In retrospect, it is clear that the government side was also becoming demoralised. A Party member, described as a ‘hard-line professor’, gave an anonymous interview to an underground paper in 1985 expressing his concern that his side had lost its direction.

It is believed . . . that one must not talk to adversaries; this really proves a lack of confidence in the strength of one’s own argument. I am most worried about the internal state of the party. Our Secretary and others like him at all levels have banned discussion . . . We are told that what is needed is discipline and the so-called ‘closing of ranks’ but the true reason . . . is to make everybody shut up. Discipline understood as the obedient carrying out of all orders . . . can be a disaster for the party. The party cannot go on being torn by the fear of reasoned argument on the one hand and of new desertions on the other.¹

A member of the secret police who had recently transferred from the criminal police stated that the effectiveness of his new branch was ‘nil. It can’t be otherwise, with police methods you can harass the underground, but you can’t destroy it’. When asked why not, he responded:

You can’t put them all in jail. There’s only one effective means of intimidation: mass executions. Like in Hungary in 1956 . . . The reaction of

society is unpredictable. Bloody riots could start and then no-one would be safe. The Party guys know they would be the first to hang on the lamp posts. That’s why the Party shrinks from such a solution.

His concern was that a ‘few years more and if people hold on as they do now and the Party goes on as stupidly as it does now, the Party will lose the grip’. Colonel Sucharski said that members of the secret police had been hopeful when martial law was declared: ‘Our perception was that perhaps we would go up again’. But over time, this outlook changed:

As we watched martial law washing out, we realised that it was time to look for another job . . . Ideological activity was dead. Before, meetings would be every two months in a factory; now, they weren’t happening at all. People left our security services after 12 years, 10 years. They got no retirement, not a penny. (To get it, you had to work at least 15 years). They could not get a job. They were, in essence, blacklisted because they had worked for the secret-police.

Discontent with the economy grew even on the government side. Politburo member Janusz Reykowski said:3

I noticed among the younger members of the Party apparatus, and also to a great extent among the government circles, a group of people who wanted reforms and agreements. I realised that they were frustrated to a great extent for economic reasons . . . They looked at those living in the West, and they knew how much worse off they were. They knew that they could not realise their ambitions in that system.

In November 1987, the government tried once again to gain some support by posing a referendum: did the population favour significant economic and political reform – to be carried out, of course, by the government itself. The referendum was defeated, in a humiliating turn for its proponents. Perhaps because of this mood, around the same time Mieczysław Rakowski wrote of the ‘new political constellation which is developing within the Socialist bloc’,4 referring to Gorbachev’s policy of perestroika, Rakowski asked: ‘Could it be that there are still people who hold on to the belief that when the explosion occurs we shall invoke the interest of the state and warn that someone could intervene in our internal affairs. But what if this someone . . . shows himself unwilling to intervene?’ Clearly, Rakowski was suggesting that a new situation was emerging:

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2. ‘Interview with a Member of Security Services’, UPNB, no. 16, 19 August 1986, pp. 34–5.
3. ‘Communism’s Negotiated Collapse: The Polish Round Table, Ten Years Later’, A Conference Held at the University of Michigan, April 7–10 1999.