did not fare well either. Jerzy Wiatr, Professor of Political Science at Warsaw University, ran in Poznan, but did not get elected.²⁰

The reason why the 'central candidates' met with such a decided rebuff from the party electorate is that most of them never engaged in day-to-day work at the grassroots level. Others, who had belonged at one time to a basic party organization with a big membership and might even have enjoyed the support of their organization, lost contact with it. In the meantime they rose on the party ladder and found positions in the central party apparatus, in the ministries or in the editorial boards of big newspapers. They joined the party organization in those institutions, where often the membership was small, in fact too small to send them to the party congress. This is the reason why they were put up as 'central candidates' in some locality with which they had little to do. It is only because of the nomenklatura system that they could be repeatedly elected despite a lack of ties with those who voted for them. That the 'central candidates' were massively defeated this time was a sure sign that the nomenklatura principle was receding behind the election one.

Indicative of the general trend was the surprisingly low re-election rate of the members of the highest party leadership and the central party organs to the party congress: Politburo (including deputy members) and CC Secretariat, 84%; CC (including deputy members), 30%; Central Revision Commission, 7%; Central Control Commission, 11%.

Thirdly, contrary to the expectation of the party leadership, more whitecollar than bluecollar workers were elected. Compared with the previous congress a year before, the share of bluecollar workers among the delegates dropped from 45.5% to 22.3%, while that of whitecollar workers jumped up from 45.3% to 67.8% (the proportion of bluecollar and whitecollar workers in the party membership is 43.3% and

47.7% respectively).²¹ According to a report by the Institute of Basic Problems of Marxism-Leninism, not only fewer bluecollar workers were elected, but fewer also ran for election. They did not want to run because they felt unqualified and feared being misused and manipulated by the party leadership as in the past.²² One should note, however, that the workers' representation of 22.3% was still very high by Western standards.

Fourthly, fewer apparatchiki and more non-professionals were elected. The party leadership became aware already in May that full-time party functionaries jumped over the hurdles of the elections only with great difficulty. From the beginning of June, the appeal "Keep the continuity of leadership!" became more pronounced. In the middle of June when the election campaign reached its climax, the CC called upon party members not to leave experienced party cadres in the lurch.²³ Such appeals do not appear to have been heeded. For a person to be a full-time party functionary was already reason enough to disqualify him.²⁴ Instead of political professionals, political laymen like full-time workers, peasants, technicians, managers, military officers and so forth came massively to the fore.

Fifthly, it is not celebrated spokesmen of the left or right wing, but nameless activists at the bottom who may be classified as moderates at best and who often had nothing to say about politics who became the favorites of the electorate. Of the congress delegates, 56% belonged to the party-controlled Branch Unions and 20% to Solidarity.²⁵ Such figures, however, mean little, because, as Politburo member Barcikowski stressed, neither Solidarity radicals nor party die-hards were elected.²⁶ One of the causes for such a result was the voting method (the crossing of names) which worked unfavorably for left-wing or right-wing candidates. The most important cause, however, seems to have been that the voters were interested less in the program than in the candidates.

Finally, men of middle age were the most prominent group among the elected, while other age and sex groups were ignored. Of the congress delegates, only 1.9% were under 29 years, and only 5.3% were women; 83.9% were party members for more than 11 years.²⁷ The age structure of the congress delegates was far from representative of the political mood in the country where Solidarity, as a youth movement, dominated the scene.

For all the limitations and possible manipulations, the elections brought unexpected results. They were indeed not as revolutionary as expected or feared, but rather mediocre. There was, however, one result of fundamental significance: the elections put an end to the domination of the party apparatus. In the press it was reported that the apparatchiki felt socially discriminated, as many of them could not find a job after they had been fired as a result of the elections.²⁸

4. Elections at the Party Congress in July 1981

At the party congress, elections were held for the central party organs and the highest party leadership. They were not held without preparation. On the contrary, most careful preparations were made.

