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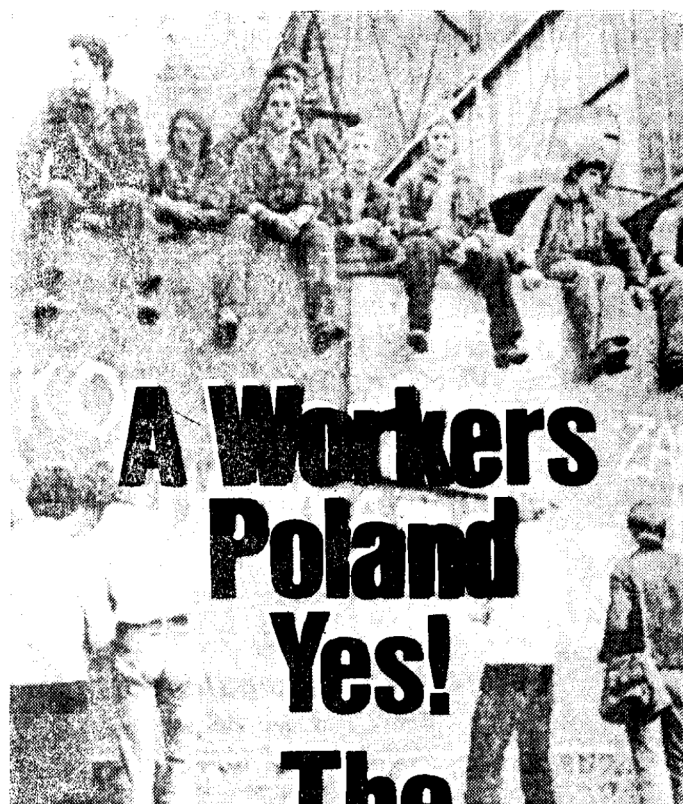
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A Workers Poland Yes! The Pope's Poland No!

Everyone predicted it was coming. A restive, combative working class, peasant strikes, massive foreign debt, chronic and widespread food shortages, a powerful and increasingly assertive Catholic church, the burgeoning of social-democratic and clerical-nationalist oppositional groupings. All the elements were there. Poland in the late '70s was locked in a deepening crisis heading toward explosion, *an explosion which could bring either proletarian political revolution against the Stalinist bureaucracy or capitalist counterrevolution led by Pope Wojtyla's church.*

And when it came it gripped world attention for two solid weeks. The Baltic coast general strike was the most powerful mobilization of the power of the working class since France May 1968. But was it a mobilization for the working class? That is the decisive question.

There is now a settlement *on paper*. The bureaucracy has agreed to allow "new, self-governing trade unions" with the pledge that these recognize "the leading role" of the Communist party and do not engage in political activities. Insofar as the settlement enhances the Polish workers' power to struggle against the Stalinist bureaucracy, revolutionaries can support the strike and its outcome. But only a blind man could fail to see the gross influence of the Catholic church and also pro-Western sentiments among the striking workers. If the settlement strengthens the

working class organizationally, it also strengthens the forces of reaction.

The Gdansk settlement *cannot last*. No Stalinist bureaucracy—a parasitic caste which must *monopolize* political power to preserve itself—can tolerate independent working-class opposition. And in Poland today the notion of such unions "staying out of politics" is plain ridiculous. The situation in Poland is one of cold dual power. On top of this, further clashes must come as the regime, massively in debt to Western financial institutions, cannot concede the enormous "free lunch" the workers are demanding. The big money wage increases will either fuel runaway inflation or even more severe shortages. Furthermore, the Kremlin has made disapproving noises about the settlement, and Soviet military intervention cannot be ruled out. The end of the Baltic general strike was only the beginning of the crisis of Stalinist Poland.

Workers Democracy or Clerical-Nationalist Reaction?

Certainly the workers are reacting against bureaucratic mismanagement, privilege and abuse. The Polish workers' grievances are real and they are just. The firing of an old militant, Anna Walentynowicz, a few months before her retirement, which reportedly sparked the Lenin Shipyard takeover in Gdansk, should infuriate every honest worker. The existence of special shops exclusive to party members and cops is an abomination, a rejection of the most basic principles of socialism.

What of the workers' positive allegiances and general political outlook? Early in the strike there were reports of singing the Internationale, which indicates some element of socialist consciousness. But while the imperialist media always plays up any support for anti-communist ideology in the Soviet bloc, there is no question that to a great degree the Baltic workers and their principal leaders identify with the powerful Catholic church opposition. It is not just the external signs—the daily singing of the national hymn, "Oh God, Who Has Defended Poland," the hundreds of strikers kneeling for mass, the ubiquitous pictures of Wojtyla-John Paul II, Lech Walesa tossing out pictures of the Virgin Mary. The outside advisers to the strike committee consisted of prominent figures in the Catholic ZNAK group and these continue to advise the "new, self-governing unions."

