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PRIME MINISTER

FOR MEDIA

TUESDAY, 15 DECEMBER, 1981

POLAND

Cabinet today discussed recent developments in Poland and received a briefing from the Minister for Foreign Affairs, the Hon. Tony Street, M.P., on his recent visit to Warsaw.

The Prime Minister said that Cabinet was seriously concerned at developments in Poland and the possible implications of them, both within Poland and internationally. It was difficult to obtain a clear picture of the situation because of the clamp down on communications within Poland and from Poland to the outside world. As a result, the Government believes that it is too early to reach any hard assessment of the situation but will continue to keep the issues under very close consideration. "Certainly the Government remains convinced of the need for the Polish people themselves to resolve their own problems without outside interference or coercion", the Prime Minister said. No country should presume to interfere in Poland's affairs at this or any other time.

The Prime Minister said that the Polish crisis, which had developed since August 1980, continued to have the most serious implications for international stability. The imposition of martial law at the weekend by the Polish leadership would seem to represent a serious new phase in the crisis.

Australia, with many other countries, sincerely hoped that these extreme and repressive measures would soon end and that they would not lead to the reversal of the main elements of reform which had been achieved in Poland in the past 17 months. In these respects the Government noted the undertakings of the Polish Leader, General Jaruzelski, undertakings which have also been conveyed formally by the Polish Government to the Australian Embassy in Warsaw. The Government also warned that if martial law led to violence, it would arouse the indignation of the international community and do much to negate the widespread sympathy and appreciation of Poland's political and economic difficulties. The Prime Minister urged that there be an early return to civil and trade union liberties and expressed the wish that current developments should not impede the spirit of conciliation and compromise which had hitherto characterised the efforts of the Polish people to find their own solution to their difficulties.

In regard to the Polish Government's request for further Australian economic support which was made to the Minister for Foreign Affairs in Warsaw, Cabinet decided that until the situation in Poland was clearer, it could not take any decisions on this request.

Nonetheless, Cabinet was mindful of the close interrelationship between economic recovery and the achievement of political stability through conciliation and consensus.

A further matter considered by the Government was the question of Polish refugees and in this regard the Minister for Immigration and Ethnic Affairs and the Minister for Foreign Affairs will keep under review the implications of current developments in Poland for Australia's policy towards Polish immigration and refugee movement. The Government is aware of and sympathises with the concerns of the Polish community in Australia over the well-being of friends and relations in Poland at this difficult time. The Government will also engage in consultations with other Governments and particularly those of Canada and the United States on Polish refugee questions.

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