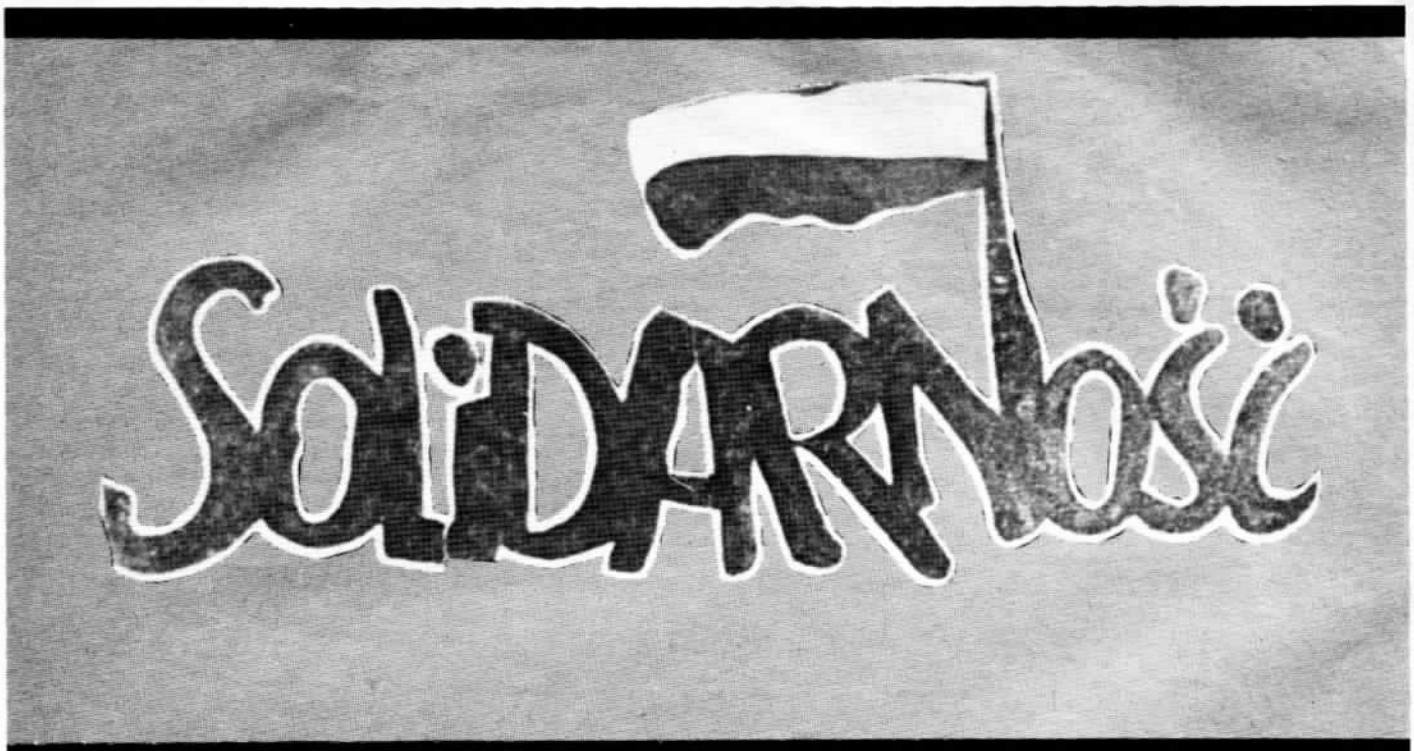
LABOUR PARTY YOUNG SOCIALISTS' CONFERENCE DOCUMENT 1981

POLAND and Workers' Democracy



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Introduction

'WE SPEAK on behalf of the 40,000 workers of the Lenin Steelworks . . . Today our union has 7 million members. We are the majority of the working people of Poland who believe that socialism is a system of social justice and that it is possible to restore the highest values: truth, justice, recognition for honest work and respect for man. Our activity does not impair the foundations of socialism in our country. *We have only condemned those who distorted its basic tenets.*'

The tremendous struggles of the Polish workers during the summer of 1980 once more confirmed the willingness of the working class to struggle to change society. But at the same time the events brought forward enormous paradoxes. Newspapers in Britain which supported the election of the Tory Government in May 1979, and every piece of anti-trade union legislation that Government has brought forward, carried headlines such as: 'Strike ends in triumph — The bloodless battle of Gdansk has ended in victory for the freedom seeking workers of Poland' (*Daily Mail*). Yet some of these same papers supported the Chilean Generals' coup in 1973 which resulted in over 50,000 trade unionists and socialists being murdered. Their 'support' in reality was a crude attempt to dirty the idea of socialism before the millions of workers in Britain who are now searching for an alternative to the Tories and their crisis ridden profit system.

In a similar vein, the mouthpiece of the British ruling class, *The Times*, commented in September 1980 that: 'We now have the curious spectacle of East and West together pumping money into the ailing Polish economy. It shows that the interests of East and West co-incide to the extent that . . . neither will gain from an economic or political collapse.'

Clearly if socialists are to be able to answer the smears of the Tories and their press, we must have a clear understanding of what has happened in Poland, during and since the strikes of the Summer of 1980. Only on such a basis as this is it possible to explain why, despite the enormous struggles and sacrifices of the workers, their lives are still dominated by a massive, unelected and unaccountable bureaucracy of state officials, police, and army chiefs, and more importantly, how such a bureaucracy can be removed.

Many questions have already been raised during the struggle: What has been the role of the dissidents and intellectuals? Why has the church gained such support? Is the Polish United Workers' Party (the Communist Party) really a workers' party?

As the struggle develops, other questions have arisen: Will Russia invade? Can Poland be reformed or must the regime be overthrown to achieve changes?

This document attempts to analyse the developments in Poland and Eastern Europe, and provide answers to these and other similar questions.

For the Labour Party Young Socialists, support for the struggle for workers' democracy in Eastern Europe is something which we have consistently argued for. In the May 1980 *Socialist Youth* (the LPYS Paper) before the strike wave began — we pointed out that:

'Faced with the products of crisis — more and more shortages, falling living standards, and loss of "free Saturdays", more and more Polish workers will begin to challenge the vast privileged bureaucracy which dominates their lives.

'When Polish workers move to solve their problems they will set up independent organisations, genuine free trade unions and political parties, separate from the church or the state.'

A victory for the workers in Poland in their fight for democratic rights would be a huge step forward in the struggle to destroy the menace of Stalinism, and therefore a victory for the working class throughout the world in the battles to replace the decaying capitalist system in the West with genuine socialism, based on the fullest democracy.

POLAND and Workers' Democracy

The Summer of Struggle

'I HAVE a true feeling of comradeship that everyone has come out on this strike. It's not just for me, nor just a protest against what has been done to me. We are striking against conditions which for a long time have been unbearable for ordinary working people. The will to strike has existed here for a long time. I am just the spark that touched it off.'

These words of a crane driver in the Lenin shipyards in Gdansk clearly express the mood of Polish workers before the strikes errupted in the summer of 1980. Years of having to queue for meat, coal, massive waits for housing and other basic necessities of everyday life, while many senior police, 'Communist Party' and other state officials lived lives of luxury, had built up an enormous store of anger and bitterness.

