

CAN THE POLES PREVAIL?

By Williamson Evers

Since the outbreak of strikes in Poland last July, the world has held its breath. Another Hungary? Another Czechoslovakia? Would another effort to liberalize a Communist country lead to another invasion by Russia?

The Poles themselves know how delicate the situation is. Jacek Kuron, a leader of the dissident Social Self-Defense Committee, has said, "We must work to increase the area of freedom and to diminish the areas of totalitarianism, without exceeding the limits set by Soviet tanks."

GRASSROOTS REFORM

The Poles are trying a new approach in their effort to liberalize a totalitarian country. In the past, liberals in Communist-ruled states have tried to open up the societies by taking advantage of rivalry within the ruling elite and siding with an out-of-power faction that could use the popularity of a more liberal program as a stick with which to beat the faction in power.

But Kuron and other Polish dissidents seem to have another idea. They want to see autonomous, energetic social groups grow up from the grassroots; these nonparty, non-governmental groups would defend the interests of their members. The dissidents hope that the power of the independent social organizations will steadily increase and thus ever-larger

portions of society can be reclaimed from the total control of the Communist party and the State. It is a vision reminiscent of Tocqueville and Kropotkin but colored by Poland's recent socialist history and the ruthless record of Russia in its borderlands.

Poland has a strong Catholic church and extensive private enterprise in farming (producing 80 percent of the country's food). So it is a country in which this program of de-totalitarianization through social self-organization might succeed, if it can anywhere. Lech Walesa, the leader of

the independent Solidarity union, has pointed out that the Catholic church is recognized by the workers, both believers and nonbelievers alike, as providing a model for "moral justice and honesty" that they all find attractive. Thus, the Poles have some experience and examples to guide them.

Of course, the ruling Polish Communist Party hopes that the wave of group-organizing will die out. The neighboring Communist-ruled states are fearful as well that the Polish example will prove contagious. Radio Prague has been constantly repeating the theme in its broadcasts that "antisocialist forces...operating backstage" are working "to break up the social structure of the Polish People's Republic."

Leonid Zamyatin, head of the international information department in the Soviet Communist Party, also stresses the subversive nature of the structural changes taking place in Poland. He maintains, true to type, that foreign forces "are instigating some groups coming out against People's Poland to form...some structural units, to shape structurally and legally the existing opposition to the present socialist system."

In isolated Albania, the daily newspaper of the ruling ultraleft Communist Party even predicted editorially that "the creation of 'independent, self-managing trade unions' in Poland will serve as a

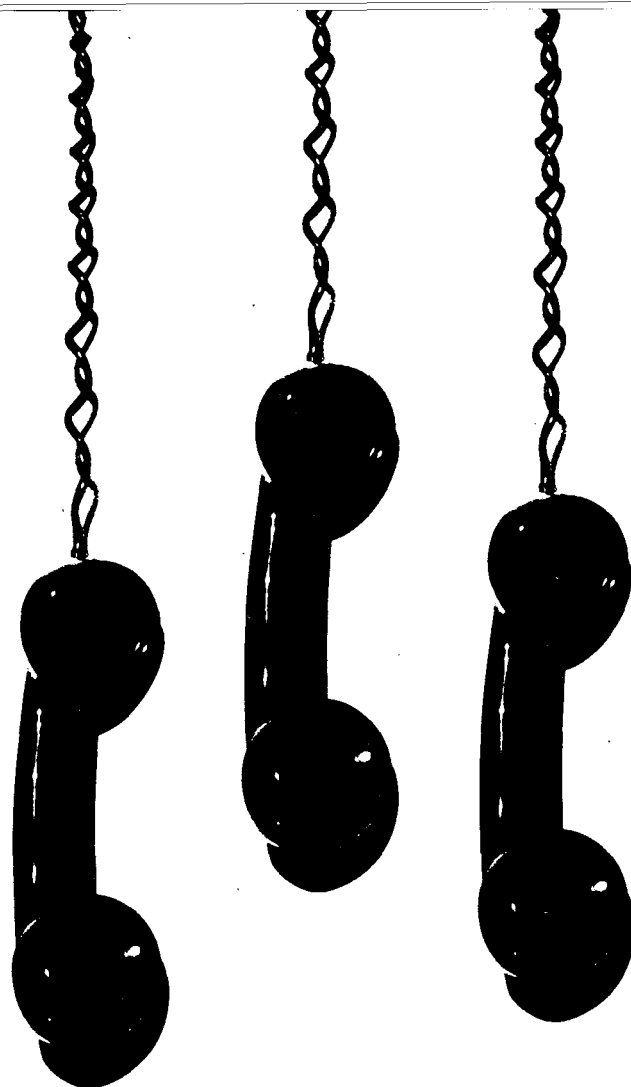
(Continued on p. 51.)



"YOU PEOPLE WANNA HOLD IT DOWN? WE'VE HAD SEVERAL COMPLAINTS FROM THE PARTY GOING ON UPSTAIRS."

Dial "D"

for Deregulation



PICTURE THE SCENE: It's been a long, trying day, and all you need is to have to make a phone call. But there you are, punching away at the Touch-Tones®. Click—click—bzzz—"The number you have reached is not in service at this time. Please check to see..." You break the connection and try again. This time you wait...and wait...and wait; after 90 seconds you realize you've reached limbo and try a third time. Beep—click—bzzz—"This call cannot be placed on your WATS line." Angrily you slam down the receiver. "If only there were another phone company!"

If all this sounds familiar, join the club. Telephone service is deteriorating nationwide, as our monopolistic telephone utilities struggle to keep up with soaring demand and do battle with increasingly unpredictable regulators. But there's light at the end of the tunnel. Portions of the phone

industry—long-distance service and terminal equipment—are being deregulated. And even the local service monopoly is under fire. New technology promises a vast array of new products and services, marrying phones with computers, television, copiers, and other devices.

How far will deregulation go? Can we really have all-out competition in telecommunications? To answer these questions we have to understand the present regulatory system and the forces contending to tear it apart.

THE TELEPHONE MONOPOLY

In the ancient history of telecommunications, Congress set social goals for much of the telephone industry with the Communications Act of 1934. Section 1 of that act was passed "for the purpose of regulating interstate and foreign commerce in communication by wire and radio so as to make available, so far as possible, to all the people of the United

The telephone monopoly is coming apart—and just about everyone stands to benefit.

BY WILLIAM J. BAHR