At the local level, 'Voivodship Groups of Delegates' were formed, while at the central level a 'Central Group of Delegates' was formed. From 29 June up to the very eve of the party congress, both groups met frequently. The party leadership utilized this opportunity to make arrangements with the congress delegates on the election procedure, the candidates to be put up for the central party organs, and even the composition of the new party leadership.²⁹ It is worthy of note that in making such ar-

rangements the voivodship groups of delegates were allowed to participate *en bloc*. They may be compared to the *caucus* in American party politics, although one must be mindful that the function of a *caucus* under the one party system is necessarily different. As such groups were chosen as the main negotiating partners for the party leadership, regional interests were put forth strongly at the party congress. In spite of such intensive preparations, the ballots at the congress brought again surprising results.³⁰

On the first day of the party congress, Kania suffered a serious blow in a ballot on the election procedure for the position of CC First Secretary. Theoretically, three procedures were possible: 1) The party congress elects on the final day the new CC, which in turn elects the First Secretary. This was the procedure applied in the past. It was, however, rejected at the meeting of the Central Group of Delegates held on the eve of the congress. 2) The party congress elects first the new CC and then the First Secretary out of the candidates recommended by the new CC. 3) The party congress elects first the First Secretary and then the CC. The last one was the procedure suggested by Kania. His calculation was that his position would be strengthened, because, in this case, his authority would be derived not from the CC, but directly from the party congress.³¹ When a ballot was taken, Kania's suggestion received 47.7% of the votes cast, while the second procedure polled 51.1%. The margin was small. Kania's defeat was probably caused by a technical failure; at the time of voting, about 100 delegates who would have supported Kania happened to be in an adjoining room and did not participate in the voting. One cannot, however, overlook the fact that nearly a half of the delegates voted against Kania's suggestion (See Table 3). The significance of this incident was not visible at first, but made itself increasingly felt.

Table 3. *Election Procedure for the Position of CC First Secretary*³²

Ballot results at the party congress on 14 July 1981 (delegates present: 1,964; votes cast: 1,813):

The party congress elects:

type of procedure	polled votes	percentage
1. the CC, which in turn elects the First Secretary	0	0%
2. first the CC and then the First Secretary	929	51.1%
3. first the First Secretary and then the CC	862	47.7%
4. (abstention)	22	1.2%

For all the preparations, the elections to the CC brought unexpected results. For the three central party organs, the CC, the Central Revision Commission, and the Central Control Commission, 44% more candidates were put up than seats to be elected. The Polish press gave neither the names of the candidates, nor separate figures for the candidates for the respective organs.³³ The CC is the most important organ. It appears, however, from Western press reports³⁴ that for the CC proportionately fewer candidates were put up than for the other organs: only 38% more than seats to be elected (See Table 4).

In spite of this extraordinarily narrow choice, the results were surprising: of the old CC members (including deputy members), only 9.2% were re-elected. Among

those who failed to come through were 5 Politburo members, 3 Politburo deputy members, 3 CC secretaries, 2 vice-premiers, 3 editors-in-chief of party newspapers, 6 first secretaries of the biggest voivodships, all CC department heads, the chairman of the party-controlled trade union, the chairman of the youth organization among others. The distaste of the electorate for all who had played some role as central authorities in the past found dramatic expression; 90.5% of the new CC members had held no central party office.³⁵

Table 4. *Candidates/Seats Ratio in the Elections to Top Party Organs*

According to the Polish press

Organs	Seats	Candidates	Ratio
CC, Central Revision Commission & Central Control Commission altogether (no separate figures available)	430	618	144%

According to the Western press (*Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 17 July 1981):

CC full members	200	275	138%
CC deputy members	70	105	150%
Central Revision Commission	90	135	150%
Central Control Commission (together)	70	100	143%
	430	615	143%

Of the newly-elected CC members, unexpectedly 40% were bluecollar workers, 14.5% peasants, and only 45.5% whitecollar workers. Among the latter there were such local dignitaries as professors, doctors, managers, engineers, and teachers, people who had barely been represented before in the CC, and would likely be regular members of the decision-making body of a Western political party (See Table 5).

