

Dear Erich!¹

After discussing matters in the Politburo, we decided to turn to you and Comrades G. Husak, J. Kadar, and T. Zhivkov on an important and, in some sense, extremely urgent matter.

Not long ago, as you know, we received Cdes. Kania and Pinkowski in Moscow.² The situation they face is, one might say, exceptionally onerous. An urgent necessity has arisen for all of us together to help Poland make it through the current crisis.

You are well aware of the political situation in the PPR. The counterrevolution is on the attack and has practically seized the party by the throat. At the recent meeting we conveyed to the Poles our views about the need to halt the course of events and launch an attack against the counterrevolutionary forces, and we are informing you about this separately.³ In these circumstances, the situation in the economy acquires enormous significance and is now close to a catastrophe. A further deterioration of the situation in Poland threatens to inflict enormous damage on the entire socialist commonwealth. For that reason it is our common internationalist and.— I would even say — our class duty to do everything we can to prevent this.

Let me emphasize that we ourselves will assume the main burden in this matter. Despite our own economic problems, which I described to you, we believe it is necessary to give Poland significant financial and economic assistance by extending hard-currency grants and extra shipments of a number of goods.

However, it will be impossible to provide this assistance without a certain degree of participation by the other fraternal countries.⁴ In raising this question, we of course are very well aware that it is not simple. For that reason, we have tried to find an approach that would have only a minimal effect on internal plans and would not be something beyond your means.

² Translator's Note: Kania and Jaruzelski were in Moscow on 30 October. See Transcript of CPSU Politburo Session, 29 October 1980 and Transcript of CPSU Politburo Session 31 October 1980.

³ Translator's Note: See "O peregovorakh tov. L. I. Brezhneva s pol'skimi rukovoditelyami," 4 November 1980 (Top Secret), in SAPMDB, ZPA, J IV, 2/202-550. This brief document, which was distributed to the leaders of all the Warsaw Pact countries (other than Poland), was promptly translated into German ("Information der KPdSU Führung") for Honecker, who ordered a senior SED Politburo member responsible for ideology, Kurt Hager, to disseminate the report to other members of the SED Politburo. The Soviet document recounted the highlights of the meeting, including Brezhnev's insistence that the Polish authorities would have to use both "peaceful and non-peaceful means" to restore order. Brezhnev noted that Kania had pledged "not to retreat further" and to prepare for "other options," including "severe measures," if political efforts to defuse the crisis proved unsuccessful.

⁴ Translator's Note: This same point had been stressed by a high-ranking CPSU official, Mikhail Zimyanin, in a meeting with his East German counterpart, Joachim Herrmann, on 31 October 1980. See "Information über die Gespräche zwischen Genossen Joachim Herrmann und Genossen M. V. Zimjanin am 27. und 31. Oktober 1981," pp. 98-99.

Concretely, here's what I have in mind. We propose to reduce oil shipments somewhat to a number of countries in the socialist commonwealth. This oil will be sold on the capitalist market and the hard-currency revenues will be transmitted to Poland in the name of the corresponding countries. This will enable Poland to alleviate its critical financial situation and to purchase certain vitally necessary products and other goods.

As far as the GDR is concerned, the volume of oil shipments from the Soviet Union in 1981 will, with your consent, be reduced by 600,000-650,000 tons of the designated amount, without affecting the level of shipments of German goods to the Soviet Union.⁵

I request, Erich, that you look upon this suggestion with understanding.⁶ I am certain that our display of fraternal solidarity will help our Polish comrades withstand what for them is a trying hour.

With Communist greetings

[signed]
L. BREZHNEV

4 November 1980

[Source: SAPMDB, ZPA, J IV 2/202-550]

⁵ Translator's Note: According to official data from the GDR, the Soviet Union shipped 19.01 million tons of oil to East Germany in 1980. See "Ausfuhr und Einfuhr ausgewahlter Erzeugnisse nach Landern," in Staatliche Zentralverwaltung fur Statistik, *Statistisches Jahrbuch 1986 der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik* (East Berlin: Staatsverlag der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik, 1986), p. 257. Hence, the reduction that Brezhnev was proposing at this point would have come to about 3.1 to 3.4 percent of the total. In the fall of 1981, however, the CPSU leadership informed the East European states that further reductions would be needed in Soviet oil exports to Eastern Europe (see Transcript of CPSU Politburo Session, 29 October 1981), a move that Honecker bitterly opposed. In the end, Soviet oil shipments to the GDR fell to 17.05 million tons in 1981 and remained at roughly that level in succeeding years (17.07 million in 1982 and 17.08 million in 1983). See *ibid.*, p. 257. Transcript of CPSU Politburo Session, 29 October 1981 shows how strongly—though unsuccessfully—Honecker resisted these changes.

⁶ Translator's Note: For Honecker's private sentiments about this matter, see Manfred Wilke *et al.*, *SED-Politburo und polnische Krise 1980-82: Aus den Protokollen des Politburos des ZK der SED zu Polen, den innerdeutschen Beziehungen und der Wirtschaftskrise der DDR*, Working Paper No. 3 (Berlin: Forschungverbund SED-Staat, 1993), p. 411.