

SOLIDARITY AFTER THE COUP

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The paradox of Poland is quite straightforward. The workers, intellectuals and activists who formed Solidarity did not know how to convert the gains of August **1980** into permanent change. The generals, security officers and party hardliners who declared a 'state of war' on **13 December 1981** did not know how to convert the locking up of Lech Walesa and other Solidarity leaders into a lasting solution of the country's economic and social problems. The list of problems without easy answers is long enough inside Poland. But the history of Solidarity and the continuing struggle of the Polish working class has presented a number of questions for Western socialists: what is the nature of Russian and East European political systems and what should be the relationships between **organisations** of the Western labour movement—political parties and trade **unions**—and organisations with similar names in Comecon countries? Also Western socialists have had to consider what political and economic response would best support Solidarity. The situation has produced some strange bedfellows. Ultra-leftists have joined forces with right-wing reactionaries in demanding a complete economic boycott of Poland and the Soviet Union and a withdrawal of credit that would push Poland into default. Western Communist Parties have stood shoulder to shoulder with bankers in Wall Street, the City and West Germany, in arguing against any interruption in financial and economic relationships with Poland. The paradoxes stretch far beyond the Polish frontiers.

Commentaries appearing not long after **13 December 1981** suggested that Solidarity should have been better prepared. The many warning signs of the authorities' unwillingness to compromise should have alerted the union to adopt a more radical course of action or, at least, to make more careful plans to withstand a probable act of repression. The fact that no such course of action was taken indicates that Solidarity was far more of a trade union than those who dubbed it an embryonic political party or social mass movement would credit. Defining trade unions is an **exercise** best left to the Webbs. Anyone who has spent a moment **examining** models of trade unions from Britain, West Germany, France or Scandinavia let alone those from the Americas, Asia or Africa will appreciate the vast differences between forms of trade-union organisation, their declared and achieved aims, and their relationships with other forces

in society. Social, political and cultural backgrounds have shaped trade unions in various ways in different countries. But all unions share the common characteristic of organising workers rather than citizens in general, and in presenting demands related to working life as a priority over more general social and political demands. In Britain the TUC Congress debates and formulates programmes on issues that are far removed from the shop floor. Policy issues range from an alternative economic strategy, withdrawal from the EEC and nuclear disarmament to cultural policy and access to the mass media. Yet there is no suggestion that the TUC is seeking to replace the Labour Party. Solidarity put forward a wide range of demands concerning changes in the political, economic and social operation of Poland but it perceived itself, right up to the last moment, as a union with all the limitations that unionism entails. The relative lack of preparation for the December coup de force underlines this view. Some preparation had been made, notably in Wroclaw, where all the union's regional funds were withdrawn from the bank shortly before 13 December. In the **Lodz** region, a traditionally militant area, the idea of workers' guards had been discussed but mainly in Connection with proposals for 'active strikes'—syndicalist takeovers of factories by workers who would continue to produce and distribute but without reference to managers or local state representatives. Since 13 December there has been a war of articles and books over the exact nature of Solidarity. This war has been conducted, in part, by people deserving respect because they were locked up in December 1981, and whose articles, interviews and speeches up to that point are available. Their analyses and comments are based on direct experience inside Poland. On the other hand, polemicists sitting comfortably in the West have also engaged in the war of words, moralising about Solidarity's failure in this or that aspect of its troubled existence since August 1980 and earnestly lecturing the union on what it should or should not have done.

Much of this exterior analysis is based on the belief that Solidarity should somehow have immobilised the security services and armed forces, either through agitation and propaganda or forms of mass activity outside barracks and police stations. This would have been as practical a course of action as asking SPG police at Grunwick to lay down their truncheons and link arms with the pickets. Despite the appearance of a **quasi-revolutionary** situation in Poland the state never lost control over its armed forces and militia. The disintegration of the Polish United Workers Party (PUWP), the collapse of economic direction at central and local levels, and the authoritative presence of Solidarity in so many areas of society hitherto the exclusive preserve of the PUWP, created the illusion that state power had evaporated. That 'the Party equals the State' in Comecon countries, was shown to be a dangerously misleading assumption.

Nowhere in the world have trade unions been able to resist armed

state power, ruthlessly applied. The extremely powerful and well-implanted German trade-union movement collapsed the moment Hitler came to power in the face of mass arrests, internments and closure of **offices**—tactics similar to those used by Jaruzelski. With a complete shutdown of communications, strikes and occupations become atomised. As the Chilean workers found in 1973, working-class resistance is difficult in the face of security forces who can use tanks to break through factory gates and are willing to shoot to kill. There can be little doubt that the spontaneous resistance of the Polish workers was generalised and strong; the sparse picture that we have shows widespread opposition and the use of armed force to smash strikes in the week following 13 December. The full extent of the resistance will not be known until a greater freedom of movement and communication is restored in Poland. But following that unpleasant week there was a return to work albeit a sullen and uncooperative return, punctuated by the Christmas break—but a return nonetheless. Again this follows the pattern of trade-union suppressions in other countries where, following the initial reactive anger, the leaderless working class conforms to behavioural norms and goes back to work.

The state also directed its application of martial law to controlling workplace relationships. The first move was the suppression of Solidarity. The union was suspended, its leaders arrested, its offices shut down and its equipment, including key printing machinery was confiscated. The process of turning Poland into a military dictatorship was achieved by declaring a 'state of war', later ratified by the Polish **Sejm** (parliament). In addition to being Prime Minister, First Secretary of the PUPP and Minister of Defence, General **Wojciech** Jaruzelski became Chairman of the Military Council of National Salvation. The term seemed to reflect Latin American language; a hunt through the classic Marxist texts yields nothing which combines the words 'military', 'national', and 'salvation'. The Council's acronym in Polish—WRON—was unfortunately close to the Polish word for 'crow', wrona. This congruence provided an immediate image for underground cartoonists and delighted the sharp-witted Poles whose national symbol is the eagle.

