

1988 Polish crisis: worse than 1980–81

by Konstantin George

On the same day that Ronald Reagan gave Mikhail Gorbachov a clean bill of health on the human rights issue, Soviet-directed thugs in the uniform of Polish Interior Ministry troops brutally crushed a steelworkers strike near Krakow, and now threaten similar action against shipyard workers in Gdansk. But, President Reagan said, "In recent months, the Soviet Union has shown a willingness to respect some human rights. . . . It is my belief that there is hope for further change, hope that in the days ahead the Soviets will grant further recognition to the fundamental civil and political rights of all."

Does the President's absurd statement mean that crisis-racked Poland, caught in a pincers between looting by Moscow and looting by Western financiers, is going to be sacrificed on the altar of a superpower "New Yalta" deal?

The first phase of the Polish crisis of 1988 came to a head at 2 a.m., May 5, when special troops of the Polish Interior Ministry stormed the grounds of the Nowa Huta steel plant near Krakow, making heavy use of percussion and tear gas grenades. Hundreds of striking workers, who had occupied the plant premises, were brutally beaten, and most of the 19-member Strike Committee were arrested. Some managed to escape in the confusion and went into hiding.

Hours later, all traffic into and out of the city of Gdansk, Poland's main Baltic port, was blocked by Interior Ministry forces, who also massed outside the sealed off Lenin Shipyard, occupied by 3,000 striking workers and Polish Solidarnosc leader Lech Walesa.

The morning of May 5, Radio Warsaw announced the storming of Nowa Huta, charging that the strike was "endangering national security," which can "no longer be tolerated

by the security organs." An ultimatum was presented to the Gdansk workers and Walesa, to abandon the shipyard, or have it stormed. Walesa rejected the ultimatum, pledging that he would be "the last to leave" the shipyard.

The Polish government, on *Soviet* orders, has acted to bring what have been relatively limited strikes so far to a head *now*, to get things over with, before the strike wave spreads totally out of control. It may already be too late. As *EIR* goes to press, the strikes have spread to Yugoslavia.

Every day a new strike

The signs of an approaching storm in Poland mounted during May 4. The strike wave spread to Szczecin, Poland's other large Baltic port, where urban transit workers walked out. The student strike expanded to shut down Warsaw University, following the closure of Krakow University, where the student strikes began.

The language of the strike leaders escalated, reflecting the desperate plight of the Poles under a never-ending regime of falling living standards. On May 4, Walesa, a moderate, declared before the striking workers of the Lenin Shipyard, "If we don't get a real reform this time, it will come to a *bloody revolution*," and, "The only reason the whole country isn't *yet* on strike, is because it's too soon." That same day, the official union for Poland's 460,000 coal miners, the nation's biggest export industry, announced that they had begun "a collective dispute with the government" over a pay increase. They had to, to prevent imminent wildcat strikes in the coal sector.

Within hours, the Polish Politburo, after an emergency session, issued a statement that foretold the decision to use

force to break the strikes, by denouncing the strikes as “destabilizing the national economy,” and declaring that the Politburo would “oppose resolutely the threat of destabilization.” The statement was prominently—and ominously—featured immediately in the Soviet media.

The Soviet decision to have the Jaruzelski regime employ force to smash the strikes was also a deliberate slap in the face to Pope John Paul II and the Polish Catholic Church. Only hours earlier, the Polish Church had begun a concerted mediation effort to end the strikes, around a solution that would provide dignity and results for Poland’s desperate workforce, and within a framework of Solidarnosc-government “dialogue.” Teams of Church intellectuals were sent to both Nowa Huta and Gdansk.

Government spokesman Jerzy Urban slapped down the Church’s efforts at mediation and “dialogue” by calling the Nowa Huta and Gdansk strikers “terrorists.”

Far worse than 1980-81

As these events document, the Polish crisis of 1988, under way since April 25, in terms of its underlying gravity, is already far worse than that of 1980-81, which nearly produced a Soviet invasion. The strike wave, expanding on a daily basis, has become *political*, and the situation is moving inexorably to a confrontation.

