

Poland at the Crossroad

Solidarity and State Pitted Against Polish Workers

Fifth Estate Collective

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With the endorsement of the Polish Communist Party's Politburo, on November 10, of a plan that would include the Solidarity union in a new coalition government, it appears that the seemingly endless period of crisis and confrontation in Poland will soon have a conclusion of classic dimensions: A militant working class, as it presses ahead with its demands, will face the combined opposition of both the state and union.

The large, and increasingly bureaucratic Solidarity labor federation is quickly scattering the remaining mist which has obscured its real role in the Polish events. It continues to force an end to strikes (in the "national interest," of course), convincing workers to return to their jobs while the national union leadership "negotiates" with the government over the union's future role.

The content of the scheduled talks seems a foregone conclusion: Lech Walesa, Solidarity president and the Walter Reuther of Poland, will tell the embattled socialist government that it is only the giant trade union which can discipline the work force adequately enough to return the country to class peace. In exchange for this service, Walesa will undoubtedly demand a role for the union as a junior partner or perhaps even full partner in the management of the state capitalist economy, either through a permanent co-determination panel, or through direct participation in the government.

It appears very possible that Communist Party leader General Wojcieck Jaruzelski will accept this plan quickly since he must realize, as does his Solidarity counterpart that time is running out for both of them. What the union has to offer may quickly evaporate as an increasingly aggressive and militant working class continues its massive strike activity even in the face of pleas from Walesa and threats from the Solidarity leadership. This brings into doubt whether the union's control can be exerted effectively in the months to come if it does not have its status elevated to that of participant in governmental policy-making.

Time is running out for Jaruzelski because of the increasing disintegration of what remains of the ruling order's ability to govern (and didn't old Lenin teach that this is half of what constitutes a revolution?). The government's administrative and repressive mechanisms are in shambles—the party itself and the police near collapse and the official trade unions completely collapsed. In fact, what does that even leave as a basis for the government to continue its rule?

The answer is clear to all observers, including the Polish government: It is only the threat of invasion by the Soviet Union and other Eastern Bloc countries which allows the Warsaw bureaucracy to remain in power. Actually, it would be difficult to find other examples in history of a ruling order so devoid of social support from any sector of society. Perhaps certain sections of the Army, with the party head also serving as chief of the armed forces may be willing to remain loyal to the state, but no one, least of all Gen. Jaruzelski, is sure of even that.

So, the situation is on a cusp, with the prospect of workers' revolution on one side and a Russian invasion on the other, if the two power brokers cannot quickly come to an accommodation. The crossroad Poland finds itself on today is not an easy one—life as it was before the current movement began will not be returned to, and the road

to authentic revolution has barrier after barrier erected upon it—nationalism, religion, but the most formidable one being the trade union mystification present in the official Solidarity organization.

“Official” must be stressed because an autonomous workers’ movement still exists and is active everywhere in Poland no matter how vainly the union bureaucracy tries to center all power and attention on its pronouncements, its congresses and its personalities. The current enthusiastic strike wave has brought workers throughout the country, who nominally call themselves Solidarity, increasingly into confrontation with their “leaders.” This is nothing new though. Since Solidarity formed itself out of the presidium of the Inter-Factory Committee (MKS), which coordinated the August 1980 general strike, its main role has been to stop and prevent strikes and to consolidate all power in the hands of the central organization in Gdansk, breaking the mass democratic nature of the inter-factory committees.

Echoing the Polish Parliament’s desperate plea to end the strikes, the national Solidarity leadership called upon its locals to cease their wildcats (that is, strikes not approved by them), threatening to enforce disciplinary measures on rebellious affiliates. The “radical” leadership suddenly begins to sound like any union in the world: “We call the strikes; not you!” Just as with the formation of the UAW in the 1930s, the quickly consolidating union bureaucracy is moving to quell local militancy and initiative, the very features which created the movement, and to install themselves as representatives of the workers.

