

RADIO FREE EUROPE *Research*

EAST EUROPE

Poland/17
11 March 1968

SITUATION REPORT

- * Massive Students' Demonstrations in Warsaw
- * East-West Contacts

Massive Students' Demonstrations in Warsaw

The closure of the play Dziady (cf. Polish Situation Reports 8 and 11, Radio Free Europe Research, February 5 and 19) and subsequent students' and writers' protests against censorship and against the Party's cultural policy (cf. Polish SRs 14 and 15, RFER) culminated in massive student demonstrations in Warsaw on March 8 and 9, with the possibility of further riots if the students' demands, to be discussed on March 11 with university authorities, fall on a deaf ear.

The immediate cause of the demonstrations was the Warsaw University students' demand for the readmission of two of their colleagues, Adam Michnik and Henryk Szlajfer, who were expelled from the university "for their participation in the January 30 demonstration" over the closure of Dziady. Dobrosław Kopecky, Czechoslovak TV correspondent in Warsaw, said on March 10. He also reported that the play was "the stimulus for anti-Soviet behavior." Although this last statement of Kopecky may be substantially correct, no anti-Soviet slogans were shouted during the two-day demonstrations and no other manifestations of anti-Soviet feelings were reported either by Western agencies or by Polish official media.

Michnik had earlier troubles with university authorities in connection with the cases of Kuron and Modzelewski and Professor Kolakowski; he was suspended for a year for "misconduct" (cf. Polish SRs, RFER, 30 March and 3 April 1967). Szlajfer was also suspended in connection with the affair of Kuron and Modzelewski (cf. Polish SRs, RFER, 22 and 29 July 1965).

11 March 1968

Two Warsaw newspapers, the youth daily Sztandar Mlodych and the "independent" Zycie Warszawy, reporting on the demonstrations on March 10, branded Michnik and Szlajfer as "notoriously organizing political adventures, conveying false news to anti-Polish propaganda centers, and violating orders of the university authorities."

Kuron and Modzelewski, who had been released from prison before their terms expired, were rearrested on March 8, Bernard Margueritte, Le Monde's correspondent in Warsaw, and UPI reported on March 9.

The number of the students taking part in the demonstrations was variously estimated at 3,000 on March 8, when the Warsaw University students clashed first with the "workers'" Militia Reserve and then helmeted regular Militia units swinging billy clubs, and as much as 5,000 on March 9, when the students of the Warsaw Polytechnical Institute went out to the streets, to be fought not only with truncheons but also with tear gas.

Several casualties were reported during the two days, including instances of outright brutality, and the Polish TV felt obliged to deny rumors that a girl student died after being beaten by the Militia.

The slogans shouted by the demonstrators went further than the original demand for the reinstatement of the two expelled students. "Constitution," "Freedom," "Democracy," "Warsawians with us," "Long live Czechoslovakia," were among those most frequently quoted by Western agencies. In reply to Militia charges came shouts of "Gestapo," "Moczar's lackeys," or even "Down with Moczar" (the Minister of the Interior and the ambitious "Partisan" faction leader).

The seriousness of the riots may be measured by the regime reaction. An extensive communique of the official agency PAP explained on March 9 that the previous day's disturbances were provoked by "small groups of unbridled and mostly well-to-do students with political [sic] ambitions" who used as a pretext for the meeting (at the University) "the expulsion of two students who had been notoriously engaged for a couple of years in various anarchistic political actions." The demonstrators, PAP claimed, "were joined by hooligan elements of various types." "Public opinion," PAP continued, "and particularly the working class, which contributes most to the costs of the education of youth and to the maintenance of academic institutions, demand from the students that this pledge (made during matriculation) be kept."

On the same day, March 9, Sztandar Mlodych and Zycie Warszawy printed editorials repeating and enlarging on PAP's theme. The demonstrating students reacted by making bonfires on the Warsaw streets of copies of the two papers.

11 March 1968

The most significant response to the demonstrations to date was an editorial in Trybuna Ludu on March 11. The paper gave its own "true" version of the event, starting with midday of March 8. It said that some of the "adventurers" went as far as to "provocatively tear the Constitution of the Polish People's Republic." The paper also gave a long list of notorious "trouble makers" ("rozrabiacze"). Among these were: Michnik; Jozef Deutschgewand (who earlier organized a protest against Michnik's suspension); Aleksander Smolar, "son of the editor-in-chief of a paper" (i.e., of Grzegorz Smolar, editor-in-chief of Folks-Sztyme, the Yiddish language paper appearing four times a week, an "assistant of Prof. Brus" (who left the Party recently -- cf. SR February 29); Wiktor Gorecki, "son of the director general of the Finance Ministry" (the father Jan Korecki has held that post since at least 1963, earlier he was known to be a hard line Stalinist); Irena Lasota, "daughter of a retired colonel;" Henryk Szlajfer, "son of a censor in the Main Office of Press Control" (the use of the word "censor" is rather surprising); Ewa Zarzycka, "daughter of the former Chairman of the Metropolitan People's Council" (who was dismissed late last Decemter -- cf. SR January 4, February 12 and 19); and Katarzyna Werfel, "daughter of the former editor-in-chief of a number of 'central' papers" (i.e. of Roman Werfel, formerly editor-in-chief of Trybuna Ludu).

It is surprising, Trybuna Ludu commented, that in these "brawls" ("burdach") children of parents who have "responsible state and social positions" took part.

While there is little doubt that the editorial underwent a thorough scrutiny at the Politburo level, the unusual listing of the student leaders' parents, many responsible Party members, suggests the possibility that the hard line faction within the Party leadership may be trying to utilize the demonstrations for its own ends. The number of Jewish names in the list of student leaders carried by Trybuna Ludu is also striking and suggests the same hypothesis. In this connection, the Pax daily Slowe Powszechne (as reported by Radio Warsaw) flatly maintained: "Zionists in Poland want to turn intellectuals and youth against the primary demands of patriotic responsibility for People's Poland." It is also obvious that the Party is most concerned about a possible alliance of students with some of the workers. The liberal use of such designations as "politicos" and "well-to-do" students points toward the Party's efforts at attempting to estrange the students from the workers.

East-West Contacts

France and Poland have agreed on the joint production and sale of a new kind of synthetic rubber, an RFE Special from Paris reported on March 8.

11 March 1968

The agreement covers sales promotion for complete production installations and the commercialization and production of the new synthetic rubber throughout Europe.

An Italian exhibition of art opened in the Warsaw gallery "Zacheta" on March 7, Radio Warsaw reported on the same day.

The actors of the Pantomime Ensemble from Wroclaw arrived in Italy at the invitation of Milan's La Scala, Radio Warsaw reported on March 9.

The Days of French Culture began in Torun on March 9, Radio Warsaw reported on the same day.

A five-day show of Mexican films began today in Warsaw, Radio Warsaw reported.

Polish Commercial Attache Jan Chowaniec spoke on March 5 at a conference on East-West trade sponsored by the American Management Association in New York, an RFE Special from New York reported on March 6.