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*Reg PA*  
*cc M' Cella*  
*M' Levesque*  
*Mlle Serchickoff*

REG. P. A.  
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USSR and Events in Poland

*Poland*  
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Developments in the last few days must increase appreciably the Soviet alarm. So long as the strikes appeared to represent a clash between workers in some key industries and the Party and Government these events were disturbing but containable. But as soon as they had repercussions on the Party itself it was bound to hit a sensitive nerve in Moscow.

In particular the Soviets must regard with dismay : first, reshuffling of the Party and Government in response to a workers' strike; second, the introduction of elements into the Party and Government representing more liberal views; third, the concession of the right to strike and free, secret elections to trade union committees (a point not mentioned in the Tass report of Giereks August 25 speech carried in the Pravda); and fourth, the spreading popular support for striking workers.

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What finally prompted the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968 was the introduction of economic reforms, and a move towards political liberalisation led by the Czech CP itself. The Soviets moved at least in part because they feared the effects of reformed Communism on the position of the CPSU within the USSR. As the Polish situation appears to develop in a similar way, Soviet alarm must be great, if no greater, in view of the size, importance and geographical location of Poland.

In the first Soviet press report not based strictly on official Polish statements, a Tass commentary, not reproduced locally, has accused the West of subversive propaganda on the Polish situation in an attempt to interfere in Polish affairs. But in reply to a query from the Moscow AP Bureau August 26, a Soviet Minister of Foreign Affairs spokesman characterized the Polish events as "purely an internal affair of the State".

Brezhnev returned to Moscow from the Crimea Tuesday, August 26. No list of individuals meeting him was given and TV only showed a still black and white photo. While he may always have planned to come back before the end of August the assumption is that he cut short his holiday because of the Polish situation.

Some writer acquaintances of the Ambassador in Moscow had been informed to the last detail about developments and assumed without question that Brezhnev had returned because of Poland. Further they said that granting of free trade union elections was of enormous significance for the USSR and it would be hard to conceal gains made by workers in Poland from workers in USSR.