

# The mess in Poland

by Jim McElgunn

The Western media are giving a distorted view of the current political struggles in Poland, according to A. Matejko, professor of Soviet and East European Studies at the U of A.

"Our basic information about events in Poland is extremely superficial... because it deals only with effects," Matejko said at a Political Science Undergraduate Association forum Friday.

The basic problem, he said, is that Poland's bureaucratic socialism is too rigid and centralized to modernize the economy efficiently. This clashes with the rising expectations of most Poles, resulting in the current power struggle between the free trade unions and the

government.

The Polish economy is plagued by poor productivity through absenteeism and disorganization: 20 - 25 percent of worktime is wasted.

Attempts to modernize in the 1970s by importing Western goods and technology have failed. Poland's debt to Western banks and corporations is over \$20 billion and there are increasing fears that it will default on its loans.

Another problem, said Matejko, is that trade with the West often impoverishes the Poles by making them dependent on expensive imports instead of producing the goods themselves.

As well, the Soviets are fearful that the "contamination" in Poland may spread. Matejko

said Hungary and Czechoslovakia and ultimately the Soviet Union itself will face mounting threats to the Communist party's monopoly on political power.

Western bankers and corporate executives with heavy investments in Poland are also nervous. Matejko said they would probably prefer that the Polish authorities keep the workers on the job repaying Poland's debts. They fear the Soviets might invade Poland, destroying important East-West projects.

Political science professor Max Mote, who also spoke at the forum, said the Soviet army is prepared to invade Poland at any time, but Soviet leaders are reluctant to move in because it would be very costly.

"The Polish army would start a prolonged civil war," said Mote, adding that some experts estimate an invasion would require a minimum commitment of 500,000 Soviet troops. This would place a great strain on the Soviet armed forces, already embroiled in a persistent war in Afghanistan.

The Soviets would then be forced to assume the Polish debt to the West, which is much larger than their own. They would also have to supply food to the Poles, worsening their own food shortages.

Invasion would damage Soviet attempts to split Western Europe from the United States, perhaps reuniting NATO and provoking an arms race the Soviets cannot afford, Mote said.

The West would very likely try to isolate the Soviets with embargoes on grain, technology and other trade. This would seriously disrupt the Soviet Union's plans to modernize its economy.

Finally, Mote said, invading Poland "might deal a severe blow to the Soviet image and prestige" in Eastern Europe and the Third World, showing that "once you are in the Soviet orbit, you cannot get out."

On the other hand, he said, the actions of the Polish free unions are "an enormous threat to rule number one in Soviet ideology," that the Party is the one and only power.

"It's a no-win situation for the Soviets."

## No support for forum

The Engineering Students' Society (ESS) will not directly participate in a *Sexism and Engineering Week* SU forum in SUB Theatre, as implied in a *Gateway* story last week.

Instead, ESS will only support other engineering students who care to debate the issue, regardless of which side they take, according to ESS President Kelly Scott.

The engineers themselves are the ones who have to come out with their opinions," Scott says, adding that he thinks the question is inherently biased, and the issue blown out of proportion.

Chances of a forum haven't been scuttled, however. SU president Nolan Astley says he will encourage interested parties at Students Council tonight to revive the debate idea.

"I don't think Council is the right place to deal with it," Astley says, although the issue of sexism is on tonight's agenda.

The idea of holding a debate stemmed from a confrontation between engineers and anti-sexist protesters in the *Gateway* office last Wednesday.

## SUELECTION

### NEED SOME EXTRA CASH?

The Students' Union requires staff for the General Election on Friday, February 6th. Help us out and earn \$4.00/hour at the same time. For further information, please contact the SU Returning Office (Room 271, SUB) or the Receptionist, SU Executive Offices (Room 259, SUB).

### An Involvement Opportunity

#### Students' Finance Board

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The Students' Finance Board is responsible for the administration of the entire student assistance program, the setting of budget guidelines for loans and the implementation of program changes in the student aid program. The SFB meets approx. 8 times a year in full day meetings.

**If YOU are interested...**

Please submit a resume to Nolan Astley, President, Students' Union, Rm. 259, SUB by 4:30 P.M. Wednesday, January 21, 1981.  
All replies will be held in absolute confidence.  
For more info contact N. Astley, President, Rm. 259, SUB (432-4236)

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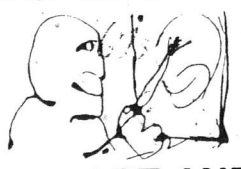
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