When meat prices were, once more, increased on July 1st, 1980, a series of scattered protest strikes demanding higher pay to compensate for the higher prices broke out. In the city of Lublin in mid July, the strikes took a city-wide nature. Train drivers struck in support of factory workers, leaving their engines blocking main railway lines. Railway workers sent in from another city to move the trains were persuaded by the striking workers to turn back. Then the buses and trolley buses also came out on strike. The initial demands for higher pay, better supplies of meat and family benefits equal to those enjoyed by the militia rapidly broadened to include the right to strike and to form Trade Unions independent of the state apparatus.

In Poland, as in the other East European states, strikes are effectively illegal and the official 'trade unions' (the only ones allowed to exist before the strikes) are controlled from the top by government appointed officials. They are only allowed to discuss minor grievances, and act mainly as organisers of holidays, welfare benefits, etc., and not as independent organisations struggling to defend the workers' living standards and working conditions.

The workers' demands, by-passing and undermining the authority of the 'trade unions', were also a challenge to the authority of the ruling bureaucracy, and therefore brought them into conflict.

Corruption

Poland, as the other East European states, is dominated by a massive regime of state officials, police and army chiefs, many of them living on salaries way above that of the workers. Holding a 'Communist Party' card has become the road to promotion. Salaries are 'topped up' by corruption and dealings in the widespread black-markets, which abound to such an extent that one official paper reported that in one swoop, 3,000 shopkeepers were fined for 'under the counter' sales. An estimated one quarter of shops sell some foodstuffs (e.g. meat), and 37 per cent of other goods in this way. In a similar light, the 'hard currency' shops selling 'luxury' goods, open only to people with western currencies (and state officials will always make sure they can obtain supplies) flourish. Nevertheless, this massive layer of bureaucrats is forced to rely on the continuation of a nationalised, planned economy for its privileged existence. Therefore these 'red bourgeois' as they are often described by the workers, are forced to pay lip service to socialism. At the same time they live in fear of any independent movement of the working class which challenges their position of privilege.

When the strike wave began to erupt the bureaucracy was in a dilemma. They recognised that repression and arrests could lead to an expansion of the strikes, so in the short term they negotiated with individual groups of workers, in an attempt to take the steam out of the movement, and conceded wage rises of 15-20 per cent in many cases.

In the Baltic coast shipyards, which had been the centre of a previous strike wave in 1970, the bureaucrats attempted to remove potential 'troublemakers' before strikes developed. When one worker, Anna Walentynowicz, who had a long record as an activist in defence of workers' rights, was sacked, the strikes took a new turn.

On hearing the news of her sacking, groups of workers began a march across the giant Lenin shipyards in Gdansk, gathering support for the strike among the 15,000 workers as they went. As they marched, the workers showed their hatred for officials, chanting: 'Join us and put an end to all the lying'. When one 'Communist Party' secretary demanded that workers pull down their strike posters, he had a pamphlet outlining the workers' demands unceremoniously pushed into his hand. On the march reaching the gates, even the 30 security guards immediately joined in.

Once on strike, the accumulated frustrations of the workers burst out. Despite management offers to reinstate sacked workers without loss of pay, the workers refused to go back. That was no longer the main issue. Higher wages, better pensions, the right to form their own trade unions were among the new demands that came to the fore.

Strike wave

The regime negotiated a deal conceding nearly all the workers' demands, and the strike committee recommended a return to work. But the rank and file workers had been approached by busmen, who had urged the shipyard workers to stay out until all workers in the area had won similar deals. Thus the recommendation to return to work was thrown out at a mass meeting, and like during the strike wave of 1970, the shipyard workers were thrown into the front line of the struggle against the regime.

Probably more than any other group of workers, those in the shipyards who had seen hundreds of their comrades gunned down in the 1970 uprising, had completely mistrusted and hated the regime, and all of its organisations and representatives.

One worker in Gdynia on the Baltic Coast described how the official 'trade unions' operated: 'The officials of the old unions were not elected democratically. When they completed their terms they themselves nominated most of the new candidates . . . There were cases of rigged elections. Newly elected committees would proceed to a hired bar to settle the details over a drink. To be a union activist was a career. In the shipyard the metalworkers' union was popularly known as the Travel Agency . . . It also dealt with the distribution of produce such as potatoes and onions. These unions, however, did not fulfil their basic role of defending the rights of the workers. I was sacked from my previous job with the agreement of the union, and the guy who signed the agreement didn't even bother to talk to me . . . Matters (of hygiene and safety at work) were totally neglected by the old unions.'

Dismissal

During the Gdansk strikes, the head of the 'trade unions', Jan Szydlak, who had no previous trade union experience before his appointment, made several vicious verbal attacks on the workers, before their action led to his dismissal.

Likewise, the 'Communist Party' was a sham organisation, consisting almost entirely of officials in the state apparatus. In the shipyards, 13 top jobs could only be appointed with the endorsement of the local party executive. A 'Party Card' became a ticket for a career. In some factories 75 per cent or more of the management were members of the Communist Party. The same method of appointment also applied to top trade union positions, which were directly appointed by the party central committee. One worker summed up the feeling of millions; 'The Party of the Bureaucrats is the Party of the Kremlin, which workers have nothing to do with.'

From the outset the workers bypassed these official 'organisations' and set up their own elected strike committees, and raised the demand for the right to form independent trade unions.



Using a megaphone, one of the strikers at the Lenin shipyard in Gdansk exchanges opinions with a shipyard management official.

Banned

Initially all members of the Communist Party were banned from some of the strike committees. This was not an 'anti-communist' or 'anti-socialist' move as the press have tried to make out, but showed the workers' distrust of the Communist Party as the mainstay of the Stalinist state apparatus. This was reflected in a

letter from the Gdansk Communist Party committee to the national leadership which lamented 'The campaign of explanation, which Party militants and the administration are waging, is becoming increasingly difficult. Sometimes, as happened to a director of the yacht yard, they have been expelled from the shipyard.'

Distortions

Unable to influence the workers 'by discussion', the regime resorted to distortions and its control of the press to try and undermine the workers. A letter from the Secretariat (HQ) of the Party, sent to all party members claimed: ' . . . anti-socialist elements amongst the Gdansk shipyard workers made political demands . . . Their demands threaten the essential security of the country . . . The most important of their demands are those concerning free trade unions, changes in the electoral law (a demand the workers had not raised — LPYS), removal of media controls and the freeing of political prisoners.' Meanwhile the state-controlled press first of all tried to deny there were any strikes, and when that became impossible, resorted to placing the blame on 'anti-socialist, and capitalist elements influenced by western imperialism'. This was too much even for a number of Polish journalists who were covering the events, who released the following declaration: 'We, Polish journalists present at Gdansk during the strike, declare that much of the news published so far, and especially the manner in which it has been commented upon, does not correspond with what is happening here.'

It was under these conditions that the workers added the call for the relaxation of press censorship, and for the publication of their demands, to their growing list of demands.

