

POLAND'S BLACK DECEMBER

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Poland's Black December

Introduction

Back in the winter of 1980, an elderly worker from Poznan told me: 'Today everyone is full of hope. But mark my words: if we stop half-way we'll soon be in mourning'. This pamphlet is dedicated to him and to class-conscious workers throughout Eastern Europe.

Black December contains five essays which, although they touch on different problems, together reveal the real nature of the current struggle in Poland. The first four pieces are reprinted from the Revolutionary Communist Party's monthly newspaper, *the next step*; written over the past 15 months, they highlight the political difficulties facing the Polish workers' movement. The last article, which was written in the aftermath of the military coup, explains why the Polish authorities embarked on the course they did and why Solidarity met with disaster.

British workers urgently need an analysis of what has happened in Poland. We believe that ours has proved unique in its ability to make sense of the situation there. Discussions with comrades from Eastern Europe have been invaluable in formulating the arguments contained in the following pages.

Victory to the Polish workers!

Frank Richards

THE POLISH DILEMMA

THE POLISH BUREAUCRACY has suffered an important defeat at the hands of the proletariat. The working class has forced the bureaucracy to accept many of its demands, including the recognition of a free trade union movement. The workers' recent gains remain in the balance as a new prime minister strives to stabilise the regime.

Why is the bureaucracy so weak?

The Polish state is the creation of the Soviet army. After the Second World War the Stalinist bureaucracy overthrew capitalist relations in Poland and set up a regime in its own image. The new regime lacked any popular support; its survival depended on coercion and the regimentation of Polish society.

Although the bureaucracy destroyed capitalism the social relations it established were not much of an improvement. The new bureaucratically administered economy lacked any dynamism. The bureaucracy could not plan the economy without the co-operation of the Polish working class. Because the Stalinist bureaucracy dared not permit the establishment of institutions of proletarian democracy it never obtained that co-operation.

The economic strategy of the Polish bureaucracy relied on massive investments in heavy industry. Together with the transfer of labour from agriculture to industry this investment temporarily produced high growth rates. But that was as far as bureaucratic planning could go. The Polish economy grew quickly, but this growth was achieved not through raising the productivity of labour but through massive investments made at the expense of consumption. Bureaucratic control could not raise productivity in either agriculture or industry. Nor could it develop the forces of production through the introduction of new technology. Inevitably, this form of industrialisation exacerbated tensions in Polish society. The allocation of resources into heavy industry demanded the sacrifice of working class living standards.

The working class riots in 1956 showed how tenuous the bureaucracy's hold over Polish society was. In response to this traumatic experience the bureaucracy came up with two solutions — economic reforms and a political compromise with Polish nationalism.

Economic reform

Only workers' democracy can ensure the rational distribution of labour-time between the different sectors of the economy. This course of action was unacceptable to the bureaucracy. Its problem was how to develop a mechanism for distributing resources in the most efficient way possible. The solution was to introduce incentives for increasing output and efficiency and to improve the economy by obtaining Western technology and credit.

These economic reforms had little effect. Incentives could only have worked

if a capitalist market had been introduced. This was a step that the bureaucracy could not take without jeopardising its political power. The Polish economy remained stagnant; food riots in 1970 indicated that economic reforms could not meet the basic aspirations of the working class.

During the period 1969-75 the capitalist world became interested in the East European market. This was the miracle that the Polish bureaucracy had been waiting for. It was able to improve economic conditions by importing Western technology and consumer goods. Between 1970 and 1974 Poland achieved a veritable boom based on imported technology and Western credit. During these years real wages went up by 25 per cent, while national income increased by a third.

Although this real increase in living standards created a measure of political stability, the Polish 'miracle' was short-lived. Every increase in living standards was matched by an increase in Poland's foreign debt. By 1975 growing consumption of food and the stagnation of agriculture turned Poland from a food exporter into a food importer. Over the next two years Poland spent \$2000 million on imported food. Today Poland's foreign debt to the capitalist world stands at \$20 billion.

Since 1975 the Polish bureaucracy has sought to solve its debt problem by attacking the living standards of the working class. But every time the government has tried to raise prices to reduce consumption it has been forced to back down by the workers' angry response.

Political 'reforms'

Alongside economic reforms the bureaucracy also tried to win new political allies.

Its immediate response to the 1956 unrest was to reorganise agriculture along the lines of small-scale private farming. To win the acquiescence of the peasantry the bureaucracy encouraged a resurgence of petty commodity production. It also encouraged nationalism. Throughout the 'sixties Polish nationalism and anti-semitism flourished. The Polish Communist Party took every opportunity to demonstrate its patriotic credentials, even launching an officially sponsored campaign against Jews.

Most important of all was the understanding the bureaucracy established with the Catholic Church. The Catholic Church was given official sanction and a privileged position by the bureaucracy. In return it has played an important role in containing unrest. During the 1956 and 1970 disturbances, for example, Cardinal Wyszynski appealed for calm. Similarly this summer the Church was instrumental in limiting the scope of strike action.

Encouraging nationalism and Catholicism has not solved the bureaucracy's problems. Indeed this strategy has strengthened reactionary pro-capitalist forces which are hostile to the bureaucracy itself. The bureaucracy has only managed to weaken Poland's secular tradition by giving Catholicism a new lease of life. Today the Catholic Church is more powerful than it was in the inter-war period.

KOR, ROPCiO and Catholicism

The Stalinist bureaucracy has not been able to contain working class action. Since 1956, the regime has been shaken to its foundations by the working class on four separate occasions. This pressure on the bureaucracy has protected the intelligentsia and the petit bourgeoisie from severe repression by the state. According

to Western commentators the Committee for Social Self-Defence (KOR) defended workers from bureaucratic reprisals. In reality KOR could not have existed without the strong Polish working class.

The forces of reaction are also well organised. In March 1977 this strand of opposition to the bureaucracy formed the Movement for the Defence of Human and Civil Rights (ROPCiO). Led by such luminaries as a pre-war general and a former head of the old Christian Democratic Party, ROPCiO has utilised the patriotic tradition of the Polish state for its own ends. Reactionary forces backed by the Church have been busy organising in all spheres of social and cultural life. In late 1977 for example the Polish Committee for the Defence of Life and Family launched a campaign to abolish the country's liberal abortion laws. The church and right wing political groups have been forced to speak out on behalf of the working class because they realise that their existence depends on working class pressure on the bureaucracy.

Where does the working class stand? Decades of brutal oppression by a bureaucracy acting in the name of Marxism has discredited communism among workers. At the same time nationalist ideology and Catholicism exert widespread influence on the labour movement. The bureaucracy has liquidated independent class politics in the proletariat and strengthened the power of nationalism and religion. As a result Polish workers fighting for their class interests often do so under the influence of petit-bourgeois policies.

The more advanced sections of the working class are influenced by narrow trade unionism. Left-wing social-democrats around KOR have campaigned to limit the scope of workers' struggles.

KOR is the dominant reformist trend in the Polish labour movement.