There was nothing funny however about the powers that the Military Council of National Salvation assumed. These included the power to arrest anyone by simple administrative decision and detain them indefinitely; to place under military orders any citizen at any time; to implement direct military control over all industrial, manufacturing and service sectors vital to the economy (notably mines, steel, heavy industry, ship-building, cars, transport, post, energy supply, communications and the media); and to shoot any citizen opposing the Council's decisions or found disturbing public order. The Council also issued regulations which prohibited any meetings of groups; being on the streets without identity papers; striking or taking part in any protest action; participating in a

banned or suspended organisation (i.e. Solidarity as well as many other associations and organisations stopped **from** functioning after 13 December); being in the streets between 10 pm and 6 am; and taking photographs.

According to official Polish figures some 6,000 people were interned. Unofficial Polish sources put the figure much higher. It was impossible to find out the exact number. Details emerged quickly enough about the better-known internees and the more notorious internment camps. But information from the more isolated regions was hard to come by even in Poland itself.

The Military Council showed considerable skill in its suppression of information and its control of both Polish and **Western** journalists. Every mechanism for communication inside the country—television, radio, newspapers and telephones—was either suspended or placed under direct military control. The curfew, check-points, the ban on leaving towns and the shut-down of internal flights successfully atomised the individual pockets of resistance. Western journalists were denied contact with their head offices and when a minimal telex service was restored it was closely censored. Even six months after the coup Western journalists were unable to travel freely around the country. They were still obliged to turn to official spokespersons for most of their hard facts, while using weasel adjectives like 'unofficial', 'clandestine' and 'claimed' when describing information issued by workers and the regrouped Solidarity movement. Poles have never had easy access to *The Times* or *The Guardian* but during the 1970s reports from Poland were broadcast back there by the BBC and other Western European radio services with Polish-language outputs. During the crucial weeks of July and August 1980 when the rolling wave of strikes culminated in the Gdansk and Szczecin occupation strikes, Western reporting and the access of Western television crews increased international pressure on Gierek to concede. Whilst the Polish media ignored the strikes, radio broadcasts from outside Poland provided accurate, up-to-the-minute information. In December 1981 the **government** dispensed with such liberal measures for foreign journalists. They were put on a very tight leash indeed and have been kept on it ever since. Direct censorship may have been lifted but all the interpreters come from the government Interpress service. It is difficult to get permission to travel outside Warsaw. If the military authorities in El Salvador or Guatemala or indeed, in Vietnam during the liberation war, applied the same ruthless control over internal and external reporting one wonders if Western reaction, especially Western socialist reaction, would have been so strong. We all recall that photograph of the Saigon police chief shooting a prisoner in the head at point blank range and the brutal faces of El Salvador militia in full colour close-up. Had films of Silesian miners being shot dead in December 1981 or stylish photographs of ZOMO

security troops tooled up for action been available from Poland, the reaction in the West would have been all the greater. In that sense, at least, the Polish military had learned something from the summer of 1980 and had a more sophisticated understanding of international media relations than their fellow officers in Latin America.

There was a definite attempt to militarise the entire country. Twenty-one officers sat on the Military Council for National Salvation. Below it were two councils, one for economic affairs and one for socio-political affairs. Former ministers and senior PUPW figures sat on these bodies. At the regional level a military officer presided over provincial defence committees which replaced the local *voivods* (provincial governors). Military tribunals dispensed summary justice to Solidarity activists caught distributing leaflets or organising meetings and strikes. These trials continued in the winter and by May 1982 more than 1,000 people had been sentenced to jail terms of up to nine years. These included well-known Solidarity regional chiefs like Slowik from Lodz and Gil from Krakow. The problem of Solidarity members imprisoned following quasi-judicial processes was different from those who were administratively interned. Any acceptable settlement would have to include the release of people serving prison sentences as well as the internees.

The military also installed itself in key factories. Putting workers under military control meant that they could be ordered to do overtime and Saturday shifts. They could be forced to accept changes in their work operations without consultation. Opposition to such orders could be punished under military discipline while being absent from work counted as desertion. As will be seen later this did not significantly improve the economy; the problem with the Polish economy has never been the amount or quality of work performed by Polish workers but the crippling shortages of raw materials, spares, key components and energy. The economy therefore could not be improved by putting factories under military control. But it all added up to the reality that Poland was now governed by a military junta, which tried to present itself in the tradition of the pre-war Pilsudski regime (1926–35) and its successor (the so-called government of the five colonels).

The military authorities launched a series of purges to clear away any other opposition besides Solidarity. 1,200 journalists lost their jobs and others were subject to a 'verification' process. The Polish Journalists Association was disbanded and a new, pro-regime, journalists' association was launched. Dressing newscasters in military uniform in the days after the coup was more than symbolic. The relative freedom enjoyed by the Polish media had been one of the major achievements since August 1980. Broadcasting, the press and publishing were brought firmly back under central control. Similar purges took place in academic areas with, notably, the forced resignation in April 1982 of Henryk Samsonowicz, who had

been elected Rector of Warsaw University under democratic procedures in **1981**. The students' union was also shut **down** and condemned as an 'anti-socialist' organisation—its leaders were arrested and interned.