Table 5. *Social Composition of the New CC*³⁶

Bluecollar workers	40.0%
Peasants	14.5%
Whitecollar workers	45.5%
Of the whitecollar workers:	
First secretaries of factory party committees	7.0%
Military officers	5.0%
Professors	4.5%
Doctors	4.5%
First secretaries of voivodship party committees	4.0%
Middle level administrators	3.5%
Managers	3.0%
Teachers	2.5%

For the party leadership the most embarrassing aspect of these elections was the fact that the results of the vote became public. The figures were not published in the Polish press presumably because of their explosive effect. But they were made known to the congress delegates who had voted. Some of them passed the figures to the Western press. It became, therefore, public knowledge that Wojciech Jaruzelski won by far the most votes. Stanisław Kania was next by wide margin, followed by

Kazimierz Barcikowski, Albin Siwak and others (See Table 6). Despite the serious limitations and manipulations to which the elections were subjected, their main effect, the democratic legitimation of power, was not lost. Sooner or later the election results would also define, rightly or wrongly, the power position of individual party leaders.

The CC elections were followed by the election of the First Secretary. Candidates for the First Secretaryship were to be proposed at the first CC plenum which met during the party congress. It was Jaruzelski who presided over this meeting and suggested Kania's candidacy. Thus, Jaruzelski, by virtue of his position as top poll scorer, took upon himself the function of an overseeing committee for the election of the First Secretary. One other candidate was to be proposed from the floor. Some suggested Stefan Olszowski, and others Mieczysław F. Rakowski. But neither of them accepted the nomination. Finally Barcikowski, Kania's right hand man, decided to run, if only for the sake of formality. The two candidates were then sent back to the plenary meeting of the congress for election, but there was no question of a showdown vote. The election was a ritual once again. Kania polled 67.6% of the votes cast, and Barcikowski 29.3% (See Table 7). Kania became First Secretary not by his own authority, but by the grace of Jaruzelski.

Table 6. *Poll Scores of Selected Candidates for the CC*³⁷

Names	Polled votes	Share in the votes cast %	Position, occupied in party and state
Elected:			
W. Jaruzelski	1,615	84.6	Politburo member, Premier & Defence minister
S. Kania	1,335	69.9	CC First Secretary
K. Barcikowski	1,269	66.5	Politburo member & CC secretary
A. Siwak	1,227	64.3	CC member & brigade head
J. Labecki	1,168	61.2	CC member & first secretary of a factory party committee
S. Olszowski	1,090	57.1	Politburo member & CC secretary
M. F. Rakowski	1,085	56.8	CC member & Vice-premier
Not elected:			
T. Fiszbach	951	49.8	Politburo deputy member & first party secretary of Gdańsk
T. Grabski	889	46.6	Politburo member & CC secretary
L. Czubiński	769	40.3	CC member & General Procurator
M. Moczar	764	40.0	Politburo member & Chairman of Supreme Control Chamber
H. Jabłoński	645	33.8	Politburo member & Chairman of State Council (state head)
S. Kociolek	601	31.5	First party secretary of Warsaw
M. Jagielski	580	30.4	Politburo member & Vice-premier
A. Zabiński	553	29.0	Politburo member & first party secretary of Katowice
J. Klasa	484	25.4	CC member & head of CC department for culture

(the sum total of valid votes cast is 1,909. This applies to all candidates)

Table 7. *Poll Scores of the Candidates for the CC First Secretaryship*³⁸

Stanislaw Kania	1,311	67.6%
Kazimierz Barcikowski	568	29.3%
(against both)	60	3.1%
(abstention)	12	—

Members of the highest party leadership, the Politburo and the CC Secretariat, were to be elected by the CC. Kania duly submitted a full list of candidates. Some additional candidates for the Politburo were proposed from the floor. They were no match for Kania's candidates. All of them were defeated by wide margin. As for the CC Secretariat, no rival candidates were put up, so that the election became a vote of confidence (See Table 8). Although no free candidates entered the new Politburo, it was, unlike the old one, a miniature of the CC in its composition, which was in turn nothing but a miniature of the congress. Only the CC Secretariat maintained its old character as a body of the top elite of the party.³⁹

