ECONOMIC PROBLEMS
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ECONOMIC PROBLEMS OF POLAND

There is little question that in recent years Polish economic problems have reached crisis dimensions. The debt to the West is projected at 24 billion dollars for 1980. Despite constant injections of Western capital, there appears no relief in the near future. In part, this is because there is no simple solution. Factors contributing to Poland's current, serious economic problems present such a tangled web that extrication of individual factors for purposes of analysis is difficult. Aside from the fact that it is a planned economy following Soviet developmental lines, there are external factors contributing to the condition of the economy. This paper will examine these factors and then proceed with a brief discussion of CMEA integration as a policy alternative to the Poles in solving their problems.

Development of an economy along Soviet lines carries several implications. First of all, a command economy is necessarily highly centralized. Thus, there is minimal input from lower levels of the system on such important subjects such as consumer demands, efficiency measures or worker satisfaction. Not only does this inhibit innovation,
(at the expense of quality and efficiency), it also isolates the leadership from the rank and file (a class with a sense of their own power in Poland). A second feature of a planned economy contributing to dissatisfaction of the people with the government is the emphasis on industrial development at the expense of the agricultural and consumer sectors. Aside from implications for the economy, these factors also complicate the reform process in that they leave the leadership vulnerable to criticism and weaken the cooperative attitude of the people.

Quantitative measurement as an evaluative standard of production also has implications for economic development and reform in Poland. The logical extension of quantitative measurement of output is that growth is a factor of increased input. Extensive growth policy weakens efficiency.

Finally, command economy pricing systems do not reflect costs of production and in the Polish economy, artificially maintaining low prices not only burdens the government, it also postpones the day of reckoning, thus sharpening the effect of price increases when they are finally instituted. From this brief outline of some of the implications of a command economy the paper will proceed to a more historical examination of the factors contributing to Polish economic problems.

Earliest economic reform was attempted in 1966, at the
time of the rise to power of Wadyslaw Gomulka. Because of its liberal scope, it generated resentment both from outside and within the country and never had a chance for extensive implementation. By 1959, reactionary forces were successful in mitigating reform and measures like the introduction of industrial associations, designed to retain greater input control at the enterprise level were overcome by recentralization of control. Enterprise performance was still measured quantitatively and by 1958 proposed price reforms were shelved altogether.

Agriculture suffered, too. Lack of agricultural reform left 85% of farm land in private hands and alienated a significant percentage of the population. Particularly poor agricultural output in 1962 illustrated the need for renewed discussion of economic reform.

In 1961-1965 another program was introduced with fewer aspirations of radical structural change but more potential for long term economic improvement. Again, conservative elements in the Party weakened the revisionist program to the point that it lost effectiveness. Student riots in 1968 followed by two consecutive poor harvests contributed to an atmosphere of political dissatisfaction. In response, Gomulka mildly purged his administration of extreme elements. The resulting power struggle allowed the entrance of more moderate and expert men who, in time, improved the atmosphere for further reform attempts.
In November of 1968, at the Fifth Party Congress, the decision to adopt intensive methods of economic growth in favor of traditional methods was announced. Too late for the five year plan at the time, the decision was to be implemented in 1971. Unfortunately for Gomułka, the consumer sector had too long served as a buffer for the rest of the economy. Poor harvests contributed to a scarcity of basic foodstuffs like meat. The Polish public, however, perceived the shortages as a result of large export quantities and resented them. Government attempts to deal with these scarcities through price rationing were ill planned. Instituting these prices ten days before Christmas started rioting in the northern cities of Gdynia and Gdańsk which spread and included unrest in most urban centers. Worsening the effect, the official response was heavy handed and included injury and death to rioters. The removal of Gomułka and several Politburo members in 1970 was seen as a necessary act of faith to maintain some measure of Party credibility for the workers.

Clearly the new leadership, headed by Edward Gierek, was placed in a difficult position for instituting economic reform. Political pressures could hardly be less favorable. Furthermore, the necessary reforms actually demanded simultaneous, conflicting measures. The intensive growth pattern included a policy of realistic pricing based on production costs in order to relieve inflationary pressures.
of government subsidization. However, because of the clumsy handling of previous price increases, the sharp increases were unacceptable. Furthermore, maintenance of low prices had been an important mark of accomplishment of past regimes and the new regime was depending on consumer incentives to contribute to worker productivity. Thus, political and economic reasons precluded price increases.

An intensive growth pattern also demands an increase in capital investment and in Poland, considerable structural reform of the economy was anticipated. However, the large amounts of required capital accumulation were not compatible with a policy of increased wages and consumption. There are further problems with the investment policy pursued, but at this point it is enough to observe that an external source of capital was necessary for the success of the New Economic Strategy for Growth.