Walesa says he desires an end to “economic strikes” because “they only hurt ourselves” and wants Solidarity to be part of the process of re-building the rapidly deteriorating economic situation in Poland. However, the task will be no easy one and will require, in the words of Deputy Prime Minister Mieczyslaw Rakowski, in May 1981, “high productivity, good work organization and an effectively operating state system.” At this moment, the exact opposite prevails throughout Poland: 24% of the country’s industrial plant lies idle, productivity is a joke, the workers are organizing only for strikes and the state apparatus is a dismal disaster.

It is only through the nation’s sole coherent mass organization—Solidarity—in which everyone from Bonn and Geneva bankers to Poland’s Kremlin masters place their hopes that the situation can be returned to “normal,” that is, through wage work, authority and sacrifice. Solidarity is coming to the rescue of Polish state capitalism in two important ways: 1) by continuing its attempt to suppress the autonomous movement of workers which still exists outside of its control, thus blunting any revolutionary thrust; and 2) by organizing workers around the sacrifices necessary to salvage the national economy from its impending collapse.

But is this fair to Walesa and the Solidarity leadership? What of Moscow’s and Warsaw’s fulminations against the union, their denunciations of its “anti-socialist” statements and its “provocations”? The Soviets are playing a careful and skillful game of manipulation to forestall the dreaded possibility of having to invade and have advised their Polish vassals to act accordingly. Both governments have regularly attempted to influence popular opinion by the process of remaining silent on events they oppose and vociferously criticizing what they support. A good example is the recent official Solidarity one-hour “general strike” which Walesa called in a clear attempt to defuse the actual wave of general strikes that workers had created in October in several provinces. Moscow, which had said nothing about the increasing factory occupations and strikes, began a furious denunciation of Solidarity’s sham, knowing full well that their criticism would only serve to bolster the event in the eyes of the Poles.

At the same time, Walesa called for an end to the autonomous and militant strikes and for full participation in a completely symbolic affair at which he requested the flying of the Polish national colors. It is no wonder the Russians haven’t invaded when they have such a powerful ally fighting what they fear the most—an “uncontrolled,” combative Polish working class and, worse, the generalization of the struggle throughout the rest of the Soviet empire.

Walesa, boastful of his obeisance to Cardinal and Pope (he still wears that ridiculously large cross), and a patriotic nationalist, emerges as the man most committed to the Soviet fears not being realized. Of course, without the extension of the strike movement within Poland and its generalization throughout Eastern Europe, the Polish workers will soon be back at the grindstone, whipped now by “their” union instead of the state’s, working to pay “their” country’s debt to the consortium of international bankers who hold the country in hock to the tune of \$30 billion.

Our dismay at the direction of Solidarity also comes in no small part from the support the union has picked up along the way. When the likes of President Reagan, the Pope, the leaders of the NATO countries, and the heads

of every conservative trade union in the West begin to roundly commend the union along with it receiving gushing editorial support from such bastions of the present order as the Wall Street Journal, the New York Times and Fortune magazine, we suggest that advocates of revolution take a step back and assess the situation.

These traditional enemies of revolution and workers have not suddenly lost their powers of reasoning nor reversed their views of the world, but it seems like the many anarchists and self-management advocates who should know better have. It seems that the long standing opposition to unions as part of capital's apparatus for selling and disciplining labor has evaporated in a giddy celebration of the union's call for self-management of the economy at the Solidarity Congress held in Gdansk this September. But what is the union all about and what are its calls for self-management worth?

Events such as the Solidarity Congress, with its big media splash both here and in Poland, are but part of the process where the "news" is made by prominent figures from important organizations and the activities of millions are presented for consumption as being represented in the motion of a few leaders. So, Walesa's call for the end of a strike in Zielona Gora province appears when transmitted through the media to have the same, if not more, importance and social weight than the 160,000 workers who remained on strike despite his pleas for them to cease. (As this was being typeset on Nov. 13, news came that the strike there had finally caved into Solidarity's call for its termination.) Similarly, the Congress in Gdansk took on an importance in the media's eyes, which far outweighed the activities of millions of living human beings and instead focused on the easily reportable functioning of some 800 "representatives" of those millions.

