

Thanks to IMF and the Russians, Poland has 19th-century health care

by Luba George and Kazimierz Kowalski

The joint Soviet and International Monetary Fund stranglehold on Poland has caused the destruction of the country's living standards, above all the collapse of health services, and acute shortages in non-food basics, essential for maintaining hygienic standards, such as soap, toilet paper, disinfectant, and the most basic medicines. This, in turn, has precipitated a dramatic increase in the flood of refugees into the West. Last year, 80,000 Poles emigrated to West Germany alone, double the 40,000 of 1986. This year the total will reach at least 150,000.

On Feb. 13 a meeting of the Solidarnosc's Committee of Health Care Workers in Warsaw issued a statement protesting the "disastrous conditions" in health-care establishments and charged the government with "cheating" workers by granting them only one-third of the promised wage increases. Later in the month, doctors and nurses in Gdansk staged a protest against poor working conditions, demanding more medicine and hospital beds.

All statistics document the demise of the health system and living conditions. According to population expert Professor Marek Okulski, the mortality rate in Poland has been rising, and life expectancy (men and women) fell from 67.3 years in 1982 to 66.5 in 1986. In the same period, deaths

from circulatory system diseases more than *doubled* (50% of all deaths are attributed to circulatory diseases). Okulski added that sanitation standards are at a "19th-century level," and it's impossible to find a clean lavatory in Warsaw; in schools and all public buildings, there's no toilet paper and no soap.

Compounding the whole health problem is an acute shortage of medicine and doctors in Poland. Of the 2,314 essential types of medicine (antibiotics, especially) that ought to be available, according to an official list, at least 1,000 are completely unavailable or in short supply. Especially lacking are drugs to treat cancer and heart disease. Pharmacies have less than half of the penicillin they require, and surgery cannot be performed in hospitals because of a shortage of anesthetics. Poles live in dread of any serious injury or illness. It could be one's death sentence.

Hospital conditions are abominable, very often resembling wartime field hospitals. Patients are crowded into wards, and left unattended, sometimes for weeks, because given the shortages, nothing can be undertaken. Some hospital wards do not even have any beds, and patients are on the floors. Patients on the floors in corridors are not uncommon.

Doctors exchanged for hard currency

Because Poland's hard currency is tied up in servicing the nation's debt of over \$39 billion, purchases of both finished medical supplies and pharmaceutical raw materials and technology from the West are impossible. (Poland heavily depends on the West for these materials.) Year after year, Poland has been forced to drastically cut back in this area. The domestic chemical industry covers only about 40% of the health service's needs. Moreover, 70% of the medicines produced within Poland require components that must be purchased with hard currency. Pharmacology in Poland is 15 years behind the West, producing medicines that are only partly effective against new strains of bacteria.

The catastrophe is further aggravated through a major loss of medical personnel. One route is through emigration to the West. That, however, is not the only route. A report published by Radio Free Europe states that many medical professionals in Poland are encouraged or sent by the government to do contract work abroad, to earn foreign exchange. Many Polish medical specialists and doctors work on indi-

SILVER

SHORT SQUEEZE

● WHO? ● WHAT? ● WHY? ●

Not what you think! Daily limits soon. Exchange cannot stop this one because it is different. **Send \$5 to SIBBET for information. He is the one advisor who predicted the other two squeezes.**

SIBBET PUBLICATIONS
1091 E. WOODBURY RD., PASADENA, CA 91104

Name _____

Address _____

Zip _____

vidual contracts abroad, while thousands more work under "collective contracts" (i.e., a medical team is hired as a group to man an entire hospital or department). Over 1,400 professionals in this category work in Libya alone. Most contracts are signed with Arab countries: Algeria, Libya, Morocco, Tunisia, Kuwait, and the UAE, as well as Nigeria and Zambia.

These contracts are arranged by the government-run Foreign Trade Enterprise Polservice for two-year periods. Fees are paid to Polservice by the employee. Polservice reports that this brings in \$13-14 million a year of hard currency the government needs to pay its debt obligations to the World Bank, IMF, and Western banks.