Perhaps the biggest single victim of **13** December, apart from Solidarity, was the Polish United Workers Party. In a tradition that springs from the bowels of history Jaruzelski and the military may have thought they were only taking over for a short period in order to administer a short, sharp shock—they would then hand power back to a refashioned and wiser party. The professed dream of generals who wish to be merely temporary rulers is either hypocritical or stupid. As the snow melted after Jaruzelski's Christmas coup one saw the PUWP fading away as well. Many party members who also belonged to Solidarity handed in their cards. Six hundred provincial and factory party organisations were purged as well as 2,000 branch party organisations. A Central Committee in March **1982** approved retrospectively what its First Secretary, General Jaruzelski, had done. However as a party—a political organism with a genuine base, a set of political objectives and some loose, if not **uniformly agreed** upon, idea of how to achieve them—the PUWP had ceased to exist. There were said to be two main currents—conforming to the classic Manichean vision of outside observers—a liberal wing grouped around **Mieczyslaw** Rakowski and the hardliners headed by Stefan Olszowski. The difference between the two groups was more a matter of debate than practical policy: Rakowski and Olszowski might argue about the extent of the purges but neither could make a deal with the Polish working class. State power had passed decisively out of the hands of the PUWP on **13** December and there was no clear mechanism for getting it back.

We should remember that the official excuse for the Jaruzelski coup was the need to avert a civil war inspired by Solidarity. But the timing of the coup was not fortuitous. Had **Jaruzelski** not intervened the next major date on the Polish political calendar would have been the local elections. Much was made of Solidarity's proposal in December **1981** to hold a referendum on the possibility of the **Sejm** suspending the right to strike with a consequent riposte by the union. But such manoeuvring and posturing had been endemic in Poland throughout **1981**. The holding of local elections could not, under the constitution, be delayed beyond February **1982**. No agreement had been reached on who could be candidates but the old system which allowed a so-called national front list (consisting of the PUWP and its sponsored political organisations) was clearly unacceptable. Even if the compromise proposed by Solidarity of reserving half the seats for the PUWP and allowing free elections for the remainder had been accepted, it would have meant a blow dealt publicly to the position of the PUWP. In addition, the process of selecting the PUWP candidates would have exposed the party to internal conflicts which it could well do without. The arrival of thousands of freely elected

municipal councillors, limited as their power might be, would have meant a powerful move towards open elections at other, higher levels. It would have been the first time since August 1980 that liberal democratic processes had operated in an institutionalised way as part of Poland's system of government. To hold elections therefore would have been fatal for the PUWP. It was one of the key, though rarely mentioned reasons for the timing of the military takeover. If now the military were to hand back power to the PUWP, except under conditions of a security police terror, the same political processes would tear the party apart. Like generals everywhere, Jaruzelski will find that taking power is easy: handing it over is extremely difficult.

The one condition that might permit a return to the days before the emergence of Solidarity would be a substantial improvement in the country's economic position. The bleak description of the Polish economy provided by D.M. Nuti in *Socialist Register* 1981 'The Polish Crisis: Economic Factors and Constraints' still obtains today. Except that it has got worse. National income fell by two per cent in 1979, four per cent in 1980, twelve per cent in 1981 and is expected to fall by as much as 30 per cent in 1982. The only economic reform pushed through has been a fourfold increase of prices which had the effect of soaking up some spare zlotys; but it also meant that poorer families are now facing the prospect of real hunger, as opposed to the shortages of the previous years. The militarisation of the economy has entailed a renewed narrow concentration on selected industries—shipbuilding, steel, engineering, automobiles and agricultural machinery. Altogether there are fourteen priority programmes which have privileged access to the dwindling stocks of key imported raw materials (the Warsaw steel works, Huta Warszawa, for example, receives wolfram and vanadium which steel plants in southern Poland are denied. All this has led to a desperate scramble to try and get individual factories into priority programmes. The dislocated Polish economy is still further distorted by the world recession which has destroyed markets for the goods that Poland can produce.

According to official statements there are more than fifty major industrial projects which are starved of components or imported raw materials either because of the Western freeze on export credits for Poland or the simple lack of hard currency. Polish banking officials have juggled to try and reschedule the 27 billion dollar external debt but with limited success. Western banks however have refused to declare a default, using identical arguments to those advanced in favour of maintaining credit lines to countries such as Chile, Argentina and the Philippines.

The lack of credit and the impact of the Western economic and financial sanctions meant that imports from the West in the first half of 1982 were running at 50 per cent below the level of the previous year. In 1981, 57 per cent of Polish exports went to Comecon countries and 62 per cent

of imports came from Comecon. Both these figures are expected to increase. Poland has signed a number of new trading agreements with Comecon partners. Czechoslovakia has agreed to increase its supply of raw materials to Poland—an East European irony because Poland was for a long time the raw material purveyor to its neighbouring states. The turn towards Comecon which is also occurring in Yugoslavia (not a Comecon member) and even marginally in Hungary, the most **Western**-orientated of all the Comecon economies, is not just economically significant but politically significant also. Gierek's dash for growth in the 1970s based on vistas of unlimited Western credit, Western technology and Western markets, was not only economically unsound: it caused contradictions in terms of raised expectations inside Poland and increased political contacts outside the country; it exposed the inefficiency of highly centralised economic control and the clumsiness of appointing decision makers on the *nomenklatura* system (for a list of *nomenklatura* appointments and the system's role in Poland see *Solidarity: Poland's Independent Trade Union*, D. MacShane, Spokesman Books 1981).