At the Congress, the delegates operated just like any other traditional union, creating the context whereby it functions in place of the workers. The Congress itself, completely coordinated by computers (even sporting a computer print-out portrait of the Pope at the Congress entrance) was comprised of predominately college-educated professionals—who proved themselves to be experts at voting, caucusing, politicking, speech-making and the rest of the activity which separates it from anything remotely connected with the process of revolution. Although Polish women have been exceedingly militant—occupying textile factories in the middle of October—they represented less than 8% of the delegates at the Congress.

Also, Solidarity's drift toward the right has been less than subtle. Everyone of the union's contacts with the West, from the Pope to the AFL-CIO, stinks of the Cold War. When the Solidarity Congress invited speakers to their gathering, it was no accident that they chose Irving Brown from the AFL-CIO's international union department, a known CIA operative in Europe for 30 years. And when they decided to open a New York office, it turns out to be located in Albert Shanker's American Federation of Teachers building where the Solidarity representatives are surrounded by dotting U.S. labor cold warriors like Shanker, AFL-CIO president Lane Kirkland and other members of the Committee on the Present Danger whose program is that of nuclear arms increases and confrontation with the Soviets.

Moreover, Solidarity's crass appeals to the most reactionary nationalist sentiments of the Poles have grown recently both in frequency and in content. At a recent Solidarity Independence Day rally held November 11, the union mobilized over 10,000 members and supporters at a ceremony to rename a Gdansk shipyard in honor of Marshall Jozef Pilsudski, a right-wing general who led a fascist regime prior to World War II. A similar rally in Warsaw, also sponsored by the union, featured banners praising Pilsudski and his devotion to "God, Country and Motherhood."

To be sure, Solidarity has its share of workers in the national organization, but the union bureaucracy is dominated increasingly by intellectuals, college professors and social democrats whose visions of social change appear to be limited to that of an American suburb. Solidarity has become much like the UAW of the 'thirties, when socialists and intellectuals rode to positions of power and domination over the working class during a period of intense class struggle, with both Solidarity and the UAW coming to bail out capitalism in its hour of crisis.

And what of the call for self-management, the dream of so many? Part of the allure that the Solidarity union holds for leftists, anarchists and self-management advocates, is based upon the labor federation's increasing demand for a say in running the country's productive and distributive functions. In its Congress, Solidarity has demanded a program of self-management or co-determination with the Communist Party, particularly in the selection and dismissal of factory directors.

On the face of it, the direct challenge from the union for authority over the production process is what gives it its most radical posture—the contest for power over the working class with the state apparatus. It is clear at this juncture, as was said earlier, that the state is no longer able to command the obedience of the workers, so if certain conditions are met (such as the exclusion of “strategic” industries from co-determination), it probably will allow Solidarity to take control of disciplining labor.

Those formulating the policies for self-management are not proposing anything that the government and its Western bank creditors would oppose: the introduction of a market mechanism and some decentralization of enterprises. “Market socialism” and a decentralized economy—along the lines of the Yugoslav model—administered through workers’ councils, might be the last chance to save the Polish economy from its impending ruin. Radical as “self-management” may sound to some, particularly when linked to workers’ councils, all of what Solidarity is proposing will simply become the mechanism for the self-managing of the bankrupt state capitalist economy and the workers’ own sacrifice and misery (see Walesa’s quote in the attached article).

Workers’ councils of an authentic nature, created from below by shop floor democracy, are already in place and being organized daily throughout the country as a product of the constant wave of wildcat strikes and factory occupations, and have already taken a hand in administering their workplaces. However, Walesa and his crew of university professor advisers have something different in mind when they speak of self-management.

Professor Bronislaw Geremek, a Solidarity adviser, has called for “the introduction of some market mechanisms inside the socialist economy.; a kind of enterprise autonomy and workers participation in the management of the national economy.” Walesa has gone farther and has advocated Poland’s joining the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the supranational capitalist investment agency and the Polish government, now just tailing along (whatever happened to its cherished “leading role” which it was so protective of?) has officially applied for IMF membership thus tying the economy even more to Western capital.

This identification by Solidarity with the “national interest,” which is no more than the interests of capital, will act, if successful, as a brake on revolutionary development, not only in Poland, but throughout the Eastern bloc. Right at a point when all of the economies of Eastern Europe are plagued with no- or low-growth situations, self-management appears on the Polish scene to rescue the bungling bureaucrats. Is it any wonder that the Western bankers, with so much at stake in the Polish debt picture, so overwhelmingly endorse Solidarity and its program?

