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N A T O      C O N F I D E N T I A L

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To: Director of Private Office

cc: Director, Economics Directorate  
Secretary, IMS  
Chief, SITCEN

From: ASG for Political Affairs

Subject: Poland: another round over?

Reference: DPA(88)381

Summary

1. The ending of the occupation at the Gdansk shipyards on 10th May may have brought to a halt the current series of strikes and work stoppages in Poland. But the government's international standing and the credibility of its economic reform programme have suffered a serious set-back. Solidarity (and Walesa) have shown they are not a spent force.

Detail

2. The strike committee at the Lenin shipyards in Gdansk called an end to the occupation shortly before 1900 hours last night. No political concessions were made by the government and no agreement was reached between the strike committee and management. The remaining 700 or so strikers left in good order, headed by Walesa. The latter was flanked by the chairman of the strike committee, Szablewski; the Solidarity priest, Fr. Jankowski, and the lay Catholic mediator, Mazowiecki. The police, who had put away their truncheons, made no move to intervene either then, or after the Mass at St. Brygida's which followed. No arrests were reported.

3. The authorities will no doubt have been much relieved that in the end wiser counsels prevailed at Gdansk - for which they probably have to thank Walesa. Their use of force at Nowa Huta (for which the Church - whose lay mediators were at the plant at the time - has received an apology from Barczikowski, a senior Politburo member) was sharply condemned in the West, and greeted without apparent enthusiasm by the Soviets. To have attacked the Lenin shipyards would not only have put the Jaruzelski regime back into the dog-house indefinitely, but could also have led to a popular explosion in Gdansk itself, where feelings always run high, if not in Warsaw and other centres.

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What now?

4. At the moment there are no signs of serious industrial unrest elsewhere. There may be some unfinished business at the Ursus tractor factory in Warsaw where a strike committee formed on 9th May suspended action until 12th May. But with the folding of the Gdansk strike, they may regard further work stoppages as futile. Meanwhile the government seems to be backing away from some of the harsher provisions of the special powers bill due to be debated in the Sejm today (e.g. strike action would still be illegal, but the penalties for attempting to organise strikes or other protest action would not necessarily involve a prison sentence).

5. The latest round of industrial unrest seems to have taken everyone by surprise, including Solidarity, even though economic grievances stemming from the February price rises had been building up among the working population. Solidarity tried, but failed to turn the strikes and work stoppages into a national movement. Nonetheless, as the arrest of nearly all its leading members showed, it remains a force to be reckoned with, now and in the future. Walesa at the outset judged the strike committee's actions as premature in their attempts to bring political concessions from the government. He acknowledged that the mood of the country would not swing behind Solidarity as it had in 1980-81, hinting obscurely that the summer months might be a better time. But perhaps the most interesting aspect of the Gdansk episode was the fierce attachment of the younger workers to Solidarity's ideals and their reluctance to end the occupation at the shipyards. If the government is forced into dialogue with these people at some future stage, they may need to involve older generation Solidarity leaders and the Church as never before.

Conclusions

6. The Polish government may now have won some respite in its battle over the economic reforms. But the programme has been discredited and the police action at Nowa Huta will not be soon forgotten. If the events of the last three weeks have taught them anything, it is that economic reforms without at least some concessions to the political opposition in Poland are going to be impossible to carry out.

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