

Who will gain the upper hand in Poland?

by Rachel Douglas

In early February, Polish Defense Minister Gen. Wojciech Jaruzelski took the reins of government as prime minister, in hopes of ending the brushfires of local-issue strikes that were inflaming Poland. He appealed for 90 days of calm, without strikes, to permit recovery from staggering industrial production shortfalls while economic reforms were drafted.

Lech Walesa, the head of the Solidarity trade unions, exhorted union members to view the Jaruzelski government as the "last" that would treat Solidarity as a partner and therefore to obey the plea for labor peace.

But on March 19, while West German Foreign Minister Hans-Dietrich Genscher was in Warsaw for talks on economic aid to Poland and renewal of regular political contacts between the two countries, the peace was broken. Police in the northwestern city of Bydgoszcz confronted Solidarity organizers who were carrying out a preplanned filibuster in the provincial assembly hall on behalf of the not-yet-legalized farmers' union, Rural Solidarity. Expelled into the street, some Solidarity members were beaten by identified men in civilian clothes, and three of them landed in the hospital.

Solidarity immediately staged walkouts in Bydgoszcz, and the union's national leaders went into continuous sessions to prepare a nationwide strike in retaliation for the Bydgoszcz incident. Negotiations with the government followed. The U.S.S.R. responded, in turn, with a barrage of press releases containing more and more serious charges against Solidarity, up to the point of calling it a counterrevolutionary "fifth column" on March 29. Meanwhile, Warsaw Pact military maneuvers

under way in and around Poland were extended beyond their original schedule, so that the forces for a Soviet military intervention to curb Solidarity were already mustered.

Not until the night of Monday, March 30 was a nationwide general strike averted by a government-union accord, scarcely an hour before it was to begin.

During the 11 days of confrontation, it emerged that the incident in Bydgoszcz was a provocation on both sides: Solidarity militants, defying Walesa's directive to oblige Jaruzelski, led the Bydgoszcz sit-in, and the plain-clothes thugs who attacked Solidarity were out of the control of the central authorities.

Both the threatened general strike and its prevention resulted from decisions taken outside of Poland, and played out by pawns on the Polish chessboard.

The militant wing of Solidarity centers on the KOR (Workers Defense Committee) grouping, which was instrumental in launching the Polish crisis last year. Through its leaders Jacek Kuron, Adam Michnik and Oxford University-based Prof. Leszek Kolakowski, KOR is under the control of British intelligence services and the European leftist support networks that also assist terrorism in Western Europe. It has been an instrument of provocations by the Soviet KGB as well, in tacit alliance with these British networks.

The Polish secret police, believed to be responsible for both the Bydgoszcz beatings and the recent appearance in Warsaw of inflammatory anti-Semitic literature, are closely interlocked with the KGB as well.

The dramatic escalation of the Polish crisis by these

two sides, leading to increased expectations of a Soviet invasion, came at an extraordinarily sensitive time in international politics—even before the attempted assassination of President Ronald Reagan.

France and West Germany, renewing their moves to expand the European Monetary System into its second, credit-generating phase, are pressing the Reagan administration to abandon monetarist policies and high interest rates. The open factional sparring inside the U.S. administration poses the possibility that Reagan could link up with the Franco-German alliance on these policies.

The jaundiced British interpretation of this state of affairs was candidly revealed by a senior British official to the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*. “The real threat to security in Europe is not Poland,” he said, “but the Franco-German alliance.”

And the Polish crisis, tested last summer against Polish leader Edward Gierek, who was the foremost East European collaborator of France and West Germany before his ouster, is the way to smash the efforts of Paris and Bonn.

The motive of the East European networks implicated in the latest destabilization of Poland stems from abiding opposition to the Brezhnev leadership's stake in rebuilding détente with the West Europeans. The presence of this factional view in East bloc councils is demonstrated by repeated Czechoslovak and East German media demands for Solidarity to be crushed, regardless of the consequences.

Several U.S. administration officials anticipated countermeasures against a Russian invasion and proclaimed them in advance with stridence. Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger, for instance, said March 27 that a Soviet military intervention would spell an end to possible East-West arms talks.

Senate Foreign Relations Committee Chairman Charles Percy (R-Ill.) suggested in a March 29 television interview that arming China would be part of a Western response to the Russians.

Breathing room

The March 30 government-union agreement deflated such scenarios for the time being.

Jaruzelski and communist party First Secretary Stanislaw Kania, advocating moderation, carried the day in an 18-hour party meeting March 29—an outcome encouraged by the prospect of West European economic assistance and the continued confidence of the Brezhnev leadership. Even though the Soviet news agency TASS issued daily warnings that Solidarity had become a threat to socialism in Poland, the daily *Sovetskaya Rossiya* wrote that the Polish government still had the overwhelming trust of the population.

And Lech Walesa outlasted the radicals to obtain

approval from Solidarity's national coordinating commission for the agreement to pledge the union to refrain from tension-creating activities such as the occupation of buildings. Two of the militants beaten in Bydgoszcz sat up in bed long enough to dispatch a letter to the commission meeting, accusing Walesa of selling out, but their bid failed.

Walesa, originally a KOR-selected organizer of the August 1980 strikes, has reached his current advocacy of moderation in large part due to his close ties to Polish Catholic Church officials, including the entourage of Primate Stefan Cardinal Wyszynski. Although Catholic radicals developed the ideology of “solidarism” and its movement in Poland, the Catholic advisers to Solidarity are concerned not to jeopardize the institutions of the Church by inviting Soviet tanks to roll into the country; they will go as far as they can to implement their low-technology, “human value” economic policies without pushing Moscow over the brink.

The other tempering influence on Solidarity is the fatigue of the Polish population, worn down by the effects of eight months of constant strikes: with 1981 industrial output at 20 to 50 percent below 1980's in various branches of industry, Poland is facing food supply disruptions so serious that in mid-March many Warsaw stores had nothing on the shelves except peas and vinegar. When the Warsaw local of Solidarity passed a resolution to reject the national union-government agreement, its worker constituents rejected the rejection.

The next milestones

Party members initially favorable to Solidarity are now also fed up with the radicals. Even Deputy Prime Minister Mieczyslaw Rakowski, who as a leading party liberal and member of the Anglo-Polish Friendship Society aided the formation of Solidarity in 1980, complained March 25 that “some Solidarity people” were attacking him personally without cause and launching “colossal actions” at the slightest excuse.

The next questions facing Poland are whether party feuding will stymie Jaruzelski's political and economic stabilization plan, whether Walesa continues to rein in the Solidarity radicals, and what foreign economic aid can be obtained to cover both the food crisis and Poland's rugged debt repayment schedules (see International Credit.)

With the food shortage causing panic hoarding throughout the country, the Polish foreign ministry called in ambassadors of the European Community nations and the United States in mid-March to request emergency food aid. And Poland has reportedly begun to miss some loan payments, starting a flurry of consultations and strategic planning in the West on how to handle the Poles' requests.