

A Reply on Poland

E.B. Maple (Peter Werbe)

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In response to "The Collapse in Poland" by Rudy Perkins in this issue (FE #309, June 19, 1982).

A Movement Which is "Represented" is Unfree.

When I hear the term "seizure of power," my flesh crawls. It is a hideous term originating in the Marxist-Leninist movement and produces images of police round-ups and the gulag; it is the code word for counterrevolution. It is a thoroughly inappropriate concept for those who believe in human freedom and one best left to those whose only program is the elevation of the police to complete political power, i.e., socialists and communists.

Power is only seized by politicians—those who would rule others. The libertarian project is to destroy power and shatter its representative, the political state. Only when this occurs will the potential for the construction of a human community based on free association and decentralization become possible.

I am probably in error to lecture Rudy since he has a long history in the anarchist movement, both at a theoretical and practical level, so hopefully much of what I object to is no more than a lack of precision on his part. That is, employing the terminology of leftist and marxist gangs points in a direction in which I am sure Rudy has no intention of going. Still, the concept of a rationalized and orderly society mediated fairly by a state which has been freed from the fetters of class rule arises repeatedly from those who should know such a dream is impossible.

A movement or a people which is "represented" is by definition unfree. The very process is absurd; it puts the Party or the "leading militants" in power. The experts rule. The people return to passivity. Soon the same state of affairs the revolution set out to eliminate prevails again. A "radical" Solidarity leadership is no better than a moderate one because it makes the decisions for millions; it decides what is opportune and what is crucial; and eventually it substitutes its will for the multitudes.

A small body of men meeting in Gdansk takes on the role of representative of millions. It becomes a racket and obtains the authority to speak to the reigning racket—the Communist Party. Perkins seems to think that a trade of rackets would have been of benefit to the Polish people when he writes that "the movement would have to assume political direction of the country." If there is any doubt what he means by this, it is answered immediately in his next sentence which sounds like nothing less than the self-management of Poland's state capitalist economy—"decisions on coal production"? Coal is Poland's major export mined in the same unhealthy, dangerous conditions that prevail in the U.S.; how would the movement "decide" what should be done with it? If the people of Poland made an authentic revolution it would by definition include an exit from the international economy of capital, and hence rid workers of the necessity of risking their health to provide foreign exchange currency. Or foreign relations: somehow the image of the "leading militants" of Solidarity negotiating with Alexander Haig is a bit more than one would expect from an overturning of Polish society. And the rest of what he writes: "allocation of food, housing, goods, etc., etc."; one can only shudder at what the "etceteras" would include. It should be said that these are not the tasks which will be coordinated by a revolutionary movement—these are dreams of administration more properly the concerns of the managers of the present state of affairs and not what should be concerning those interested in its overthrow. The revolutionary movement will lead the assault on capital and defend what it has gained. To cast it into the role of "coordinator" of the revolution is the sure road back to totalitarianism.

Again, it is probably inappropriate to lecture Perkins on the difference between the rank and file movement of millions and the bureaucratic edifice of Solidarity which devised strategies, made proposals, had negotiations, etc.—everything that distinguishes the leaders from the followers. Although, in this case the so-called followers were not very good at their assigned task—they repeatedly carried out strikes, occupations and other actions significantly more radical than what either the moderates or the “radicals” in the leadership wished to see occur. Still, his focus remains on the activity of the official organization. So what if Walesa finally realized that his organization would have to “seize power?” It is nothing more than what he had said months previously as to what he would be willing to do if the situation arose. [See “Poland at the Crossroad: Solidarity and State Pitted Against Polish Workers,” FE #307, November 19, 1981, Sidebar: Quotations from Chairman Walesa.]

The potential for revolution only existed (or still exists) in the daily acts of the unchronicled millions who began to act much differently than either the present rulers of Poland or the official Solidarity organization wished them to. One reason the Solidarity leadership never considered the implications of a military defense of its gains is that it accepted the parameters of the existing society whether it was for strategic or ideological reasons. If there was a desire on the part of anyone within the official Solidarity organization for an authentic anarchist/communist revolution—one which sweeps away the political state, the capitalist economy, and all organs of repression—it was never enunciated. Rather, they appeared satisfied with a laundry list of reforms, most of which at least sounded like improvements, but which had they been implemented would have served the function of bailing out Polish state capitalism and the CP bunglers who created the mess.