Large amounts of capital were available only in the West. The strategy was to import both foreign capital and foreign technology. This technology, in the forms of machines, equipment, licenses and also industrial cooperation agreements was to be used to modernize the economy. The increased imports were also expected to satisfy rising consumer demands. Pressures on the Balance of Trade were expected in the first years until the technology could be implemented to the extent that Poland was producing manufactured goods.
for export. Initially, Western debts were to be paid with increased exports of raw materials. Unfortunately this scenario does not even approximate what really happened.

The reasons for the failings of the New Growth Strategy are many and complex. The plan failed because of its own weaknesses and overambitiousness. Attempts to simultaneously satisfy consumption and investment proved inflationary despite Western investment. Investment was concentrated in heavy industry which is relatively high in capital intensity and has longer lead times vis-à-vis light industry, which could have at least taken up some of the domestic consumption burdens if not met some of the export demands. Furthermore, not only did exports not develop according to plan, imports expanded beyond plan. In fact, even though percentage increases in imports from the West have been declining since 1972, imports still exceeded exports as late as 1977. This is in part due to the excessive growth of disposable income (also beyond plan). For example, real wages exceeded planned every year from 1971 to 1977. Aggregate supply was increasing at a slower rate than planned due to slip ups in production coordination, further aggravating the situation.

Intensifying the problem created by inflated imports are the discrepancies in planned and actual exports. Though actual rates of growth of exports exceeded planned rates at current prices every year from 1971 to 1975, at constant prices the actual rate was higher only in 1972. Thus, ex-
port shipments peaked early in the plan but failed to expand sufficiently after that.

Implications of these factors on the deficit were disastrous. As already reported, a deficit early in the program was expected. In 1972, possibly due to the large amount of exports, the deficit was smaller than anticipated. However, in 1973, it grew twice as fast as planned. Furthermore, the expected decline in deficit growth in 1975 was not realized. This evidence supports data on the apparent inability of the Polish economy to alter its position as a major exporter of raw materials to that of a manufactured goods supplier. Even raw material exportation could not be sufficiently maintained to cover the disappointing exports of manufactured goods. For example, in 1975, the increase in unit price of coal was 64.3%, the highest for the period 1970-1975. In 1975, the quantity exported decreased by 4.01, the lowest amount for the same period. Thus, even in the year of their greatest increase of production of coal, the Poles could not take advantage of higher prices because of their inferior position in the world market. This particular instance provides a good example of how external and internal factors combined to the detriment of the economy. An additional example is provided by the agricultural sector of the economy.

Lack of attention devoted to agriculture in Poland made
The economy more vulnerable to Western market price fluctuations. Lack of a reform policy in agriculture has allowed it to remain a "temporarily private sector" in a command economy. This places it in an ambiguous position: capitalist development would never be encouraged yet socialist program incentives were slow to arrive (in the form of health insurance, etc.). Because of these structural weaknesses, agriculture in Poland today suffers chronic shortages amounting to about 25% of domestic consumption. Even government officials now admit that the poor harvests are due to poor policy as well as adverse weather. When these harvests fall short of needs, the government has to increase imports of grain and fodder, draining hard currency that could conceivably be used for industrial modernization. This results in Poland's further dependence on world market supplies.

Unfortunately for the Poles, the Soviets have not acted to cushion them from world market prices in this area as the Soviets also suffered from poor harvests. For example, with Poland still reeling from poor harvests in 1973 and 1974, the Soviet Union terminated wheat shipments to Poland after their own disastrous harvest in 1975. Even when resumed, imports from the Soviet Union accounted for only one seventh of total grain imports for Poland.

Besides suffering from these problems that seem particular to Soviet-style economies, Poland also had to contend
with the problem facing all economies in the seventies: the global increases in oil prices. Statistics on Polish oil import in the seventies suggest that demand is highly inflexible except in the very short run. For instance, though in 1974 crude oil import decreased by 5% when prices increased by 25.2%, the following year witnessed an import increase of 25.7% when prices increased by 106.9%! And furthermore, the geographical structure of trade did not significantly alter from the relatively expensive non-socialist markets to the temporarily and artificially lower prices of the COMEA market. In fact, crude oil import from socialist markets declined 25% from 1972 to 1976. This was most probably not a policy of Polish economic decision makers but rather an option pursued by the Soviet Union. The Soviet Union has been known to take advantage of sharp increases in world prices. In 1975 the Soviet Union obtained cooperation in terminating the five year fixed price a year ahead of schedule (because of the sharp world price increases in 1973-1974). To replace the traditional five year base period, they substituted a three year base period in order to gain their terms of trade advantage and to reduce their rather substantial subsidization of exports to Eastern Europe. Note that the sharpest increase in crude oil prices did occur in 1975. Hence, direct effects of the oil price increase on the Polish economy were significant. Not only did it
cut her export base, it increased import quantities and forced the hand of the Soviet Union regarding subsidization of East Bloc countries.