At the same time they established a daily strike newspaper, *Solidarnosc (Solidarity)* to keep all the workers informed about the progress of the negotiations. Seeing the strength and solidarity of the shipyards, and how the government was being forced into negotiations, more and more workplaces, and public transport, came out on strike, and established their own strike committees. Within a few days the Baltic Coast towns were in the grip of a General Strike.

'Workers Of All Factories Unite'

THIS ADAPTION of Karl Marx's famous words — 'Workers of all countries unite' — became the watchword of the Gdansk workers. Within a few days an inter-factory strike committee had been established with delegates from over 500 workplaces in the area. At one period the strike was growing so quickly that there were about two dozen representatives of workplaces queueing up to register at any one time with the strike committee.

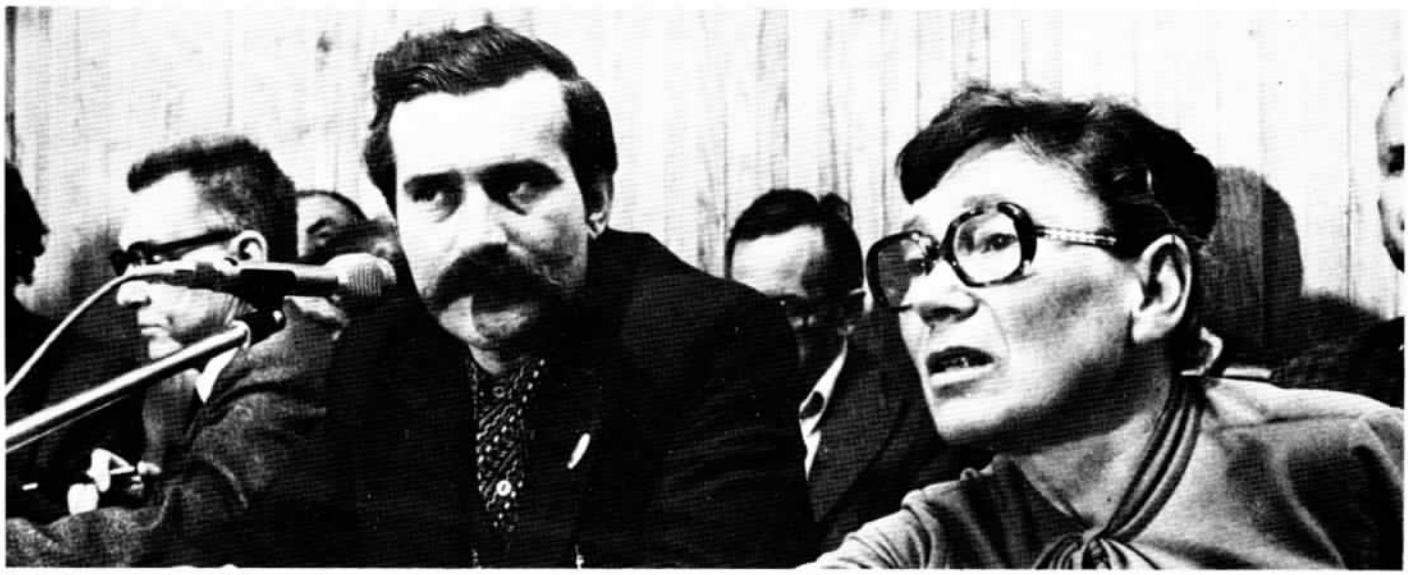
The workers were no longer prepared to listen to government officials doling out the orders. The only body with any authority among workers was the inter-factory strike committee. One small incident, no doubt repeated hundreds of times showed where the real authority lay; a woman from the fish canning plant approached the strike committee appealing that 'the people must have food'. Workers at another plant returned to work temporarily to produce the 120,000 cans needed so that fish in the canning plants could be distributed to strikers, rather than being allowed to go bad.

Nor was the movement limited to industrial workers. Leading musicians organised free concerts, and peasants came from the countryside with donations of food. All of the middle layers of society were affected.

Commandeered

Fleets of trucks were commandeered for the distribution of medicine, food, and coal to hospitals. Taxi drivers placed their services at the disposal of the committee. Workers in key service industries stayed at work under the direction of the committee. The authorities, under the direction of the strike committee were even forced to ban the sale of Vodka to prevent drunkenness.

Even the Police and Army lost their authority on the streets. A senior army officer whom had been refused petrol (which was rationed by the strike committee) attempted to enlist the help of a plain clothes policeman who was at the same petrol station. But he too was refused service. Their ensuing conversations, over 'secret' radio wavelengths were intercepted by workers and relayed over a shipyard tannoy system to supply some humour in the middle of tense negotiations:



Solidarity leaders, Lech Walesa and Anna Walentynowicz, at a free trade union meeting.

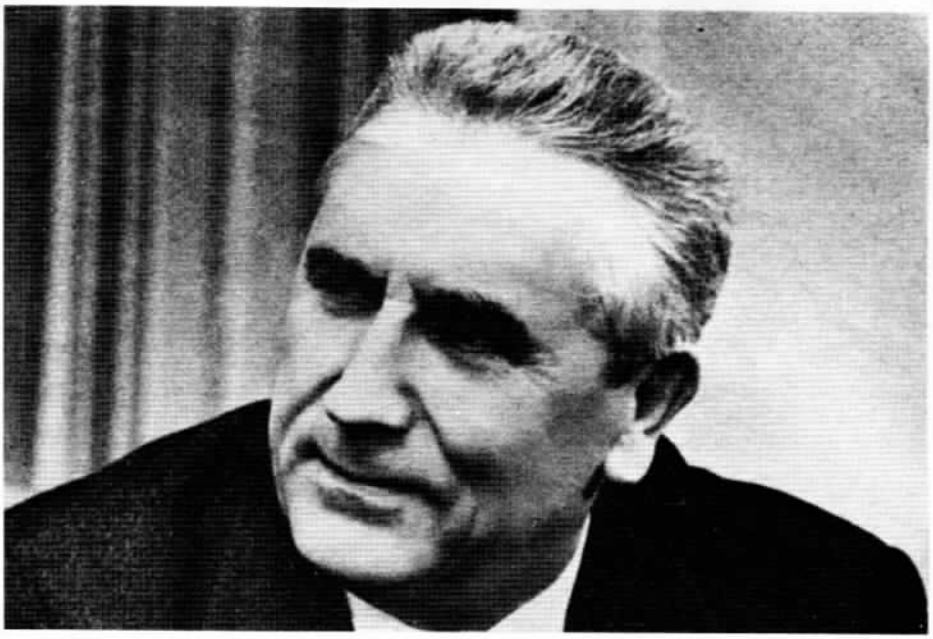
'Agent Jawonsky to base. They won't listen to me either' (Derisory cheers from the strikers) 'Please advise next move. Over'.

'Base to agent Jawonsky. Stay by the petrol station. Will send a uniformed officer to sort the matter out as soon as possible (General laughter).'