There were other interesting results from the elections to the top party organs. First, there were people who lacked a clear political profile. Indeed, it is possible to classify the new CC members as 80% belonging to the Branch Unions and 20% to Solidarity.⁴¹ Such a classification, however, means little, as was the case with the congress delegates. Almost all party leaders who made a name for themselves by a more or less clear political commitment — Tadeusz Grabski, Andrzej Zabiński, Stanisław Kociotek, Jerzy Putrament and others of the conservative wing, and Tadeusz Fiszbach, Mieczysław Jagielski, Krystyn Dąbrowa, Roman Ney, Edmund Skrzypczak and others of the reformist wing — were refused admittance to the CC. With only a few exceptions, the new CC members were people about whom it was not known what political orientation they represented.⁴²

Table 8. *Elections to the Politburo and the CC Secretariat*⁴⁰

	Politburo full members share of polled votes	Politburo deputy members	CC secretaries
Kania's candidates	70-98%	66-79%	85-98%
Candidates from the floor	18-30%	24-26%	—

The second feature is the strong representation of regional interests. If there was something which tied the new leaders with the electorate, it was not a common *Weltanschauung*, nor a common political conviction, nor a professional or social solidarity, but precisely common regional interests. Characteristically, in the new CC the province was far more strongly represented than the capital. Apart from the military who are not bound to a locality, of the new CC members only 22% represented Warsaw, while 31% represented the voivodship capitals, 26% small cities and 21% villages.⁴³ They could be people who give serious thought to regional problems, but it is doubtful whether they were capable of coping with state tasks. This overrepresenta-

tion of regional interests was an inevitable consequence of the way the candidates were screened. The choice was negotiated essentially between the central party leadership and the voivodship delegates.

Thirdly, an overwhelming majority of the new CC were political laymen. Compared with the old CC, the share of full-time politicians dwindled dramatically from over 60% to only 3.5%.⁴⁴ The same can be said of the Politburo, though to a lesser extent. This is an eloquent sign of the declining influence of the party apparatus. However, this does not necessarily mean that the new CC would become more independent from its executive organs. Rather the opposite could be the case. Interestingly, the CC Secretariat, in contrast to the CC and the Politburo, was composed mainly of political professionals. It was clear, however, that it would be difficult for the CC Secretariat to recover its former power, for the decline of the party apparatus meant at the same time the decline of the party as a whole.

An interesting open discussion on the nomenklatura system unfolded in the cadre policy subcommittee of the congress. The majority spoke against the nomenklatura of names, but they had nothing against the nomenklatura of positions. They sharply criticized such a practice as a 'merry-go-round of offices' within the same circle of the party establishment; instead they demanded a periodic 'rotation of offices' among a wider circle of party activists.⁴⁵ The subcommittee recommended to the congress in its final report that the nomenklatura be upheld as a system giving the party a decisive influence on the appointment to key positions.⁴⁶ This suggests that party members who moved up from the bottom by free elections were interested in a redistribution of power within the ruling party, but they were not quite ready to share power with people outside the party. They were almost revolutionary inside the party, but conservative vis-à-vis the outside.

4. In Lieu of a Conclusion

A gradual transition from the nomenklatura principle to the election principle may be observed in the personnel changes in the Polish party in 1980-81. The free elections did produce this effect, inadequate as it might have been. They brought about something near to a collapse of the party apparatus, the mainstay of the nomenklatura system, and enabled new people to ascend to leadership positions which were not earmarked for them. The question is whether the free elections helped the party to consolidate its position as the party leadership had hoped.

