

April 9, 1981

Speech of CPSU General Secretary Leonid Iliyich Brezhnev before the CPCz CC Presidium in Prague, (excerpt)

Citation:

"Speech of CPSU General Secretary Leonid Iliyich Brezhnev before the CPCz CC Presidium in Prague, (excerpt)", April 9, 1981, Wilson Center Digital Archive, SUA, A UV KSC, PUV 2/1981, 16 April 1981
<https://wilson-center-digital-archive.dvincitest.com/document/112629>

Summary:

Speech of CPSU General Secretary Brezhnev before the CPCz CC Presidium in Prague, (excerpt) regarding the situation in Poland and criticizing Polish leadership

Original Language:

Czech

Contents:

Translation - English

9 April 1981.

[...]

Now to the matter which is disturbing us all first and foremost—about the situation in Poland.

I will not speak here about the facts of the situation in that country, you know them as well as we do. The situation is—it can be said without exaggeration—critical. This concerns both politics and the economy. However the latter is the result of the former incorrect policies that have also brought the economy to the verge of collapse. The extent to which the actions of the opposition, that is "Solidarity," and the counterrevolutionaries and enemies of socialism who inspire it, are active and well-thought out in terms of organization and propaganda, is the extent to which the actions of the PUWP leadership and Polish government are indecisive and powerless.

You know, comrades, that on March 4, after our congress ended, we met with representatives of the Polish leadership and once again we told them directly that the situation is becoming dangerous. We recommended quite emphatically that they finally take decisive action against counterrevolution.

After that I had several more talks with Comrade Kania by telephone during which I presented the same ideas, I pointed out the new facts arising from my contact with the Polish leadership.

We strongly recommended that the Polish authorities pursue an active and offensive course in internal policy; we directly, boldly, and plainly made clear to everyone the situation in the country, its causes, and ways out of the crisis proposed by the party and government in the interest of the people. At the same time it is especially important to show with actual examples the destructiveness of the actions of those who are sowing anarchy, aggravating strikes and undermining governmental authority.

We strongly recommended that the Polish comrades actively make use of valid legal norms and if necessary introduce new ones (by declaring a state of emergency) in an effort to isolate and suppress the evident counter-revolutionaries, leaders of the anti-socialist campaign who are directed by imperialist forces from abroad.

In our opinion all that does not have to mean bloodshed, which Comrades Kania and Jaruzelski fear. Rather on the contrary, continuing to make concessions to the hostile forces could lead to the shedding of the blood of Communists, honorable patriots of Socialist Poland.

That which has been said of course does not preclude, but rather on the contrary assumes contact and work with the working masses, which are currently in the ranks of "Solidarity." And also with a certain part of the leadership of that organization, since it is far from homogeneous both in the center and also especially in the localities. Our friends must above all endeavor to expand the mass basis of their policies and in support of these unite patriots on whose hearts lies the fate of Poland.

We are having talks with the Polish leadership roughly along these lines. I have been telling them that there is still a chance to act decisively against the forces of counterrevolution by gathering and mobilizing the healthy forces in the party and by making use of instruments of state power such as the public security forces and the army.

Comrades Kania and Jaruzelski have agreed in words that it is no longer possible to retreat, but in reality they continue to retreat and are not taking decisive measures

against the enemies of socialism. Take for example developments after the provocation in Bydgoszcz,⁵⁹ which was provoked by Solidarity. Impressions are rather gloomy. Our friends succeeded in averting a general strike. But at what price? At the price of further capitulation. Kania himself now recognizes that they made great mistakes and he blames [Deputy Prime Minister Mieczyslaw] Rakowski but the latter is losing control.

It is difficult to say now how events will develop further. Given the present tactics of the PUWP leadership it is hardly possible to expect that the pressure of the anti-socialist forces will diminish. Of course, that disturbs us all, all members of our community. The Polish comrades are preparing to undertake something at the upcoming session of the Sejm. We'll see what comes of that.

In my opinion our common obligation is to help the Polish Communists to take a stand against counterrevolution. They still have opportunities to do that if the leadership would only demonstrate sufficient political will.

As far as I know, comrades, we assess events in the same way and therefore we can influence the Polish comrades and so work in the same direction. It is not out of the question that developments will require a further meeting of the leaders of the fraternal countries on the Polish question. We will not decide on that now.

The crisis in Poland will of course have negative long-term consequences. We must all learn appropriate lessons from it.

For example such a fundamental question as this: how did it happen that within a few months a country was—in a word—thrown into chaos, with the economy on the verge of collapse and anarchy reigning? Whenever this question is addressed, what is usually mentioned is the continuation of private farming in the countryside, the activities of dissidents, the influence of the church, the diversions of Western intelligence agencies. That's without argument. But to be sure the forces hostile towards socialism were [present] in Poland even earlier. What has enabled them to emerge? It is obviously the erosion of relations between the party and the working class.

All socio-economic policies of the former leadership were basically calculated to achieve a leap forward with the aid of Western loans. Indeed they succeeded in some respects in modernizing industry. But what sense is there if the new factories are fully dependent on raw products, materials and assembled products which must then be obtained with hard currency?

Furthermore whole plants for prestigious production for example of color television sets, were bought from the West.

And when it was necessary to repay for the loans, they did not find any other way than to place this burden primarily on the working class. Living conditions of workers have worsened in recent years. The party began to lose its main societal support. And that enabled the enemies of socialism to engage in a struggle for power.

Capitalists will not voluntarily assist in the building of socialism—such is the truth that you all must be clearly aware of. If they provide us with loans, if they trade with us, then the best case is that they are applying market principles, and a worse case that they are pursuing purely political objectives.

When Polish representatives explain why it is difficult for them to take the offensive against counter-revolution, they openly say—we're dependent on the West.

That is the greatest lesson for socialist countries. All of them ought to once again assess the extent of their indebtedness abroad and do everything to prevent it from increasing and approaching a dangerous limit.

[...]