Politics and 'free trade unions'

All the important opposition tendencies are united on one important issue — the working class must not issue a political challenge to the regime lest it should provoke a Soviet invasion. The threat of Russian intervention has been used by the Polish bureaucracy as a strong ideological weapon to contain the working class.

At present KOR represents the most dangerous tendency in the working class. KOR seeks to advance the interests of workers along strict trade union lines. As Jacek Kuron, its principal leader stated: 'Unless we Poles organise ourselves and stick to purely economic demands, catastrophe could become inevitable' (*Le Monde*, 20 August 1980). This theme was repeated by strike leader Lech Walesa when he stated: 'I am a trade unionist. Politics do not interest me' (*Le Monde*, 27 August 1980).

KOR's economistic approach opens the way for reactionary forces to extend their influence in the working class. Why? Because trade unionism will not make workers immune to the political ideas that prevail in Polish society. In the absence of proletarian politics the nationalist trends will become the dominant force in the trade union movement. Whether KOR likes it or not the working class will always formulate political demands. The question is, what will be their class content?

The strike movement in the Baltic coast reveals the dangers that lie ahead. In Gdansk the workers formulated their economic demands. Inevitably, though, they found it necessary to involve 'experts' to assist their negotiations with the



bureaucracy. The intellectuals who were called in to aid workers in the last stage of negotiations were all sympathisers of the petit-bourgeois Catholic movement. 'Experts' such as Tadeusz Kowalik, a bourgeois economist, Bodhan Cywinski, a Catholic activist and Tadeusz Mazowiecki, a nationalist journalist were all happy to see workers restrict their demands to economic issues. They were pleased because they knew that in the absence of a proletarian alternative their petit-bourgeois politics would prevail.

The focus of workers' demands has been the issue of independent, free trade unions. Because it creates the organisational basis for working class politics this is a demand that all revolutionaries must support. However, trade unions on their own provide no answers for the Polish working class. The problem facing Polish workers is political power not wage bargaining. What's the use of a wage rise

when most essential commodities are in short supply? Workers need to control production to ensure a more efficient development of the productive forces and the evolution of a planned economy.

Every opposition group supports free trade unions because it sees in these organisations a powerful instrument for advancing its own interests. The Catholic Church and the reactionary nationalists want to flourish on the backs of the Polish working class. In effect the 'keep politics out of the working class' brigade subordinates the proletariat to the nationalist opposition forces.

What next?

Polish revolutionaries face a real dilemma. Decades of bureaucratic oppression have destroyed communism as a living force in the Polish working class. Its most advanced sections have sought refuge in narrow trade unionism while the mass of workers

follow the lead of nationalist politicians. There exists no organised vanguard that can point out the contradiction between workers' interests and the pro-capitalist politics of the nationalist forces.

Although as yet there is no conscious expression of pro-capitalist sentiment within the working class, restorationist forces are gaining ground every day. Communism is too discredited to develop as the political focus for the anti-bureaucratic forces in the immediate future. For many class conscious workers the alternative appears to be the continuation of bureaucratic oppression or the strengthening of reactionary nationalist forces.

What should revolutionaries do? The first priority is to strengthen the anti-bureaucratic forces. Class conscious workers have every interest in the overthrow of the Polish regime, for as long as the bureaucracy exists communism will stand discredited and nationalism will flourish. Revolutionary communists must not draw back from this struggle even if in the short run the nationalist forces gain the upper hand.

The working class has to fight against the bureaucracy. This is the only way to expose the reactionary role of the Church and Polish nationalism and re-establish communism as working class politics.

Class conscious workers must challenge the programme of KOR and condemn this organisation's call for 'realism'. The best guarantee against a Russian invasion is not economic demands but proletarian politics. The potential for united action among the East European and Soviet working class is considerable. Already workers throughout Eastern Europe have drawn inspiration from the actions of the Polish proletariat. A ruthless struggle against nationalism will ensure that Polish

workers will win the solidarity of workers throughout the region. This is the only realistic policy for class conscious workers to follow. It is the only way to deal with the threat from the Soviet bureaucracy.

There is tremendous potential for working class revolution in Eastern Europe. But there are major obstacles. Polish workers must not allow their fear of reactionary nationalist forces throw them off the course of the anti-bureaucratic struggle. Their task is to transform the opposition movement into one that is dominated by a proletarian outlook. There are no guarantees that revolutionaries will prevail in the short run – but in the long run they will have set off a chain-reaction that no-one will be able to resist.

(from *the next step*, No 7, October 1980)

THE LONG ROAD TO GDANSK

There aren't many workers who follow their leaders' negotiations with management on loudspeakers and tapes. Yet, despite the creative tactics employed in August and September, the Polish working class remains strongly affected by nationalism and Catholicism. As for the Communist Party, it has less than three million members, but is held in complete contempt by the masses — another paradox. The history of Stalinism in Poland explains how this state of affairs has come about.



POLISH NATIONALISM isn't strong for nothing. The country has a long and bitter experience of national oppression. In 1772 it was partitioned by Russia, Prussia and Austria; and, ever since then, regimes based in Moscow, Berlin and Vienna have divided and redivided it. The Poles believe in Poland because they have rarely had it for themselves.

In August 1939 Stalin signed an infamous pact with Hitler to get him to 'agree' not to invade the Soviet Union. Part of the price the Kremlin was prepared to pay for this was yet another carve-up of Poland – this time by the Nazis. Stalin got eastern Poland, but the Polish workers got nothing. Then, in September 1939, began six years of war in which one in every five Poles lost his life. The memory of that period – of the Red Army atrocities like that at Katyn, of Stalin's complicity in the suppression of the Warsaw Rising – still lives on in Poland today.

The Soviet Union's eventual liberation of Poland from fascist tyranny could have ended the distrust its people felt for the USSR. But the Kremlin merely transformed Poland into a vassal state. Ever since 1945 the threat of a repeated Soviet invasion has given powerful impetus to the development of Polish nationalism.

The rise of Polish communism

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries Polish nationalism was such a striking phenomenon that Marx, Engels and Lenin all wrote about it at length. They argued that the Polish working class had a duty to lead the struggle for the right to national independence. In his important pamphlet *The right of nations to self-determination* (1914), Lenin took issue with the Polish revolutionary Rosa Luxemburg for underestimating the sig-

nificance of fighting against national oppression. Failure to advance the slogan of Poland's right to secession from Tsarist Russia was, he said, tantamount to playing into the hands of the Polish bourgeoisie. It allowed the Polish capitalists to isolate the communists politically and take control of the battle for democratic rights at the expense of the workers.

Unfortunately Polish revolutionaries ignored Lenin's advice. They contended that the national question was a diversion and that the pernicious effects of bourgeois nationalism on the working class could only be avoided by Poland's incorporation into Russia or Germany. In practice they ensured that the national grievances workers felt were not directed against the capitalist system.

