

## Polish crisis threatens détente in Europe

by Rachel Douglas

When Polish leader Edward Gierek announced on Aug. 24 sweeping leadership changes and went half way to meet Baltic seacoast strike leaders' demands for "free trade unions," he came close to and may have passed the limit on the ground he can concede. Gierek faces "demands that strike at the very foundations of . . . the nation and state"; the ruling party's daily paper reminds that Polish politics are "governed by [Poland's] alliances"; the Soviet news agency TASS warns of attempts "by imperialist circles to interfere in a major and unpardonable way" in Poland—the composite picture is of a crisis that becomes more explosive each day it continues.

In the British and American media, the line went out in the first days of the strikes, that the U.S.S.R. would not intervene, that the unrest in Poland was a golden opportunity to promote "democracy" in Eastern Europe without the penalty of a Soviet military response. This is incompetent strategic thinking, and every bit as dangerous as the "limited nuclear war" doctrine the Carter administration has just announced. Both of these policies miscalculate Soviet thinking.

First of all, Moscow *would* intervene militarily in Poland if Poland were thrown into chaos by nationwide strikes and disturbances that got out of the control of Gierek and the other Polish leaders.

But more important, Moscow does not react to Poland in isolation. The strategists in the Kremlin look at Poland, Iran, the Chinese army poised to invade Vietnam, the Israeli escalations against Syria, Jimmy Carter's Presidential Directive 59 nuclear war strategy—all at once. The provocations around Poland, both the

destabilization inside and the international campaign outside, are sending the Soviets into heightened readiness for world war.

Already, an important meeting in what is currently the most critical process for avoiding war—the dialogue between Eastern and continental Western Europe—has been postponed because of the crisis in Poland. According to reports published in France, the Carter administration pressured West German Chancellor Schmidt to cancel his visit to East Germany for talks with President Erich Honecker. Its postponement was announced Aug. 22, until "a time more favorable to progress in German relations," in the words of Schmidt's spokesman.

The Europeans are worried. The Schmidt-Honecker meeting and the August trip of Gierek to West Germany to meet Schmidt (also canceled) were to have opened a crucial phase of discussions among continental European leaders, talks which some observers were predicting would be vital not only for détente, but also for solving the most crucial problem facing countries in both halves of Europe: the lack of adequate cheap energy supplies.

Many Europeans have voiced hopes that Gierek would be able to bring the situation in Poland under control, both for the sake of restoring these jeopardized opportunities for trade and dialogue and because they feel that without Gierek, Poland could not avoid a slide into chaos. As one prominent West German businessman—a conservative with close ties to the United States—put it: "Gierek's a Communist, and I know this may sound strange . . . but I think we should support Gierek in this situation. When you look at the alterna-

tive—this KOR group—you'd have to be crazy not to support Gierek.”

The nature of the KOR, the British-linked dissident group that pushed the Polish strikes onto “political” ground, is detailed in this report.

### **The question of ‘human rights’**

The United States government’s first official pronouncement on the Polish situation was to back the “human rights” of KOR leaders arrested for fanning the strikes. According to columnists Evans and Novak, the administration has already set the wheels in motion to make “human rights” and Poland the central topics at this fall’s Madrid Conference on European Security and Cooperation (CSCE). Secretary of State Muskie and Carter’s emissary to Madrid, Max Kampelman, they reported, have each held meetings with “Jewish, East European, and other ethnic groups” to prepare a tough line for the Madrid meeting.

Some American and international trade union officials are moving on the same track as the Carter administration towards confronting the U.S.S.R. on “human rights” issues. In the current international crisis, carrying this campaign directly into a Warsaw Pact member country—not with propaganda but by personal contact, as they have done—constitutes a dangerous provocation of the Soviet Union.

In May, the International Labor Organization (ILO) sent a delegation to Poland from its Geneva headquarters, led by an official whose specialty is “human rights.” He made contact in Poland with the KOR group, which had launched the call for “free trade unions,” now the main demand on the Gdansk strikers’ list which the authorities have said they cannot meet.

Instead, Gierek has offered to conduct open elections in the regular trade unions. On Aug. 27, the International Federation of Metalworkers, headed by United Auto Workers official Herman Rehban, called on the ILO to go to Poland and supervise these elections. On the same day, a delegate of the French union confederation CFDT visited the strike hall in Gdansk and handed over a token sum of 11,000 French francs to the strike committee.

The demand for “free trade unions” and support for it from abroad have nothing to do with the freedom, human rights, or prosperity of the Gdansk shipyard workers or any other Poles. It is a ploy by these international organizations *and their networks in Poland* to keep the strikes going. The result to date is a tax of millions of dollars a day on Polish state coffers because ships cannot dock to unload goods, which means an economic recovery and the improvement of consumer goods supplies (it was a meat price rise that triggered the strike) in Poland will be even more difficult to bring

about than they were before. In addition, the threshold of Soviet intervention, which would render the “human rights” point moot, is lowered.

Moscow would prefer that Gierek solve the crisis as “an internal affair” of Poland, as TASS put it, and speedily endorsed the leadership shakeup that was announced after a six-hour Central Committee meeting of the ruling Polish United Workers Party (PUWP) Aug. 24. The shifts announced, however, are ones that will cause greater instability in Poland, maintaining the danger of a crisis explosion either immediately or some months later.

Gierek’s personal authority was weakened, as his own closest allies and protégés, including Premier Edward Babiuch, lost office. Planning chief Tadeusz Wrzaszczyk, who as minister of machinery had helped carry out Gierek’s rapid industrialization program of the early 1970s, was removed from the PUWP Politburo and his government job. Of seven other Politburo and government officials ousted, three are definitely known as Gierek associates.

The incoming leaders are identified with economic liberalization plans, reforms which would *not* cure the Polish economy, but rather adapt it to the requirements of certain hard currency creditors. As we elaborate in the accompanying report, British and American banks have exerted leverage to make Poland conform to the economic trends of the most debt-strapped Third World nations. This road leads straight to austerity, impoverishment, and more political instability.

### **The new government**

The new appointees are the most amenable to effecting these shifts. Measures under consideration, judging from publicizing by this faction of the Hungarian “New Economic Model,” are the alignment of domestic prices with world market prices, the decentralization of some economic decision making coupled to an incentive program favoring exports that earn foreign exchange, and concentration on export-oriented light industry at the expense of big industry and energy projects.

Mieczysław Rakowski, promoted to the post of PUWP Central Committee Secretary, has written in favor of these policies. Marian Krzak, the former chairman of Bank Handlowy who is now finance minister, is identified with them.

The biggest concession by Gierek was the readmission to the Politburo and the Central Committee secretaryship for the economy of Stefan Olszowski, whom he and Babiuch ousted just six months ago. Olszowski favors economic liberalization. Gierek referred in his speech to the reinstatement of “comrades who had already warned of shortcomings—warnings which we did not heed.” Gierek’s own allies became the scapegoats.