

# 'War communism' austerity follows Poland's choice of new leadership

by Rachel Douglas, Soviet Sector Editor

The Ninth Congress of the Polish United Workers Party (PUWP), which met in Warsaw July 14-20, replaced 91 percent of the party's Central Committee and ousted 7 of 11 Politburo members. The nearly 2,000 delegates spent most of their sessions on the politicking that produced these changes, while they scarcely touched on pressing, substantive issues of economic stabilization and relations with the Solidarity trade unions.

Stanislaw Kania, the First Secretary, succeeded in the tricky political maneuver of satisfying both the reform-minded delegates and the Soviets. He won re-election after a vote for the Central Committee eliminated his two chief challengers, Gdansk liberal Tadeusz Fiszbach and Tadeusz Grabski, who had built himself up as Moscow's man for the job.

Whether Poland would survive was a question not answered so clearly.

Within three days after the congress adjourned, the Polish government gave its tentative agreement to a debt-rescheduling package proffered by the Western banks holding Poland's commercial debt. It then shocked the nation with the announcement of food price increases as great as 400 percent, and averaging 110 percent.

One Pole described the austerity measures as "war communism," which in Poland refers to the devastating decade of the 1940s—reconstruction after World War II.

The economy is not producing enough to keep itself going. Even this year's good crop will be diminished because peasants lack spare parts for machinery. The work force is not far behind its machines on the way to collapse; a Solidarity spokesman told the Paris daily *France Soir*, "Men in the factories no longer have the strength to work."

Poland's economic disintegration, ironically, should disabuse believers in at least one kooky geopolitical prognosis, namely that the Polish experiment in political liberalization will pluck a thread to unravel the Warsaw Pact as Eastern European nations, one after another, emulate the Poles. This is one version of the "crumbling empire" hypothesis, on the basis of which leading British think tanks and London's Foreign Minister Lord Car-

ington calculate their chances of striking new geopolitical deals with Moscow.

On the eve of the party congress, *Christian Science Monitor* columnist Joseph Harsch interpreted the military implications of the Soviets' losing Poland in this way—a removal of the Russian defense perimeter 500 miles eastward and the neutralization of every Warsaw Pact member except Bulgaria—as highly desirable for NATO.

Now, the problem with such hopes of a splintering the Soviet bloc is not only the danger of getting NATO into a strategic war with the U.S.S.R. Now, the project can hardly succeed: "The sine qua non for impact on other East European countries is solving the economic crisis," said one close observer of Polish politics, otherwise any other country will say, "look what a mess this kind of demand lands you in."

## Polish model—for the West?

Coincident with Poland's announcement of austerity and acquiescence to the Western banks' terms for rescheduling the debt, there were calls for Poland to join the International Monetary Fund. Poland, evidently, is to be a model if not for the rest of Eastern Europe, then for returning *all* of Europe and other nations to postwar levels of misery.

Already, the Western bankers' agreement to re-schedule the \$2.37 billion commercial debt payments falling due this year mandates IMF-style conditionalities. A quarrel between American and European parties to the debt negotiations was settled under the provision that Europe's preferred long-term deferral of the payments—over seven years—would be adopted, if the American conditions were also met: Warsaw must provide detailed economic information and guarantee it has a workable economic reform. The *New York Times* reported "speculation that Poland may apply to become the 41st member of the IMF" and the *Journal of Commerce* editorialized that this would be a "happier" solution.

Without waiting for the IMF to make its formal appearance, the Polish government followed its July 23

food price hike proposal July 26 with an array of drastic austerity measures. The emergency plan, billed as step one of economic reform calls for voluntary overtime at crucial factories; price increases on energy, household appliances, fuel and alcohol; reduction of housing construction and investment; shutdown of inefficient factories; reduction of energy and raw materials consumption. In the state stores, meat will cost nearly three times as much as before, bread triple, milk more than quadruple, and sugar quadruple. The average monthly food cost, said Price Commission chief Krasinski, would rise from \$18.18 to \$66.66 for the smallest spenders and from \$45.45 to \$121.21 for the top end of the scale. In addition, the monthly per capita meat ration will be reduced from 3.5 kilograms to 3 kilograms for at least two months.

Poland is in such narrow straits that the Commodities Credit Corporation line left over from 1980, released by the Reagan administration for use by the Poles to purchase 400,000 tons of chicken feed, will not effect a fundamental improvement. A new credit of DM 1 billion, contemplated by the West German Reconstruction Loan Corporation, will also be used for emergency purposes.

Prime Minister Wojciech Jaruzelski, in a speech at the end of the congress, heralded the price rises with the explanation that the government had somehow to close the gap created by a 23 percent increase in wages against a 15 percent decline in production, and even deeper fall in some critical sectors such as coal.

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Solidarity, formed through strikes that followed a much more modest price increase announced in July 1980, is caught between renegotiating previously won concessions and striking once more with the result that its members will face even worse shortages, higher prices and shutdown of their places of work. Lech Walesa, the union leader, said July 23 that he hoped Solidarity would not just have "an influence on making lines longer . . . on there being less food." But Walesa then took to his bed, suffering from exhaustion, and others in the union are threatening to strike over meat shortages.

## Politburo lineup emerges in Warsaw

The method of voting used by the congress delegates, in the first secret-ballot elections ever held by a ruling communist party at a full congress, contributed to the clean sweep by newcomers. It also discouraged delegates from making their votes into positive endorsement of one policy or another; instead of voting *for* candidates on the basis of merit and platform, the delegates were invited to cross off 79 out of a list of 279 candidates for membership on the Central Committee. There were well-organized lobbies to defeat factional leaders and representatives of powerful regional party constituencies, so that most of the prominent figures from all factions lost. The party leaders of four key regional organizations, Warsaw, Gdansk, Katowice and Krakow (two liberals and two political conservatives), whom Kania had hoped to install on the new Politburo, all failed to make it onto even the Central Committee.