The errors of the Polish Marxists became particularly apparent in the years immediately following the First World War. Despite a surge of working class militancy in the post-war slump, the newly-formed Communist Workers Party of Poland (CWPP) was unable to grow – precisely because it neglected the national question. As a result the reformist and patriotic Polish Socialist Party became the dominant force in the labour movement.

Between 1921 and 1923, however, Polish communism came of age. Under the guidance of Lenin, Trotsky and the Third International, the CWPP went over to the Leninist approach to self-determination, formally adopting it – after a series of debates – at its 1923 congress. By 1924 it was, though still forced to work underground, poised to become the leading political tendency in the working class.

A revolution betrayed

Victory eluded the CWPP. With the ascendancy of Stalin the Communist

International was turned into a tool of the Soviet bureaucracy. Stalin pursued his vendetta against the revolutionaries of Trotsky's Left Opposition on a global scale. Outside the Soviet Union, the CWPP became his first target.

The CWPP strongly opposed the Soviet bureaucracy's attempts to expel Trotsky from the Bolshevik party. In December 1923, its Central Committee sent a letter to Moscow denouncing Stalin's manoeuvres in no uncertain terms:

'For our party, nay for the whole Comintern, for the whole revolutionary world proletariat the name of Comrade Trotsky is insolubly connected with the victory of the Soviet Revolution, with the Red Army, with communism. We refuse to admit the possibility of Comrade Trotsky being put outside the ranks of the leaders of the Russian Communist Party and those of the Communist International.' (cited in M K Dziewanowski, *The Communist Party of Poland*, 1976)

Such a forthright show of political independence was something the Soviet bureaucracy could not stomach. Stalin moved fast; the CWPP was anyway vulnerable because repression in Poland had forced many of its leaders into exile in Russia. At the Fifth Congress of the Communist International in 1924 he was able personally to supervise the removal of the majority of the CWPP's Central Committee — without consulting the Polish party's congress.

That did not prove to be the end of the revolutionary CWPP. Stalin was forced to purge its leaders in 1925 and again in 1928. As the application of Stalin's line to Poland led to disaster after disaster under the Pilsudski dictatorship, new opposition currents emerged in 1930. In 1932 there were renewed expulsions.

The CWPP was finally destroyed in the Great Purge of 1937-38. Nearly every

Polish Marxist living in Russia was either executed or sentenced to penal servitude. Only a few leaders such as Gomulka escaped this fate — and that was because they were languishing in Polish prisons at the time. In 1938 the Executive Committee of the Communist International quietly dissolved the CWPP altogether on the pretext that it had been infiltrated by 'enemy agents'. Friends and associates of Lenin like Adolph Warski-Warszawski and Maria Koszucka and Julian Lenski-Leszczyński disappeared without trace. The CWPP was no more.

The workers, the state and the church

Stalinism has ensured that, for Polish workers, 'communism' means Soviet tanks and Soviet firing squads. Stalinism has not only been responsible for the elimination of the vanguard of the Polish working class; it has strengthened reaction in every quarter.

To give their regimes some semblance of legitimacy Poland's Stalinist rulers have wooed the Catholic church for more than three decades. Their only worry has been that popular support for Catholicism might get out of hand. In 1945 they gave Boleslaw Piasecki, leader of the fascist and strongly anti-semitic Falanga party before the war, official sanction to establish Pax, a body dubbed as a 'progressive' Catholic movement. No wonder Polish workers have found it hard to see how 'communism' represents their interests as a class.

The Polish bureaucracy has tried everything to win itself sympathy among the masses — the anti-Jewish campaigns of 1956 and 1967-8 being only the most lurid examples. Every one of its efforts has been unsuccessful; every one has merely bolstered Polish nationalism and

the church. Today only Brezhnev's troops stand between the workers and the overthrow of Kania's government.

The Polish proletariat has no illusions in the state. It hates the system that oppresses it. At the same time Stalinism has wiped out the communist traditions of the working class. The only choice seems to be between the Warsaw bureaucrats on the one hand and nationalism and the church on the other. At the moment there can be no doubt that workers will opt for the latter.

Polish workers will not take on the church and pro-capitalist forces so long as the bureaucracy survives. While the Stalinists remain in power nationalist politicians and reactionary bishops will go on claiming to speak on the workers' behalf. Very simply, widespread loathing for the bureaucracy puts class divisions in the background.

Trade unions are not enough!

Polish militants cannot hope to shrug off the effects of Stalinism without a relentless struggle. They will have to combat the influence of nationalism and the church; but it will be their fight against the bureaucracy that will best allow them to do this. Every blow they inflict on the bureaucrats will allow them to highlight the divergence of interest between the working class and the church. Both strands of reaction — the bureaucracy and the church — must be opposed simultaneously.

The main barrier to this today consists in the narrow trade union politics of the KOR, the so-called 'workers' defence' committees. The KOR has consistently told workers to limit their demands to economic issues alone. This reformist prescription stunts the political development of the workers. If the proletariat

does not draw up its own, independent political programme it will uphold that of another class.

In Britain the Socialist Workers Party and other organisations on the radical left have said that trade unionism, pure and simple, will suffice for Polish workers. For the SWP any strike in Poland, 'whether for higher wages or against price increases', is 'necessarily political' (*Socialist Review*, 18 September 1980). In one sense, of course, the SWP is right — any trade union demand is political. But the question is: what is the *class content* of the Polish workers' demands? Do they focus on granting the church access to the media, or do they begin to challenge 'the leading role of the Communist Party'? Do they aid reaction or lead to the emancipation of the working class?

Trade union politics hinder the emergence of a revolutionary party in Poland. That is why Poland's rulers have shown the toleration they have done towards the new unions that have been set up. It is also why the church has applauded the initiative. For this reason a fierce ideological struggle against the politics of the KOR is the task of the hour.

Fifty years of Stalinist manipulation have left their mark on the Polish workers. It will be some more years before Polish labour accepts the leadership of revolutionaries. For that to happen at all, for the gains of this summer to be held on to, Polish militants will have to declare war on every backward trend in the working class. Time is precious; the Polish revolutionary movement of the 'eighties has yet to be built.

(from *the next step*, No 8, November/December 1980)

TWENTY FIVE YEARS AFTER BUDAPEST, ONE YEAR ON FROM GDANSK

Twenty-five years have passed since Hungarian workers took up arms against the Stalinist bureaucracy. The revolution of October 1956 was crushed by the overwhelming military might of the Soviet regime. But the continuity of working class resistance in Eastern Europe is revealed by the activity of the Polish working class today.

The contrast between Hungary in 1956 and Poland in 1981 reflects the different circumstances in which European workers fight to defend their interests. Yet the lessons of Hungary in 1956 are not unimportant for Polish workers today. This was recognised recently by Polish workers at the Polam electronics factory in the town of Pila. Editors of the factory's newsletter wrote and distributed a pamphlet on workers' struggles in Poland and Hungary in 1956. When local authorities moved in to confiscate the pamphlets workers came out on strike.