What will happen in the days ahead is unpredictable. If the Gdansk shipyard is stormed, with Walesa inside, all bets are off. An explosion could occur. The anger of the population, already intense before the strike wave began, after the storming of Nowa Huta, has reached dangerous proportions.

Build up to confrontation

During the week of April 25-30, the Polish government had adopted a strategy of attempting to isolate the largest and most political of the strikes, that of the 16,000 Nowa Huta steelworkers, by granting the large wage increases demanded by other strikers. That accomplished, over the weekend of April 30-May 1, the government dispatched thousands of special troops to Nowa Huta, to intimidate the strikers into submission.

The government miscalculated. The threat of force backfired. On May Day, thousands demonstrated against the government in every large Polish city. The list of protests was impressive:

- Thousands demonstrated in Warsaw and the main port of Gdansk. The police moved in, brutally beating marchers and arresting over 100. In Gdansk, the protesters fought back with fists and stones, where, to use the Soviet jargon, the “correlation of forces” was in their favor. They taught more than a few police that they are not the only ones capable of administering beatings. These incidents, coupled with a now daily phenomenon of sidewalk crowds of ordinary citizens calling the police “Gestapo,” poignantly illustrates the deep anger and vastly more combative mood of Poland’s captive

population, as compared to 1980.

- In Wroclaw, 3,000 demonstrators were charged by club-swinging police.

- In the central Polish city of Plock, 5,000 demonstrators were dispersed by riot police.

- In Poznan, the center of Poland’s 1956 Revolution, police charged into a crowd of 5,000 demonstrators who carried Solidarnosc banners.

- In Lodz, police broke up a demonstration by 3,000, and arrested at least 20.

Challenge to Moscow’s Quisling regime

The May Day protests were but the prelude to the strike wave. On May 2, the Lenin Shipyard workers, who had spearheaded the 1970 strike wave that toppled Polish leader Gomulka, and the 1980-81 strike wave that ended civilian rule, began a strike in solidarity with the Nowa Huta steelworkers. The Gdansk Strike Committee turned the strike wave into a political confrontation by demanding, on top of large wage increases, that the opposition Solidarnosc be legalized as the price for ending the walkout.

Next, the Pafawag plant in Wroclaw (Silesia), which makes railway rolling stock, went on strike, followed by 1,000 copper miners in Luben. The workforce from many large plants, including the giant steelworks in Katowice, announced they will join the strike, should force be used.

Poland’s Jaruzelski regime was placed in a bind: If it continued to capitulate to strikers’ wage demands, as it did to settle a rash of urban transit strikes, it would thereby only encourage more strikes at other enterprises. But if force were employed to break the main strikes, a national explosion might be provoked, with unpredictable consequences, or the groundwork laid for an explosion in the near future.

Caught in this bind, the Polish government first attempted to “settle” the crisis through intimidation. It threatened that those enterprises on strike would be allowed to “go bankrupt” and be closed down. These threats made the government a laughing stock. The Gdansk shipyards build ships for *Russia*, the Nowa Huta steel works supplies finished steel products for *Russia*, the Wroclaw plant builds railway rolling stock for *Russia* and other Comecon nations. The Luben copper mines produce Poland’s second leading export item to the *West* (after coal) for vitally needed hard currency. So much for Warsaw’s tough language.

On May 4, however, the regime issued a more credible threat. The Politburo declaration’s use of the phrase twice that Poland is being destabilized, made clear that force would be used, and that the ultimate option, a Russian invasion, would be used if all else failed.

Radio Moscow and the Soviet media, which until then had played down the Polish events, responded by broadcasting the Polish Politburo declaration, emphasizing that Poland is being “destabilized.” Thus, Moscow officially proclaimed that a Polish crisis as bad or worse than that of 1980-81 was

now under way.

The looting 'pincers'

The reason that the 1988 Polish crisis is worse than 1980 is that in the intervening eight years, Poland has been subjected to much higher rates of *looting*, by both the Soviets and Western creditor banks. The looting "pincers" has reached intolerable proportions. This has not only collapsed living standards to a level far lower than in 1980, but, unlike 1980, the Polish people have no illusions that measures taken from "above" by the government will improve matters. On the contrary, knowing that living standards will otherwise keep falling, a desperate, "backs to the wall" combat mood has set in.