Before continuing with the indirect effects of the oil crisis on the Polish economy, the Soviet role in the economic problems of Poland must be emphasized. Indeed, it has been argued that the "severest shocks" to Poland's economy came from the Soviet Union. This is not surprising given the fact that the Soviet Union is Poland's largest trading partner. Furthermore, the Soviets themselves were subject to a great deal of pressure from world markets and perhaps the decision to cut Eastern Europe somewhat loose from dependence on the USSR was inevitable. This latter effect can be viewed as an indirect implication of world market prices on the Polish economy. There exist other indirect implications.

As already pointed out, the oil situation in the early seventies created havoc in many economies by feeding inflation and recession. It also created a rather unreceptive environment for Polish exports. The low quality goods characteristic of Eastern Europe do not fair well in a healthy world economy. When money tightens, the situation worsens. There is evidence of a correlation between world imports and Polish exports (.9258). Average rates of growth of world imports for the period 1974-1976 declined by 63.4\% from the period 1971-1974. This suggests that the weak
condition of Polish exports was due in part to waning global interest in imports. The correlation between Polish exports to advanced countries and imports of industrial countries is even slightly higher (0.9455). This manifested itself in a sharp drop in the rate of growth of Polish exports to advanced countries for the years 1974-1976; very nearly 30 points). Once again it becomes clear that the strategy failed to develop an export selection of sufficient interest for advanced countries, thus, the deficit could not be controlled.

Clearly, both external and internal factors have contributed to the failure of the New Strategy. To determine which is more significant is rather pointless. What is significant is that the Party in Poland recognizes that "serious native shortcomings" and inefficiency have contributed to Poland's current negative trade growth rate. In the opening speech of the Party Congress meeting in Warsaw on February 11, 1980, Gierek somberly discussed the current economic stagnation of country, attributing it to both rising world costs of fuel and raw materials but also inefficiency in planning, management and work performance. At present, the hard currency indebtedness of Poland to the West has reached 18 billion dollars and is expected to rise another 30% in 1980. Gierek's candor can be viewed as an indicator of the perceived severity of the problem. For instance, he warned that
productivity has to increase and when pointing out the progress that has been made in living standards, real wages, health, education and industry, he also warned that the government will have to deal with the sensitive problem of artificially maintaining low cost food. Given the history of rioting in Poland against food price increase (1956, 1970, and 1976), this measure could be viewed as the advent of a new pragmatism in dealing with the economy. Past attempts to deal with the economic problems have been relatively unsuccessful partly due to complications from the lack of political confidence in the regime.

It seems that the Gierek regime is as prone to isolation from the people as the Gomulka regime was. As already pointed out, the food price riots of 1976 demonstrated the shallowness of support for the regime though the problems might have been between Gierek and middle level management and not Gierek and the workers. The necessity of the price increase was obvious; wages increased 40% since Gierek's rise to power whereas basic foodstuff prices had remained at their pre-December, 1970 level. Reportedly, the people did understand this necessity. Apparently, attempts were made to discuss these price hikes with the people before implementation but misunderstandings arose as to the extent the workers would be consulted. Problems arose from poor planning in terms of instituting the increases all at once instead of
gradually. Ironically, this was probably due to reluctance on the part of the government to institute the increases. Whether the leaders created their own problems by waiting or whether they were inevitable given the political climate of the country is debatable.

Aside from the problem of implementing the price hikes in one sweep, the prices were resented because they were twice as large as had been expected. Despite these problems, the increases were expected to be tolerated in part because the people had been expecting them for a year. Instead, rioting once again forced a withdrawal of price increases and the government again suffered political defeat. It is important to note that the Polish leadership has to contend with a public that has successfully exercised power over the regime several times in the last 25 years. This will make it even more difficult for the leadership to implement possibly unpopular reforms of the economy in the future. These demands for loosening the tight controls over individual or group input in the political and economic systems will likely come into conflict with the tendency of the regime to move in more conservative, power centralizing directions in dealing with the economy. Conflict is especially likely to take place given the institutional outlets that exist for political expression. For example, the Catholic Church is strong in Poland. Weakening of the government for any
reason can only serve to strengthen the Church further. As representative of the Faith of 95% of the population it has considerable leverage vis-à-vis any unpopular regime. Furthermore, the Faith of the Poles is closely associated to their feelings of nationalism. Thus, the Church assumes a political role regardless of the political climate of the system. Selection of a Polish Pope can only serve to reinforce both roles of the Church in Poland. Traditionally, the Church has not tied itself too closely with specific intellectual dissent movements but any "ground breaking" done by the Church is sure to benefit other groups.