Only four members of the pre-congress Politburo survive on the new one. They are Kania, General Jaruzelski (who is also defense minister), Kania's ally Kazimierz Barcikowski, and Stefan Olszowski, the politically conservative economic reformer who has close links to East Germany and the U.S.S.R.

Two associates of Olszowski, with him the kernel of a group whose attempt to replace Kania was backed by the Soviet Union in June of this year, lost their Politburo and Central Committee seats. These were Tadeusz Grabski and Andrzej Zabinski. Henryk Jablonski, president of the Polish People's Republic for many years, relinquished his Politburo post, as did Mieczyslaw Jagielski, the deputy prime minister who handled the negotiations in which Solidarity was formed, and Gen. Mieczyslaw Moczar, the former security chief who was attempting to return to his 1960s status as a party power broker. Two workers put on the Politburo last spring were kicked off it, as were two regional officials, economic reform specialists, who had been deputy members. Deputy Politburo member Tadeusz Fiszbach, first secretary of the Gdansk party organization before,

during, and since the great strikes centered in Gdansk, lost not only his Central Committee post, but also the chance to bid for Kania's job on behalf of the extreme reformist, anglophile wing of the party.

Into their shoes steps a group of people described by one expert as "unknown and unpredictable." Of the newcomers on the Politburo, only Foreign Minister Jozef Czyrek and former Interior Minister Miroslaw Milewski, criticized by Solidarity for his handling of the investigation of beatings of union members in Bydgoszcz, have national leadership experience. The others are four workers, three regional party officials, and two professors. One of the workers is a woman member of Solidarity, Zofia Grzyb; another, A. Siwak, is a Warsaw construction foreman who told the congress he knew of workers hounded to death by Solidarity—a speech much applauded by the Soviet media.

Three of the new Politburo's members have party jobs requiring their presence in a city other than Warsaw, and five others—the workers and one of the professors—have already said that they will keep their old jobs and give the Politburo just half their time.

### **Lack of leadership**

A diluted Politburo was the natural result of this congress, which was dedicated more to finding fault with past leadership than with determining of how to lead Poland. The major business of the first two days of the congress was discussion of a report, drafted under Grabski's direction, on the misdeeds of former First Secretary Edward Gierek and seven of his colleagues—all of them out of office for 10 months. The debate dragged on until one frustrated delegate cried, "I cannot . . . endorse the fascination with the issue of the past. . . . There are forces . . . who would like to reduce the history of the party to an endless sequence of errors and distortions and who dream about a party constantly giving accounts of its real and imaginary faults, a party on its knees."

Establishing the principle of political culpability for policies that fail and instituting a statute that limits the holding of top party offices to two terms (10 years), the congress made leadership a dirty word. Kania himself said, "I have stated that I do not wish to be a leader, not only due to my parameters, but also due to the fact that then [in September 1980, when he was installed] and today, I am not sure that our party needs something called leader."

A congress workshop on the party's "ideological unity," one of 16 so-called problem teams where issues were discussed but no decisions taken, proved that the prevalence of Kania's middle road between "dogmatists" and "revisionists" may not be enough to keep the party glued together. The debate there was heated,

reported the official news agency, over the historical role of the Polish Socialist Party, which merged with the communists to form the PUWP after World War II; that signals that the bid to turn the PUWP into a social-democratic party, and even the reconstitution of the Socialist Party as an independent entity, are still alive.

Addressing this problem team, Kania's associate on the Politburo, Barcikowski, recommended that the party improve its attitude toward the social sciences, whose work "we should all learn how to utilize." In Poland, that means to turn to a school of social science run by Prof. Jan Szczepanski, trainee of the Tavistock Clinic in Britain, birthplace of the most vicious techniques of psychological manipulation of labor and political leaders and populations. Szczepanski's professionals' ability to better predict the Polish crisis, which now seems to impress Barcikowski and Kania, must have been due in no small part to their intimate connection with the diverse intelligence operatives who ran the destabilization.

### **The general and the Soviets**

With the weakening of the Politburo, Prime Minister Jaruzelski emerged during the congress as a pivotal leader for the party and the country in the immediate future. General Jaruzelski collected the highest number of votes in the tally for Central Committee, and it was he who broke the news of impending austerity to the congress. As a professional soldier and a member of the top Polish leadership since 1968, Jaruzelski also provides assurance to Moscow that Poland will be loyal to the Warsaw Pact.

Although the Soviet media withheld any enthusiastic endorsement of the congress, its secret-ballot elections, or its new statutes, having Jaruzelski and Kania in charge of stabilizing Poland suits Moscow better than a takeover of the party by its anglophile wing would have. By June 21, when the Soviet Politburo sent a telegram on Poland's national holiday, it was "Dear Comrades" again, instead of the cool "Esteemed Comrade Kania" with which Leonid Brezhnev offered congratulations and the icy "S. Kania"—no title—of the June 5 Russian letter written in anticipation of Kania's ouster.

Viktor Grishin, the Soviet Politburo member who represented Moscow at the Polish congress, expressed confidence in Warsaw's loyalty to the alliance and the party's "ability to restore the party's prestige in society." But in a speech at a Warsaw factory, Grishin expatiated on the Soviet Union's own gigantic burden of investments in Siberian development and the military. He managed to suggest that the U.S.S.R. would not rush to rescue Poland from biting austerity, as long as social calm and Warsaw Pact allegiance survived.