With the wisdom of hindsight, the answer is in the negative. It was not a regeneration, but a further disintegration of the party that set in after the congress. A second big wave of mass exodus from the party began a few weeks later. Within a half year about a half million members turned their back to the party.⁴⁷ At the beginning of September 1981, a non-party writer who had placed much hope in a reborn party observed with consternation: "One gets the impression that the party is simply not there."⁴⁸ In November 1981, when some Solidarity activists launched an action to drive party committees out of the factories, the party could not take any effective countermeasures. The action was a great success. Wherever it occurred, the party committees fled without offering much resistance.⁴⁹ On 13 December, when Martial Law was proclaimed, the party was virtually in dissolution.

It is incorrect to make only intra-party circumstances responsible for the decline of the party. There are many extra-party factors, domestic as well as international, that contributed to it. But one cannot overlook the impact of the free elections; they greatly contributed to the destabilization of the party, making it incapable of action.

There are in the opinion of the author three reasons why the elections did not help to regenerate the party.

First, while there were free elections, there was no free political competition in the party. Free elections without free political competition make little sense. Candidates were not allowed to compete for influence and enlist support with attractive political platforms, not to speak of making a coalition or grouping with other candidates sharing the same political stand. Against this background, it is understandable why the new leaders who moved up through free elections were interested almost exclusively in personnel policies and little inclined to develop new political conceptions. Simply they were not used to it.

The lack of an institutionalized way of changing the leader is a well-known defect of the political system of Communist countries. But they often use the 'change of guard' as a means to solve a political crisis and to regain the lost confidence of the nation. This was the case with Gomulka's comeback in 1956 and with Gierek's ascension to power in 1970. But this time, it was no longer possible to resort to this 'proven' measure. No popular enthusiasm ensued when Kania took power. This may have inclined the party leadership to take a more decisive measure, namely to institutionalize the 'change of guard' by free elections. At first, it appeared as if the election atmosphere did succeed in arousing the interest of a wider circle in party affairs. Many non-party intellectuals wrote to party newspapers and journals, expressing their hopes and concerns about the party congress.⁵⁰ But popular enthusiasm, if there was such a thing at all, faded away quickly when it became clear that the free party elections brought indeed new people, but no new policies.

Secondly, while rank and file party members were aroused from a long political sleep by free elections, they preoccupied themselves almost exclusively with their own interests, paying little attention to all-nation tasks. National elections, rather than party elections would have been the suitable means to direct the attention of the party members to all-nation tasks. But the party could not afford national elections, for it would have been a sure loser under the circumstances. Free party elections were the *ersatz* national elections. The rank and file became active, not because they felt responsible for all-nation tasks, but because they recognized in the free elections an opportunity to influence the personnel policy of the party or even to move up in the party hierarchy. All the election fuss was after all nothing but a storm in a teacup. The rank and file had gone from a political coma into political narcissism. The closer they came to power, the more directly they were confronted with autonomous social forces, the very forces which had helped them to advance in the party. But when they awoke from their political narcissism, they found a hostile world around them.

Finally, free elections failed to achieve their most important goal, namely to bring back a strong leadership to the party. The party leadership expected that the elections would bring party members nearer to the top. At a first glance this expectation seems to have materialized. As far as the top leadership was concerned, the elections resulted in the formation not of a completely new leadership, but of a coalition of the old and the new. The impression, however, that an ideal coalition of the old and the new, top and bottom, came about is deceiving. The elections did not bring together top and bottom; on the contrary, they brought them further apart. As the ties between top and bottom had long been non-existent, the elections were bound to discredit the old leadership and to bring forth a new leadership from the rank and file.

The new leaders who suddenly soared up from the depths to dizzy heights were not equal to the big political tasks. Perhaps, it was a question of time for them to acquire the know-how of state business. For the time being, however, they had to rely

on the survivors of the old leadership, particularly the so-called Big Four — Kania, Barcikowski, Olszowski, and Jaruzelski. It was a coalition of need, but not of mutual trust. In addition, the position of the Big Four did not become stronger, rather weaker. Their power basis, the party apparatus, was decimated, and they did not enjoy the wholehearted support of the new forces, with the exception perhaps of Jaruzelski, whose power was based not on the party apparatus, but on the army, and who seemed to command considerable support among the new forces.

