

Polish Workers Fight Revisionist Line Part 1

Which Way Out for Poland

This is an edited version of a major article that appears in the forthcoming issue of *The 80s*, theoretical journal of the Communist Workers Party. Part 2 will follow in the next issue of *Workers Viewpoint*.

Dennis T. Torigoe

The thousands of workers who downed tools and took over the Lenin Shipyard in Gdansk last July began a workers' movement that has reverberated far beyond Poland's borders. Workers and bourgeoisie, communists and capitalists pondered what it meant for workers to rebel against a government run supposedly for the workers. In many ways, it echoed the debate at the beginning of the Cultural Revolution in China over a decade ago.

Were the workers in Poland going berserk, threatening anarchy and the overthrow of the system (and thus making Soviet invasion "necessary") as some opportunists say? Or was it a result of the accumulated revisionist lines and policies of the leadership of the Polish United Workers Party (PUWP)? And most important of all, how to begin resolving the serious problems of Poland?

Polish Workers Strike to Protest Food Prices—The Fourth Time Around

The recent strike wave is the fourth major workers' protest in Poland's postwar history. Previous strikes occurred in 1956, in 1970 and again in 1976. Never before, however, has the strike wave swept so many workers into the movement as in this past year. And never before have the workers been able to form and maintain as powerful a workers' organization as Solidarity, the independent union born out of the struggle.

Marxists around the world are asking: "Is it terrible or is it fine?" Some revisionists, like those in *Line of March*, a sect divorced from class struggle, call the Polish workers "reactionary," demanding that the Soviet Union militarily intervene and "save socialism."

But Marxist-Leninists don't sidestep the truth. The roots of the Polish workers' revolt are deeper than a few "hooligans" or "anti-socialist" elements. The real basis lies in the revisionist lines and policies of the leaders of the PUWP and the Polish government it leads, particularly the lines they followed in handling the relationship between the party, government and the masses after World War II. This profoundly affected how the PUWP reacted to the economic dislocations of the country.

As Lenin said, "A political party's attitude towards its own mistakes is one of the most important and surest ways of judging how earnest the party is and how it fulfills in practice its obligations towards its class and the working people. Frankly acknowledging a mistake, ascertaining the reasons for it, analyzing the conditions that have led up to it and thrashing out the means of its rectification—that is the hallmark of a serious party."¹

As we will show through examining the history of the PUWP, it is just this refusal to make thorough-going

self-criticism and rectification that has deepened their opportunism and forced the workers to rebel. Instead of correcting wrong lines, especially weak mass line, party leaders have tried to protect their positions, breeding careerism and giving rise to a stratum of bureaucrats. And as they tried to justify their opportunist positions, the situation got worse and worse. This vicious cycle has backed the PUWP into the corner it's in today.

The workers had no alternative but to rise up. There was absolutely no other way to turn the situation around. And clearly if the workers had not risen up, the future would have been literally out of control, giving the imperialists an opening to step in and take over. As for the present, we think that as long as the Soviet Union does not intervene, the future for the Polish workers is definitely bright and will strengthen the socialist system in Poland.

The Vicious Cycle of PUWP's Revisionist Line

The problems facing the PUWP stem in part from the way it came to power in Poland. Before World War II, the Polish communist movement was very weak and in 1938 the Polish Communist Party was dissolved. Reconstituted during the war, it was part of the overall resistance movement but was one of the smallest parties in Poland.

The key to the communists' coming to power was the Red Army's liberation of Poland from the Nazi occupiers. Aided by the Comintern, the Polish communists, then called the Polish Workers Party, began extensive work among the masses. Party membership grew rapidly as area after area was liberated.

But the road to power for the Polish Communist Party was not easy. Though backed by the Red Army and the Soviet Union, its standing among the Polish masses was far from consolidated. It still faced much larger anti-communist forces in the country, including the Home Army, the largest of the anti-Nazi armed forces directed by London exiles. It was only after a bloody civil war lasting over three years that the armed resistance of the Home Army and other anti-communist guerrillas was smashed. The war cost thousands of lives on both sides.

The history of the PUWP's taking state power brings into sharp relief the fallacy of "exporting revolution," a line held by the Soviet revisionists today. Because it had not been necessary to establish the party's moral authority among the masses prior to the seizure of state power, this problematic task existed in the period after. Most of all, the PUWP had not had to deal seriously with winning over and keeping the majority of the masses on its side. That is the problem of a deep and thorough-going understanding of, and ability to implement, the mass line. Even now, the PUWP still has not been able, or refuses, to deal with the question seriously.

To see the effects of this revisionist line in the PUWP, we must begin with events in 1956. At the Stalin factory

in Poznan, workers walked off the job demanding higher wages, setting off a chain of events which led to the rise of Gomulka four months later.

Right after the Poznan walkout, the party leadership opportunistically blamed an imperialist plot. However, as Gomulka himself summed up, "The workers of Poznan were not protesting against people's Poland, against socialism, when they came out into their city streets. They were protesting against the evil that has become so widespread in our social system and which touched them so painfully, against distortions of the basic rules of socialism, which is their ideal. . . . The clumsy attempt to present the Poznan tragedy as the work of imperialist agents and *agents provocateurs* was politically very naive."

With these lessons in mind, Gomulka set out to find a "Polish road to socialism." Two important measures stand out from that period—the establishment of workers' councils and the decollectivization of agriculture. Both of these highlight the fundamental problems of Poland in the 1980's, some 25 years after Poznan.

The Rise and Fall of Workers' Councils

There was a spontaneous demand of the masses for more opportunities to supervise the leadership of the management and the party. Trade unions under PUWP leadership did exist but the demand for workers' councils showed clearly the masses did not see them as representing the workers' interests. Nor did they serve as the "schools of communism" Lenin described.

