

Reason eases a tense Poland

By Diana Johnstone

PARIS

EVERYTHING HAD BEEN SET UP—threats, admonitions, food shortages, a classic provocation, conspicuous military maneuvers—for the Soviet-backed hardliners to take over the decisive March 29 central committee meeting and launch a crackdown. Instead, the partisans of democratic renewal—*odnowa*—emerged victorious from the dramatic 18-hour confrontation. As “brotherly” Soviet and East German armed forces rumbled interminably back and forth across the Polish landscape, the majority of the Polish United Workers Party (“scarcely worker, less united than ever, but still Polish”) turned its listening ear to the Polish people. For once, the real workers on the central committee, the “marble men” whose role has always been to shut up and look proletarian, spoke their minds. The rank and file was on the side of Solidarity. “The use of force would be not only a tragedy for the nation, but would discredit the very idea of socialism in the world,” the secretary for Siedlce warned.

Occasionally liberal, constantly ambitious Stefan Olszowski, who has apparently staked his future career on Russian power, praised cooperation with the US-



A European cartoon shows Poland as the black sheep of the Warsaw Pact.

SR and called on the central committee to endorse the joint Soviet-Polish statement, wrested from Polish leaders in Moscow March 4, calling for a “reversal” of the course of events in Poland.

Defying Soviet directives, the central committee held to the course of “renewal” and gave in to rank-and-file demands to hold a special Party congress as soon

as possible—before July 20. In preparation for the Congress, democratic elections are to be held within the party. They promise to assure a strong pro-renewal majority.

Thus the Communist Party itself is slipping out of Moscow’s grip. From the Kremlin viewpoint, this is the worst thing that could possibly happen. The ghost of

Eurocommunism, murdered in Czechoslovakia in 1968, has come back to haunt Eastern Europe.

Before the central committee meeting, tension had been high for 10 days, since police on March 19 broke up a meeting in Bydgoszcz between local officials and Solidarity representatives who had come to discuss legal recognition of the farmers’ branch of the free union. Several Solidarity people, including national leader Jan Rulewski, were so badly beaten by police they had to be hospitalized.

The incident had all the earmarks of a classic police provocation—that is, an attack designed to make a target group overreact and thus cut itself off politically from a less sensitive majority. Coming just a fortnight after Brezhnev ordered PUWP leader Stanislaw Kania to “reverse the course of events,” and just three days after the start of Warsaw Pact maneuvers on Polish soil, the timing looked suspicious. Was Bydgoszcz the signal to start rolling back the gains made by the free union? Solidarity threatened to shut down the country in an unprecedented general strike. The union demanded sanctions against officials responsible for the police brutality, as well as registration of the new farmers union, access to news media, an end to prosecution of political dissidents and rescinding of a 50 percent limit on strike pay.

Meanwhile, a clamor of scandalized outcries arose from Poland’s friendly neighbors, the USSR, Czechoslovakia and East Germany (the countries participating in the maneuvers), whose media have for months been portraying the Poles as thoughtless, ungrateful incompetents who have squandered economic aid lavished on them and let themselves be led into violent chaos by their own religious fanaticism and agents of capitalist imperialism. The union demands were portrayed as pushing the country over the brink of total collapse, as part of a deliberate plot against “socialism.”

The Polish government headed by Gen. Wojciech Jaruzelski, who had concluded an earlier crisis in February by a 90-day “social truce” with the union, only to have his credibility undermined by Brezhnev’s command, alternately blew hot and cold.

Fork-tongued “liberal” editor Mieczyslaw Rakowski, picked to represent the government in negotiations with union leaders, accused Solidarity of “incredible agitation” against the government out of all proportion to what happened at Bydgoszcz. “Do you want to demonstrate to the whole world that independent unions run by the workers cannot exist under socialism because they bring about the country’s collapse and destroy domestic tranquility?” Rakowski asked.