That the party failed to establish a strong leadership may have deeper roots. The nomenklatura system tends to favor a bureaucratic type of politicians and eliminates charismatic leaders. The politicians of the nomenklatura school proved to be utterly helpless in a situation of open public life and mass politics. However, the free party elections also failed to produce strong leadership personalities that were clearly needed to overcome the profound crisis that Poland was undergoing.

In the West, there is a belief in free elections as a means of solving a political crisis. Some believe that they are applicable to socialism as well. Socialists or sympathizers of socialism in the West believe that socialism can work only with free elections; socialism without free elections is not socialism. The Polish experiment seems to question this belief. Admittedly, the free elections in Poland were introduced under very difficult circumstances and in a very insufficient way. Even if they had been introduced under more favorable circumstances and in a more satisfactory way, it is doubtful whether they could have made the system work better, for the obvious negative results they produced were more or less conditioned by the system itself. Unless the system is changed, free elections alone do not solve a political crisis, but, as the Polish experiment clearly indicates, are rather likely to lead to a dysfunctioning of the system.

Notes

- 1 The present paper forms a part of a more extensive research done by the author on the nomenklatura controversy in Poland. For the intellectual and workers' anti-nomenklatura movement, see "Pōrando ni okeru nomenklatura ronso. Ichigenteki shihai shudan no tasogare [Controversy over Nomenklatura in Poland: Twilight of a Monopolistic Instrument for Social Control]," *Kyosanshugi to kokusaiseiji* [*Communism and International Politics*], 6, No.4 (February 1982): 53-79; 7, No.1 (May 1982): 55-88. A somewhat shortened version of this article is available in English and in German: "Controversy over Nomenklatura in Poland, 1980-81: Twilight of a Monopolistic Instrument for Social Control," *Acta Slavica Iaponica*, 1 (1983): 57-103; "Nomenklatura in Polen; Die Kontroverse um ein Hauptinstrument politischer Kontrolle der Gesellschaft (Kōln: Bundesinstitut für ostwissenschaftliche und internationale Studien, 1983). For the so-called 'horizontal structures,' a movement of rank and file party members against the nomenklatura rule, see "Shirarezaru tōnaitoso. Pōrando suiheiundō no kiseki 1980-81 nen [Anonymous Rebellion in the Party. Rise and Fall of the Horizontal Structures in Poland, 1980-81]," *Gendai no riron* [Contemporary Theories], No.204 (August 1984): 51-67, No.205 (September 1984): 65-77. For the free election movement in the party, see "Genzon shakaishugi ni okeru shakaihendō to seijitaisei. Pōrando ni okeru tōnaisenkyo (1980-81) ni sokushite [Social Change and Political System under Real Socialism: An Analysis of Party Elections in Poland, 1980-81]," *Suravu kenkyu* [Slavic Studies], No.31 (1981): 81-125. The present paper is based on the last of the above-mentioned articles in Japanese.
- 2 See Ito, "Controversy": 64.

