

East-West links rebound after Polish crisis

by Rachel Douglas

The end of the two-week strikes in the Polish port cities of Gdansk and Szczecin Aug. 30 and in the mine district of Upper Silesia two days later dampened the danger of immediate Soviet intervention and stopped Poland's slide into economic paralysis due to the strikes. The settlement bought time both for Polish leader Edward Gierk and for the groups who pushed the strikes into the delicate realm of demands for political reform, but it does not ensure stability for Poland.

The crisis could flare again. Already, the British-linked dissident group known as KOR has announced its plan to carry the demand for "free trade unions" throughout Poland and into other nations of Eastern Europe.

The Soviet Union, although not happy with how much ground the Polish regime conceded the strikers, evidently approved the settlement in order to give Gierk some breathing room. But European banking sources involved in Poland consider the announced solution to be short-term, and fear a new explosion if the Soviet leaders try to shape post-strike Polish politics in terms of a crackdown on the dissidents, and limitations on the "independent, self-governing trade unions" that will now be allowed.

The danger comes not only from the developments inside Poland, but effects they have had on the already tense international situation, especially on Moscow's assessment of whether any detente policy is worth pursuing.

Even before the Gdansk settlement, leaders in Eastern and Western Europe declared that efforts for East-West cooperation and dialogue must not be frozen because of the crisis in Poland. Despite the postponement of two important East-West summit meetings in the month of August, West German Chancellor Helmut Schmidt, President Valéry Giscard d'Estaing of France and the former prime minister of Italy, Giulio Andreotti, all urged a cautious approach to the Polish tinderbox by both East and West.

Their restraint aided at least a temporary cooling off of the Polish crisis, while the Western Europeans' reaffirmation of their East policy was read in Moscow as evidence that Soviet President Leonid Brezhnev's Europe-centered detente was still viable. On the basis of the current American strategic posture and the proliferation of confrontation "hot spots" around the globe, the Soviets judge that detente is finished outside of Europe.

Soviet Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko, writing in an August issue of the Soviet Communist Party journal *Kommunist* pronounced the United States an unreliable partner in international relations, "liable at any moment to violate its international obligations," and prone to declare "spheres of its vital interests" in a way that recalls territorial claims in the "Wild West."

Brezhnev seconded this evaluation in a major foreign policy speech he gave in Alma Ata, Kazakhstan Aug. 29. The Soviet president especially criticized the recently announced shift of United States strategic doctrine,



Photo: Wide World

Striking workers at the Lenin shipyard in Gdansk, Poland last month.

which he said was intended "to make the idea of nuclear war acceptable to public opinion" through the idea of "limited" or "partial" application of nuclear weapons that "has nothing to do with reality."

Brezhnev contrasted Western European foreign policy, particularly that of France and West Germany, to the dangerous course he attributed to Washington. His own meetings this year with Giscard and Schmidt, Brezhnev said, were examples of the importance of "deepening detente and international cooperation."

German coal deal

One of the diplomatic events cancelled because of the Polish crisis was Schmidt's first official meeting with East German President Erich Honecker, which was to have taken place in the German Democratic Republic on Aug. 27. (The other was Polish leader Edward Gierk's trip to Bonn.) The postponement of the Schmidt-Honecker meeting, years in preparation, was of special concern to West German observers of East-West relations because it is known that Honecker, like Brezhnev, has a "tough line" faction to contend with at home—party and military men who think that even a Eurocentric detente is of no use any more.

In a Sept. 1 statement at the Leipzig trade fair, however, Honecker denied that there would be any freeze in relations. As he toured the Hoechst chemical company's pavilion, Honecker pointed to "new horizons of relations between the two German states," both

in economic cooperation and for the sake of—using Schmidt's words—"peace and détente in Europe, but also in the world." Honecker quoted Schmidt's call that "war must never again start from German soil."

To back up Honecker's words, there was the surprise announcement of a coal deal, evidently one which would have been issued by Schmidt and Honecker had they met. During the next five years, 1.5 million tons of East German brown coal and coal powder will be delivered to West Germany in exchange for coal machinery and coal processing facilities. The deal is valued at between 10 and 20 million deutschmarks (\$6-12 million).