Polish economists generally agree that the only way to get the economy moving again is to permit a degree of liberalisation both in economic and managerial decision making and in the market. But all moves in that direction, even if they do not go as far as Solidarity's economic programme and even if they evade the question of self-management and workers' control, carry a political price. The price is the weakening of centralised state power. This may be less important in a country like Hungary where there is no powerful and strongly based opposition to the ruling party but it is vital in Poland which has a suppressed but still massively supported trade union and the powerful Catholic Church. Economic liberalisation also poses the necessity to **come** to some deal with the working class in order to make workers accept the initial period of austerity, as well as labour redeployment and unemployment arising from such reforms. In short, it is difficult to modernise and improve an East European economy without at the same time modernising and improving political relations. Such a process would threaten to end the Soviet system of political control which has operated in Russia since the late 1920s and in East Europe since the late 1940s. The decision, at least in the Kremlin, appears to be to maintain political security at the expense of economic development (the emergence of Yuri Andropov, the KGB chief for the past 15 years, as a potential successor to Brezhnev underscores this point) and to draw the Eastern European economies back into Comecon again. Given the crisis in Western capitalism such a move, though mainly undertaken for internal political reasons, also has some economic logic behind it.

In Poland, however, a gentle return to the economic practices and managerial style of the 1950s and a goodbye wave to increased Western

trading could still not be achieved easily without the cooperation of the working class, and here the continuing existence of Solidarity as an underground union considerably restricts the options available to the authorities. One has to be careful about terminology here. The activities of the independent self-governing trade union Solidarity (in **Polish—NSZZ Solidarnosc**) were suspended following the declaration of a 'state of war' on **13 December 1981**. Its offices were closed down, equipment confiscated and many of its leaders interned. At the workplace and community level managers and regional administrators must no longer negotiate with Solidarity representatives.

Yet six months after the coup all available evidence shows that the union still exists in some tangible form for the industrial working class. In the words of Neal Ascherson reporting a visit to Krakow in March **1982**: 'The core of the opposition at present is the extraordinary moral solidity of the industrial workers, taking no extreme attitudes but calmly telling any inquirer that they still support Solidarity. In this sense, the confident mental world which Solidarity created in **1980** still survives., This process of survival has been helped by the work of union activists underground and the refusal by workers to accept a new union **organisation** that might be imposed on them from above.

At first sight the military coup was extraordinarily impressive. **Four-fifths** of the union's national leadership plus its more famous advisers like Jacek Kuron, Adam Michnik and Bronislaw Geremek were swept into internment camps. Lech Walesa was held separately in a villa near Warsaw. Yet as the lists of internees gradually became available, knowledgeable observers of Solidarity were struck by how many were fringe and unimportant people. Apart from the top echelons of Solidarity leadership the kind of people picked on showed that the security police were working from old lists of oppositionists and lists of people no longer active full-time in Solidarity. So a large number of intellectuals were interned while the shop-floor leadership, provided it did not expose itself in the cruel days of resistance immediately following **13 December**, was left largely intact. Between September **1980** and December **1981** every single workplace in Poland had a Solidarity organisation. In large industrial plants **95** per cent of the workforce paid dues to Solidarity. Short of taking out and shooting every known Solidarity representative from each factory, office, hospital and print shop it would be difficult to remove the union's presence from workplaces in Poland. In Western countries most trade-union activists carry on a day-to-day work without reference to, or feeling a need for, the physical presence of the top union leadership. The same is true in Poland.

At one level Solidarity has been forced back into the kind of clandestine activities undertaken by those trying to set up independent trade unions in the years before August **1980**. But at another level the crucial difference

is that hundreds of thousands of Polish workers have had sixteen months of being able to organise freely, hold elections, choose shop stewards, select regional and national representatives and negotiate with employers, local and regional government as well as with national ministers.

Unlike other momentary periods of reform in Eastern Europe (Poland 1956-7, Czechoslovakia 1968) which, in essence, involved a debate within the party and was reserved for an elite, the sixteen months of Solidarity's existence involved nearly every industrial worker. A small example indicates why most workers want a return of Solidarity in order to regain a measure of control over their working lives: since the coup the accident rate in Polish industry has shot up. In the first three months of 1982 the Minister of Mines, General Piotrowski, reported fourteen deaths and 5,642 accidents. It was concern over unsafe working practices and consequent deaths in mines that led to the creation of one of the first **independent** trade-union cells in Silesia in 1977. So the reason why Solidarity remains fixed in workers' minds is not the desire to forge a weapon to overthrow the **PUWP** but, more prosaically, the need for a **defence** mechanism against the unreasonable-demands of management. Of course as the **PUWP** were interlinked with the appointment and control of managers there was a connection.

The union continues to signal its existence through publishing a wide range of journals, bulletins, leaflets and posters. Solidarity publishes a weekly magazine in Warsaw and even a pirate broadcasting system, 'Radio Solidarity', has managed to transmit irregularly. The authorities' concern about these activities is underlined by the heavy prison sentences imposed on activists who are caught. Even so, Polish conspiratorial abilities combined with wide popular support means that the Polish secret police are simply unable, through the classic mechanisms of informers and fear, to penetrate completely the underground movement and arrest its organisers. If, as seem likely, there is a broad-based underground **organisation** with mass popular **support**, this will be an important-break-through in post-war Eastern Europe with potentially far-reaching implications.

Several key Solidarity leaders including Zbigniew **Bujak** from Warsaw (unquestionably the most authoritative Solidarity working-class leader apart from Walesa), Wladyslaw Frasnyniuk from Wroclaw, Bogdan Lis from Gdansk and Wladyslaw Hardek from Krakow have formed a provisional national coordinating commission and have been able to meet and issue statements. Their call for May Day demonstrations was widely followed (50,000 marched in Warsaw and in Gdansk) as well as token stoppages to commemorate 13 December.