Collapse

For this conversation to take place in a country where strikes were still meant to be illegal, where the press was strictly censored, and every movement of opposition had been met by arrests and harassment, showed how far the workers movement had progressed, and the collapse of the authority of the police and army in the Gdansk area.

The tremendous movement provoked a split in the ruling regime as to how to do deal with it. A majority of the 'politburo' under Gierek wanted to use the military to end the strikes. Troops were moved to the outskirts of Gdansk. But the strike committee sent delegates to the military camps to discuss with the soldiers and explain the struggle to them. In the course of the discussions it rapidly became clear that the sympathies of the working class youth in the army lay with the workers' struggle. At this point the military commanders, unable to guarantee the 'loyalty' of the troops, refused to sanction an intervention. The regime had been forced into a 'U-Turn'.



Eduard Gierek, Polish 'Communist' leader 1970-80, replaced Gomulka after the 1970 riots with promises of reform — but nothing changed.

The Regime's About-Turn

LIKE WITH any other ruling class or caste, or group of employers, the regime's willingless to 'negotiate' wasn't based on whether or not the workers' demands were 'just' or 'fair'. This can be clearly seen from statements from leaders of the bureaucracy such as Politburo member and chairman of the official trade union, Jan Szydlak who had declared at the beginning of the strikes that: 'The Authorities do not intend to give up their power or to share it with anyone else.' The deciding factor in forcing the about turn was the willingness of the working class to struggle on the one hand, and the weakness of bureaucracy, on the other. Seeing there was no other way of halting the spread and rapid radicalisation of the strikes, the regime was forced to accept almost all of the workers' demands which included:

Release of all political prisoners;
Reduction of press censorship;
Improvement of the Health Service;
Publication of the workers' demands;
The right to form free trade unions, independent of the state;
The right to strike;
Retirement after 30 years work;
Better pensions;
Three years' paid maternity leave for working mothers.

Seeing the success of Gdansk elsewhere in Poland the strikes deepened. In Wroclaw car and truck factories, and even the opera house flew banners which proclaimed: 'We back the Baltic Coast'. Soon over half a million workers were on strike. All the main industrial centres were affected. Workers in Warsaw threatened a General Strike. The same demands, for higher wages, food supplies, and for free trade unions, easing of censorship, etc. were raised everywhere. Then the powerful Silesian miners forced an agreement that the 'Baltic Agreement' applied to all workers in Poland. In the weeks following, about 8 million workers, over half the workforce, in over 3,500 factories, left the old, state-controlled unions to set up their own unions.

Support

Peasants and students also formed their own committees and declared their support for the workers. A document from a peasants' committee of Grojec County expressed their feelings: 'We decided that they (the workers' demands) are just and worthy of our support. Your rightful struggle for trade unions, independent from the party and state apparatus, aids our own attempts to establish a similar trade union organisation for agricultural workers. With this aim in mind we have already established in several parts of the country the Peasants' Self Defence Committees and the Farmers' Trade Union. We assure you that despite the harassment and obstacles created by the official authorities we shall continue our activity. We understand these actions are necessary to bring changes leading to an agricultural policy which will ensure that there is enough of our own Polish bread for everybody and we do not have to humiliate ourselves by begging abroad for credits to buy grain . . .

'We want to tell you, brother workers, that the state and party dignitaries, who demand sacrifices from you, in the name of the common welfare, do not set an example themselves. They pay themselves high salaries yet want to economise on the money paid to the workers . . .'

Faced with the massive movement of the workers and the sympathy for them among peasants and intellectuals the bureaucracy had been forced to make massive concessions. But there was one issue they were not, and never will be prepared to compromise on —



Lech Walesa and Vice-Premier Jagielski pushing their way through crowds of strikers to a tense session of negotiations on August 27, 1980.

maintaining their position of power and privilege in society. For this reason the regime insisted that the new unions accept 'the leading role of the Communist Party in Poland's political system', in other words the control of the bureaucracy over society must remain untouched.

Many workers were wary of this, remembering as one worker put it, how: 'We've been promised reforms in the past — and later disappointed, as they were first granted and then taken away. This time we're not so stupid as we once were.' Behind these words lay a clear understanding of how the bureaucracy, as in 1970 and 1976, will use its position of power to undermine the concessions. The workers have moved to establish their own Trade Unions as a means to defending their gains. The opening words of the first statement of the Gdansk Inter-Factory Strike committee explained the importance of free trade unions:

'The first of our demands is of crucial importance. Without independent trade unions all the other demands can be ruled out in the future, as it has happened several times in the short history of the Polish Peoples' Republic. The official trade unions have not only failed to defend our interests: moreover, they have been more hostile to the justified strike action than the party and state organs.'

Governors

Already the new unions are being used by workers to demand, and in some cases, succeed in removing factory managers and regional state governors.

But while many workers understood the need for a struggle to overthrow the bureaucracy as the only guarantee of the workers' demands being implemented, their leaders were not taking all their advice from the workers. Listening to the dissidents, intellectuals and the church, some of the workers' leaders, and in particular the chairman of the Gdansk strike committee, Lech Walesa, accepted the bad advice that they should accept the 'leading role of the Communist Party' which in reality meant the continued rule of the bureaucracy. This compromise will mean the workers facing renewed battles.

Bureaucracy

Every move of the workers to use the trade unions to defend their gains threatens the position and authority of the regime. Therefore as soon as the workers' movement subsides, the regime will begin a new round of repression. The workers will be faced once more with the task, if their gains are to become permanent, of carrying through a struggle to completely overthrow the Stalinist bureaucracy.

The Rise of Stalinism

DESPITE HAVING to pay lip service to 'socialism' and 'marxism', the Polish bureaucracy draws its roots not from the struggles of the Russian workers to overthrow Czarism and establish the first workers' state in 1917, but from the monstrous Stalinist bureaucracy that later came to dominate Russia.

In 1917, the Bolsheviks, led by Lenin and Trotsky, envisaged the Russian Revolution as the first link in an international struggle, to overthrow capitalism. Socialist planning of the resources of the economies of the more advanced countries would have provided the material base for establishing workers' democracy all over Europe.

Uprisings

But the defeat of the German Revolutions of 1918 and 1923, and the defeat of workers' uprisings in Italy, Bulgaria, Hungary, and other countries resulted in the revolution being isolated to a single backward country.

Economic backwardness, widespread illiteracy, and the exhaustion and death of thousands of the most courageous workers in 7 years of international and civil war, meant that many positions in the young workers' state had to be filled by recruiting officials of the old Czarist regime, on wages of up to four times that of workers. A privileged bureaucratic elite began to crystallise which found in Stalin a representative for its conservative outlook.

After Lenin's death in 1924, this

layer began to express itself more openly in the Communist Party. By the late 1920s a political counter-revolution was in full swing. This meant the eradication of the last remnants of workers' democracy, whilst leaving the nationalised base of the economy intact to ensure the continuation of the privileged position of the bureaucracy.