Recent events in Poland have in turn become a source of inspiration for Hungarian workers and students today. There was an angry response when rumours began to circulate early this year about the use of Hungarian troops in a joint Warsaw pact invasion of Poland. Slogans supporting Polish workers have been painted on walls and Hungarian youth proudly wear the Solidarity badges they can get hold of. The September issue of *Partelet*, a periodical for the activists of the Hungarian Communist Party, is devoted to an attack on people who propagate 'ultra left' ideas, ie political opponents of the regime. Hungarian bureaucrats are ready to do all in their power to prevent the spread of the Polish disease across their borders.

The Hungarian bureaucracy well remembers that it was the unrest in Poland in 1956 which triggered off the Budapest uprising. The march in Budapest on 23 October 1956 which began the revolution was organised to demonstrate solidarity with the movement of Polish workers.

The workers' councils set up by the Hungarian working class in 1956 and the militant activities of Polish workers today are a testimony to the creativity and determination of the proletariat in Eastern Europe. At the same time these struggles bring to light a common problem: the working class in Eastern Europe lacks a clear proletarian outlook and a revolutionary party. As a result the petit bourgeoisie, particularly the intelligentsia, has always exerted an overwhelming influence over the struggles of the working class.

Growth problems

CAPITALISM was overthrown in Eastern Europe, not by working class revolution but by the Soviet army. The Soviet bureaucracy destroyed capitalism but prevented the proletariat from taking power. Throughout Eastern Europe Stalin installed puppet regimes characterised by their spineless subservience to the Kremlin. These bureaucratic regimes enjoyed no legitimacy. Moreover the absence of workers' democracy ensured that all attempts to plan the economy were doomed from the start. Socialism cannot be built and a planned society cannot be created without the active participation of the working class.

The bureaucracy that ruled Eastern Europe succeeded in initiating some economic development in the late 'forties and early 'fifties: but growth was restricted to heavy industry and the cost was enormous. The bureaucracy's strategy was straightforward: mobilise all available manpower into the capital goods sector, channel rural manpower into industry and direct investment into construction or enlargement of existing industrial plant. In other words economic growth was the result of more workers and more investment using more of the existing plant and machinery rather than the outcome of using better technology and higher levels of productivity.

This type of extensive growth soon faced problems. With shortages of manpower from the rural areas growth could only be maintained through higher volumes of investment. As the proportion of national income used for investment shot up, resources available for consumption declined. At first living

standards stagnated then they began to decline.

Apart from forcing down consumption, this style of economic growth was extremely wasteful. Bureaucratic command rather than conscious planning led to an inefficient use of resources. As essential goods were in short supply workers had no incentive to work: hard work was not rewarded. High economic growth statistics obscured the fact that the figures reflected high growth in volume but not in quality. This is how leading spokesman of the liberal wing of the Hungarian Communist Party Imre Nagy characterised the defects of the 1949-53 Five Year Plan: the results achieved meant 'increase in production for its own sake' which 'combined with the neglect of technical standards, inevitably allowed almost no increase in productivity during the First Five Year Plan. Shortages arose not only in consumer goods, but also in capital goods designed to produce consumer goods' (*The New Course*, Praeger, 1957).

High rates of investment at the expense of consumption and the efficient use of resources led to political instability throughout Eastern Europe. The bureaucracy could only survive by police terror. By the mid 'fifties the bureaucracy became aware of the danger of working class unrest and the need to find a new economic strategy. The Twentieth Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in 1956, with the denunciation of Stalin by Khrushchev, was a symptom of the bureaucracy's determination to find a new course. But 'de-Stalinisation' promised too little and came too late. On 28 June 1956 Polish workers in Poznan took to the streets and in October the Hungarian working class smashed the Stalinist bureaucracy.

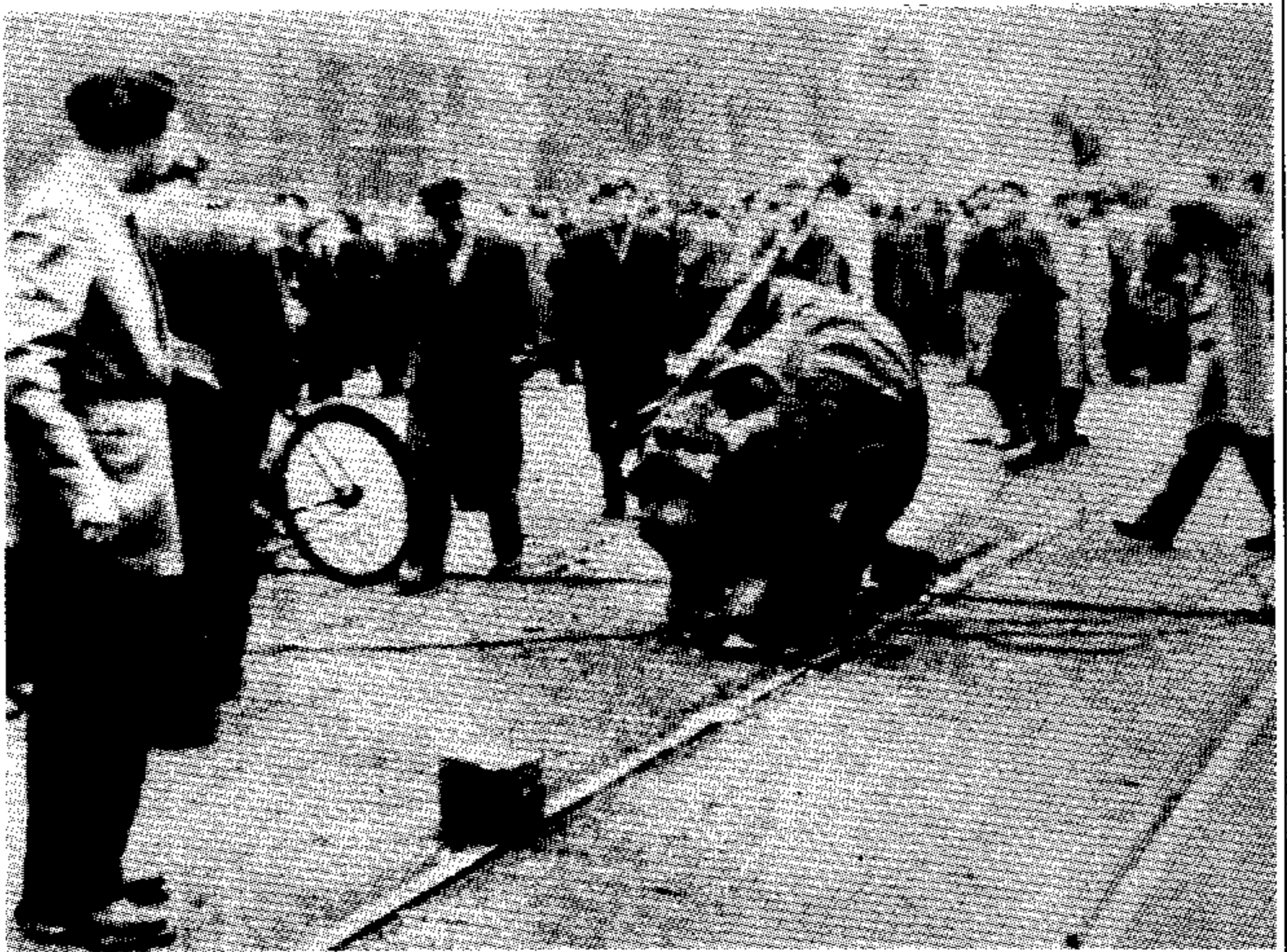
Tremors in Hungary

By late 1955 virtually every section of Hungarian society was united in its hatred of the existing regime. Even the Hungarian Communist Party was deeply divided. Nagy's liberal wing of the party took every opportunity to criticise the disastrous policies of the bureaucracy. The liberals used the 'de-Stalinisation' drive launched by the Soviet bureaucracy to initiate their own campaign.