There is a debate about what **tactics** the underground union should follow. Zbigniew **Bujak** has argued that Solidarity should be patiently rebuilt by creating a wide network of groups and committees. These

would provide aid for internees, discuss problems in the workplace, if necessary organise strikes over workplace issues but without strike leaders, and publish leaflets and bulletins. The loose network of groups and workplace cells would wait for the hopeless economic situation to bring Jaruzelski to the negotiating table. He would then be obliged to release Walesa and accept the existence of Solidarity. Decentralisation is vital to **Bujak's** tactic which he describes as 'positional struggle'. **Bujak's** lieutenant, the teacher Wiktor Kulerski, has described what he calls an underground Society: 'Not a centralised organisation with complete allegiance towards it but a multi-centred movement, decentralised, informal, consisting of mutually independent and loosely connected groups, circles, committees etc., with a large scope for independent decision-making. . . Such a movement could lead to a situation when the authorities control empty shops but not the market, workers' employment but not their livelihood, state-owned mass media but not the circulation of information, printing houses but not publishing, the post and telephones but not communications, the schools but not education.'

Jacek Kuron's tactics contrast with **Bujak** and Kulerski's. Kuron's writings from inside his Bialoleka prison camp have been widely published in the underground Solidarity press. Kuron does not consider that the 'state of war' can carry on indefinitely without a protest or a demonstration erupting into a national uprising that would provoke Soviet intervention in the style of Hungary in 1956. In order to avert this scenario Kuron has called for a highly centralised underground organisation to which activists should give total obedience. Attempts should be made to subvert the army and the security police and at some point a general strike should be called combined with an attempt at taking over radio and television stations. Kuron stresses that the object of such direct action should be to forestall a casual uncoordinated protest undertaken probably by youngsters (an important demographic point is that 60 per cent of the Polish population is under the age of 30 and for them the historic rebuilding achievements of post-war Polish communism are not even a lived-through memory) and its outcome should be a negotiated settlement including the restoration of Solidarity and a pledge that Poland would respect its alliances i.e. stay a loyal Warsaw Pact member. Although according to summaries in the Western media Kuron's position seems adventurist, in his full prison texts he shows great concern that the Polish situation may be slipping dangerously out of control—forces that neither the Church, nor underground Solidarity, let alone the military can handle, could be unleashed causing external intervention and total repression. Certainly there is growing rank-and-file pressure for some sort of action and people are reluctant to give up the idea of having a relatively formal underground union organisation—a shadow Solidarity as it were.

The Church with its memories of the Stalinist repression in the early

1950s is also conscious of the danger. But there is no sign of the Church adopting Kuron's conclusions and supporting a pre-emptive strike aimed at a controlled confrontation. The response of the Catholic Church to the December 13th crackdown and its consequences mirrors uncannily the behaviour of the Church after the Gdansk strikes and the creation of Solidarity in 1980. Just as the veteran primate, Cardinal **Wyszynski**, initially wavered in the middle of the August 1980 strike and, in one sermon, hinted that a return to work was the best answer, so too his successor, Archbishop Glemp, temporised in the immediate aftermath of the coup. He made a call to do nothing and warned repeatedly against activities that could justify increased violence by the state. The Church later stressed the need for a restoration of human and trade-union rights. But as with all political bodies the Polish Church is divided; the zig-zags in its statements and policy declarations indicate the political debate being waged inside it. A key figure, Archbishop Henryk Gulbinowicz of Wroclaw, is more outspoken in his references to Polish nationalism. Pope John Paul II's external involvement complicates matters. It is a problem for the military authorities and for the Soviet Union who realise that the Pope's nationality and his commanding presence as a world super-star focus world attention on Poland. But it is also a problem for Glemp and the Polish bishops whose ability to take independent decisions is limited by the need to refer to the Vatican. The Polish Church may have one faith but it has two masters, Glemp and **Wojtyła**. The existence of the Polish Pope further helps to internationalise the Polish crisis.

What has been the strategy of the Church? Like the good Abbot during the French Revolution it wants to survive. Peter Hebblethwaite says that one of the Pope's characteristics is to see things in terms of there being 'a distant goal, a spiritual aspiration, an inaccessible horizon, to be reached God knows when. He reverses the terms of **Newman's** famous hymn and sings: "I ask not to see the distant scene; I only know what the next step is".' So too in Poland. The Church may have a vague vision of a 'free' Poland in some far-off future but it offers no prescription about how that 'freedom' is to be achieved. The comforting rhetoric about the Church representing Polish nationhood during the centuries of Russian, Prussian and Austro-Hungarian partitions of Poland cannot obliterate the period 1919-39 when the Church was one of the worst landlords in Poland and allied itself with the most reactionary elements in the Polish bourgeoisie and its ruling military junta.

During the 1970s and in the period after Solidarity's birth the Church and the Polish working class developed a symbiotic relationship which has continued since the Jaruzelski declaration of a 'state of war'. As if transported 700 years the Church enjoys a place in Poland unheard of in most other countries since feudalism. It has authority, position, influence and the nation's rulers must always take it into account. But it has no

direct power, no foot-soldiers, and like feudal prelates the Polish bishops must seek understandings with temporal holders of power to maintain and advance the Church's authority. In the West we have been mesmerised by the Polish Church; but it is worth recalling that in two areas central to the Catholic Church in other countries—the legal control of female sexuality and fertility and the control of the school curriculum—the Polish priesthood has no power. If priests occasionally fulminated from the pulpit, they have had little effect. Contraception, abortion and divorce are easily obtained and widely practised in Poland and the education process from infant school to university is totally atheistic.