Lech Walesa replied, “Our stubborn-
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Now it’s time for hard, boring work

Andrzej Gwiazda and his wife Joana Duda-Gwiazda played a leading role in May 1978 in founding the Baltic free union committee that organized the 1980 Gdansk strikes leading to the creation of Solidarity. Gwiazda, a 45-year-old technician, actually negotiated the key demand for a free union with Polish government representatives in August 1980. Considered leader of the radical tendency in Solidarity, wary of the Catholic Church hierarchy, Gwiazda is vice president of Solidarity national committee, the free union’s number two leader after Lech Walesa.

Here are excerpts from an interview with Gwiazda that appeared in January in the official weekly *Literatura*.

“Here in Gdansk, as well as in other parts of the country, people in the local committees are voicing alarm, especially over wildcat strikes that keep going on. We rush from place to place, we calm people down, we explain. But I tell those who are scared out of their wits that if people go on strike, it’s not because they don’t want to work but usually because they have a good reason....

“Not long ago, we had a dramatic scene. A delegation arrived from the Irena glassworks—a girl in tears and two boys just as upset. They had been on strike for four days already. The director had simply walked out and told them they could strike for three months, because a plant like that could be shut down for good; there was no need for it.

“And in fact, no one had been willing to talk with them. We had to help those people right away. We asked them to show us their demands. We made some corrections. We told them they should divide them into general demands, demands to management, and that certain grievances should be presented to the state’s attorney. ‘And we can do that?’ they asked, all surprised. ‘Sure you can....’”

What problems are you having with the elections in Solidarity?

“We tell people: don’t be ashamed of wanting to take responsibility in the union. We want a strong union, not for our personal use, but to get things done.

“Another thing is for people to get involved so that the need for an electoral platform becomes obvious to them. The way of thinking is changing. You can no longer vote for Malinowski because he’s a nice guy who can empty half a liter of vodka and still stand up, or because he tells good jokes. No, Malinowski has to have a program; he has to know what he wants to do in the union.

“Not one of us talks about immediate results or quick success.... We have a huge amount of hard, boring work ahead of us. We have to get to it and give lots of help to union militants. This work includes a financial analysis of each enterprise, as well as a centralization of data on work safety, living conditions—for even though we’ve set up central specialized work groups, the main information has to come from the workers themselves. In each enterprise, each town, each region, there are lots of things to do that no one will do for us.

“There are needs, including psychic needs, that have been building up for a long time. For instance, there was huge frustration over the fact that work had to be sloppy, that we were producing crap, that work was done in contradiction to the most elementary rules. There was a fury against work that could only produce miserable results. It’s a funny thing that the desire to do a good job is reappearing among young people, just like what used to exist in the generation of the old foremen who would get stomach ulcers and heart attacks because they were ordered to produce any old thing just so it was fast and plenty. Young employees earning good salaries have come to see us to work in the union with just one motive: they couldn’t do good work, the principles and the pace imposed from above forced them to mess up the job.”

On co-management.

“First let’s see management, and afterwards we can talk about co-management. It’s really hard to call the ‘economic disorder we’ve had up to now ‘management.’”

“Consider the fact that until now, the government could treat the director like

a punching ball and if he wanted to keep his job he had to keep quiet and even applaud. At present, the directors who are up against pressure from the workers can become promoters of a real rationalization of economic management.

“But we won’t achieve thorough economic reform without thorough political reform. Only thorough political reform can restore people’s confidence.

“To do something, to participate in economic reform, we must have concrete data. I’ve raised this problem at every meeting with the government. In a word: without concrete information, the new unions cannot make any practical contribution to working out an



Union leader Andrzej Gwiazda

economic reform. That’s my opinion: I don’t see any possibility of correcting something that is unknown.”

On learning democracy.

“One of the things that’s made the biggest hit and people always ask about is the right to recall representatives. It’s written in Solidarity statutes that recall works just like election: that is, if there’s a majority on a motion to recall, any representative can be relieved of his responsibility. At any time. That’s what people consider one of the guarantees of democracy.” —D.J.