- 3 *Trybuna Ludu* (8 September 1980; 6 October 1980; 3 December 1980).
- 4 See Ito, "Controversy": 66-67.
- 5 Piotr Moszyński, "U schyłku kadencji," *Polityka* (9 May 1981): 6.
- 6 The author investigated 13 cases. See accounts in *Życie Warszawy* on the voivodship party committee plenums: Bydgoszcz (17 October 1980), Tarnowa (30 October 1980), Legnica (1/2 November 1980), Płock (1/2 November 1980), Szczecin (8/9 November 1980), Słupsk (15/10 November 1980), Warszawa (18 November 1980), Łódź (18 November 1980), Rzeszów (20 November 1980), Jelena Góra (27 November 1980), Elbląg (12 December 1980), Kielce (18 December 1980), Radom (17 March 1981).
- 7 See Ito, "Shirarezaru tonaitoso," No.204: 54—59.
- 8 "Sprawozdanie CKR PZPR za okres od VIII Zjazdu do IX Nadzwyczajnego Zjazdu PZPR," *Nowe Drogi* (August 1981): 61.
- 9 *Trybuna Ludu* (2 December 1980).
- 10 "Tymczasowy regulamin wyborów władz i delegatów," *Życie Partii*, No.345 (February 1981): 8-12.
- 11 Piotr Moszyński, "Sprawa wyborów," *Polityka* (7 March 1981): 1,5.
- 12 Politburo member Edward Barcikowski stated in a report to the CC plenum in March 1980 that 15% of the party organizations held elections, see "Podstawowe problemy sytuacji w kraju w toku przygotowań do IX Zjazdu," *Nowe Drogi* (April 1981): 20, but he corrected it as 10% in another report to the CC plenum in July 1981, see "Wystąpienie na XII plenum KC PZPR," *ibid.* (August 1981): 172.
- 13 Ernest Skalski, "Notatki z Gdańska," *Polityka* (11 April 1981): 5.
- 14 Barcikowski, "Podstawowe problemy": 20.
- 15 The author could not see the text of the revised Ordinance, as it was not published in party periodicals like *Trybuna Ludu*, *Nowe Drogi*, and *Życie Partii* or CC plenum documents. It is possible to know, however, the main points of the revision from Barcikowski's report, "Podstawowe problemy," p.21, and from the related articles of the draft party statute, "Statut PZPR. Projekt," *X plenum KC PZPR. 29—30 kwietnia 1981 r. Podstawowe dokumenty i materiały* (Warsaw 1981): 247-295.
- 16 Barcikowski, "Podstawowe problemy," p.21. Some Western writers seem to overemphasize the libertarian character of the revised Ordinance, see, for instance, David S. Mason, *Public Opinion and Political Change in Poland, 1980-1982* (Cambridge: Cambridge U.P., 1985): 155-156.
- 17 See, for instance, Andrzej K. Wróblewski's interesting reportage on an election meeting, "Linia porozumienia," *Polityka* (9 May 1981): 6—7, and also an account of the Politburo meeting, *Życie Warszawy* (3 June 1981).
- 18 "Uchwała w sprawie zwołania IX Nadzwyczajnego Zjazdu i wyboru delegatów na Zjazd," *Nowe Drogi* (May/June 1981): 30; Barcikowski, "Podstawowe problemy," *ibid.* (April 1981): 21.
- 19 "Sprawozdanie KC PZPR," *Nowe Drogi* (August 1981): 60.
- 20 Kevin Ruane, *The Polish Challenge* (London: British Broadcasting Corporation, 1982): 192—195; Jerzy Wiatr, "Poland's Party Politics: The Extra-Ordinary Congress of 1981," *Canadian Journal of Political Science*, 14, No.4 (December 1981): 816-817; "W kraju," *Polityka* (4 July 1981): 2.
- 21 Barcikowski, "Wystąpienie," *Nowe Drogi* (August 1981): 173; "1964 delegatów na IX Zjazd PZPR," *Życie Warszawy* (1 July 1981); "Sprawozdanie Komisji Mandatowej," *Trybuna Ludu* (15 July 1981); ZSZ, "Delegaci," *Polityka* (27 June 1981): 2.
- 22 Zbigniew Sufin, "Nie chcą czy nie są wybierani," *Życie Warszawy* (3 June 1981).
- 23 Stanisław Kania, "Przemówienie na zakończenie XI Plenum KC PZPR," *Nowe Drogi* (July 1981): 25; "Uchwała XI Plenum KC PZPR," *ibid.* 21.

