

# Poland's new leader Rakowski: Perestroika means bloodshed

by Irene Beaudry and Luba George

The Polish government resigned on Sept. 19 after it had been severely criticized by the Communist Party for having failed to implement "economic reforms." Prime Minister Zbigniew Messner was replaced by Politburo member Mieczyslaw Rakowski.

Rakowski's appointment was a combined International Monetary Fund-Soviet dictated arrangement. The Soviet Union, which is undergoing a deep economic crisis, marked by severe shortages of food and consumer goods, has to ensure that it can continue to extract from Poland the goods it needs; and with Poland's foreign debt at \$40 billion, the IMF is refusing to give any new credits unless Poland undertakes vicious austerity.

So far, the Polish government's so-called "reforms," involving price increases for a whole range of food, fuel, and consumer products, have backfired, in that they prompted public protests and widespread demands for pay raises to compensate for higher prices. The strikes in April and May and again in August 1988 dramatized the collapse of the economic program. Thus, the need for a more ruthless and cold-blooded rule in Poland, under the disguise of surface "liberalization" schemes, has become the order of the day. Rakowski, a butcher with a "liberal reformer" mask, has been chosen for the job.

His appointment was pushed through by the real strongmen of the Polish Politburo—Interior Minister Gen. Czeslaw Kiszczak and Defense Minister Florian Siwicki. Moscow's hand behind the naming of Rakowski was signaled by an interview with him appearing in *Pravda*, on the day of his appointment.

## Blood and sacrifices

During the summer, Rakowski granted two interviews in which he made no secret what his coming "new style" rule would bring to Poland: a future of savage austerity and, in his own words, "blood, sweat, and tears."

Rakowski, as the interviews reveal, has pledged himself

to implement measures that will make Poles work harder for less. To achieve this, the Solidarity movement will have to be crushed, while, as a "liberal" cover, a mere structure is to be left behind.

On June 11, Rakowski was interviewed by the Hungarian government newspaper, *Magyar Hirlap*. Having just returned from touring the provincial centers of Poland's textile industries, Rakowski unashamedly said that he was "amazed" to find that women workers and their families lived *better* than he thought. The Polish people, he added, "did not allow their standard of living to be taken away from them. They would rather work more." In reality, Polish living standards have collapsed to the levels of the 1950s, after years of combined IMF-Soviet looting.

Rakowski will try to ram through economic measures which he himself describes as "qualitative deterioration"—i.e., a managed further lowering, in stages, of living standards. How does Rakowski propose to achieve this "qualitative deterioration"? In the June 11 interview with *Magyar Hirlap* he explained the coming policy of mass unemployment:

"In my view, we are approaching a situation similar to that prevailing in Hungary. If we start from the premise that socialism has caused demoralization in the people's attitude to work, it is possible that socialism will have to go through the *developmental stage of partial unemployment* [emphasis added]. An enterprise that functions inefficiently draws money from my pocket; and so does the state when it subsidizes this enterprise."

Rakowski's plan to break the resistance of Solidarity, the government-banned independent trade union movement, and make people work harder to satisfy both IMF creditors and the crisis-ridden Soviet Union is to do away, through "restructuring" (*perestroika*), with the large plants which are the strongholds of Solidarity. Rakowski pledged to "increasingly re-route from investment- and energy-intensive branches which accumulate losses to branches which produce for the

market and repay investments in a short period of time.”

Such energy-intensive industries, said Rakowski, “are the large centers of the working class, our strongholds, where class power exists. . . . The workers there represent an enormous power, and any demagogue can cause confusion in their heads if he is skillful enough. . . . Socialism would also look different if instead of the huge industrial plants, thousands of small firms existed. These firms have the ability to initiate and to adjust more quickly and more flexibly. . . . The present period is full of tension, and makes us prepare for a painful accounting, but there is no other way out.

“I predict that the system to which both Hungary and Poland belong will have to overcome extraordinary contradictions and conflicts in the coming few years. Once I formulated that it will take blood and tears to implement restructuring. One of the listeners became very angry, but precisely then we had the example of Azerbaijan and Armenia where, as is known, there were casualties. Let us formulate it like this: The shift by socialism to renewing forms which renew themselves cannot be implemented without paying the price. The Hungarians are already paying for it and this is, in the final account, fortunate.”

In an interview with the Italian daily *La Repubblica* July 20, Rakowski repeated his equation of *perestroika* to bloodshed: “Yerevan, Sumgait, Alma Ata . . . there has already been bloodshed for restructuring in the U.S.S.R. The same could happen in Eastern Europe in the near future . . . the growing importance of the national issue which is making the Central and Eastern European states more difficult, economic problems, the urgent need for reforms, distrustful people, and the old guard’s inevitable struggle against innovation. Yes . . . there may be years of conflict, strong feelings, and struggles.”

Bloodshed and cooptation will go hand in hand. On Solidarity in parliament? Rakowski answered: “Who knows? Possibly. We and they are still marked by the twofold trauma of 1980 and 1981—Solidarity’s challenge and then martial law. But time heals everything and everybody. There has been talk of a future Christian Democratic party. I am not in favor of that idea. However, I do not rule out the possibility that in the future . . . our current opponents will sit in parliament if they are prepared to be loyal to the system.”

However, on Sept. 26, a confidential party document telexed to party chiefs in factories across Poland ruled out any possibility of Solidarity being reborn even as a tamed “social-control” mechanism. The document said Solidarity supporters would be allowed to join the Communist-led CPZZ unions set up to replace Solidarity, “giving them a proportional share in the leadership and melting them down into the trade union structures.”

The first test for Rakowski’s schemes will come when the next explosion rocks Poland in late October or November, when the full impact of the latest price rises hit the consumer as electricity and rent bills arrive.

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