At this point the Polish workers’ struggle stands at a crossroads—if the current trajectory of autonomous, self-organized activity cannot be halted by Solidarity’s ideological subterfuge or by military suppression, revolution stands posed on the horizon, not Only for Poland, but for all of Eastern Europe and perhaps the Soviet Union itself.

While the Soviet Union naturally opposes this course, it is doing everything possible to avoid the necessity of direct intervention knowing the consequences would bring about a period of prolonged chaos to its Bloc and a disruption of its growing financial connections with the West. For its part, the West opposes the prospects of revolution as well, knowing that such a prospect would mean huge losses in terms of Poland’s \$30 billion debt and instability in the rest of Eastern Europe in terms of investment possibilities. Also, the appearance of an authentically revolutionary, democratic, free socialist’ bloc would destroy the capacity to characterize the East as bent on war and domination of the West, the cornerstone of U.S. military and foreign policy.

Moscow’s trepidation about invading stem from several other factors, not the least of which is a seeming total lack of any coherent strategy in the present crisis. Their commitment to keep secure the countries which comprise their military buffer and economic empire remain in force, but after their continuing debacle in Afghanistan, their desire and capacity to become bogged down in yet another unwinnable war against a rebellious population is an unattractive prospect to say the least. Also, even though the NATO countries have flashed the Soviets the green light for an invasion through their assurance that the West would not respond militarily in the event of a Russian intervention, more is et stake for the Kremlin.

The Soviet Union, like its Eastern European satellites, is becoming increasingly integrated into Western (particularly European) capital due to its overall falling growth rate and increasing economic stagnation, and cannot afford what an invasion of Poland would bring. Such an action would mean an end to Western investment in the Eastern Bloc, something that the USSR is counting on to finance such massive projects as the Yamburg natural gas field, which Soviet officials describe as “the largest project in recorded history.” West German banks are presently scheduled to provide a good portion of the \$45 billion price tag on the 3,600 mile transmission field which even-

tually would supply Western Europe with 35% of its natural gas. This is part of a 25-year economic cooperation agreement signed between Germany and the Soviet Union, but one which surely would be abrogated if the Soviet troops march into Warsaw and Gdansk.

What is at stake in Poland is of tremendous consequence, for it is here that the greatest potential for revolution presents itself. If the Polish working class allows the Solidarity bureaucracy to represent it to the state and capital, if they strike only when told, if they willingly work hard for the Polish debt, if they submit to the authority of leaders, they will only go down a road we know so well. The opposite path is uncharted and untraveled in the modern epoch, but it is the only one which holds promise of a new world.

Sidebar: Quotations from Chairman Walesa

“I will have to hold talks very quickly with the authorities and tell them, ‘Gentlemen, do not exploit this moment of our weakness. Because if you do, then I’ll make you remember it later. I’ll not forget that you made things very difficult for me.’”

—Gdansk, October 3, 1981, *The New York Times*, Oct. 4, 1981

“What we need is less striking and protesting and more working and mof;tzring the agreements that have been signed. I need around me fewer people who want to fight all the time and more who want to talk and negotiate.”

—Gdansk, August 1981 *Fortune*, September 7, 1981

“I must stay where I am: to struggle, to extinguish the unnecessary fires, like a fireman...If the (Polish) government says, ‘This is a mess, we resign,’ Solidarity should take the responsibility and I should take the situation into my hands.”

—Interview with Oriana Fallaci, February 1981, *Detroit Free Press*, March 23, 1981

“We are conscious of the fact that to find a way out of the present difficulties it will require sacrifices and self-denial on the part of every Pole, even though he bears no responsibility whatever for our economic collapse.”

—AFL-CIO *News*, July 11, 1981

“We even say that a little bit of censorship is needed, because some publications are put out in our name which are not controlled by us.”

—Gdansk, August 1981, *Fortune*, September 7, 1981

“I would be a dangerous man if I were not a Catholic...We don’t want to bring down this government or any other government.”

—*Newsweek*, December 8, 1981.

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