- 24 See, for instance, an account of the Politburo meeting, *Życie Warszawy* (21 May 1981).
- 25 Barcikowski, "Wystąpienie," *Nowe Drogi* (August 1981): 173; "Sprawozdanie," *Trybuna Ludu* (15 July 1981).
- 26 See an account of the Politburo meeting, *Życie Warszawy* (21 May 1981).
- 27 ZSZ, "Delegaci": 2.
- 28 Piotr Moszyński, "Co zrobić z aparatem," *Polityka* (30 May 1981): 6; Jędrzej Miller, "Za co byliśmy odpowiedzialni," *Życie Warszawy* (5 May 1981).
- 29 *Życie Warszawy* (30 June 1981).
- 30 A voluminous stenographic record of the party congress is available: *IX Nadzwyczajny Zjazd PZPR. 14-20 lipca 1981 r. Stenogram z obrad plenarnych* (Warsaw 1983), 1168 pp. But this record is little useful, for the bulk of the materials included is composed of speeches by delegates in plenary sessions which are of little importance and were published elsewhere. There is little on ballot and election results at the congress. It includes no record of discussions in subcommittees which may be interesting. As a result the present paper heavily draws on contemporary accounts in the Polish as well as Western press.
- 31 A direct election of the first secretary by the conference or congress was one of the demands raised by party activists from the very beginning. Apparently it was already practised at lower levels. It was, however, only in the middle of June 1981 that the party leadership decided formally to accede to it. See "Uchwała IX Plenum KC PZPR," *Nowe Drogi* (July 1981): 21. Jerzy Urban, then leading commentator of *Polityka*, commented on it as a change from parliamentary to presidential democracy. Urban, "Przeciw czemu i za czym," *Polityka* (4 July 1981): 5. This was perhaps the main consideration which motivated the party leadership to take the decision.
- 32 The table was composed by the author on the basis of the figures given by Bernard Guetta, "Le premier secrétaire sera désigné par l'ensemble des délégués après l'élection d'un nouveau comité central," *Le Monde* (16 July 1981). The figures were not published in the Polish press, but a hint on the issue was dropped by Andrzej Bajorek in an untitled article in *Życie Warszawy* (15 July 1981): 8. The validity of the vote was questioned by Kania's supporters on the grounds that neither of the motions polled the required absolute majority of the delegates present, but only of the votes cast. On the following day, however, Kania decided to recognize the ballot as valid, as he thought it better to have the delicate issue finished as early as possible than to have it lingering on. See Bernard Guetta, "Le congrès de Varsovie," *Le Monde* (17 July 1981).
- 33 *Trybuna Ludu* (17 July, 7 1981); *Życie Warszawy* (17 July 1981).
- 34 *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (17 July 1981); *Le Monde* (18 July 1981).
- 35 Zygmunt Szeliga, "Naprawdę nowa ekipa," *Polityka* (25 July 1981): 7.
- 36 Ibid. See also "Nowo wybrany Komitet Centralny. Kto?" *Trybuna Ludu* (18/19 July 1981).
- 37 Composed by the author on the basis of the figures given by Bernard Guetta, "Elections-surprise à Varsovie," *Le Monde* (19/20 July 1981).
- 38 *Trybuna Ludu* (20 July 1981); *Życie Warszawy* (20 July 1981).
- 39 Jerzy Urban, "Zmiany," *Polityka* (25 July 1981): 7.
- 40 *Trybuna Ludu* (20 July 1981).
- 41 *Le Monde* (21 July 1981).
- 42 Even the Polish press admitted it. See Janusz Reiter, "Nowi ludzie - nowa szansa," *Życie Warszawy* (18/19 July 1981).
- 43 Szeliga, "Naprawdę nowa ekipa": 7.
- 44 Ibid.
- 45 *Trybuna Ludu* (18/19 July 1981; 20 July 1981); *Życie Warszawy* (17 July 1981).
- 46 *IX Nadzwyczajny Zjazd*: 441.

- 47 *Życie Warszawy* (17/18 October 1981; 19 October 1981); *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (8 February 1982).
- 48 Andrzej Szczypiorski, *The Polish Ordeal: The View from Within* (London: Croom Helm, 1982): 145.
- 49 See Ito, "Controversy:"80.
- 50 For instance, Stanisław Soltysiński, "Bezpartyni a partia," *Polityka* (28 February 1981): 3; Zdzisław Sierpiński, "Jest to także i moja sprawa," *Życie Warszawy* (14 July 1981).