The Polish workers' revolt was contained by the liberalisation of the bureaucracy under the leadership of Gomulka. Demands for more liberal measures along

Polish lines were voiced throughout Hungary as well. This led Moscow to replace the leading bureaucrats in Budapest in July 1956. But the new regime led by Ernő Gerő was just as repressive and just as compromised as the previous one. Unlike their Polish colleagues the Hungarian bureaucrats were in no mood to reform.

The unresponsive stance of the Hungarian bureaucracy ensured that social unrest would gain momentum. Students and intellectuals began to organise mass meetings. In August the factories began to stir. By September unrest had become so widespread that students could publicly demand economic and political reforms



and the establishment of a government led by Imre Nagy without any reprisals from the secret police.

On 22 October student groups throughout Hungary called for a mass demonstration 'in solidarity with our Polish brothers'. The demonstration of 23 October in Budapest set off a remarkable chain of events. Attempts to ban the demonstration failed as tens of thousands of workers and students converged to the rallying point. By the afternoon the demonstration was so large that all normal activities in Budapest came to a halt.

Budapest explosion

In the evening a section of the demonstration marched to the main radio station. Their demands for social change were met with a rebuff and when the people pressed towards the doors, members of the AVO, the Hungarian secret police, opened up with machine guns. The massacre of unarmed demonstrators changed the character of the protest movement. Groups of demonstrators broke into police stations and military barracks and armed themselves. By dawn on 24 October workers in the factories around Budapest had downed tools and come out on strike.

During the day fighting spread and a number of skirmishes took place between Hungarian workers and Soviet troops. But the state had collapsed, the Communist Party had vanished and in an act of desperation the bureaucracy handed the government over to Imre Nagy. But despite his popularity nobody was any longer in control of the situation. On 25 October the fighting in Budapest subsided. Hungarian workers fraternised with Russian troops and many Russian soldiers expressed their sympathy with the

revolution. Most Russian troops withdrew to their barracks and military action was restricted to shoot outs between workers and AVO men.

By Friday, 26 October the conflict had spread throughout Hungary. By Saturday, the revolution had acquired a degree of organisational coherence. Workers' militias were established in Csepel and Angyalföld, the proletarian suburbs of Budapest, and revolutionary councils were set up throughout the country. In effect the revolutionary councils assumed all governmental powers.

This was the highpoint of the Hungarian revolution. Spontaneously dozens of political parties sprang up and hundreds of newspapers and newssheets were published. A major debate on the way forward involving tens of thousands of workers and students was raging on the streets, factories and revolutionary councils. The overwhelming support for the revolution forced the Soviet bureaucracy to make a tactical retreat: on 30 October Soviet troops began their withdrawal from Budapest. Negotiations between the representatives of the revolutionary councils and the Soviet bureaucracy began on 1 November. The revolution appeared to be near victory.

The lessons of the revolution

A few days later, on 4 November the Hungarian negotiators were arrested and Soviet troops launched a new offensive. This treachery was met by a general strike. Workers' councils were established in most major industrial plants. It took three days of intensive fighting to break the back of the resistance — though the struggle lasted till 11 November in Csepel.

The Hungarian revolution showed the



strength of the working class and the fragility of the bureaucracy. The Stalinist bureaucracy also learned a lesson: repression alone was not enough to ensure social stability. While the bureaucrats presided over the deaths of more than 15 000 revolutionaries and crammed the jails to over-flowing, they embarked on the path of economic reform. To prevent another explosion the Hungarian bureaucracy tried to increase the living standards of the working class.

The tragedy of 1956 was not military defeat of the Hungarian workers at the hands of the Soviet bureaucracy. The real tragedy was that the absence of a revolutionary party meant that workers would draw only negative conclusions

from their experience. After 1956, Hungarian workers turned away from social and political questions and fell into passivity. 'What can we do against Russian tanks?' was the question that haunted the proletarian suburbs around Budapest.

Throughout the revolution workers fought for what they saw as essential for their liberation: workers' and peasants' power and democracy. Often influenced by nationalist and anti-communist propaganda the proletariat retained its instinct of self-preservation and took power into its own hands. Even those workers who burned red flags still maintained their allegiance to workers' control over production and looked upon

pro-capitalist politicians with suspicion. But the ideological confusion meant that the revolution became merely a heroic episode born out of desperation with no long-term consequences.

Today, 25 years later, the Hungarian working class has begun to stir again. But the workers' movement will have to be built anew if it is to overcome the confusion and ultimate paralysis of the generation of 1956.

Poland's drift to disaster

Like their Hungarian colleagues, the Polish rulers realised after 1956 that coercion had to be tempered with economic concessions. Throughout the 'sixties and 'seventies the Polish bureaucracy tried to abandon the wasteful course of an extensive form of growth. Instead it tried to raise productivity through the introduction of new technology. This strategy had only a limited impact because the bureaucratised economy was incapable of generating productivity increases. In the late 'sixties and early 'seventies the Polish economy received a boost from massive injections of Western credit and technology. High growth rates leading to steady increases in living standards occurred till 1974.

But this economic miracle relied entirely on foreign credit and could not be maintained indefinitely. Even before the credit ran out and Poland was pushed to the edge of defaulting on its \$27 billion debt to the West the structural weakness of the economy became apparent. The bureaucracy was not able to assimilate the new foreign technology for the same reason that it could not raise productivity previously. The absence of conscious planning meant that new technology was introduced in an arbit-

rary manner. The result was massive waste: billions of dollars worth of investment was tied up in uncompleted projects whilst operational plant was used at 20 to 50 per cent capacity. The bureaucracy was simply incapable of overcoming the structural obstacles to the development of the forces of production. As a perceptive report on Poland noted:

'we find that after 1956, just as after 1970, there was an improvement in the standard of living, a rash of dramatic and ambitious plans, and an upsurge in activity generally; but in each case it was confined to the first two years.

