

## Eye on Washington by Nicholas F. Benton

### U.S. helping Soviets cool out Poland

A spokesman for the Polish trade union Solidarity came to Washington, D.C. Sept. 7 to meet with President Reagan, as the year's second major strike wave in Poland began to wane.

According to Polish officials, a third wave, bigger than either of the two seen so far this year, is expected when the next big bite into Polish living standards will be taken in December.

But while the strikes are being driven by mass ferment against austerity, the visit of the Solidarity spokesman indicates that a faction in the United States, working through the National Endowment for Democracy, is working to help cool out the strikes, as desired by Soviet General Secretary Gorbachov and the International Monetary Fund (IMF).

I was surprised to find that the Solidarity spokesman, Janusz Oniszkiewicz, after a short meeting with President Reagan, was not willing to tell the press that it is Poland's austerity which is driving the strike wave.

At a press conference on the White House driveway, I asked him if he was bothered by the fact that Poland was paying its debts on time to the IMF, at the expense of domestic living standards. He ignored the part of my question about the debt payments, and replied that the cause of the unrest in Poland is that austerity is being imposed by a regime that the population has lost trust in. "For austerity to work," he said, "it has to be by ac-

ceptance, and not by force. It requires trust, trust in the leadership to sacrifice. So, profound economic and political changes are needed."

He said that Solidarity's goal is to get the Polish government to "resign from its totalitarian ambitions," and allow the existence of independent institutions, such as free trade unions. It sounded like he was advocating the kind of *glasnost* that Gorbachov would like to implement in Poland.

In other words, recognizing that deepening the austerity will lead to mass unrest, the Gorbachov policy is to defuse the situation by cosmetic moves to "democratize," in such a way that responsibility for the austerity is shared by institutions of "the people," and thereby not simply blamed on a totalitarian regime.

As long as the focus of change is "political reform" rather than debt relief and economic development, the operation is aimed at forcing anti-austerity ferment into an even tighter economic straitjacket.

### U.S. role in steering Poland's dissent

According to Eric Chenoweth, the former executive director of the Institute for Democracy in Eastern Europe, the U.S. Congress voted \$1 million to go to free institutions in Poland last year, which was sent through the National Endowment for Democracy (NED).

Among other things, this money was used to organize a "human rights" conference in Poland Aug. 15-21, which was composed of peace and ecology groups, including one, known as Freedom and Peace, with close ties to the Green Party of West Germany.

Chenoweth led a delegation from the AFL-CIO in the United States, and another U.S. "human rights" group,

known as "America Watch," was also there.

The conference focused almost entirely on political reforms, with Chenoweth insisting, "I am not an economist," and thus that he was unable to talk about how to redress the demise of the Polish economy.

He said only that the Solidarity union "is trying to unleash free enterprise" with some small, locally based companies trying to produce consumer goods like computer software and houses.

Joshua Muravchik, an American Enterprise Institute senior fellow, said that Solidarity "is seeking a social compact with the government to share the responsibility for austerity."

He mused that some of the U.S. taxpayers' dollars conduited into Poland through the NED have been used to publish books like Milton Friedman's *Free to Choose*—a book which ranks up there among history's most disgusting frauds, with Jeremy Bentham's libertarian tracts defending pederasty and usury.

Chenoweth pointed out that the austerity in Poland now is so severe that an average steelworker's wages can pay for only 15 meatless meals a month for a family of four.

Nonetheless, he said, Solidarity has taken the position that it favors loans from the IMF—despite the fact that the conditions for repayment of such loans has contributed to the recent escalation of austerity—in exchange for "pluralism, influence and a degree of political control."

Indeed, the Solidarity spokesman at the White House said, "We are going to need a stabilizing loan [from the IMF] to help us go through the coming difficult period of economic readjustment."

It didn't sound much like his priority is relieving the conditions that are forcing his countrymen to strike.