False policies

When the false policies of the Communist International enabled Hitler to come to power in Germany in 1933 without a struggle in opposition, and when the Stalinist leaders initially hailed Hitler's accession to the Chancellorship as a sign of capitalism's weakness, with the slogan 'Hitler — then our turn', Trotsky (then in exile) concluded that the Russian bureaucracy was beyond reform, and it would take a new political revolution to overthrow it and restore workers' democracy. Trotsky based the programme for a political revolution around the demands that Lenin first raised as a guard against bureaucracy in April 1917:

1 That society should be run through a system of soviets (Committees of elected workers' representatives), that there should be free elections, with the immediate right of recall over all elected representatives and other officials.
2 No officials would receive a higher wage than a skilled worker.
3 There would be no standing army, and no special privileged officer casts, but an armed people, i.e. a workers' and peasants' militia.
4 No bureaucratic elite. All positions in society should be rotated among the people.

Added to this is the demand raised by the Hungarian workers during their uprising in 1956, that no more should there be a one-party state, but freedom of all political parties which accept the plan of production.



Hungary 1956. During the workers' uprising, the statue of the hated Stalin crashes to the ground.

The overthrow of Polish capitalism in 1945 took a different course to Russia. Towards the end of the second world war as the Red Army rapidly advanced across Eastern Europe, many of the former factory owners, Police chiefs and other state officials fled with the retreating Nazi armies, fearing otherwise that they would be arrested and tried for their crimes of collaborating with the Nazis.

In many factories owners and managers had fled, in many towns the police had disappeared, making it a small task for the mighty power of the Red Army to be used by its Moscow masters to sweep aside the remnants of Polish capitalism. Eighty per cent of the economy was Nationalised early in 1945. But this was not carried through with the mass involvement of the workers from below. From the outset there was no workers' control over workplace conditions. While a plan of production was established, based on the state ownership of the means of production, it was never based on democratic workers' control, on the independent checking of plans, targets, etc, by workers' organisations, as had been the case in Russia in the early years after the revolution of 1917. From the outset the Polish State was reconstructed, under the wing of the Red Army, in the image of Moscow 1945, of the police dictatorship headed by Stalin.

Plan of production

Nevertheless, despite the massive bureaucratic deformations which existed, the establishment of a plan of production marked a massive break with Poland's semi-feudal past. Under a plan of production, natural resources of coal and iron were utilised to develop heavy industries such as coal mining, iron and steel manufacture, and shipbuilding on a scale and at a speed that have never been possible under capitalism with a mass of small producers.

National income grew by an average of 7 per cent in the years 1951-1972 (compared with an average figure in Britain of around 3 per cent) — a figure that has only been equalled by Japan and South Africa in the West. Industrial production rose by a massive 13 times over since 1937. These and many other similar figures spell their own message in steel, concrete, roads and railways. The social advances based on this development have been enormous. Illiteracy, which had stood at 20 per cent of the population over 7 years old in 1945, is now only 10 per cent (mainly old people) in the rural

areas, and only 2.4 per cent in the towns. The education system, which suffered the destruction of 60 per cent of buildings during the war, has been entirely rebuilt. The proportion of Gross National Product spent on Education in Poland (6.5 per cent) is five times that of Britain (1.3 per cent). This is borne out in figures such as class sizes, which have been reduced from an average of 62 in 1937, to 23 in 1979. In medicine, Poland now has 18 doctors per 10,000 of the population, compared with a figure of 13.1 in Britain (and this figure will probably fall now as a result of Tory cut backs in the NHS).

These examples and many more, social and economic, are a crushing answer to reactionaries, like the Tories and Solzhenitsyn who oppose the concept of a planned economy. What they want to see in reality is not workers' democracy in Poland, but a return to capitalism with the barbarism of mass unemployment. In opposition to this, during the recent struggles, the workers made it absolutely clear that they were not calling for a return to capitalism, but the establishment of workers' democracy, on the basis of a planned economy.

Economic Crisis Looms

THE REMOVAL of Premier Jaroszewicz, early in 1980, on the grounds of 'ill health' (the same mystery disease that claims most scapegoats for Stalinist regimes) was an indication of the crisis looming in Poland. The scale of the economic crisis was such that National Income actually fell by 2 per cent in 1979 (something almost without precedent in Eastern Europe), compared with the average growth rate of 7 per cent over the 1950s and 60s.

Agriculture

In Poland this process has been especially sharp as a result of previous policies of the bureaucracy. Following the 1956 uprising, in an attempt to build himself a base of political support among the peasants, Gomulka denationalised 80 per cent of the land into tiny, inefficient peasant plots, a move from which the agriculture is suffering to this day. After the 1970 uprising, food price subsidies were introduced to hold prices steady, in an attempt to fend off further strikes. By 1979 because of the crisis in agriculture these subsidies had reached a massive £2,500 million, 20 times the cost in 1970. In addition much of the development of industry has been financed by foreign currency loans. But as a result of misplanning, the economy has been unable to develop industries producing goods of quality and type suitable for export, so that the loans (and the interest charges on them!) now total over £8,000 million. The interest charges on this sum alone in 1980 came to nearly £2,000 million. This means that 68 per cent of all Poland's projected exports are going just to pay off interest charges. Polish workers now face the humiliation of seeing ever increasing amounts of the two main export goods, meat and coal going abroad while they have to spend hours queuing for the very goods they have produced.

Even in the early years after the overthrow of capitalism in 1945, the lack of workers' democracy led to shortages and bottlenecks which slowed down the potential for growth. But the impetus provided by a plan of production for the development of basic heavy industries, utilising natural resources of coal and iron and the importation of basic industrial techniques from Russia and the West meant that the economy was able to grow at massive rates. In recent years, the attempts to develop different industries, beyond the basic heavy industries have led to the effects of the lack of workers' democracy becoming more apparent. The more developed and varied an economy becomes, the more complex the relationships of supply and use of different resources between different sections of the economy become. Unlike capitalism a planned economy doesn't have the 'check' of the market, of demand for goods, and periodic crisis, to act as a regulator of what is produced. Decisions covering investment, and production need the check of workers' democracy if massive errors of shortfalls, or excesses of production of particular goods are to be avoided. In addition to these problems, the nationalistic attempts of each of the East European bureaucracies to build 'socialism in one country' is a further burden on the economy. This idea, flies in the face of one of the main benefits of a planned economy, to eliminate wasteful duplication of products, and to gain the fullest benefits of large scale industry. Instead each bureaucracy attempts to develop 'their' industries to the extent that Hungary and Czechoslovakia, adjacent to each other, have developed separate ball-bearing industries.



August 22, 1980 — the occupation of the Lenin shipyard in Gdansk is unshakeable and hundreds of other plants rally in support.

Economic stagnation

Taken together, the effect of a bureaucracy appropriating for itself a massive share of production, the lack of workers' democracy, and the attempt to build 'socialism in one country' account for the slowing

down of growth, and even decline, in the East European states.