'In both periods the crisis struck at similar moments and for similar reasons: toward the end of the first five-year planning period, and as a result of a breakdown in investment policy'. (*Poland: the state of the republic*, Pluto Press, 1981, p12)

The resulting crisis forced the bureaucracy to resort to its old standby — cutting social consumption. But Polish workers had come to expect an *increase* in their living standards. Ever since 1970 every attempt made to cut living standards through withdrawing subsidies of food prices has been resisted by the Polish proletariat. The events of 1980, leading to the establishment of Solidarity, follow a decade of continuous working class resistance.

Strains on Solidarity

Polish workers today, like their fellow workers in Hungary in 1956, have no illusions in the state. They see the bureaucracy as an alien anti-social force which acts as an obstacle to the realisation of their aspirations. But unlike the Hungarian workers in 1956, the Polish movement did not surface out of a feeling of desperation. In 1980 the Polish workers had something to lose and in the first

instance their movement was an attempt to defend the living standards they had already achieved. Consequently the Polish movement has a coherence and stability which the Hungarian workers lacked. But this stability also contains the danger of the institutionalisation of class protest.

Moreover the Polish movement like the Hungarian lacks a revolutionary party. The Polish working class is vulnerable to the reactionary influence of the Church and pro-capitalist forces and to the gradualist philosophy of KOR and other reformist forces. KOR, the Church, Polish nationalists and indeed the liberal wing of the bureaucracy have all argued for moderation lest the struggle provoke a Soviet intervention. In this way they have all sought to confine the activities of the working class to trade unionism.

The same forces also broadly agree on the necessity for economic reforms – a greater utilisation of the market mechanism, rationalisation, economic incentives, etc. These reforms spell disaster for

Polish workers – they would mean millions of unemployed and further reductions in living standards. The lack of opposition to these reforms from the working class shows that the Polish proletariat has not yet differentiated itself as a class with independent interests.

Stalinist renewal?

Despite the insidious influence of the Church, KOR and other forces the proletariat has refused to vacate the battle field. Various attempts to disengage the working class have failed. The well-publicised 'renewal movement' for democratic change inside the Communist Party failed to arouse any enthusiasm in the factories. The July conference of the Polish Communist Party may have been more 'democratic' than ever before but few Poles were taken in by the Party's new media-created image: for most Polish workers the conference was a non-event. Polish workers are not about to rely on the promises of the bureaucracy



to reform the system.

Nor are Polish workers prepared to confine their actions to narrow trade unionism. Trade unions are of limited use when workers' main problems are food shortages, the chaotic state of a society in which you have to queue for everything, and state repression. Higher wages do not mean higher living standards as the most basic goods are not available and trade unions cannot plan and control the economy. The recent national conference of Solidarity showed that Polish workers are determined to take matters into their own hands. Inevitably many of the speeches to the conference were anti-communist. This is only to be expected as Polish militants associate communism with the present regime. This point of view was clearly expressed by one of the delegates from Gdansk: 'We have had enough after 36 years of the dictatorship of the proletariat. Let's remove the paragraph from the Gdansk agreement which recognises the leading role of the party'.

The delegate from Gdansk hates the proletarian dictatorship because he identifies it with the tyranny of the Stalinist regime. In the same vein other delegates called for 'democracy', 'free elections' and other trappings of bourgeois democracy. Stalinism has ensured that even the most militant workers express their class interests in the language of anti-communism.

Vigilance plus Marxism

But the message that came loud and clear from the Solidarity conference gives little comfort to anti-communists. Militants spoke out against Walesa and other Solidarity bureaucrats who have tried to curb the class struggle. Demands for the decentralisation of decision-making within

Solidarity reflects the growing vigilance of Polish workers. Other demands raised at the conference such as the right of workers to elect factory managers expresses the growing determination of workers to take matters into their own hands. And the appeal to the proletariat of Eastern Europe to follow the path of Polish workers demonstrates a growing concern for working class unity.

The September conference of Solidarity demonstrates the potential for the development of a revolutionary movement. Whether this potential is realised depends on a ruthless struggle against petit-bourgeois politics. The growing crisis in Poland means that the present movement cannot sustain itself much longer unless it overcomes its ideological confusion. Revolutionaries have a long and protracted struggle on their hands. Decades of Stalinist rule have discredited communism and strengthened nationalism, Catholicism and other reactionary ideas in the working class. But whether workers use the rhetoric of bourgeois democracy or of Polish nationalism their struggle against the bureaucracy is progressive. The more far-reaching the struggle, the clearer it becomes that the interest of workers lies not in Polish nationalism or Catholicism but with proletarian power. Already many workers have come to question the moderating influence of the Church, KOR and the Solidarity bureaucrats.

Poland need not repeat the Hungarian tragedy. What the Polish working class requires is a continuation of its tenacity plus the violence of the Hungarian revolution and the ideology of Marx and Lenin.

(from *the next step*, No 17, October 1981)

THE YEAR THE SOVIET BLOC BEGAN TO BREAK UP



AT THE END of 1981 Poland plunged into chaos. Announcing the imposition of martial law on 13 December General Jaruzelski declared grimly that 'our country is on the edge of the abyss'. The upheaval in Poland is only the most dramatic expression of the political crisis that afflicts the entire Soviet bloc. From Rumania to the Caucasus, as well as in Poland, workers have moved into action against the bureaucracy.

The Polish 'disease' in Russia

Political unrest in the Soviet Union in 1981 was more widespread than in any other year in the post-war period. Riots and strikes in Estonia challenged the authorities throughout the year. In

October workers in Ordzhonikidze, a regional capital in the North Caucasus, fought pitched battles with police and the army and besieged the local Communist Party headquarters in protest against racist violence, police brutality and corruption. Even when tanks and tear gas were used against them, the demonstrators continued to pelt the police with bricks. Rioting was followed by transport strikes throughout the region.

The bureaucracy is concerned about the influence of the Polish events, particularly on the working class of the Ukraine, the Baltic states and the Russian republics. It has tried to prevent the 'Polish disease' from spreading by conceding to workers' demands. Two strikes

in Kiev over the summer were even led by official union and Party activists. In one factory workers objected to new work norms, in another they protested about the disruption of the local water supply. Instead of the usual repression, the authorities responded by improving conditions to avoid further unrest. In October Soviet Politbureau member Constantin Tchernenko aimed to forestall the emergence of Solidarity-style independent unions by insisting that the official unions do more to defend the rights of workers.

The bureaucracy is worried that deepening economic crisis and major shortages are worse than in Poland. During the whole month of November no butter could be bought in Moscow. The provincial towns fare even worse: fruit, vegetables, dairy products and meat are constantly in short supply.

Consumer goods of all sorts are difficult to come by. The extent of this problem was illustrated by an investigative journalist working for *Literaturnaya Gazeta*. He was sent on an assignment to Krasnodar (a city of over half a million people) with instructions to bring with him no toothbrush, soap, razor blades, shaving cream, underclothes, socks or writing materials, but to buy them on arrival in the city. After a full day in Krasnodar he couldn't find any of the items. In the end he had to purchase these basic commodities on the local black market.

The Soviet bureaucracy claims to be taking a hard line on black marketeers. The press is full of exposes of economic saboteurs, speculators and hoarders. But public relations exercises will do little to satisfy the public outcry for food and consumer durables.