INSHORT

Trust me

Not everyone believes Thomas W. Pauken, Reagan's choice to head Action, when he says he's "comfortable" with the autonomous status of the Peace Corps under the good-works agency's umbrella. Among the skeptics are senators Paul Tsongas, Christopher Dodd and Alan Cranston, who were nonetheless unable to prevent their colleagues on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee from voting 8-7 to send Pauken's confirmation on to the full Senate.

As former volunteers, Tsongas and Dodd would be particularly aware of the Peace Corps' sensitivity to any charges of a connection to U.S. intelligence operations overseas—and that's the problem with Pauken. In a pre-vote letter to Sen. Charles Percy, chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee, Cranston warned that "Mr. Pauken has not been candid about the extent of his intelligence work and connection from 1967 to 1973." Despite Pauken's protestations that the military just "happened to assign me" to intelligence in Vietnam, Cranston wrote, enlistment records show that Pauken requested the assignment. And during his 1968-69 stint in Vietnam, Pauken "was actively involved in 'covert' and 'clandestine' intelligence-gathering activities," according to the letter.

At the Senate hearings, former Peace Corps general counsel William Josephson testified that if Pauken wins the Action post, "for the first time, to my knowledge, the United States will have acted, however unintentionally, to lend credence to the false charge that the Peace Corps is an arm of U.S. intelligence." A Jack Anderson column warned that Pauken's confirmation "could jeopardize the safety of American volunteers abroad." And amid the grumblings at Action headquarters, there is a growing sentiment that the ties between Action and the Peace Corps should be severed as soon as possible.

Goodbye, VISTA

Some folks at the Peace Corps may want to split from Action, but VISTA—also under Action's wing—has no choice. "A decision has been made to phase out the VISTA program in fiscal year 1983," said a memorandum distributed this month to employees of VISTA and Action. As of Sept. 30, 1980, 4,800 VISTA volunteers were working in 2,000 communities across the country.

A rough draft of the memo, obtained by the Associated Press, referred to "the evolution of new ways of mobilizing citizens in voluntary services to their fellow Americans, and especially to the poor." The final version deleted the phrase "and especially to the poor." That was the only change.

Watch out, FoIA

The CIA has apparently decided that we already know enough—maybe too much. The *Washington Post* reports that the agency has sent a message to Congress proposing that it be granted a complete exemption from provisions of the Freedom of Information Act. In past years, the CIA has requested only certain specific exemptions to keep its operational and technical files secret—now it wants to slam all the drawers shut.

