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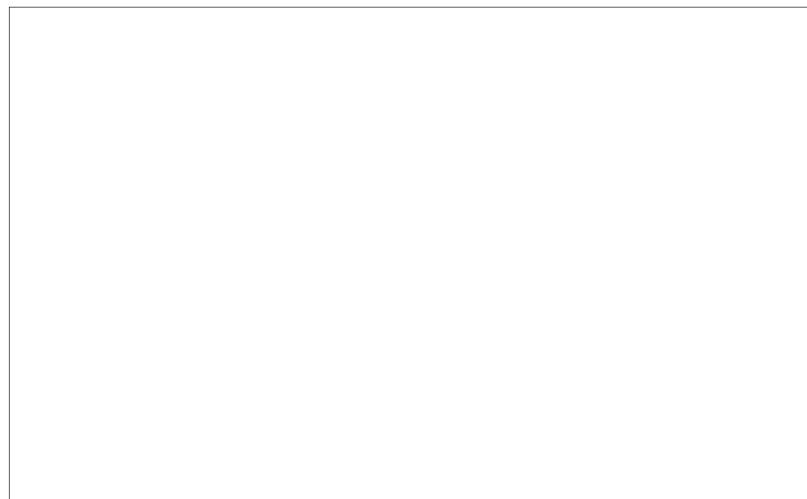
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THE POLISH ELECTIONS

Comment on:

Faced with no practical alternative, the Polish voters gave overwhelming support on 20 January to Wladislaw Gomulka and to the parliamentary candidates favored by his regime. The mandate apparently exceeded regime expectations, and will strengthen Gomulka's hand in dealing with disruptive elements within his party.

Official results will not become known until later in the week, but it appears that, with perhaps a few exceptions of little consequence, the composition of the Sejm will be as planned by the regime with approximately 50 percent of the seats going to Polish United Workers' (Communist) Party candidates, some 35 percent to the two collaborating front parties, and the remainder to nonparty and Catholic representatives. According to press reports, preliminary returns indicate that all of the party leaders who were candidates were elected.

The high rate of participation, ranging from 91 to 96 percent of eligible voters in areas reporting so far, was encouraged by regime activists, who made personal visits to those who had failed to register, and by the Catholic Church. Support by the church was probably also decisive in persuading a large majority of voters--reportedly between 60 and 70 percent--to heed a last-minute plea by Gomulka to vote the straight ticket without deleting names of regime-favored candidates. Although there are no reports of intimidation or coercion, few of the electorate other than students took advantage of the opportunity to cast their ballot secretly.

The elections were orderly and quiet.

No significant unrest was reported, even in the Lublin area where antiregime agitation has been especially strong.

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