

August 22, 1981

Notes from Brezhnev's Meeting with Stanislaw Kania and Wojciech Jaruzelski, 14 August 1981

Citation:

"Notes from Brezhnev's Meeting with Stanislaw Kania and Wojciech Jaruzelski, 14 August 1981", August 22, 1981, Wilson Center Digital Archive, SAPMDB, ZPA, J IV 2/202-550, first published in CWIHP Special Working Paper 1.
<https://wilson-center-digital-archive.dvincitest.com/document/112763>

Summary:

In this meeting, Brezhnev expresses anxiety about Poland's path, especially since it has deteriorated since Congress when it was expected to improve. Kania says that the political crisis can be overcome and that they are seizing the initiative. Brezhnev insists that they will soon face off with the enemy, and there is still the opportunity to mobilize and rebuff the counterrevolution. Brezhnev concludes that large scale political action is the most feasible way to turn Poland to socialism.

Original Language:

German

Contents:

Translation - English

On 14 August 1981 a meeting took place in the Crimea between the CPSU CC General Secretary and Chairman of the Presidium of the USSR Supreme Soviet, Cde. L. I. Brezhnev, and the PZPR CC First Secretary, S. Kania, and the PZPR CC Politburo member and Chairman of the PPR Council of Ministers, W. Jaruzelski. Also taking part in the discussion were Cdes. A. A. Gromyko, K. U. Chernenko, and K. V. Rusakov.

The CPSU CC attached great significance to this meeting with the Polish leaders.

At the outset of the discussion, Cde. L. I. Brezhnev expressed great anxiety about where Poland is heading. You hoped, he said to Cdes. S. Kania and W. Jaruzelski, that events would begin to turn around in some definite way after the Congress. But in actuality the situation has continued to deteriorate, and the counterrevolution is stepping up its onslaught.

All the steps taken by the CPSU and the Soviet Union throughout the Polish crisis were dictated exclusively by concern about the interests of socialist Poland. Cde. L. I. Brezhnev proposed in complete candor, as befits Communists, to speak about Polish affairs.

Cdes. Kania and Jaruzelski described the situation in the country and the party in substantial detail. They acknowledged that there is ample basis for the alarm that the leaders of the CPSU and other fraternal parties have expressed about the fate of socialism in Poland.

The Polish comrades emphasized the positive influence of the Extraordinary 9th Congress of the PZPR, after which, in their view, "the party can act more decisively." The PZPR leaders described the new composition of the Central Committee as "manageable." "A process of consolidation is currently under way in the PZPR. . . . An example of this can be seen in the 2nd plenum of the party's Central Committee, where the speeches were notable for their high quality, principled stances, and feeling of certainty," noted Cde. S. Kania.

Referring to the PZPR's struggle to find a way out of the crisis, Cde. S. Kania declared in particular: "Today no one will say that the party does not see any way to overcome the crisis. The PZPR has a program, and today it is seizing the initiative."

Cdes. S. Kania and W. Jaruzelski strove to show that the line they have chosen is in complete accord with the specifics of the Polish situation and is giving a basis for speaking about initial successes on the road to political stabilization. As evidence that the situation is beginning to turn around, they cited the work of the 2nd Plenum of the PZPR Central Committee, the agreements with Solidarity at the LOT airline, the prevention of street disturbances in Warsaw, and other such things.

The Polish leaders affirmed that every direct attack against the people's regime will be dealt a formidable rebuff. However, their statements obviously do not imply that they will immediately pursue a decisive, no-holds-barred confrontation with the political adversary and with the counterrevolution. Cde. S. Kania said: "We constantly intend to use the most decisive measures against the counterrevolution. But this will be possible only when popular support is guaranteed."

Cde. S. Kania spoke with satisfaction about the situation in the state security organs and the army, which "despite certain difficulties are both in very good shape." Referring to Solidarity, Cde. Kania declared that "society and the working class are beginning to move away from Solidarity, and its leaders do not want [the union] to be perceived as a destructive force."

Solidarity called on [its members] not to permit strikes for two months and to agree to work on eight free Saturdays. It is known, however, that Solidarity intends to take the output produced on these Saturdays and allocate it through its own channels.

After speaking about the difficult situation in the mass media, Cdes. S. Kania and W. Jaruzelski discussed a number of organizational measures and personnel changes intended to improve the situation in the press. It is known that "Zolnierz Wolnosci" is the only newspaper up to now that has adhered to a staunch position. Even "Trybuna Ludu" has been tolerant of ideological wavering.

Cdes. S. Kania and W. Jaruzelski gave particular emphasis to Poland's difficult economic situation. In their view, this is precisely the issue that accounts for the prolonged nature of the political crisis.

They acknowledged that difficulties in the economy are caused above all by [Poland's] indebtedness to the West and by the destructive activity of extremists from Solidarity. "Poland's foreign debt," said S. Kania, "has grown astronomically. . . . They don't give us loans as a gift. Credits are extended to us at very high interest rates of up to 20 percent."

