

outrage has yet to appear in any Western newspaper, except for a belated report in the London *Times*, although eyewitness documentation has been made available to the West in press release form by the Independent Press Service of the Ukrainian Helsinki Union, operating out of Lvov and Kiev.

These events mark the first confirmed use of Interior Ministry *spetsnaz* units, created late last year and composed of Afghan War veteran Army *spetsnaz* troops whose period of active service had ended. These units were created specifically to intervene against national unrest.

The events of August followed a series of arrests and intimidations by the KGB and police of Ukrainian activists, after mass demonstrations and a bus drivers' strike in June and July. On July 20, the KGB arrested one of the leaders of the Helsinki Union, Vyecheslav Chornovil, and warned him to stop "attempts to incite hostility among nationalities . . . supplying Western subversive centers with information which is used against the Soviet system, and organizing mass demonstrations which violate public order." Soviet and Ukrainian official press have been demanding that an end be put to "activities of extremists." They have named five dissidents: Mikhail Chornovil, Bogdan Horyn, Ivan Makar, and Yaroslav Putko. All fear that the same fate is awaiting them that happened to Armenian leader Airikyan, who was deported to the West.

These warnings were followed on July 24, by arrests of 16 members of a cultural club in the Ukrainian capital of Kiev. The club has been campaigning against Russification and petitioning for the release of "prisoners of conscience." On July 27, the newspaper *Lvov Pravda* announced that the Lvov Executive Committee had forbidden all meetings and demonstrations organized by the Lvov Initiative group which they accused of "anti-Soviet agitation and provocation."

Throughout late July and early August, dozens of Ukrainian national activists were seized by the KGB, thrown at gunpoint into waiting cars, and driven into forests outside Lvov and Kiev. There they were threatened with execution by pistol or drowning, and after being severely beaten, were left half-conscious in the forest, to find their way back to the city.

In Moscow itself, Interior Ministry *spetsnaz* units were used to break up an Aug. 20 demonstration. Five hundred protesters, members of the Democratic Union—the illegal opposition political party set up in May—gathered near Pushkin Square to protest the 20th anniversary of the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia. They distributed leaflets denouncing the 1968 invasion as a "crime." Police with loudspeakers ordered the protesters to disperse or face "legal consequences." The police, KGB, and Interior Ministry *spetsnaz* units charged into the crowd with clubs and dogs. Passers-by, shocked by the brutality, shouted "Fascists!" at the police, as they watched about 100 protesters being dragged into police buses. Some women were pulled by the hair, while men were punched or kicked as they were bundled into buses.

## Polish crisis: more

by Konstantin George

The course of the strike wave that began in Poland on Aug. 16 confirms that, no matter what happens in the immediate period ahead, the Polish crisis of 1988 is of a dimension far more grave than that of 1980-81. This was already *EIR*'s reading when the first strikes erupted in April and May of this year. At the time, we alerted our readers that the next explosion would likely occur in August.

In the current situation, anything can happen.

As of Aug. 25, the strikes had shut down at least 11 coal mines in Upper Silesia, and brought all activity in Poland's two main ports, Szczecin and Gdansk, to a halt.

The government cannot allow such a state of affairs to prevail much longer without taking direct and brutal action on a large scale, or else ending the strikes through successfully intimidating the workers. A showdown is inevitable, with two possible results: Either the strike is broken, or government violence triggers a nationwide strike and an all-out crisis, with a growing danger of Soviet military intervention.

Most knowledgeable observers expect the government to succeed, through the use of pressure and blackmail tactics, in stopping the strike wave. However, the strikes may end, but the crisis will not only remain, but intensify. It was only in May that the government had apparently "won" against the strikers, only to find itself confronted with a far worse eruption three months later. Should the government again "win" in August, it will only have ensured an even briefer interval of "calm" before the next and worse explosion occurs in the fall.

This is why both the opposition and the government agree on one point, the enormous gravity of the situation, comparing it to 1980 (when the crisis produced the fall of the Edward Gierek regime and the imposition of martial law by Gen. Wojciech Jaruzelski).

Bronislaw Geremek, an adviser to Solidarnosc leader Lech Walesa, declared on Aug. 23, "The situation in Poland is exactly as explosive as it was during the strikes in the summer of 1980, and the dangers are also exactly as great." On the evening of Aug. 22, in a speech broadcast on Polish TV, General Kiszczak, the interior minister, announced that the wave of "illegal strikes . . . the open violations of peace and order . . . has called forth the specter of anarchy. . . . It's the duty of the leadership to prevent a return to the

# unrest to come

situation that existed in the country on Dec. 13, 1981" when martial law was imposed and Jaruzelski took over power.