Whether the average Poles were spontaneously creating conditions for revolution is hard to say; so little is known about their activity. It is certain that the movement is not dead; almost every day brings new stories of resistance to the repression and at this juncture all who resist are heroic. When a people are under the gun, a credentials check of religion or trade union aspirations matters not.

Two other quick points. In the section about “nurturing militancy,” this sounds distinctly like advice to the cadre on how to manage the ranks. If the basis of your action has someone else as its object, you should take a quick look to see if you are not in a hierarchy.

Secondly, Perkins puts quite an emphasis on military preparation for the anticipated coup. Had this been done even so slightly, wouldn't this in itself have been used as the provocation needed by the government to justify the repression? The solution does lie, as Rudy suggests, with subversion of the army, but the question is a complex one.

All of this criticism should not be taken to mean that I did not appreciate much of the information and some of the author's observations; I hope the author takes time in the next issue to answer my remarks.

—E.B. Maple, June 1982

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From London we have received a poster on Poland, “It's Us They're Shooting in Poland,” from which we quote: “It remains to be seen whether this clampdown conducted according to the most tested methods of ordinary stalinism will enable them to restore an economy of such complete dilapidation: everyone knows that penury is a consequence and a condition of the functioning of totalitarian bureaucratic society, and that, in addition to the pillage that the USSR makes its Polish province undergo, the failure of any rationalisation of production and distribution is inscribed in the very nature of this system and makes it the eternal debtor of the Western bourgeoisies. This interdependence on the economic level corresponds with explicit connivance in the practice of power: ‘Speaking only as a banker it would be a good thing if Russia invaded, because then she would be obliged to honor Poland's debts.’ (London bank official, *The Sunday Times* 12/13/81)

“The putsch, a police operation conducted by the Russo-Polish bureaucrats and the militia, cut short drastically that which mere infiltrations into Solidarity had not been able to succeed in doing...Simultaneously, the euphoric unconsciousness of the management of Solidarity, in refusing to understand that a situation of double power could only precede a confrontation, decoyed the movement towards illusory “free elections” whilst they had received alarming information issuing from the highest level: (The dissident general, Dubicki) revealed that he had warned, since Nov. '80, those responsible in Solidarity about what was being hatched and that he had advised them to get ready to go into clandestinity. He continued to inform them later on about the preparation of the state of war, but, he concludes, ‘they minimized the whole problem. They knew and didn't act.’ (*Le Monde*, 12/12/81)

“The alternative is posed from now on:

“Either the Polish workers, by actual deliberate sabotage of production (cf. call from No. 4 of the Solidarity bulletin), will lead passive resistance to a more advanced struggle which will liquidate the dead weight of the past in the minds of the living, notably the emotional attachment to a leader and the last nationalist, religious and reformist dregs of the movement. It will be a matter, at the very least, of going over to a conscious dynamics of radicalisation and extension over the whole sphere to the east of the Polish situation. Such a development requires the taking over by the workers themselves of all the aspects of their struggle, which amounts to putting into action the principles of direct democracy put forward since the beginning of the movement.

“Falling short of these conditions, the Church will regain the place it was in the process of losing, and normalisation will prevail a little while longer with the trinitarian holy alliance that is being formed between the firing-squad party, the episcopal stench and the collaborating tendency of the trade union management opportunity purged by the putsch.”

This is an interesting contribution to the discussion on the Polish events, and includes a censure of the British peace movement for failing to take up the Polish question in its patriotic attempt to negotiate “peace” between the western bourgeoisie and the stalinist dictatorships. It also contains an (as ever) unfortunate reference (in a quote from Rosa Luxemburg) on “the growing anarchy [sic] of capitalist production,” but features many interesting and revealing quotes from the western capitalist press.

Copies of the poster are available free upon request from the FE with book orders or for 40 cents postage and handling. They can also be obtained directly from the people who produced them at: BM, bis, London WC1V 6XX, UK.



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