In 1970, the beginning of the stagnation of the economy led to an attempt by the bureaucracy to 'solve' shortages by raising prices of food, fuel and rent by 10-30 per cent. Workers in the Baltic shipyard towns such as Gdansk and Gdynia, and the coal mining areas of Krakow and Katowice led a magnificent uprising. Factories, mines and shipyards were occupied, elected strike committees were established. Fearful of the situation, the bureaucracy withdrew the price rises (although not before hundreds of workers had been gunned down by the riot police in Gdansk). Instead massive subsidies were introduced on many prices. Again, on 25th June, 1976 'overnight' food price rises of 45 per cent were met by mass strikes, demonstrations, and the ripping up of railway tracks. Within days they were withdrawn as a 'mistake'.

Tight-rope

Thus in the period up to the Summer of 1980, the bureaucracy had been walking a tightrope, between a deepening economic crisis on the one hand, and the working class that had grown in strength. Many former peasants moved into the new factories and the towns and cities, and became more educated and cultured, losing many of the backward prejudices that still exist in scattered village life. Herded into massive factories and housing estates, with their lives dominated by the factory clock, they rapidly absorbed the consciousness and outlook of the industrial workers around them. Today 55 per cent of the population lives in towns, compared with 31.8 per cent in 1946, and half the population is under 26 years old.

It was this young strong, working class, with the experiences of struggles in 1956, '70 and '76 behind it, that confronted the bureaucracy.

For a whole period the bureaucracy attempted to head off a struggle, maintaining the price subsidies, despite the massive drain on the economy they represented. But such a situation cannot last for ever. Confronted by an actual fall in agricultural output in 1979 of 1.4 per cent, at the same time as more and more agricultural produce was needed to finance foreign trade debts, the bureaucracy attempted to 'end' the shortage of meat by pushing up prices in July 1980, which led to the strike explosion.

At the present time, the bureaucracy has been forced to make massive concessions in order to head off the workers' struggle and preserve its own position of power and privilege. But the economic crisis is rooted in the Stalinist system itself, in the existence of a massive bureaucracy, and the lack of workers' democracy, and lack of international planning between the different East European states. Until the workers are successful in overthrowing the bureaucracies in Eastern Europe, the economic problems will remain, and indeed become more acute. This means that the next period will be one of renewed and increasing struggles, in Poland and throughout Eastern Europe.

In Poland itself the regime has already announced public spending cuts of £1,250m, mainly by cutting major construction projects, including two major power stations, despite the economy suffering from a chronic energy shortage, and power cuts. Likewise, investment as a whole, even before these latest cutbacks, had fallen by 8 per cent for two years running. These new cutbacks will mean a further slowing down and decline in the economy. In the next period, the Polish bureaucracy will have no alternative but to try and take back from the workers the gains of the last struggle. But this will pave the way for renewed struggles, in which the workers will draw on the experiences of 1956/70/76, and now the summer of 1980 as well.



December 1970. Rioters set the HQ of the 'Communist Party', symbol of oppression, ablaze in Szczecin.

The Struggle Ahead

THE PRESENT situation represents an uneasy truce. The bureaucracy has been forced to concede (on paper) a whole range of demands including the establishment of free trade unions, but they still control all the reins of power — the press, police, army and economy.

The development of independent workers' organisations represents an element of workers' control, a challenge to the authority of the bureaucracy. At local level this has meant demands for more control over the hiring and firing of workers, for the opening of accounts to workers' inspection. One of the demands of the Gdansk strike committee was "The undertaking of actions aimed at bringing the country out of its crisis situation by the following means:

(a) Making public complete information about the social-economic situation.
(b) Enabling all sectors and social classes to take part in discussion of the reform programme."

A later issue of *Solidarity* put the question more bluntly: 'We would like to know and furthermore we have the right to know what the purpose of all our efforts of the past 36 years has been. We have the right to know what has happened to the fruits of our labours — which have not been small — that we should find ourselves in this situation. I and everyone else have the right to presume that the new "efforts" which we are being exhorted to make will be wasted just like the previous efforts were . . . On what battlefront is it that we have suffered such great defeats? Who is attacking us so effectively that a quarter of our investments are wasted, and appear on the debit rather than the credit side of our national budget?'

Investigate

The statements clearly show how the workers will use the unions to investigate the causes of the problems in the economy, and why the bureaucracy will be unable to tolerate the development of independent trade unions for any period of time. Even an official paper, *Polityka*, was forced to publish an opinion poll which showed that a massive 83 per cent of the population blamed the policy of the regime for the unrest. This shows the potential support if an opposition party were able to develop without harassment.

Undoubtedly we will see the same methods as were used after 1956 to behead the unions. Attempts will be made to 'bribe' activists with 'better' jobs, and new apartments in areas away from where they have built up support among workers. Some will be absorbed into the bureaucracy itself. Attempts will be made to switch those that can't be bribed in one way or another and subjected to arbitrary harassment.

Chief Prosecutor

As proof of the planned crackdown, 'Solidarity' had obtained (through a sympathetic printworker) a copy of a document from the Chief Prosecutor outlining plans for a crackdown. The document was entitled 'On the present methods of prosecution of illegal anti-socialist activity' and was sent out 'to be used skillfully in political and professional work'.

The whole document outlined how the Chief Prosecutor's office was operated as a tool of the security police. At one point it goes to great lengths to explain how 'Members of the Security Service conducted, or tried to conduct with them (dissidents) conversations of an explanatory, conscience-forming character, mostly without any result'!

But this attempt to begin a crackdown was premature. When the printer and a member of 'Solidarity' were arrested for possessing the document, workers in Warsaw prepared a General Strike for a series of demands against the political police: a cut in their budget, a commission to investigate abuses of power, putting on trial of those responsible for the police violence against workers in 1970 and 1976, and of course the



Former head of Polish TV, Maciej Szczepanski, now facing trial for 'embezzlement'. Under pressure from below, the bureaucracy has clipped the wings of its more "flashy" brethren.

release of the two arrested workers.

At this stage the regime was forced to pay the price for moving too quickly, and had to release the arrested workers, and greatly restrict the open activity of the security police. They will have to wait longer, until the enormous confidence of the workers begins to ebb away.

Purge

In the meanwhile, in an attempt to restore the 'authority' of the police, the new layer of party and state officials are carrying through a 'purge' of some of the disgraced old officials such as former party leader, Gierek. In a blaze of publicity, one or two individuals, guilty of the worst excesses of corruption, are being put on trial. In these 'exposures' — in reality the tip of the iceberg — a glimpse can be gained of the lifestyle of the top layers of the bureaucracy. The lifestyle of one of them, the former head of the state-run TV, Maciej Szczepanski would have made many western millionaires jealous! His personal 'haul' included a country villa with a sauna and swimming pool, and a lavishly adorned bed that cost over £50,000. Under his direction, Polish TV chiefs also had at their disposal a private island in the Mediterranean, and a safari lodge in Kenya. In addition he had seven cars, two planes, a helicopter and two yachts, a 42-bedroomed country estate, and 31 full-time domestic staff!

