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PLUS BLUES PARAPHERNALIA DANCE FLOOR

## USSR consumers face food problems

**MOSCOW (AP)** — Long lines at meat counters and shortages of eggs, butter and other staples this winter show that Soviet consumers are shouldering the burden of another poor harvest and Kremlin aid to Poland.

A crackdown on profiteering in food and other "deficit goods" was announced last week in the Communist government's latest move to reduce public grumbling about shortages.

The Kremlin has not officially acknowledged reports it has sent thousands of tons of food to Poland to support that nation's Communist government, which imposed martial law Dec. 13 after 16 months of strikes and political unrest.

Western observers speculate the Soviet leadership has been afraid to admit it is sending food to Poland while its own citizens scrounge and stand in lines to buy groceries.

The Soviet Union's problems are reflected in the entire East European bloc of nations it has dominated since the end of World War II. Sharp inflation is sweeping their centralized

economies and stiff price increases have been announced in Poland and Czechoslovakia and are expected in Romania.

Economic analysts in the West blame a lack of foreign currency, poor harvests and each country's rigid, government-run system. They also say Poland's economic crisis has sharply affected its East European trading partners in COMECON, the common market of 10 Communist countries.

Conservation has high priority in Moscow this winter. Restaurants give smaller portions of meat, bakeries have reportedly reduced butter content in confections and homemakers have been told to cook with stale bread.

Shoppers queued last week at Grocery Store No. 2 in central Moscow for a chance to buy hunks of stewing beef at \$1.40 a pound and sausage at \$2 a pound.

Others swarmed around a salesgirl when she wheeled out a shopping basket of butter. One-pound chunks sold for \$2.10 and were limited to one per buyer.

Few Muscovites can afford to pay steep prices at the central farmers' market which is not run by the state. Market stalls were charging \$5.09 a pound for prime beef and \$21 for a chicken.

Eggs, available only occasionally in state stores, cost \$4.20 for 10 at the central market. A honeydew melon cost \$20. There are few buyers.

Cabbages, potatoes, apples and lemons were on sale at state counters, but Soviets have to pay three or four times more at farmers' markets for better quality produce. Few can afford to on average weekly wages that are the equivalent of \$60 at the official rate.

Soviets are used to bland winter diets, heavy on canned goods and bread, but this year has been tougher than usual. Months of snow and sub-freezing temperatures have hampered food distribution. Harvest shortfalls, combined with food shipments to Poland, have further strained the system.

The government admitted last month that agricultural production fell 2 percent in 1981 from the previous year. The 1981 grain harvest figure wasn't disclosed but Soviet sources have hinted it was less than 170 million tons — meaning that 40 million to 50 million tons will have to be imported from the West to compensate.

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