

Government ultimatum ends Polish strikes

by Konstantin George

On Aug. 30, the Polish government issued an ultimatum ordering strikers to resume work on Aug. 31, or else face the full gamut of legal punishment, including fines, jail sentences, and loss of employment. This announcement defined the reality of the current situation in Poland, and not the much heralded "negotiations" that occurred on Aug. 31 between Solidarnosc leader Lech Walesa and the government, headed by Gen. Czeslaw Kiszczak, the tough interior minister.

The "negotiations," which also included the participation of Bishop Dabrowski, as the representative of the Polish Catholic Church, were nothing more than the government's providing a face-saving way for the opposition to end the strikes quickly, before violence was employed. The regime's move may succeed in fooling the credulous that a "more liberal" course is being adopted, in that strike leader Walesa had declared the talks "historic," in that for the first time the Jaruzelski regime had "negotiated" with Solidarnosc. By going through the show of talks, the government got what it wanted. Walesa on Aug. 31, after the three-hour meeting with General Kiszczak, ordered the strikes to end.

Now a "further dialogue" between regime and opposition will continue. Behind all such talk—widely heralded, of course, by the Western media—lies the brutal reality that the government's threat to use force was what brought the August strike wave to an end.

Under heavy pressure from Moscow, the Warsaw regime could not have acted otherwise. First of all, the strikes had for over two weeks crippled Poland's two major ports, Gdansk and Szczecin, and, by the strike at the Stalowa Wola plant (one of the country's largest arms plants), were harming Poland's military production. Such a state of affairs ruled out a prolonged strike, and formed the backdrop to the regime's ultimatum.

Military production affected

The Aug. 30 ultimatum, barely covered in the Western media, was broadcast on Polish radio by Interior Minister General Kiszczak, and repeated by Labor Minister Sekula. It denounced the "illegal strikes" which have "closed the ports"

as "threatening the economy," and said that now that the strikes have spread "to military production," they are "threatening the security of the country." Earlier, the Polish news agency PAP had reported that the talks with the strikers in the ports of Szczecin and Gdansk had been "broken off," and similarly with the striking bus drivers of Szczecin.

As Walesa was meeting with Kiszczak on Aug. 31, the regime not only reiterated its ultimatum, but for the first time issued an unmistakable warning that Moscow's patience was also wearing thin. This took the form of a statement in the name of the Polish General Staff, read by the Chief of the Polish General Staff on radio and TV. The statement declared that the strikes were "affecting the nation's security and defense capability," and otherwise are "endangering Poland's obligations to its [Warsaw Pact] alliance partners." Such language has not been used concerning troubles in an East European satellite since the summer of 1968, prior to the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia.

Moscow will not invade Poland now, with the strike wave ended. However, beginning in November, when the next strike and protest wave is expected (on top of the worsening food and consumer goods shortages and the rising inflation, already over 50%, severe fuel shortages will be felt), the danger of a Soviet military intervention will grow.

The General Staff threat was backed up within hours by a Polish Politburo communiqué which declared that "the illegal strikes are causing severe economic damage," and then made the cosmetic "dialogue" with the Opposition conditional on ending the strikes: "The possibilities for a furthering of the dialogue and enriching the platform of national understanding could suffer because of them."

The rest of the communiqué was fluff, but nonetheless worth quoting from, to prove the fraud of the "national understanding" tactic. Referring to the fact that the Walesa-Kiszczak talks occurred on Aug. 31, the eighth anniversary of the pre-Jaruzelski regime's short-lived recognition of Solidarnosc, the Politburo declared, "The justified protest of the working class [1980-81 strikes] and the extraordinary Ninth Party Congress [the first congress of the ruling party under Jaruzelski] . . . opened a new phase in the history of People's Poland. . . . The party is seeking to fulfill the just demands of the working people." Then the Politburo admits that what you have just read is mere rhetoric: "Many of the goals [of the just demands], however, cannot be reached"

Here, in one sentence, lies the reality of the Polish situation: That even if the government wanted to meet the "just demands" of the people, the worsening economic crisis, caused by the joint Soviet and Western looting of the Polish economy over many years, precludes any improvement. In fact, the exact opposite is pre-programmed: an ever worsening economic situation and galloping collapse of living standards. It guarantees the next Polish explosion, probably by November, and the most serious crisis in Eastern Europe since the Czechoslovakia crisis of 1968.