But the new 'investigator of corruption', General Moczar, is better known to workers for his past, as Chief of Police, brutally suppressing opposition to the regime. On one occasion in 1968 he ordered the arrest of 3,000 student demonstrators, and in the past he played an active role in helping to whip up anti-Jewish movements. This weeding out of individuals like Szczepanski is only a cosmetic action that is intended to cover up for the corruption and privileges of the remaining bureaucrats. There will never be any attempt by the regime to explain what is wrong with the system that can allow individuals to accumulate such wealth and power, or how they were able to do it 'unnoticed' in the past. The bureaucracy can never ask questions like these because the answers inevitably point against the regime as a whole, and for the need for workers' democracy, for the regular election of all officials, and none to receive a wage higher than a skilled worker.

New Storms Loom

AS THEY face renewed battles in the future to defend the gains of the recent period, and a renewal of police harassment of trade union activists, many workers will undoubtedly begin to wonder about the advice they received particularly from the church and intellectuals, 'not to go to far'.

During the recent rising there can be no doubt that many workers looked to the Catholic Church. In Eastern Europe, as under Fascist and military dictatorships, the church is often the only legal voice of opposition or semi-opposition to the regime. This can build up over decades an enormous sympathy for the church among workers and peasants. In Poland this is added to by the historic role played by the church as a voice of opposition to the great powers that have oppressed the Polish nation over a period of centuries.

This sympathy for the church was reflected by portraits of the Pope being hung up next to those of Karl Marx outside the shipyards. Clearly while the workers looked to the ideas of Marxism for political inspiration, they at the same time had respect for the



Lech Walesa being blessed by the Bishop of Gdansk, Henryk Jankowski, who appealed to the workers not to go 'too far'.

church for the role it had played as opposition to the regime. But among many workers these sympathies were shaken by the frequent appeals of church leaders 'not to go too far'. For example the Bishop of Gdansk, clearly not noticing the movement taking place under his feet, advised the workers 'That prolonged work stoppages and possible disturbances or the shedding of brotherly blood are contrary to the good of society'. He went on to appeal to the strikers 'to act in their wise and prudent manner'. After a TV appearance from Cardinal Wyczynski, which contained frequent appeals to workers to return to work, one member of the Gdansk strike committee commented 'We did not expect him to go so far in helping the government — we are disappointed.'

Much of the advice the workers received from the 'dissidents' was in a similar vein.

Repression

A statement issued by the 'Workers' Self Defence Committee' (KOR) (which was set up to fight against repression of activists after the 1976 strikes), on 12th August, 1980, immediately before the explosion of strikes, claimed that one of the factors of success of the earliest strikes was that:

'The strikes are often well organised. They do not carry out their action outside the area of their enterprise.' Yet within two weeks of this appeal for moderation, the entire Gdansk area was gripped by a general strike. It was clearly the workers' determination to struggle, and to spread their struggle to other workplaces that forced the concessions from the regime.

A statement issued by Jacek Kuron, a leading member of KOR in August 1980 showed how many of the dissidents were in effect a liberal wing of the bureaucracy, calling for the regime to reform itself, rather than for the workers to overthrow it:



Polish workers and soldiers thronged the streets of Warsaw in October 1956 when workers' struggles led the bureaucracy to 'reshuffle' and bring Gomulka to power. Illusions in Gomulka were soon dashed.

'Is it possible to create boundaries within which the dynamic of the movement can be contained? It is both possible and necessary, but the only way it can be done is to establish a programme which would simultaneously allow the movement to develop and to become aware of its own limitations . . .' He continued: 'This involves working out a programme of democracy consistent with the aspirations of the Polish people while at the same time keeping within the necessary bounds.'

'Keeping within the necessary bounds' can mean only one thing — accepting the continued rule of the bureaucracy. And the regime recognised this, tolerating many of the dissidents as a semi-legal opposition, as a safety valve, even before the strikes.

Dissidents

Despite the conservative outlook of many of the dissidents and priests, undoubtedly many workers looked to them on account of the repression they had faced from the regime in the past and the role they had played in helping to fight against repression. Also in a Stalinist regime, where the press, and publication of books, etc., is strictly censored, any voices of opposition will be eagerly listened to.

Will Russia Invade?

BEHIND THE hesitancy of the intellectuals and many of the workers' leaders is the fear of invasion from the USSR. With the experience of Russian invasions in Hungary in 1956, and Czechoslovakia in 1968, such an event cannot be ruled out, especially if the Russian bureaucracy feels there is no other way left for them to preserve Stalinism in Poland.

But since 1968, and especially 1956, there have been a number of developments that make the situation less favourable for the Russian bureaucracy. Not least of these is the developing economic problems which now afflict all of the East European states. A recent report in the official Russian trade union paper, *Trud*, pointed out that many Russian miners are now being forced to give up their Sundays off, and work double shifts. The paper lamented that 'No one ever asks the permission of the miners' Trade Union committees.' Russian workers such as those at the giant Togliatti car plants, are also increasingly discontented with their conditions and seeing that the only way results can be gained is by relying on their own strength, and taking strike action.

In 1956, when the Russian bureaucracy invaded Hungary to put down the uprising, many of the first troops going into Hungary, faced with a general strike and what was clearly a workers' uprising, refused to fight, and some even went over to fight with the



29 October 1956. At the height of the uprising, workers march through the streets of Budapest. Russian tanks were forced to withdraw — only to return days later . . .

Hungarian workers. Only a second invasion, using troops from distant Asiatic republics, who couldn't understand the language and therefore the leaflets of the Hungarian workers, was able to put the rising down.

The Russian bureaucracy has been forced to jam radio broadcasts in attempts to prevent workers from hearing about the strikes, and particularly the workers' demands. The East Germans have placed intolerable restrictions on travel to and from Poland, an obvious attempt to prevent the spread of the 'Polish disease!'.

Uncertainty

The fear and uncertainty of all the East European regimes stems from the crisis in their economies which are leading to increasing calls to the long suffering workers to sacrifice. In Hungary, where inflation is over 13 per cent the regime admits that 'citizens' living standards have dropped "temporarily" last year and may "stagnate" this year.' This has already resulted in some workers catching what the bureaucrats call the 'Polish disease' and striking. Yugoslavia faces runaway inflation of over 30 per cent.

In Rumania, meat shortages led to strikes in August 1980 of 3,000 workers. Remembering the strike by 30,000 miners in 1977, the authorities made sure that massive supplies were in the shops the very next day!

In all the comments of the East European regimes over the Polish event, the most outspoken against the Polish workers have been the East German and Czechoslovakian regimes. The attacks of these regimes, making frequent attempts to make out that the general strikes were the work of anti-socialist elements, reflected their own fears as they preside over the most unsteady economies in the bloc.

East German workers, sandwiched between the relative affluence and democratic rights of the West German workers, and the struggle of the Polish workers to the East, will have been watching with great interest the struggles of the Polish workers. Nor will the regimes be able to hide completely what has happened as an estimated 100,000 Czech and East German workers were on holiday on the Baltic Coast when the mass strikes erupted.

The bureaucracies are caught in a dilemma. While they fear nothing



5 November 1956. Russian tanks smash the Hungarian workers' rebellion.

more than the establishment of a regime of genuine workers' democracy, on the other hand an invasion of Poland would be an entirely different question to the invasion of Hungary in 1956.