The eruption of the Polish working class in August 1980 gave the Church a powerful new ally in its unceasing struggle for positional influence. There is not and has never been a single Polish Church policy towards either Solidarity or the state. If anything the relations between Solidarity and the Church betrayed a constant nervousness and vacillation. To be sure, whenever Glemp or the Pope met Walesa they told him to be careful and moderate, which was rather like advising a fish to keep itself wet. The Church lacked a coherent policy for political transformation which it could ask Solidarity to try and bring about. There were minor advances, such as the transmission of mass on the radio and increased pilgrimages to Rome but the Church in Poland was no stronger on 13 December 1981 than it had been on 31 August 1980. The problem of power was always a test that could only be resolved between the Polish working class and the Polish state.

In its fight for survival and advancement the Church is not neutral nor does it stand apart from the main conflict. It has provided spiritual and physical shelter for the Solidarity activists operating underground. The visits of priests to internment camps have provided a channel of communication between Walesa, Kuron and Michnik and those outside. One Polish army officer, whose remarks were secretly recorded at a party meeting inside Polish television, claimed that the Solidarity leaders working clandestinely were probably using churches and monasteries as hiding places. The army officer even complained that it would be impossible to send in ZOMO units to capture people within the sanctuary of church walls because of the national and international outcry. Churches have also been used, he maintained, as meeting places and for storing paper and ink used in producing underground Solidarity newspapers. The continuing flow of charity from the West that has been distributed through Church channels is a reminder of Jaruzelski's inability to fulfil the first duty of a ruler, which is to feed the ruled.

It is interesting to see that the Church has also provided the launch for some mass protests. One can ban demonstrations and break up rallies but it is impossible in Poland, to stop people attending a religious service. The major demonstrations that took place in May 1982 developed as

people left Churches. Anyone who has attended a crowded Polish mass will know how easy it is to slip through the packed throng standing at the back of the church and pass messages, leaflets and communicate without fear of effective surveillance. The Church is an important **organisa-**tional tool in the fightback of the Polish working class. The authorities know this but are powerless to do much about it. Glemp has strongly denounced attempts to arrest priests and, even if he wished to, he cannot stop junior clergy from carrying messages or offering their vestries as meeting rooms. In March 1982, the Primate's social Council put forward a ten point plan which amounted to little more than the standard demands of freeing internees, recognising the right of Solidarity to exist and function according to the 1980 agreements and calling for a social dialogue. Solidarity, 'should have defended the idea of a limited social and union programme with more determination and consistency'.

Jaruzelski has been politely indifferent to the Church though his politeness is tactical—he may want to use the Church as a fence-mender at some later date. The presence of the Polish Church limits **Jaruzelski's** field of operation far more than the rulers of other Eastern European states. A key problem in Poland is agriculture and the Church will resist any reform that weakens private tenure. It is in the countryside that the Church is most strongly implanted. The development of any effective neo-Stalinism in Poland will be difficult, if not impossible, unless the Church is uprooted and destroyed.

In fact, the attempts at pressuring the Church, through classic **police-**state repression in the early **1950s**, backfired. The imprisonment of Cardinal Wyszyński, the refusal to permit the building of churches, the desecration of existing churches and the harassment of priests did nothing to weaken the Church's authority or position. The Church has emerged stronger from each of the major post-war crises in Poland. Short of murdering every priest and burning down every church Jaruzelski has to tolerate the existence of a well-organised focal point for opposition as well as a Pole sitting in the Vatican with immense international prestige. These factors complicate the general's options.

Jaruzelski also has to consider the response of the trade-union and labour movements in countries all over the world. Despite the widespread use of the adjective 'inevitable' in left-wing commentaries following the Jaruzelski coup, the Western labour movements were as much caught by surprise as Solidarity itself. The initial reaction was to issue a stream of strongly worded denunciations; but there ensued a lack of certainty and, in some quarters, a definite reluctance to develop concrete **labour-**movement opposition to the suppression of Solidarity.

The response of unions tended to follow their previous reaction to the arrival and existence of Solidarity. Right-wing trade-union leaders found themselves on platforms with Conservative **MPs** protesting against the

arrest of Solidarity leaders but reserving their real venom and rhetorical fire for the Soviet Union and communism in general. Union leaderships that were closer to the Communist Party issued token protests and generally kept their heads down. Sometimes craft solidarity transcended the political divide as when the Communist Michael **McGahey** ordered a minute's silence from the Miners' Union executive in honour of the Polish miners shot down by the militia as they tried to maintain the occupation strike in Silesia.

The different responses inside the British trade-union movement were echoed in other Western countries. In France, the socialist trade-union confederation CFDT, which had developed close ties with Solidarity and had hosted a visit by Lech Walesa, made the organisation of support for Solidarity its number one campaigning issue early in 1982. By contrast, the Communist CGT supported the Jaruzelski coup and despite strong internal opposition to its pro-regime position, played down events in Poland. The confederation accused all those supporting Solidarity in France of trying to whip up anti-communist hysteria for internal political reasons.

There was something in this. As well as the different positions taken up by the two major trade-union confederations (the third French trade-union confederation, Force *Ouvrière*, with its mixture of **hardline right-wingers** and ultra-leftists, also vigorously condemned the suppression of Solidarity as did the autonomous and extremely powerful teachers union, FEN) the 13 December coup produced a huge public row between the French Socialist Party and the French Communist Party. The former was strongly pro-Solidarity, the latter equally strongly pro-Jaruzelski. Lionel Jospin, the Socialist Party's First Secretary, spoke at public meetings denouncing what had taken place in Poland while Georges Marchais, his Communist Party homologue, went on television to support the Polish authorities. The strains between the two parties over the Communists' humiliating defeat in the French presidential and legislative elections earlier in 1981 and the bickering between the two French union confederations over how to respond to the policies of the **Mitterrand-Mauroy** government were reflected in the divergent reactions to Poland.