Soviet policy has been and remains to be to loot Poland, and for that matter, all its Eastern European satellites, as much as possible. Given Soviet war economy requirements, this looting will increase, to meet the demands of the Soviet war and civilian economy. The problem for Moscow is that until now, it has permitted a large-scale parallel looting of Eastern Europe by the financier interests of the Western oligarchy. This phenomenon in Eastern Europe has created an East bloc-wide economic crisis, replicating the Soviet Union's "scissors crisis" of the late 1920s. Then as now, dramatic Soviet policy shifts in response to the crisis are on the agenda for the near future. The transformation of this underlying economic crisis into a political explosion, as is now occurring in Poland, dictate that these policy shifts be enacted in the very near future.

So, in recognition that the looting of Poland by "two thieves" at the present scale cannot go on, Russia is moving toward measures that would scale down the amount of Western looting permitted, while permitting continued massive plundering of Poland's economy for the cause of the Soviet war economy.

The looting by Western financial interests of Poland has been massive. Over the past two years, Poland has paid nearly \$11 billion in interest payments on outstanding debt, "receiving" in return a mere \$3 billion in "new" credits to roll over existing debt repayment on principal. Despite this net outflow of \$8 billion from Poland to the West, Poland's net debt to Western creditors climbed, in the last year alone, from \$34 billion to \$39 billion.

The April 24 *Pravda* signaled the policy change. Going beyond the usual attacks on Western radio stations and "subversion centers," *Pravda* attacked the West for attempting to destabilize Eastern Europe, "for example, Poland," "especially through economic levers." *Pravda* noted that the massive Polish price hikes of Feb. 1 and April 1 were, among other things, agreed to as measures required to satisfy "economic reform" demands made by Western creditors. It then added that "no sooner" was this agreed to, than the West began to "provoke . . . an explosion of dissatisfaction."

In short, the Western "thief" would have to have his franchise reduced.

Gorbachov begins embracing cult of

by Luba George and Konstantin George

Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachov received Patriarch Pimen and the entire Russian Orthodox Church Moscow Patriarchate leadership, the Holy Synod, at the Kremlin on April 29. The occasion was a celebration of the 1988 Russian Millennium, the 1,000 years that Russia has been "Christianized."

The reception at the Kremlin's glittery Catherine Hall, the first of its kind in Soviet history, was broadcast as a lead item on Soviet TV and radio. Present with Pimen were Metropolitan Filaret of Kiev, Alexei of Leningrad and Novgorod, Juvenali of Krutitsy and Kolomna, Vladimir of Rostov and Novocheerkassk, Filaret of Minsk and Belorussia.

The only comparable event in Soviet history came at the height of World War II, when Josef Stalin received the Moscow Patriarch in 1943. Stalin, then in a desperate situation, decreed that thousands of churches could reopen, and the Church, in return, pledged its all-out support in mobilizing the people for Holy Russia's war effort.

The televised spectacle of Gorbachov and the Holy Synod went far beyond Stalin's behind-closed-doors meeting with the Church. It conveyed the imperial splendor of pre-1917 Russia, of Czar and Church, hand-in-hand for the cause of "Holy Russia."

The party secretary expressed the hope that "the 1,000th anniversary celebration of the introduction of Christianity into Russia," whose highpoint will occur in a week-long series of celebrations in mid-June, would bring together "all believers and workers" to take part jointly "in the great cause of perestroika and socialism's renewal." Believers and non-believers, said Gorbachov, "fought side by side" to "build socialism," and "at the front" in World War II. Since an "overwhelming majority of believers have accepted the perestroika . . . a broader social dialogue is possible."

ROC consolidates power

The Millennium was not the only reason for Gorbachov's unprecedented session with the Holy Synod, a session which underscored what would appear as the astounding rise in power and influence of the Russian Orthodox Church. It occurred in the context of one of the most intense crises in