National identity

Poland has a centuries long history of being an oppressed nation, which means there is in the consciousness of Poles a strong feeling of national identity, and a tradition of determined and bitter struggle against armies of occupation. An invasion would almost certainly lead to a civil war in which the bulk of the soldiers in the army would fight on the side of the workers. Such a civil war, even if it resulted initially in a bloody defeat of the Polish workers in the face of the might of the Soviet Army, would have enormous repercussions throughout Eastern Europe, particularly now as the regimes are economically less stable than in 1956 or 1968.

For these reasons the Russian bureaucracy has shied away from the idea of an invasion as long as it appears the situation in Poland can be 'stabilised' by other means. At the present time some of the leaders of the Trade Union 'Solidarity' such as Lech Walesa, and the Cardinals of the Catholic Church have persuaded the workers to hold back in their struggles. As long as this remains the case, the bureaucracies will be prepared to wait for the movement to die down before using their control of the police, army and economy, to whittle away the concessions.

The only way the workers' gains can be made permament, and true workers' democracy established is on the basis of the complete overthrow of the bureaucracy. The establishment of workers' democracy would be a beacon to workers throughout Eastern Europe.

For this reason, the regimes will use every means, including possibly as a last resort an invasion, to crush an isolated workers' state.



Will the workers' jubilation last? Only the overthrow of the Bureaucracy can guarantee the gains already made.

To ensure the success of such a struggle, against the other Stalinist bureaucracies, and the inevitable attempts of economic sabotage that a workers' state would face from the capitalist powers, the Polish workers will need to build themselves a new political party, independent of the state and Church, that is thoroughly armed with an internationalist outlook. The only way in which the threat of invasion and sabotage will be successfully defeated will be through appeals to workers throughout Eastern Europe, and the West, to support and spread the struggle for workers' democracy and socialism. The fear of the bureaucracies in Eastern Europe of a successful political revolution is only matched by the fear of the capitalists in the West. With their system entering a period of massive crisis, and mass unemployment, one of their few arguments against socialism is to play on the fear in workers' minds of the possibility of a Stalinist type regime. The successful establishment of a workers' state would destroy this myth, the menace of Stalinism would crumble. An interview in an Italian newspaper with some car factory workers soon after the strikes showed how workers had understood this — 'In Poland we've seen that when the workers are on the move, not even the Soviet Union with its tanks can do anything about it. What does this mean? That the working class can guarantee any democracy — even a socialist democracy. Poland has been a victory for all workers — for Italian workers too.'

It is out of fear that the continuing economic crisis in Poland will lead to renewed struggles, and the possible overthrow of the bureaucracy that we now see Western powers burying their hatred of the nationalised economy, and pouring massive loans into the Polish economy, in an attempt to head off more struggles. In the first few months after the strikes, West Germany granted new loans of over £280m, the USA about £100 million, and the EEC is making arrangements for Poland to have cheap access to some of its mountains of surpluses such as butter and milk, for these reasons the Russian bureaucracy have made a loan of $1 billion in 'hard' western currencies to finance reforms.

Forward to a New Society

IN 1917 the economy of India was more advanced than that of Russia. Today while Russia is the second world power, in India millions live — and die — in the gutters. The massive advances in Russia, and throughout Eastern Europe, China, Cuba, etc., have been based on the overthrow of capitalism, and the establishment of a plan of production. Today, however, the potential for the future is being squashed under the weight of massive bureaucracies, and the separate attempts to build 'socialism in one country'.

The overthrow of the bureaucracies in the East and of capitalism in the West would mean the possibilities of linking together the economies in a harmonious plan of production. This, linked to the fullest workers' democracy, of discussion and debate about production targets, methods, and techniques and the full utilisation of new technology such as computers and robots would pave the way for a massive leap forward in the development in the productive forces, increases in living standards, and a huge reduction in the working week.

As people become relieved of working long hours in manufacturing industry, they would have the time to participate in the running of society, which would end the existence of a special layer of officials.

Based on a super-abundance of wealth, the ending of want and poverty, classes in society would begin to disappear. For the first time in human history the development of art, science and culture would no longer be the preserve of the wealthy few, but would be actively participated in by the entire population. On that basis, the pre-history of mankind would end and undreamt of possibilities would open up for society.

Every struggle of East European workers against the barbaric regimes of Stalinism, and of workers in the West against capitalism, takes us nearer to the goal of workers' democracy that the Russian workers began the struggle for in 1917.

THE LPYS National Committee issued this press statement as an open letter of protest to the Polish Embassy in August 1980:

We and the Labour Party Young Socialists call upon your Government to concede the full demands of the workers represented by the Gdansk Strike Committee.

We completely disassociate the LPYS from the reactionary campaign of the British Tories, the Anglo-Polish Conservative Club and other right-wing Polish exile groups who have only their profiteering, anti-working class interests at heart. The stance of the Thatcher government, which is rushing to arm the bloody military dictatorship of Pinochet in Chile, is determined not by support for the Polish workers' demands. It is determined by their total opposition to state ownership and a planned economy and desire to see a return to capitalism in Poland.

It is you, the ruling bureaucratic caste in Poland who stand as a bulwark against the introduction of democratic workers' control of society, the absence of which has led to economic bungling and mismanagement and the current economic crisis. Cosmetic changes in the government will not change the situation nor convince the Polish workers.

The Polish working class have declared against your bureaucratic rule. In solidarity the LPYS support the struggle against bureaucratism and for the implementation of the measures laid down by Marx and Lenin to begin the socialist transformation of society:—

Free elections and the right of recall over all officials.

No officials to receive more than a skilled workers' wage.

No separate regular army controlled by the bureaucracy but an armed working class and peasantry.

No bureaucratic elite. All positions to be rotated amongst the people.

The right to strike, the right to independent trade unions, a free press and the right to vote freely are elementary conditions for a healthy workers' state.

FOR WORKERS' DEMOCRACY TO BUILD A SOCIALIST POLAND!!

Also signed by:
Dennis Skinner, MP,
Jo Richardson, MP.

Glossary

Gomulka: Polish Communist Party Leader 1956-70.

Gierek: Polish Communist Party Leader 1970-August 1980.

Kania: Polish Communist Party Leader August 1980-?

Jaroszewicz: Polish Prime Minister until early 1980.

Polish United Workers' Party — the Communist Party.

Solidarity — Independent trade union set up by the workers during the summer of 1980, and at the present time 'recognised' by the regime.

Szczecin, Gdansk, Gdynia — Baltic Sea Ports and centres of the workers' struggle.

Important Dates

1945: Capitalism overthrown under the impetus of the Red Army.
1956: Workers' Uprising diverted onto Nationalist lines. Gomulka becomes Party Leader.
1970: Uprising based in the Baltic seaports. Hundreds of workers gunned down in Gdansk. Gomulka deposed and replaced by the 'liberal' Gierek.
1976: Meat price rises of 45 per cent provoke uprising in Warsaw and other areas. Price rises withdrawn.
1980: July: First strikes break out. First city-wide strikes in Lublin.
1980: August: General strike in Gdansk area forces regime to concede independent Trade Unions.

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