Infant mortality

Another grave side-effect of the economic crisis and general impoverishment is reflected in the country's rising infant mortality and lower birthrates. According to the government's Main Statistical Office figures, the infant mortality rate in 1986 was 11,100, or 17.3 for every 1,000 live births, *one of the highest in Europe*. The Polish weekly newspaper *Odrodzenie* attributed a quarter of these deaths to infections contracted in hospitals, through lack of sanitation and non-sterilization of equipment, etc. Birthrates show drastic decreases—16.9 live births per 1,000 population in 1986 compared with 19.6 in 1980 and 18.0 in 1985.

Prenatal care is well below Western standards. Only a few hospitals have ultrasound equipment to monitor pregnancies. The number of miscarriages, premature or complicated births, and low birth weight (8% of newborn babies in Poland weigh less than 2.5 kilograms, or 5.5 lb.) is very high. Many women of childbearing age are employed in hazardous industries. Women constitute over 45% of the workforce; 60% are of childbearing age.

The number of maternity wards in hospitals fell from 4,488 in 1970 to 1,406 in 1986, with beds often placed in cramped corridors.

When mothers leave hospitals they face shortages of infant formula and baby food, meager supplies of cereals, instant meals, and sterile fruit juices. Only 40% of the demand for cereals, 30% of the demand for juices, and 20% of the demand for instant meals are being met.

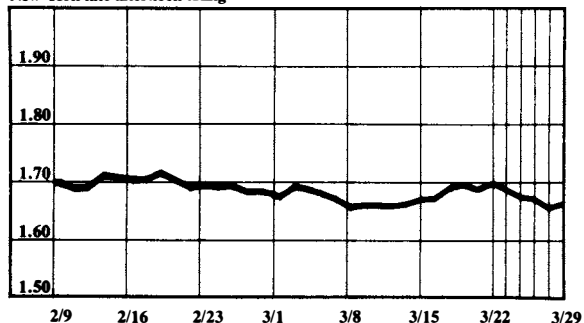
The drastic cuts in imported medical supplies have also ended once-normal vaccination programs for infants and children. Thus, efforts to halt the country's mounting rates of pulmonary tuberculosis and measles, for example, has become a serious problem in Warsaw and other cities, because since the late 1970s *only 30%* of all children have been vaccinated.

A Polish doctor who recently emigrated to West Germany told *EIR* that the current annual TB rate is estimated to be anywhere from 86 to 96 cases for every 100,000 inhabitants—appalling when compared with other European countries (e.g., in Denmark the corresponding figure is about 9 per 100,000).

Currency Rates

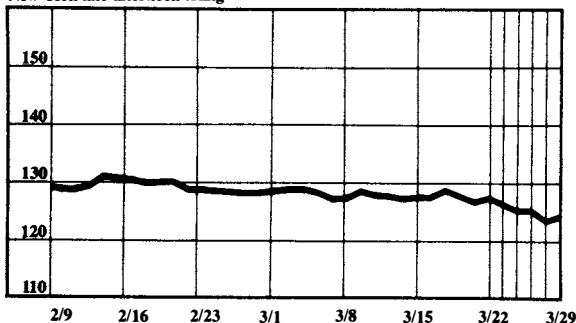
The dollar in deutschmarks

New York late afternoon fixing



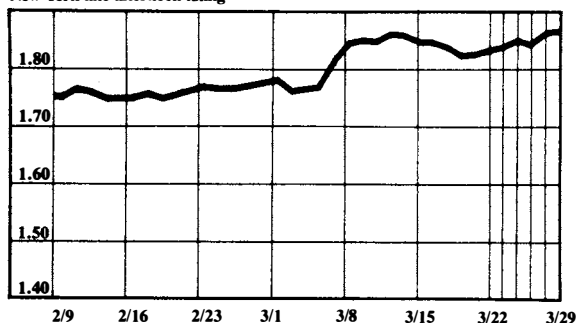
The dollar in yen

New York late afternoon fixing



The British pound in dollars

New York late afternoon fixing



The dollar in Swiss francs

New York late afternoon fixing