Aside from political ground lost in attempts to reform the economy, some researchers attribute real economic loss resulting from political dissatisfaction of the workers. Terry and Korbonski suggest that confidence was not fully recovered by the regime even after withdrawal of the price increases in 1976. Instead, a "sullen apathy" infected much of the populace and continues to affect worker productivity due to poor attitudes and also an increasing rate of alcohol consumption. This might appear conjecture but it is interesting to note that in Gierek's February 11th speech, he also referred to alcoholism as a cause of absenteeism and other general labor discipline problems that cost considerable financial losses annually. For a Party leader to so candidly discuss a social problem that a communist system has
theoretically eradicated, indicates the scope of the problem.

Clearly there are political and domestic implications stemming from the price hike pattern in the Soviet Union. Adjustments are made on a large scale and there exists a time lag between world price inflation and domestic price increases. From one perspective, the time lag can be seen as politically stabilizing (at the cost of efficiency). However, even this single positive implication of the price adjustment policy is beginning to diminish.

From this examination, it is apparent that the Polish leadership has failed to deal with its economic problems, which are increasing in severity. Poland currently maintains the largest Western debt of all the East Bloc countries, the servicing of which costs Poland approximately half her yearly foreign exchange earnings. Though some economic progress has been achieved (in living standards, for example), the problems that the Poles were trying to solve through incurring the debt, still exist. These include the problems of integrating new technology into the economy, increasing worker productivity and supplying domestic consumption. Unfortunately, trends for the future look equally grim for the Poles. For instance, in spite of consecutive decreases in growth rate of imports from the West, they were still exceeding exports by 65% in 1977. And whereas other countries like Hungary are attempting to improve their hard currency
deficit through correcting the problems of a command economy. Poland has remained conservative in her approach to reform. Though Glierek had indicated that 1980 would signal the end of borrowing and that investment would be even more severely curtailed than it already has been, recent reports from Poland contradict this. In April of 1980 it was revealed that Poland had "opened its books" to the Western creditors. One interpretation of this unusual move on the part of a Communist state is that Poland is seeking new credits in order to obtain more technology for further modernization. In other words, if the same problems exist, apply more of the same solutions. There seems to be no reluctance on the part of the West to continue advancing loans to Poland either.

Out of some sense of "euphoria" attached to lending to Communists or out of a real sense of interdependence stemming from the size of the debt, the French and the West Germans have renewed their capital commitment to the Poles. This situation places the Soviets in an interesting position regarding the Poles.

First of all, the Soviet incursion into Afghanistan has been interpreted by some as interfering with the granting of loans sought by the Poles early in 1980. Thus, Soviet political activities have interfered with Polish economic activities. Soviet position is also ambivalent. As already demonstrated, the Soviet Union's own economic problems have
moved them to be less willing to act as a buffer between the East European economies and the West. But is the Soviet Union willing to let Western countries have such free access to their satellite states? A Soviet loan amounting to about 500 million ruble commercial credits indicates some measure of support for her fraternal socialist states. But it is highly unlikely that the Soviets will "rescue" the Poles as they did in 1956 and 1971. The costs have just become too large. It has even been suggested that the Soviets might take advantage of the opportunity to cut the proverbial apron strings and allow Poland to fare for herself. Or, possibly, the Soviets anticipate the West cutting support to Poland and thus assuming the culprit role in the collapse of the economy. Assuming that the West cannot afford any default on Poland's extensive debt, what alternatives still exist for repayment?

One option would be product repayment through buy-back agreements. If these amount to as much as 25% of outstanding loans, then this mortgagors the valuable output of the economies. This would severely limit any possibility for the economy emerging in a condition healthy enough to compete with Western markets. A second possibility is offered by Portes. He suggests that the debt may act to strengthen CMEA ties, the logic being that attempts to pay the debt might require sharp cutbacks in trade with the West. This being the case, East European countries would be forced to rely more heavily on each other.
will be an examination of the possibilities and implications of CMEA integration for the Poles.