Chancellor Schmidt believes that expanded economic deals will be a critical contribution to cooling down the Polish crisis, too. On Sept. 3, Schmidt replied, by way of a press interview, to Jimmy Carter's private note urging more economic aid for Poland. Indeed, Schmidt told the *Westdeutsche Allgemeine Zeitung*, the United States, as the bigger economy, should give three times as much assistance to Poland as West Germany does (Bonn's latest government guarantee for private loans to Poland exceeded \$200 million) and should attach no political strings. It is essential, Schmidt explained, to "resist the temptation" of interfering in the domestic politics of the borrowing nation or to "give the impression of pursuing domestic political goals" through actions in a foreign country.

Schmidt surprised West German television viewers

Sept. 1 when he devoted the first of his national campaign broadcasts to his East policy, which Christian Democratic Union-Christian Social Union opposition candidate Franz-Josef Strauss has been trying to exploit as a campaign issue against Schmidt as the Oct. 5 elections approach. The CDU presidium had issued a communiqué calling the Polish strikes testimony to the failure of Schmidt's foreign policy, while a CSU spokesman denounced Schmidt for backing West German investment in the "corrupt and bankrupt" Polish economy.

Schmidt, whose Social Democratic Party won decisively when the Chancellor conducted a regional election last spring on the issue of "war or peace," defended his policy with enthusiasm. The Federal Republic of Germany, he said, favors unhindered relations with all nations—especially with Poland! The Bonn government will remain firmly committed to détente despite "suspicions and slanders," because there is no alternative. "The concern of German policy in Europe," declared

Both the Soviet Union and Western Europe hope Poland's Edward Gierak can gain some breathing room. Chancellor Schmidt believes that expanded economic deals will be a critical contribution to cooling down the Polish crisis and achieving 'utmost reasonableness' on all sides.

Schmidt, "is peace in all of Europe. Europe is Dresden, Warsaw, Gdansk and Budapest as well. . . . Our foreign policy has to be one of utmost reasonableness."

Giscard, who plans to go ahead with a visit to Warsaw in the second half of September, said in his own statement on the Polish crisis that he valued the "historic ties of friendship" between France and Poland and would like to see a "hands off" policy approach from *all* foreign powers.

Polish danger remains

The crisis in Poland, however, did not end with the tentative agreement between the Gdansk Interfactory Strike Committee and Deputy Prime Minister Mieczyslaw Jagielski. Moscow is viewing the settlement warily.

On Aug. 31, *Pravda* published the harshest official Soviet statement of the entire crisis—a full day *after* the Gdansk settlement was known. *Pravda's* article, bearing the authoritative signature A. Petrov, said that "anti-socialist elements" connected with Polish emigré organizations had stood on the shoulders of striking workers for "counter-revolutionary objectives."

The language in *Pravda* suggested that Moscow, or at least a section of the Soviet leadership, wants the settlement to be followed by an internal crackdown in Poland. This would be aimed first off at the dissident group KOR (Workers' Defense Committee), whose members fanned the strike and were the first to introduce the "political" demand for "free trade unions." A Sept. 1 Soviet television broadcast attacked KOR leaders Jacek Kuron and Adam Michnik by name for their "anti-socialist activities."

Kuron, released from jail in Warsaw Sept. 2, promised an escalation which will only hasten Soviet pressure on Warsaw to silence the KOR group. Kuron pledged to spread his organization to "other countries of the Soviet empire."

The official Soviet announcement of the settlements in Gdansk and Szczecin omitted details of the major political concession made by Jagielski. His agreement with the Lenin Shipyard workers in Gdansk, which is to serve as the basis for a new law on trade unions, provides for setting up "independent, self-governing trade unions," outside the official trade union structure. On its part, the Inter-Factory Strike Committee promised that the new institutions would not attempt "to play the role of a political party" nor "challenge existing international alliances."

In addition to Moscow's uneasiness, the Polish economic crisis and the approach to it of those Polish leaders promoted in the Aug. 24 shakeup triggered by the strikes virtually guarantee that Poland will remain on the brink of crisis. A complete overhaul of the Polish Communist Party's economic "action program" is under way, and in the words of the new Finance Minister Marian Krzak, it will place Poland "somewhere on a scale between Hungary and Yugoslavia."

Hungarian-fashion decentralization of economic decisions and austerity like Yugoslavia's are what some of Poland's foreign creditors had hoped to achieve. But the result of those policies will be a Poland *less* able to meet workers' demands for higher living standards, *deeper* into the hole of debt-dependency, *not* able to generate surplus to invest in the expansion of its industrial base, and *more* prone to accepting International Monetary Fund-style conditionalities which mandate a tighter domestic economic regime and thereby create the conditions for a new explosion of social and political unrest.