The chaotic economy

Growing political instability is a result of the inability of the Soviet system to provide for the needs of its people. The Soviet economy declined steadily through 1981. According to official statistics, both industrial output and labour productivity fell well below growth targets for the year. The real situation is even worse as the published figures make insufficient statistical adjustments for price increases.

A better indicator of the state of the Soviet economy is the actual volume of production. If we examine increases in physical units for individual industries we find a small or negative increase. Thus, output of the following products has actually declined: coal, rolled steel, cars, lorries, timber, footwear and meat.

The crisis of the Soviet economy is above all due to the inability of the bureaucracy to plan the allocation, production and distribution of society's resources. Plans are drawn up and targets are proclaimed. But in the absence of workers' democracy these plans are simply bureaucratic decrees. Individual enterprises have no incentive to raise productivity — they just have to meet the targets set by the centre. Managers try to hoard as much resources and workers as possible, and give up as little as they can get away with to meet the requirements of the plan.

In a capitalist economy productivity increases benefit the individual capitalist. But in the Soviet Union productivity increases may mean higher targets and norms and a decrease in the allocation of resources for the enterprise concerned. Soviet managers often feel that raising output and rationalising production techniques is actually against their interests.

A nation of gardeners

In the Soviet economy output figures are padded, shoddy goods are produced and resources wasted. In July *Partinaya Zhizn* reported one example of the Soviet economy in action. In February the Kalyona Hydroelectric Station was supposed to go into operation. However, upon inspection it was discovered that the Station had been turned over for use in an unfinished state to meet planning targets. In addition, the generator had major design faults. As a result the plant operated for 10 days at 10 per cent capacity. It was then shut down for four months so that construction could be completed.

Workers have no incentive to work. What's the use of higher wages if most essential goods are not available in the shops? Many large enterprises try to motivate their workers by offering their employees an allotment on which to grow food. It is estimated that in Leningrad alone there are more than 300 000 plot holders. Not surprisingly workers put little effort into their work and save their energy for their gardens.

The proliferation of city allotments is the result of the crisis of Soviet agriculture. Food shortages are a permanent feature of Soviet life, so people try to grow their own food. There are 33 million private plots in the Soviet Union — one for every two Soviet households! In 1981 the food situation deteriorated further. For example, according to the plan, collective and state farms were supposed to have sold 7.7 million tons of vegetables to the state; but by mid-August less than one million tons of produce had arrived at the marketing agencies.

Stagnation in agricultural output is

above all due to the inability of Soviet industry to provide the inputs necessary for rational farming. Bad planning and transport and the lack of an efficient system of distribution and storage make things even worse. To prevent famine the Soviet Union has to rely on large imports of grain from the West.

Structural problems

The Soviet Union has come to rely on Western technology to run critical areas of its industry. But it cannot simply increase its technology imports without increasing its debts and its reliance on the capitalist world. The current five-year plan aims to limit imports of Western goods to an annual increase of 4.1 per cent. Necessity has forced a revision of this figure: in 1981 exports to the Soviet Union went up by 27 per cent.

During the past year government experts have attempted to introduce reforms to stimulate production. There has been considerable discussion about restoring elements of the market mechanism and realigning prices with the real value of goods. But these reforms cannot be effective if they are introduced piecemeal. And any major reforms would lead to the restoration of capitalism — something that the bureaucracy is not prepared to accept.

The attempt to link enterprise management bonuses to the fulfilment of delivery contracts provides a good illustration of the impossibility of reforming the Soviet system. Enterprises are notorious for meeting the physical requirements of targets rather than producing what industry requires. Last summer the bureaucracy tried to overcome the problem of enterprises not meeting delivery deadlines by decreeing that bonuses

would be paid to the enterprise that came up with the goods on time. In response to the decree, managers at the Stankolit factory in Moscow started paying more attention to delivery contracts. This had a positive effect: managers stopped worrying about the total tonnage of the castings the factory produced and started making more of the lightweight castings that many of its customer plants wanted. However, the Stankolit factory was promptly penalised by the Machine Tool Ministry for falling short on the tonnage target. Deputy Minister G N Fedorovski chastised the Stankolit managers, explaining that 'you can't get by without tons in our business. They figure in the plan. Resources are allocated with them. And everyone's used to them'.

Reforms implemented in one enterprise immediately run into external constraints. Central targets are measured according to quantitative not qualitative criteria. And there are other obstacles.

Deliveries of raw materials, machine tools and other inputs are unpredictable. Transport is another problem. Bottlenecks in distribution wreak havoc with plant level decisions. According to a recent study, underinvestment in roads in the Russian Republics has resulted in an average speed for lorries of 30kph.

Things falling apart

The prospects for the Soviet economy are not good. Western technology, bought with gold, oil and other natural resources, has so far prevented the collapse of industry. But without a major reorganisation things can only get worse. The restructuring of the economy, however, cannot be achieved within the present relations of production. And the Soviet bureaucracy will fight tooth and nail to defend the existing system.

The bureaucracy is fighting a losing battle. Because it cannot raise living standards it faces the prospect of growing



instability. Chronic labour shortages give the working class some leverage against the bureaucrats. Despite widespread repression, workers are well placed to defend their interests. An upsurge in workers' struggle is on the agenda for 1982.

The Soviet bureaucracy also faces pressure from national minorities. Throughout the Soviet Union movements for national independence are pulling the country apart. From the Baltic Republics to Central Asia resistance to the Great Russian chauvinism of the Soviet bureaucracy is on the increase. At a time when the economy is disintegrating, national struggles are an important threat to the integrity of the Soviet Union.

The most immediate threat to the Soviet bureaucracy comes from Eastern Europe. The bureaucracy fears the consequences of unrest in the Eastern bloc for its internal authority, as well as the difficulties it will encounter in maintaining control over its satellites. While Poland poses the greatest problems, the economic crisis spares none of the Warsaw Pact countries. Romania faces a major economic crisis and virtual famine. Along with Czechoslovakia it has been forced to introduce a system of informal rationing. The wave of strikes in Romania's largest coal field in the Jiu Valley in mid-October shows the shape of things to come in 1982.

1981 marks an important turning point for the opposition movement in Eastern Europe. Until recently it was dominated by isolated groups of intellectuals and professionals. The events in Poland, Romania and the Soviet Union have shown that finally the oppressed workers of the region have moved into battle.

(from *the next step*, No 20, January 1982)

POLAND'S BLACK DECEMBER



ON 13 DECEMBER 1981, the Polish army took over the running of Poland, declared martial law and launched a wave of terror against the Polish working class. Before the end of the month thousands had been imprisoned, Solidarity had been destroyed and the last pockets of concerted working class resistance had been defeated. What lay behind the take-over of Polish society by the military, and why was the repressive regime established by General Jaruzelski so effective in crushing the Polish workers' demands?

Who rules?