During the discussion, Cde. L. I. Brezhnev cited a broad array of facts and comprehensively highlighted the rapidly growing danger posed by the situation in Poland. He focused the attention of the Polish leaders on the threat to the Polish people's socialist gains. Recent meetings with the leaders of a number of fraternal parties in the Crimea confirmed that all of us are alarmed about where Poland is heading. The ranks of the party are depleted. Its leading role has been greatly enervated. Solidarity is in control at a majority of large enterprises and is putting forth outrageous political demands. Anti-socialist forces who are preparing to storm the positions of the PZPR are showing increased signs of aggressiveness.

The economy is being strangled under the burden of debts. Instead of a well-tuned rhythm of production, one finds work stoppages, protest meetings, and strikes. As a result of all of this, the living standard of workers is on the decline. They are dragging the economy to the bottom, labor discipline is collapsing, no clear economic program is at hand, and the economic life of the country is being disrupted by Solidarity.

In the ideological sphere the enemies of socialism are acting with impunity and are casting aspersions on the PZPR, the national state, and socialism.

On the basis of information expressed by the Polish leaders during the discussion, Cde. L. I. Brezhnev dwelt at length, in an acute and precise manner, on the political meaning of recent events in Poland. He especially emphasized that the danger threatening the PZPR is a right-wing danger. Reliable Communists and Marxist-Leninists, who are currently out of office, are an important reserve of the party and must be defended. One's view of this question, emphasized Cde. L. I. Brezhnev, in contemporary circumstances is a criterion of party spirit.

Overall, he said, no matter how one evaluates the results of the 9th Congress, one thing is clear: The Congress in and of itself did not bring radical changes in the course of events. The adversary retained the initiative and actually increased the force of its attack, whereas the party and the people's regime continue to retreat.

It is impossible to stop the adversary without a struggle. There have been enough concessions; there is nowhere left to retreat. Simultaneously you must declare as loudly as possible to the whole nation that the main reason for the current hardships in Poland is the criminal activity of the bosses of Solidarity. Why do you not just flatly say that they are precisely the ones who bear responsibility for the current onerous

situation in productive output?

The Polish comrades, said Cde. L. I. Brezhnev, are not ready for a confrontation. By speaking about it as nothing other than "bloodshed," they end up wanting to avoid it all costs. We, though, are speaking about a political confrontation, which is already under way. It is being waged by the adversary. As far as a bloody confrontation is concerned, one might indeed occur if you don't pursue the political confrontation to its logical end and restore the leading role of the PZPR.

Events are already spilling out onto the streets. It could very well happen that in such circumstances blood will flow no matter what. And perhaps there will be even greater bloodshed than there would be if you take preventive measures and forceful administrative measures. There has never been a case when revolution triumphed over counterrevolution without a battle and without the use of force.

No one is opposed to acting reasonably. But the anti-socialist forces are not at all inclined to respond in a similar manner. All evidence suggests that they are launching a new frontal attack against the party and socialism. That is why any hope of defending socialism by means of persuasion, without resorting to other means at your disposal, is an illusion. Sooner or later, the Communists will have to square off directly against the enemy.

However, this had better not occur too late: The class enemy is now trying to penetrate the army and state security organs and to deprive you of all your support. Avoiding a confrontation now would mean playing into the hands of your enemies and giving them the opportunity to strengthen their positions even further. Now, in the wake of the Congress, a more or less propitious moment has arisen for you, but it can't last long.

The insidious schemes of the anti-socialist forces have emerged with sufficient clarity. Through strikes or threats of strikes, these forces are keeping the party and government in constant tension, denying any opportunity to stabilize the situation. At the same time, they are giving their main emphasis to the demand for worker self-management, which is of an anarcho-syndicalist nature, going so far as "group responsibility" for the enterprise and the means of production.

A concession on this issue would mean the destruction of the economic foundation of socialism. We are talking here about "self-management," which might take the form of a variety of current paths of capitalist development. And in parallel the political system is being undermined. They are demanding that elections to the Sejm and the People's Councils be moved up and are threatening to create a so-called party of labor.

Now, as far as we understand, said Cde. L. I. Brezhnev, there is still an opportunity to mobilize all the supporters of socialism and to rebuff the counterrevolution. But to do this you will need to end your faintheartedness. The Polish comrades themselves have emphasized, on numerous occasions, that an extraordinary situation has emerged. Doesn't it follow that measures to deal with the situation must be of the same caliber — that is, "extraordinary"?

Cde. L. I. Brezhnev emphasized that when the Polish friends resort to decisive actions, they have every reason to count on sufficiently broad support from the population, which is tired of anarchy and chaos and is afraid that Solidarity might plunge the country into a national catastrophe.

During the discussion, other thoughts were raised about how to gain control of the situation in the country, including the need to work actively with the branch trade

unions, to exert influence on public opinion about the necessity of economic measures, to carry out appropriate work to counter the Solidarity congress, etc.