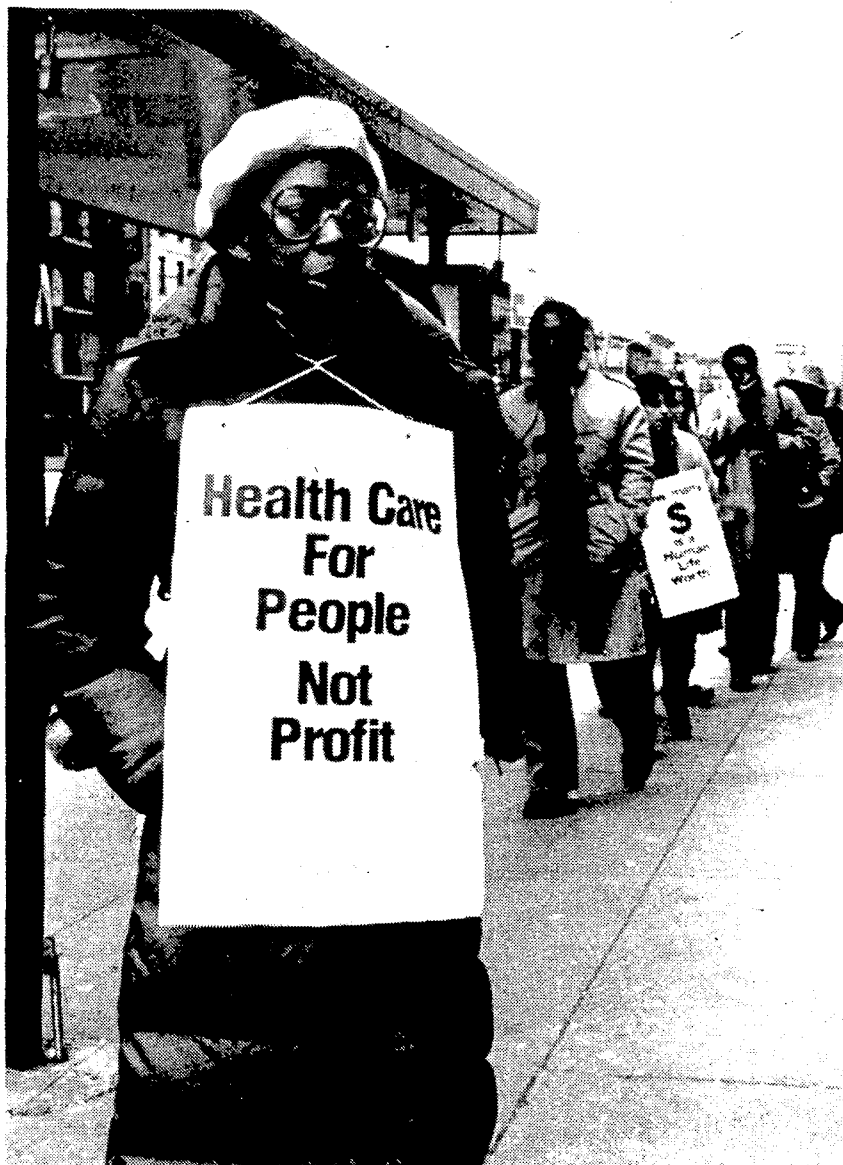
According to the Zodiac News Service, CIA deputy director Max Hugel has taken to arguing that requests under the FoIA are hindering the agency's ability to "perform its vital mission." Hugel also claims that the Act has only rarely produced information of public interest. Victims of CIA dabblings in illegal domestic spying and mind-control and drug-testing experiments might dispute this.

"I really must be going..."

On April 2, 500 residents of Chicago's 8th congressional district conducted the fifth and largest of the "people's hearings" organized by the Illinois Coalition Against Reagan Economics (ICARE). The star attraction at the meeting, held not far from *In These Times*' offices, was Rep. Daniel D. Rostenkowski, the powerful chairman of the House Ways and Means Committee and leader of Chicago's Democratic delegation in Washington.

For nearly two hours, the old-line Daley man withstood—and evaded—demands that he oppose impending cuts in welfare and unemployment compensation, food stamps, daycare, youth programs and energy assistance for the poor. "He refused to commit himself," said ICARE executive director Milt Cohen, "but he got the message strong and clear." No one from the ethnically diverse 8th C.D. could remember the last time Rostenkowski had shown up to hear his constituents' demands.

—Josh Kornbluth



Health-care workers picket Harlem Hospital in support of the CIR's ill-fated strike.

New York City to doctors: let your patients drop dead

NEW YORK—Last month, 2,500 interns and residents in New York City defied a court order and walked off the job for seven days. The doctors, all members of the militant Committee of Interns and Residents (CIR), were asking for guaranteed minimum staffing levels for physicians, nurses and technicians, as well as for an end to shortages of crucial medical equipment. These are guarantees that, to some extent, have been won in the past by doctors' organizations in Chicago, Boston and San Francisco.

That there exists a doctors' union at all underscores the changing face of American medicine. Increasing numbers of physicians (an estimated 40 percent of practicing doctors) now work as salaried employees of city or private hospitals or large private health-care organizations such as Health Insurance Plan (HIP). These are institutions run by managers, not doctors, whose interest is in the bottom line rather than in improving conditions in hospitals with no beds for critically ill patients, no blankets and long lines to get into the emergency room.