Even more ominous was the strike committee's demand for "access by all religious groups [read Catholic church] to the mass media." This is an *anti-democratic* demand which would legitimize the church in its present role as the recognized opposition to the Stalinist regime. In effect the Baltic shipbuilders are asking for a state church in a deformed workers state.

But that church is not loyal to the workers state. Far from it! The Polish Catholic church (virulently anti-Semitic) has been a bastion of reaction even within the framework of world Catholicism. Especially since 1976 the Polish church has become increasingly open and assertive in its anti-Communism. Early last year the *Wall Street Journal* (2 January 1979) observed: "Thus, the priesthood has become in effect an opposition party."

This article also pointed out that the cardinal of Krakow was especially responsible for the greater oppositional stance of the church. A few months earlier this Polish



Lech Walesa is "a committed Catholic and nationalist" who "has not the least in common with communism," according to liberal West German Der Spiegel.

prelate had become the first non-Italian successor to the throne of St. Peter in four centuries. Karol Wojtyla is a dangerous reactionary working hand in glove with U.S. imperialism (especially his fellow countryman Zbigniew Brzezinski) to roll back "atheistic Communism," beginning in his homeland. As we wrote when this Polish anti-Communist was made pope: "... he now stands at the head of many millions of practicing Catholics in East Europe, a tremendous force for counterrevolution" ("The President's Pope?" *WV* No. 217, 30 October 1978).

The Polish episcopate, fearing both Russian military intervention and its inability to control a workers' uprising, took a cautious tack during the Baltic general strike. But whatever the hierarchy's present tactical calculations, in a power vacuum the church, well-organized with a mass base, will be a potent agency for social counterrevolution.

Poland presents the most combative working class in the Soviet bloc, with a history of struggling for independent organizations going back to the mid-1950s. It is also the one country in Eastern Europe with a mass, potentially counterrevolutionary mobilization around the Catholic church. Thus, unlike Hungary in 1956 or Czechoslovakia in 1968, the alternatives in the present Polish crisis are not limited to proletarian political revolution or Stalinist restabilization. At the same time, it is not Afghanistan where the Soviet Red Army is playing a progressive role in crushing an imperialist-backed, clerical-reactionary uprising. In a sense Poland stands somewhere between Hungary in 1956 and Afghanistan.

Trotskyism and "Free Trade Unions"

The Baltic strike committee's main demand and gain was "free trade unions." This particular slogan, pushed for years by the CIA-backed Radio Free Europe, has acquired a definite anti-Communist and pro-Western connotation. Remember the 1921 Kronstadt mutiny's call for "free soviets"—free from Communists, that is.

An integral part of the Trotskyist program for proletarian political revolution in the degenerated/

deformed workers states is the struggle for trade unions independent of bureaucratic control. Trade unions and the right to strike would be necessary even in a democratically governed workers state to guard against abuses and mistakes by administrators and managers. But it is far from clear that the "free trade unions" long envisioned by the dissidents would be free from the influence of pro-Catholic, pro-NATO elements who represent a mortal danger to the working class.

In any case, in the highly politicized situation in Poland today the "new, self-governing" trade unions cannot and will not limit themselves to questions of wage rates, working conditions, job security, etc. They will either be drawn into the powerful orbit of the Catholic church or have to oppose it in the name of socialist principle.

And in determining that outcome the presence of a revolutionary vanguard party would be critical. A central task for a Trotskyist organization in Poland would be to raise in these unions a series of demands that will *split* the clerical-nationalist forces from among the workers and separate them out. These unions must defend the socialized means of production and proletarian state power against Western imperialism. In Poland today the elementary democratic demand of the separation of church and state is a dividing line between the struggle for workers democracy and the deadly threat of capitalist restoration.

The nucleus of a Leninist-Trotskyist opposition in Poland would have nothing to do with the present dissident groups. It would denounce the social-democratic Committee for Social Self-Defense (KOR) for helping tie the workers to imperialism, the pope and Pilsudskiite anti-Soviet nationalists. But among the rebellious workers there must be elements that are fed up with the bureaucracy and look back to the traditions of Polish Marxism, while having no truck with bogus "democracy" in priests' cassocks. It is among this layer above all that revolutionaries must struggle to win the cadres to build a genuinely communist proletarian party, capable of opening the road

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Poles greet Red Army soldiers in 1945. Stalinist Russia carried out a bureaucratically-deformed social revolution.

to socialism by ousting the bureaucratic caste which falsely rules in the workers' name.

Break the Imperialist Economic Stranglehold!

The abandonment of agricultural collectivization in 1956 has played no small role in contributing to Poland's present economic and political crisis. It has saddled the country with a backward, smallholding rural economy grossly inefficient even by East European standards. And the strength of the Polish church is based on the social weight of the rural petty bourgeoisie. Today over a third of the labor force still toils in the fields, while 80 percent of farmland is privately owned. Only by eliminating their hideous poverty and rural isolation can the hold of religious obscurantism on the masses be broken. An immediate, key task for a revolutionary workers govern-

ment in Poland is to promote the collectivization of agriculture.