Referring to the economic situation, Cde. L. I. Brezhnev expressed the conviction that the crisis in Poland is above all of a political nature, and that it is precisely in the political sphere and in the struggle against the enemies of socialism that the key to stabilization of the economic situation lies. You know, he said, how to reestablish your positions in political life, how to bring the mass media back under your control, and how to reaffirm the authority of the regime. Gradual movement toward improving other spheres of Soviet-Polish relations, emphasized Cde. L. I. Brezhnev, will depend on the further course of events in the PPR. Will Poland be socialist, will relations be internationalist, will it move along a different path, will the nature of relations become something different along state, political, and economic lines? It is important that all of this be well understood not only by political officials, but also by the broad Polish public. Naturally, we assume that the Polish Communists will do everything possible to prevent the class enemy from shifting the country over to the capitalist camp.

With regard to the consideration of possible measures during the upcoming period, Cde. L. I. Brezhnev said: "What precisely is done in the near future must of course be decided by the Polish leadership itself." But we are convinced: The time has come to begin fighting as boldly as possible. To this end, you must mobilize the entire party, rallying it around a Marxist-Leninist platform. Among the concrete steps cited by Cde. L. I. Brezhnev were stern measures against the ringleaders of street demonstrations and disorders and a campaign aimed at making every Pole aware that the country has been driven to chaos, ruin, and hunger not because of the PZPR's mistakes, but because of the subversive work of Solidarity and the leaders of the counterrevolution, which has stemmed mainly from strikes. Obviously, you must categorically reject the demand for a transfer of enterprises to the property of individual collectives; nor must you in any way permit the creation of new parties or go along with early elections for the Sejm. You must finish the trial of Moczulski and sentence him for his hostile activity.

This is the minimum course of action dictated by current conditions. I have spoken to you numerous times about additional measures on a wider plane. All of these, without doubt, are just as necessary now as when I spoke about them earlier.

Cde. L. I. Brezhnev drew the attention of the Polish leaders especially to the fact that imperialist reaction, in cahoots with Beijing, is seeking to turn the PPR into a source of additional tension in the international situation. To this end, they are voicing speculation about the threat of Soviet intervention and are presenting themselves as champions of Polish independence. One must decisively struggle against this line and explain to the Polish nation that the real danger to its national existence comes from imperialism — our common enemy. In particular, it is essential that everyone in Poland understand that credits lent by Western banks and governments are in no way a gift, but a commercial transaction, for which enormous rates of interest must be paid. For Poland this amounts to servitude.

The discussion touched upon bilateral economic relations between the USSR and the PPR. Referring to the grave economic situation in Poland, Cde. L. I. Brezhnev reported to the Polish comrades that the CPSU CC and the USSR Government approved a decision to defer Poland's repayment of debts for earlier loans until the next five-year plan, to supply the PPR with additional raw materials for light industry as well as certain consumer goods, and to facilitate the fuller exploitation of Poland's industrial potential.

At the same time, Cde. L. I. Brezhnev reminded them that the USSR and other fraternal countries are doing a great deal to help People's Poland get out of its current plight. For our part, we have provided economic aid to Poland of nearly 4 billion

dollars in just the last few months. Unfortunately, however, the economic situation in the PPR continues to deteriorate. This has taken its toll on the Polish side's fulfillment of its obligations to the Soviet Union and other socialist countries, which has had a detrimental effect on our economic working groups who are operating specially in cooperation with the PPR.

During the discussion, Cde. L. I. Brezhnev said with particularly forceful emphasis: All of us now have no greater hope than that socialist Poland will soon eliminate the threat of counterrevolution, recover from its devastating illness, and return to normal life. I want to hope, declared L. I. Brezhnev, that Comrades Kania and Jaruzelski will do everything necessary to achieve these goals. He expressed the desire that the Polish comrades would match their words with deeds. As far as the Soviet Union is concerned, the PZPR leaders and Communists will always be given firm support. We will always remain allies and brothers in the future.

Comrades S. Kania and W. Jaruzelski thanked the CPSU CC General Secretary for his advice, his thorough analysis of the situation, and his fraternal help. The Polish leaders expressed the view that their course "is a line of seeking agreement, but also a line of struggle." "We will do everything necessary," they declared, "to preserve socialism in Poland."

Among the concrete issues raised by the Polish leaders was a request for us to send to Poland a group of officials from USSR Gosplan headed by Cde. Baibakov. Agreement was reached on this matter. The Polish leaders raised the idea of convening a special session of CMEA to consider measures of joint assistance to Poland. They were told that this matter should be referred to CMEA.

The CPSU CC Politburo completely endorsed the results of Cde. L. I. Brezhnev's discussion with Cdes. S. Kania and W. Jaruzelski. In accordance with the approach to the Polish crisis that has been coordinated with the other fraternal parties, the CPSU regards this new, large-scale political action as a contribution to our common efforts aimed at turning around the situation in Poland to the benefit of socialism.