Timed with Kiszczak's threat of a return to martial law and mass repression, the Soviet media that evening broke its silence on the events in Poland. The Soviet news agency TASS denounced the "terroristic strikes" in Poland, and, referring to the coal strikes in the Polish region of Upper Silesia, a leader in coal and steel production, noted that they "threaten the entire region."

Kiszczak and the Soviets' threats followed a series of deliberations on the Polish crisis, which reveal how serious the situation is. The Polish National Defense Council, the country's supreme body, under the chairmanship of General Jaruzelski, met twice in 72 hours (on Aug. 20 and Aug. 22) to work out measures to crush the strikes. The first phase of a brutal crackdown against the strikers was subsequently launched:

- Already on Aug. 21, columns of vehicles carrying special police and Army units had moved into Upper Silesia, and began sealing off the coal mines on strike. As an added precaution against the spreading strike, large numbers of these units deployed just outside the Upper Silesian capital of Katowice, a large industrial city housing one of Poland's largest steel works.

- On the evening of Aug. 22, special police units known for their brutality, the notorious "Zomos," stormed three bus and tram depots in Szczecin, which were occupied by strikers. About 60 strikers were arrested and carted away from each depot.

- Starting on Aug. 24 and continuing into Aug. 25, police and troops begin storming some of the coal mines on strike, and in other cases, enforced a total blockade against the striking miners occupying the mines, to starve them out. By the end of Aug. 25, at least 3 and possibly up to 6 of the 14 mines on strike were again "working." But the post-strike "work" being conducted is slow and sporadic, with workers largely going through the motions of working.

## How the crisis unfolded

The strikes began on Aug. 16 at the Manifest Lipcowy coal mine, near the town of Jastrzebie in Upper Silesia. Within four days, the coal miners' strike had spread to at

least 14 mines, and affected some 70,000 miners. In that same time frame, the Polish Baltic port of Szczecin was hit by a strike of its dock workers, shutting down the port, parts of the Adolph Warski shipyards, and the city's bus and tram drivers, knocking out urban mass transit. By Aug. 22, the Lenin Shipyard workers in Gdansk, led by Solidarnosc's Lech Walesa, joined the strike, to be followed soon thereafter by the Gdansk port workers. Also by Aug. 22-23, other strikes had broken out in various regions: at a turbine-producing plant in the western Polish city of Poznan; at a railway car repair plant in the Silesian capital of Wroclaw; at the Stalowa Wola armaments plant (which had also been struck briefly in April) in southeastern Poland; and partial strikes were occurring at the huge Nowa Huta steel works (one of the bastions of the April-May strikes) outside Krakow.

The workforce at other huge industrial facilities, such as the Huta Warszawa steel works in Warsaw, and the Ursus tractor plant outside Warsaw, warned the government that if violence were used against the strikers, they would then join the protests.

The dynamics of the strike wave provide the most stunning proof of how much the Polish economic situation has deteriorated since the spring. That the strikes are being led by the coal miners is a barometer of how far living standards have collapsed. Coal miners earn roughly double the average industrial wage in Poland. They also earn significant overtime pay, since bituminous coal, a prime export item to the West for hard currency, is produced seven days a week, around the clock. In April and May, the coal miners had not joined the strikes; now they are leading the strike wave.

Another critical qualitative difference between the current strike wave and that of April-May is that in the spring, in the Polish ports, only the Lenin Shipyard workers in Gdansk walked out. Their strike lasted nine days, but remained isolated and collapsed. This time, both ports, Szczecin and Gdansk, have been struck simultaneously, creating a national crisis with the paralysis of Poland's seaborne trade.

As of this writing, though there is an ebb in the coal strikes following the brutal interventions by the Interior Ministry's thugs, the two ports are still on strike and paralyzed, and new strikes cannot be ruled out.

Last, but not least, this time around, every single strike has made both economic demands—usually for a 50% wage increase—and political demands that Solidarnosc and other independent trade unions be legalized.

The government and the governing institutions are thoroughly discredited in the eyes of the population. General Jaruzelski can only survive through the use of force and bullying tactics, and it is noteworthy that now, as opposed to April and May, the Polish government is not even pretending to negotiate with any of the strikers. Jaruzelski's ability to survive through employing violence will not last forever, and the situation will inexorably evolve to the point where even that will not succeed, and a Russian invasion will be a live option.