"There is nothing new or particularly innovative about what we are seeking," Dr. Jonathan House, the 33-year-old head of the union remarked one night during the strike. "What we want—a rational approach to staffing levels that the city itself believes is necessary—would allow the municipal hospital system to run in the black. Increased reimbursement by third parties—Medicaid, Medicare and private health insurers—would follow from more efficient health care of more people."

But the city bureaucracy didn't address that argument. Mayor Edward Koch and the quasi-public Health and Hospitals Corporation,

which he controls, were clearly scared of setting a precedent by allowing city workers to control workplace conditions. Koch feared that such a settlement with the CIR would have repercussions in his dealings with other, more powerful city unions like those of the police and the firefighters. He was pleased by the lukewarm support the doctors received from many of the city's labor leaders.

The city fined the doctors two days' pay for each day of the strike and threatened to withhold vital medical certification. After a tearful, stormy meeting, the CIR's 70-member strike committee voted to end the walkout after one week without achieving any of the guarantees it had sought from the city. A long strike, doctors reasoned, would have a disastrous impact on the union's limited financial resources.

—Eric Nadler

GM to warn of shutdowns

Under pressure from church groups and labor activists, General Motors recently agreed to publicize for the first time its policy on advance notice of plant closings, and to give at least six months' notice in advance of permanent plant shutdowns.

The decision was announced by the Interfaith Center on Corporate Responsibility, a branch of the New York-based National Council of Churches. It followed a month of negotiations between the nation's number one car maker and three church groups that had threatened to introduce a shareholders' resolution requiring such notification at

the next annual GM shareholders meeting. In return for GM's pledge to give the notice, the groups—which have purchased small amounts of stock in the corporation to enable them to raise such issues at annual meetings—agreed to shelve the resolution indefinitely. While such a resolution would have little chance of passing, it could embarrass the corporation and damage its public image.

Keith Rolland of the Interfaith Center called the agreement—publicized by GM in the April issue of its shareholders' publication, *Public Interest Report*—"a major step forward. It means the company can be kept more accountable to the public." He said the church groups that did the negotiating, as well as locals of the United Auto Workers, will monitor the company's adherence to the new policy.

Company spokesman insisted that there has been no change in GM policy, other than to state it publicly. "We've always tried to give at least six months' notice before a closing," one said. But in fact, workers at GM's New Departure Hyatt Bearing plant in Clark Township, N.J., were given only four months' notice when they learned last month that their plant would be closing down beginning this July unless a buyer is found. And late in 1979, GM laid off without any notice all 3,600 workers at an assembly plant in Southgate, Calif., for an indefinite period. Today 1,800 of them remain unemployed.

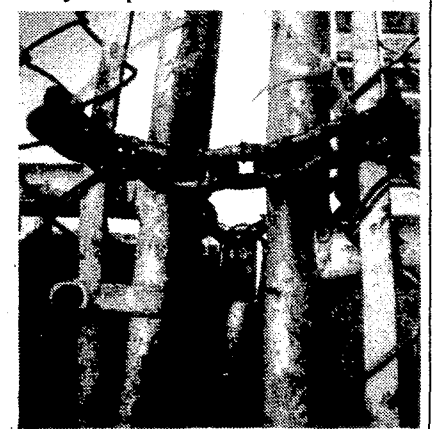
For years, the UAW has tried unsuccessfully to get GM, Ford and Chrysler to include policies of advance notice in union contracts. Short notice in a plant shutdown is doubly damaging to workers because in addition to losing their jobs and often losing credit for work-hours put toward a pension, they have no time to plan ahead financially for a period of unemployment. Nor do they have a chance to retrain for some new profession.

In many European countries, such as Sweden and West Germany, the state requires firms to give anywhere from six months' to a year's notice before moving or closing down a plant. The U.S. has no such laws.

The advance-notice policy, if GM makes good on its promise, will give much-needed added security to auto workers, especially in older plants. With GM and the other U.S. automakers posting record losses in 1980 and the sales outlook this year remaining unpredictable, there is a strong possibility of more plant shutdowns.

—Dave Lindorff

The padlocked front gates of a Chrysler plant.



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