The switch to army dictatorship was forced on the bureaucrats at the helm of the Communist Party by the growing disintegration of the Polish state. Kania's regime just could not halt the collapse of the economy. Early in October the

Government set up a special anti-crisis committee to deal with the hardships of winter; but it soon revealed itself impotent, being forced to admit that it couldn't control food supplies 'because money ceased to be an economic instrument' (*Zolnierz Polski*, 25 October 1981).

Poland's economic crisis was exacerbated by a protracted period of political upheaval. Political unrest had virtually paralysed the Polish bureaucracy throughout the year. Although the Polish working class had not managed to seize power, it had prevented the state from controlling society. Kania's replacement as Communist Party secretary by General Jaruzelski on 19 October was a desperate attempt to retrieve the situation. But it came too late.

In October working class protest spread and grew in its intensity. The authorities' continued refusal to grant the reforms they had promised, plus acute food shortages, unleashed a wave of

industrial action. In Walbrych, Tarnow and Krosno workers went on strike to get corrupt officials in local government

dismissed. The bureaucracy found itself powerless when confronted by protests like this: when the police tried to prevent Solidarity activists from selling their publications and badges in Katowice on 20 October, for example, there was such an outcry that riot squads had to be called in, only to be driven into retreat by a barrage of rocks.

Twenty-four hours later there was a repeat performance of the Katowice incidents in nearby Wroclaw. No sooner had police arrested some Solidarity militants for broadcasting from a mobile van than thousands of people came out on the streets. On the next day (22 October), local transport workers went on strike to demand the release of those detained. This was sufficient to see the men set free.

The local strikes were bitter and entirely spontaneous. Even the leadership of Solidarity lost control over them. As a means of allowing people to let off steam, therefore, it announced a one-hour general strike on 28 October. A day later Lech Walesa called for an end

to wildcat strikes — but all to no avail. Government provocations, such as the Polish Parliament's call on 31 October for a ban on all strikes, only raised the political temperature. Hundreds of thousands of workers stayed away from work during the first week of November.

The collapse of Solidarity

Until November the Polish bureaucracy relied on the leaders of Solidarity to contain the working class movement. The popularity of Walesa and his colleagues gave them influence over wide sections of Polish society. Their decision to confine Solidarity's aims to purely trade union issues meant that the bureaucracy could use them as mediators between the workers' movement and the state.

But as the crisis assumed greater dimensions so Solidarity's mediating role diminished. During its October conference, the leadership of Solidarity just about managed to retain its credibility in the face of widespread rank and file criticism. The programme passed at this conference expressed the moderation of the leadership with its call for a new 'social contract' with the bureaucracy. However, the time for give and take had long passed.

Workers wanted food, freedom and power; the bureaucracy could no longer tolerate day-to-day physical challenges to its authority. Thus, Solidarity inevitably fell victim to the growing polarisation of Polish society. In a last-minute bid to stabilise things, Walesa met Jaruzelski and Archbishop Glemp between 3 and 4 November and signed a three-month 'social truce'. But nobody paid any attention to this. Solidarity had lost its utility to the bureaucrats. On 30 November special police broke up a

10-day sit-in by firemen, and so gave notice of the bureaucracy's intention to crush the mass movement. A week and a half later the government began to publicise its plans to suspend union activity.

By this time Walesa and his circle were isolated even within Solidarity. Matters finally came to a head at a meeting of the national commission of Solidarity in Gdansk on 12 December. Just hours before the declaration of martial law, militants led by Jan Rulewski and Karol Modzelewski overruled Walesa and passed a resolution calling for an indefinite general strike.

Why did Solidarity collapse?

The collapse of Solidarity was unavoidable so long as it remained a trade union movement for reform. The establishment of free trade unions was an important gain for Polish workers. But unions on their own could do little to liberate workers from bureaucratic oppression. What's the use of higher wages if the shops are empty? Polish workers can only defend their class interests if they smash the bureaucracy and take full control over the economy.

In fact Solidarity went beyond the confines of trade unionism — albeit in an unconscious way. Despite public proclamations about only being a union, it had to respond to social and political issues. Increasingly, the leadership of Solidarity began to refer to itself as a 'social movement'.

Solidarity's lack of basic direction, however, turned it into a potential weapon against those who had created it — the workers. The bureaucracy did its best to integrate Solidarity into its system of domination; but this was never really

on, because the contradiction between the working class and the bureaucracy was too profound to be resolved through an integrationist strategy. Moreover an even greater danger began to present itself.

Polish workers were looking for political solutions to the problems they faced. But their own organisation, Solidarity, wanted to keep politics out of their lives. On the other hand, the right-wing nationalist forces in Poland had no such inhibitions. Led by the Confederation for Independent Poland (KPN), they denounced the political system and demanded major changes. Not surprisingly, they soon won support among workers.

During the months of September and October the KPN grew in strength. Fortunately, it didn't get enough time to consolidate its base in Solidarity. But what did happen was that Solidarity started to fragment along regional and political lines. To counter the influence of the far right, leading figures in KOR such as Kuron set up a social democratic 'Club for the Self-governing Republic'. At the same time splinter groups of all kinds began to emerge throughout Poland.

This process of radicalisation changed Solidarity's outlook. In response to rank and file pressure, it began to concentrate on more overtly political issues. The local elections which were to have been held in February 1982 were one of these. Soon Solidarity had become not one movement, but a coalition of political and regional associations. It could no longer lead, but only follow.

The confused and heterogeneous composition of Solidarity made it an unwieldy instrument for defending workers. As the 12 December national commission meeting showed, Solidarity would have

split under the pressure of its diverse social constituents even if there had been no military coup. Its lack of readiness for such a turn of events was the organisational reflection of its diffuse political outlook. When reforms are out of the question, any reform movement is doomed to irrelevance.

An interview after the coup with Seweryn Blumsztajn, a leading Solidarity official in charge of *Agencja Solidarnosc*, illustrates where Solidarity stood on 12 December:

'We were convinced generally that a confrontation was inevitable and that the systematic reform of power would not occur till afterwards. It was evident that the struggle would take the form of a general strike. We were ready for this psychologically and politically.

'However nobody had imagined that the authorities would take measures as brutal as they had and Solidarity was not technically prepared.' (*Le Monde*, 19 December 1981)

In other words Solidarity was ready for an aggressive fight for reforms but not for an all-out struggle for power. And the issue was that of power: the side that was most resolute and ruthless in pursuit of its interest emerged as the victor.

In the aftermath of Jaruzelski's bloody repression it may seem insensitive to blame Solidarity for Black December. But these sentiments are misplaced. The Polish working class has not been destroyed and there is still time to rethink strategy so that the yoke of bureaucratic oppression can be removed for ever. More than a year ago we noted that Polish society could not be reformed. The upheaval of 13 December has shown this only too tragically. Is there another way? The power of the working class paralysed the Polish state throughout 1981. If this power is fused with the

programme of proletarian revolution then the movement of change will become irreversible. Let 13 December strengthen the resolve of workers throughout Eastern Europe — next time we cannot stop half-way.



the next step

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