Responding to the violent strikes/protests over food price increases in 1970-71, the new Gierek regime promised huge wage increases for the workers, higher procurement prices and state pensions for the peasants plus the rapid modernization of Polish industry. This "economic miracle" (a term actually used in official propaganda) was to be achieved through massive loans from the West and also the Soviet Union.

In an immediate sense this economic maneuver, aimed at transforming Poland into something like an East European Japan, was derailed by the 1974-75 world depression which sharply contracted the country's export markets. At a deeper level, Gierek's economic gamble failed because the Stalinist regime is incapable of mobilizing the enthusiasm and sense of sacrifice of the Polish working people. This

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Edward Gierek (left) placed Poland deeply in debt to Helmut Schmidt's (right) West Germany attempting to buy off a combative working class.

incompetence is endemic in a bureaucracy, more due to a lack of an effective feedback than to material privilege.

In 1978 over 50 percent of Poland's hard currency earnings were absorbed by debt service, in 1979 over 80 percent and today over 90 percent. Poland has avoided becoming the world's biggest bankrupt only by agreeing to austerity programs imposed by its imperialist creditors. At the same time, the Russian leadership, fearing a popular explosion if the Polish masses are pushed too hard, is paying a good part of Warsaw's foreign debt. In one sense Poland has become the intermediary through which Western finance capital sucks surplus out of the Soviet workers and peasants (whose living standards are substantially lower than those of the Poles).

While the Polish Stalinist regime's economic mismanagement is today glaring, the *historical superiority* of collectivized property and centralized planning, even when saddled with a parasitic bureaucracy, remains indisputable. Between 1950 and 1976 the advanced capitalist economies grew at an average annual rate of 4.4 percent, the backward capitalist economies at 5 percent and the centrally planned East European economies 7.7 percent (*Scientific American*, September 1980).

The Polish workers must not pay for the gross mismanagement of the Gierek regime nor should they have any confidence in the bureaucracy's "economic reforms." Egalitarian and rational economic planning is possible only under a government based on democratically-elected workers councils (soviets). As a revolutionary, transitional step toward that, Polish workers must struggle against the bureaucracy for control over production, prices, distribution and foreign trade.

A revolutionary workers government in Poland would *cancel the foreign debt*. Well, it might export comrade Edward Gierek to West Germany where he can work off his

obligations in a Ruhr coal mine. A very good idea, some Polish worker might say, but will the bankers of Frankfurt write off \$20 billion with a shrug? What of imperialist retaliation, economic or military? To this inevitable reaction the Polish proletariat must appeal to the workers of West Europe: We do not want to be the clients of your masters but your comrades in a new venture—international socialist planning in a Socialist United States of Europe!

For the Revolutionary Unity of the Polish and Russian Workers!

All organized forces in Polish political life—the Stalinist bureaucracy, the church and all wings of the dissident movement—each in their own way inculcate hostility to Russia as *the enemy* of the Polish people. A hallmark for a revolutionary party in Poland is a positive orientation to the Russian working class. And this is not simply a question of abstract internationalism, it is a matter of life and death.

Illusions about the good will of the Western capitalist powers common in East Europe do not extend to the Soviet Union. Having lost 20 million fighting Nazi Germany, the Soviet people understand that NATO's nuclear arsenal is targeted at them. The Soviet masses also know that the imperialist powers' war against their country, hot and cold, began with the Bolshevik Revolution of October 1917.

The Soviet working people fear the transformation of East Europe into hostile, imperialist-allied states extending NATO to their own border. The Kremlin bureaucrats exploit this legitimate fear to crush popular unrest and democratic aspirations in East Europe, as in Czechoslovakia in 1968. There were numerous reports that Soviet soldiers were shaken when on occupying Prague they encountered not a bloody fascistic counterrevolution, as they had been told, but protests by Communist workers and left-wing students.

Revolutionary Polish workers cannot hope to appeal to Soviet soldiers unless they assure them that they will defend that part of the world against imperialist attack. And a proletarian political revolution in Poland must extend itself to the Soviet Union or, one way or another, it will be crushed.

- For trade unions independent of bureaucratic control and based on a program of defending socialized property!
- For the strict separation of church and state! Fight clerical-nationalist reaction! Guard against capitalist restorationism!
- Promote the collectivization of agriculture!
- For workers control of production, prices, distribution and foreign trade!
- For proletarian political revolution against the Stalinist bureaucracy—For a government based on democratically-elected workers councils (soviets)!
- Break the imperialist economic stranglehold—Cancel the foreign debt! Toward international socialist economic planning!
- For military defense of the USSR against imperialism! For the revolutionary unity of the Polish and Soviet working classes!
- For a Trotskyist Party in Poland, section of a reborn Fourth International! ■