



PRIME MINISTER

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POLAND

The Soviet Union and its Warsaw Pact associates are exerting great pressure on Poland and have adopted a most intimidatory military posture. The clock of the Polish crisis is ticking towards midnight. It is imperative that it be stopped if consequences of the utmost gravity are not to be set in train.

The Australian Government continues to deplore the Soviet Union's tactics of intimidation. At the same time we recognise that, as compared with its behaviour towards Afghanistan and earlier towards Czechoslovakia, Hungary and East Germany, the Soviet Union has up to now shown restraint. I make this statement now because it may well be that the Soviet Union in recent days has embarked on a course which may put that restraint aside.

Soviet restraint has no doubt been the result of prudential calculations, but it is no less a fact for that. The Australian Government believes that those reasons of prudence have been and continue to be well founded. We ask that the Soviet Government, in its own interests and in the interest of world peace, continue to give them the fullest weight in its deliberation.

A Soviet attack on Poland or the instigation of massive internal repression would poison East-West relations. Detente could not be negotiated over the blood of the Polish people. The political and economic costs for the Soviet Union would be very heavy, and Soviet society is already under great strain. The effects within the Warsaw Pact region would be incalculable, as the Warsaw Treaty Organisation was exposed as not merely an alliance against the West but as one of isolated and unpopular governments against their own nations. The non-aligned countries of the world would draw their own conclusions about the danger of association with the Soviet Union.

Apart from all this, an element of profound instability and tension would be created in the centre of Europe, still the most sensitive strategic region in the world.

On 29 March, the Tass News Agency, Moscow, said:

"Only the Polish leadership, and not Washington, has the right to determine what measures are necessary to be taken to solve the internal problems in Poland. In Washington they should know that this is doubtless a prerogative of Poland and of Poland alone."

What is being asked of the Soviet Government is no more than that it recognise the validity of these sentences if the word "Moscow" is substituted for "Washington", and the first sentence reads: "Only the Polish leadership, and not Moscow, has the right to determine what measures are necessary to be taken to solve the internal problems in Poland".

As things are it is the possibility of a direct or disguised Soviet military intervention, not an American one, which causes the Poland crisis to threaten the peace.

The people of Poland are seeking a peaceful and durable compromise among themselves. They must be given that chance. Any attempt to use force to prevent moderate, responsible change in a situation where existing arrangements have manifestly failed will not result in stability but in an ultimate explosion involving more than Poland itself. I ask again that the Soviet Government, which has studied the dynamics of change closely over the years, ponder the truth of this.

On this matter there is a substantial coincidence of views between the major Australian parties. The Leader of the Opposition has spoken very clearly of the outrage the Federal Parliamentary Labor Party would feel if there was an armed intervention by the Soviet Union, and of the irreparable damage to the process of detente which would result.

I wish to express the Australian people's sympathy, concern and support for the people of Poland at this time of trial.

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