Theoretically, integration should be compatible with expanded trade with the West. The "basic principle for the realization of socialist economic integration is the necessity of assuring a continuous development of the production forces" while simultaneously raising living standards. Developing productive capabilities can only expand trade opportunities for East Bloc countries. Furthermore, the tendency toward integration is viewed as natural given the international character of socialism. Lenin viewed the drawing together of nations as an objective process that would "finally and ultimately lead to the creation of a single world economy, . . . and integral whole(regulated) according to a common plan." All countries participate in the enduring process of historical integration. Hence, even states developing without the benefit of organized integration will eventually become integrated in a single community, including capitalist states. With this background, it is easy to see how intensified integration and expanded East-West trade can be viewed as compatible, in fact as a process of eventual integration of all states. However, the theory encounters some obstacles in practice.

Basically, there are differences between East-West trade and intra-CMEA trade and Poland had to choose between
the two developmental programs. When obstacles to CMEA integration interfered with Poland's deriving any extensive benefits from it, Poland pursued the only option left: the use of Western trade to expand its productive capabilities. Reasons for turning to the West are manifold.

Among the primary reasons for Poland's turning to the West for economic development is the failure of the CMEA to contribute significantly to her development. There are indications that in the late fifties and early sixties Poland expected the necessary support for her economy to come from the CMEA. Reasons for Gomulka's opting for Eastern support include his own conservatism. After he regained power he removed liberal reforms in his own economy and reestablished the highly centralized control methods. This prevented the economy from attaining a position competitive in Western markets. In turning to the East, Gomulka expected CMEA integration to provide one source of strength for the new "Socialist Commonwealth" in the face of domestic and foreign enemies. Unfortunately, the increased activity between the member states multiplied the incidents of conflict between them too. Concerns over national sovereignty could not be subjugated to integrational interests. The classic illustration of this problem is Romania's objection to remaining a large scale raw material supplier of the East Bloc in the interest of CMEA integration.
tempts have not overcome the problems of simultaneously developing regional production specialization and developing a wide industrial base for each country. An example of this conflict affecting Poland occurred in the sixties when offers that other CMEA states cooperate in exploiting Poland's large coal reserves were rejected. This offer was then extended and taken up by American, West German and other Western bankers. The Poles turned to the West when the East failed her. The CMEA could not provide support because the CMEA was not strong. Problems in coordinating the various economies with their independent pricing systems, their various levels of development, the lack of an overall plan for production coordination and inconvertibility of currencies were too great. Aside from weaknesses in the organization so the CMEA, there existed conditions that facilitated the expansion of trade with the West.

Poland has generally maintained stronger relations with the West since World War II than other East European countries. For example, Polish trade with the West as a percentage of total trade has remained 10-20% higher than the trade conducted between other East European countries and the West. Also, Poland would probably have been interested in participating in the Marshall Plan for economic recovery had political ties with the Soviet Union not prevented her.

Secondly, Gierunka's rise to power coincided with the ad-
vent of detente thus making Western trade expansion easier. Because of the high degree of political/ideological confidence the Soviets have in the Polish leadership, stemming from Polish support for Soviet economic policies for East Europe, Poland could make the economic overtures to the West without fear of political repercussions. Furthermore, the Soviets were expanding trade with the West at the same time.

An additional factor facilitating Polish expansion of trade with the West was the willingness of the West to make the capital available. As already indicated, the West is still willing to advance large amounts of capital to Poland in spite of, or possibly because of, the already tremendous debt to the West.

Examining all these factors, it becomes clear why the Poles opted for economic expansion with Western capital. It can also be predicted that in the foreseeable future, Poland will not be changing her pattern of trade. This is due in part to the improbability that the CMEA will develop significantly and be able to provide support to Poland. Also, since the commitment to the West has already been made, it would be difficult to change developmental patterns at this point.

This examination has certainly presented a bleak picture, not only for the Poles but for East Europe in general. The combination of external influences and structural weaknesses
of the economy, has placed the Poles in a precarious position. Internally, the domestic political position of the leadership is so weak that any reforms will be difficult to implement, especially since the reforms demanded are fundamental changes in the command economy model including decentralization of control. As pointed out, this might serve to weaken the political position even further (vis-à-vis the Church) but attempting more control over the workers would cause at least as much harm. Thus, the leadership has left itself very little room to act domestically.

The international scene is no more promising. Western debts have reached such an outrageous level that one has to wonder how much further the West will commit itself to Poland. If continued support will be contingent on expanded access of the West to the economy (as has already happened), implications develop for Soviet-Polish relations. The Soviets themselves are supporting a large debt that can only prohibit their intervention to rescue the Polish economy. Finally, if both the East and West fail to support the Poles, the spill-over effect on the entire East European area could have serious implications internationally. This final possibility may provide the necessary incentive for closer examination of the problems of the Polish economy in the hope that some solutions can be found.
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