The reaction of the Italian Communist Party was quite different. Enrico Berlinguer, the Italian Communist Party leader, pronounced that the coup in Warsaw heralded the end of an era that had begun in 1917. Again, domestic politics played a part. Since Berlinguer was still clutching onto his 'historic compromise' theses of the mid-1970s and in addition a reinvigorated Socialist Party was snapping at his heels, he found it vital to maintain the pluralist, non-Soviet policies of the past 15 years. The response of the **PCI** reflected the debate it had initiated on Poland and the more mature analysis it had developed by contrast with the **PCF**. The Italian trade-union movement, although politically divided, does not

suffer the sectarian bitterness that exists between the leadership of the French unions. Indeed, in some industries and crafts (metal-working and journalism) there is a single union, combining the Communist, Socialist, and Christian strands—a fusion that would be inconceivable in France. Unlike the grudging acceptance of Solidarity by the French CGT in the period after August 1980, the Italian trade-union movement warmly embraced their Polish comrades and the Communist CGIL hosted a visit by Walesa to Rome in 1981.

In West Germany, trade-union support for Solidarity was more muted. Criticism of the suppression was made but a statement issued by Willy Brandt, as Chairperson of the Socialist International, warned against interference in Poland's internal affairs. This summed up the West German labour movement's position though it seemed somewhat illogical for an international left-wing body to absolve itself from concern about the politics of a country which has seen the most decisive working-class action for many years. For advocates of detente, events in Poland disrupted the patterns of a slow, cautious movement towards a lessening of East-West tension and political liberalisation based on increased trade and contacts. Instead, the Polish working class had, through **Solidarity**—the very antithesis of the official East European unions with which Western trade unions had studiously developed contacts in the 1970s—suddenly created areas of political, social and cultural liberty for all Poles which *Ostpoliticians* like Brandt had never considered possible. Furthermore the **Jaruzelski** coup, which was aimed so directly at working people and trade-union organisation, spat in the faces of Westerners who had argued that improved contacts would prevent repression as seen in Berlin in 1953, Poznan in 1956, Budapest in 1956 and Prague in 1968.

Thus the Polish question became a major problem for the Western labour movement. The presence of Polish exiles—some from the 1939–45 diaspora, others exiled in the anti-Jewish purges of 1968 as well as a handful of Solidarity members stranded in the West on 13 **December**—was a pressure on the trade unions. But the groups of Poles and the support groups for Solidarity could not form one common organisation—there were no less than six separate pro-Solidarity groups in London alone and this dispersed support for Solidarity inside the British labour movement. The demands raised were clear and easy enough to support—the release of interned prisoners, the resumption of talks with Solidarity and a return to the August 1980 agreements—but no-one knew how the British labour movement could achieve them. The TUC and several major unions, including the TGWU, AUEW, GMWU, NUT and NALGO sent protests, and, in some cases, delegations to the Polish embassy. Len Murray tried, unsuccessfully, to obtain a visa to visit Poland as part of a delegation sent by the European TUC. Some unions contributed to a TUC fund which was used to buy food and medical supplies; six **lorry** loads were sent off

to Poland in spring 1982. A handful of trade-union leaders were photographed outside TUC Congress House loading supplies onto the lorries. Generous though the gesture was, by the time the charity reached Poland it merged with the immense flow of aid from Catholic sources in the United States and West Europe without any specific trade-union orientation. Several of the British unions and the TUC itself had established personal links with Solidarity leaders and representatives between August 1980 and December 1981 when there had been an exchange of visits. Often in making protests Western union leaders were talking about people they knew personally. The international labour movement links which Solidarity actively developed during its period of legitimate operation now paid off. Since 1945 the British labour movement has made links with Eastern Europe through official bodies like Communist Parties, trade unions, peace organisations, municipalities, which are controlled by the ruling Communist Party. Visits to East Europe were carefully organised. A busy schedule of meetings, factory trips, receptions and a couple of pleasant days beside a Black Sea or lakeside resort, left the impression of cementing contacts across the ideological divide. Unofficial contacts were difficult to arrange and meetings between groups of rank-and-file workers impossible. All this was totally changed by the arrival of Solidarity. For the first time, Western trade unionists could get a real glimpse of workers' problems and hear what the working class had to say. Solidarity, while being welcoming and courteous, wasted very little time on official banquets. A Western union general secretary was likely to find **him/herself** on a speedy tour of factories and makeshift Solidarity offices with a quick sandwich and a cup of tea as the only refreshment. At the same time, in addition to the well-publicised visits abroad by Walesa, Solidarity sent delegations from the factory floor to visit their equivalents in West Europe and North America. Hardly a LOT flight left Warsaw without a Solidarity delegation on board. These strengthening and increasing contacts between Polish workers and the Western trade-union movements caused some anguish in East Europe, especially in Prague where the Russian-controlled World Federation of Trade Unions is based.

But beyond a public wringing of hands and the despatch of humanitarian aid, the Western trade-union movement and, in particular, the British trade-union movement seemed uncertain in its response. At a rank-and-file level there was a warm response to factory visits and conference speeches made by Solidarity activists in exile. Massey-Ferguson workers in Coventry blacked any movement of goods to and from the Warsaw Ursus tractor factory after an appeal by Piotr Kozlowski, deputy convenor of Solidarity there and who was in England, by chance, on 13 December. On the other hand, Communist Party shop stewards stopped Kozlowski from speaking at other factories in the Coventry and Manchester areas. These blocking tactics were in contrast to the Executive Committee of the

CPGB which had urged a release of prisoners and a restoration of democratic rights and civilian rule.

The TUC wrote to all the national trade-union centres in East Europe protesting against the repression of Solidarity and, apart from the Hungarians, received dismissive responses. So insulting was the reply from the East German equivalent of the TUC that TUC leaders decided to suspend relationships with East Berlin. Although contacts between Congress House and East Europe were effectively frozen in 1982 as a result of the suppression of Solidarity, there was no serious move to reconsider the purpose of TUC-East European union relationships. A motion calling for a severance of such links was decisively rejected by the Scottish TUC in April, 1982. And while the TUC, as a national centre kept its distance from East Europe, there were still bi-lateral visits being made by British unions to the Soviet Union and elsewhere. The events in Poland had shaken but not decisively altered British trade-union policy towards the official trade unions in East Europe.

The Labour Party added its voice to the public outcry in December, though it clearly did not enjoy the embarrassing company of President Reagan and Mrs Thatcher. A very poorly organised Labour Party meeting in March indicated a lack of enthusiasm for Solidarity in Labour Party headquarters. The exuberant support for Solidarity from reactionaries everywhere made the process of building a labour-movement campaign that much more difficult. The growing peace movement, the existence of disarmament as a major issue coupled with the specific British campaign against the United States cruise missiles meant that anti-Reaganism was at a premium. On the whole what Reagan was for it seemed natural to be against. The hopeful and positive initiative of European Nuclear Disarmament, based implicitly on a loosening of East-West tensions and drawing much political comfort from the existence of an independent trade union in Poland also took a severe knock with the suppression of Solidarity. It was clear that Reagan was working for a return to the Cold War. But it was uncomfortable for those who had invested political hope in thawing the ideological divide in Europe to see such a brutal ice-making machine installed in Poland. Both the creation and the suppression of Solidarity should serve as the first point of reference for a major re-evaluation of the labour movement's attitude to Comecon countries and their political institutions. But there is no evidence that such a re-evaluation has yet begun.

When the labour movement does deal with the issue, it will have to take into account several questions. First, what do socialists mean when they talk of economic or financial sanctions? Do we mean a complete blockage of all trade or simply a refusal to extend credit? Who should take such decisions and what procedures for compensation should there be for state- or privately-owned companies and workers who suffer as a result?

What should be our criteria for applying such sanctions? An absence of democratic political rights (Taiwan, the Soviet Union)? An absence of independent working-class organisations (China, Tanzania)? Imprisonment of trade-union leaders (Poland, Turkey)? Persecution of racial minorities (Vietnam, Israel)? Repression of gay rights (Ireland, Cuba)? Or are we only to be moved into making such calls when a particular event seizes our attention (Chile, 1973; Poland, 1981) but ignore the continuing permanent repression existing in many countries? Is it possible to put together a tailor-made set of economic and financial sanctions for a limited period? Or, is it not more likely, that economies can survive indefinitely against such external sanctions and that, if anything, the application of sanctions can make the people of the victim country more determined to resist what is seen as external interference?

Does the labour movement really know how contemporary international financial operations work and how they can be controlled, not just in a theoretical sense but in terms of day-to-day operations? Should the Labour Party not pay more attention to what possibilities exist for a socialist government intervention in the overseas operation of the City? Instead of the false trail of sanctions should not the labour movement concentrate on providing effective political and material support for organisations seeking to introduce democratic, progressive change inside their own country? Is it possible or honest to expect a clear division between 'political' and 'trade-union' demands in countries (South Africa, Brazil, Poland) where working-class political pressure can only be channelled through trade-union organisations? What relationships should labour-movement organisations have with their equivalents in East Europe? What are the possibilities of building links at a rank-and-file level? Did the almost communard internal democracy of Solidarity also present a challenge to Western trade-union systems of operation?

Why did the British labour movement (in common with other Western labour movements) not campaign in the hopeful period after Solidarity's birth for a massive package of Western aid to Poland so as to support a secure economic base for the political gains made by the working class? **Is** it not too late even now to make the offer of substantial Western aid to Poland—to replace an ineffective stick by a juicy carrot—in exchange for the release of interned prisoners and the restoration of Solidarity? What are the long-term implications of the militarisation of Poland? Are we to see more examples of generals becoming party leaders and then cementing their position by military force majeure? What has happened to the post-1917 communist political principle (and practice) that has the army and security forces firmly subordinate to the party?

The list of questions can continue and to attempt an answer from a socialist perspective is a daunting task. But it is a task that needs to be undertaken. The **1945** European settlement is no longer acceptable to

an increasing number of workers in East Europe and to an increasing number of socialists, including many in Communist Parties in West Europe. After the heroic early phase of industrialisation, accumulation and rapid social, educational and cultural improvements in East Europe the atrophy of personal freedoms (it was **Marx** and **Engels** after all who pointed out, 'that in no social order will personal freedom be so assured as in a society based on common ownership') and the absence of political dialogue has brought about deteriorating economic relationships that finally ended in the absurd and alarming sight of generals taking power in an advanced north European state.

The events in Poland mark a decisive break in European socialist history. The rupture came because the country's working class, almost unconsciously, made a fumbling bid for power but the Polish state was not ready to tolerate the dual power which existed for **16** months between September **1980** and December **1981**. Poles talked fondly of sharing power but they were chasing a will-o'-the-wisp: the phrase 'power-sharing' is one of the phoniest additions to the modern political vocabulary. Power cannot be shared. It can only be transferred. And Solidarity, like all trade unions, was not the instrument for securing in a decisive fashion that transfer of power.

NOTE

For anyone interested in following events in Poland through reading original documents two indispensable sources in English are *Labour Focus on Eastern Europe*, Box 23, 136 Kingsland Road, London E8 and the bulletin of the Information Centre for Polish Affairs, 115 Redston Road, London N8.