Whether the workers' councils were a correct form or not is not the question here. In any case, the PUWP began to oppose them and then took *administrative* measures against the workers' councils. The first step curbing the power of the workers' councils was the instruction to the trade union organizations to fight them. By the spring of 1958, Gomulka had announced plans for legislation to reduce the status of workers' councils and the plans were enacted into law in December. Thus by 1958, Gomulka himself had forgotten what he had called "the painful lessons" of the Poznan.

As Lenin through bitter experience of the early years of Soviet power learned, "... One of the greatest and most serious dangers that confront the numerically small Communist Party which, as the vanguard of the working class, is guiding a vast country in the process of transition to socialism (for the time being without the direct support of the more advanced countries), is isolation from the masses, the danger that the vanguard may run too far ahead and fail to "straighten out the line," fail to maintain firm contact with the whole army of labour, i.e., with the overwhelming majority of workers and peasants. Just as the best factory, with the very best motors and first class machines, will be forced to remain idle if the transmission belts from the motors to the machines are damaged, so our work of socialist construction must



As long as the Soviet Union does not intervene, the future for the Polish workers is bright and strengthens socialism in Poland.



The Polish workers had no choice but to rise up. The intolerable situation was the accumulated result of the revisionist lines and policies of the leadership of the Polish United Workers Party.

nd?

meet with inevitable disaster if the trade unions—the transmission belts from the Communist Party to the masses—are badly fitted or function badly. It is not sufficient to explain, to reiterate and corroborate this truth; it must be backed up organizationally by the whole structure of the trade unions and by their everyday activities.”

This extremely important truth returned to haunt the PUWP again and again in the decades following Poznan.

Faced with this crisis, the PUWP removed Gomulka from the position of First Secretary and replaced him with Edward Gierek, a coal miner's son elected to the party's Political Bureau in 1959.

Gierek's Opportunist Policies — From Bad to Worse

The strikes of 1970 also brought home with a vengeance the fact that Poland's economy had a massive contradiction. Throughout the 60's the economy as a whole grew at a brisk 6% pace based on the development of a number of industries. But the peasant-dominated agricultural sector based on small private plots was clearly beginning to drag the economy back. The attempted price adjustments of 1970 indicated that.

The choices open to Gierek upon his rise to the first position of First Secretary were clear—either deal with the agricultural problem head-on and start taking the necessary steps, painful as they were, to rectify the situation; or sidestep it and take the path of least resistance.

At that point, it was clear that the worse sin the PUWP could commit would have been to do nothing at all on the agricultural question—which is essentially a peasant question. Collectivization seems to be seen as a deadly threat by the Polish peasants and the government. If in fact there was widespread collectivization, there probably would be massive distress that would mean greater food shortages and more workers' revolts.

But the PUWP had to act, whether it instituted a step-by-step cooperative and commune movement based on concrete local conditions—as China did in the 50's and 60's or another version of the NEP under Lenin, with further unleashing of market forces and the polarization of the peasantry, including the expansion of the kulak class. It was clear, that the condition of Polish agriculture was creating both economic and political dislocations on a massive scale. No long-run solution was possible without solving this problem. And half-steps only made it worse.

Under Gierek's leadership, the PUWP committed the opportunist sin—it sidestepped the question. After the 1970 strikes, Gierek was forced to rescind the price increases and lower them to the pre-1968 level. He removed a few top level leaders of the PUWP, including a number of Political Bureau members, and replaced 12 out of 18 provincial party secretaries. The replacement of people, however, was incidental. The main thing was that the line remained revisionist.

Without dealing with the fundamental underlying problem of agriculture, Gierek tried to cool out the workers' resistance by creating more consumer goods. This treated the symptoms of the problem without getting to its basis. It only put off the problem to the point where it exploded with ever greater ferocity.

Basically, Gierek gambled with the Polish economy. Fearing them he failed to explain clearly to the workers and the masses the scope and extent of the problems the country faced. Instead of mobilizing the masses to deal with the problems, he lied to them and tried to cover up the contradictions.

1976 — Revisionists Do It Again

The economic problems, especially the crisis in agriculture, forced the government again to try to raise food prices in 1976. They raised meat prices 60% and sugar 100%. On June 28, 1976 workers in the cities of Ursus and Radom went on strike, occupying party offices and paralyzing the railroads. In the end, the government rescinded the price increases but 20 people lay dead and many were arrested.

removal of the leadership that occurred in 1956 and 1970. Instead, the revisionist PUWP leadership tried harder to cover its tracks. This represented the growth of opportunism.

At the Dec. 1976 Central Committee meeting the PUWP decided to put more funds into subsidizing the low prices of agricultural products and into the production of consumer goods in general. In the long run it amounted to doing nothing; in the short run it meant drying up investment and running the economy into the ground.

Most important, however, was the line basis of the Polish revisionists' actions. They were treating the Polish working class essentially like a bunch of animals. The revisionists refused to explain to them the economic and political dislocations the country faced, deeper than even five years before, repudiating the incorrect line and policies they held and removing those responsible—primarily Gierek himself. Nor did they have the guts to call on the Party and advanced workers to lead the struggle for the purging of the revisionist line and make the sacrifices necessary to turn the country around. Instead of a vitally necessary *concentric attack* in all spheres—political, organizational, ideological and economic—to deal with the problems, the revisionists took short-sighted pragmatic measures to cool the workers off. Some of this was necessary. But it did not deal with fundamental problems.

The Severe Economic Dislocation in Poland Today

Because of these problems, since 1975 the Polish economic picture is one of steady deterioration. Agricultural production shrank every year except 1977. National income, industrial production and investment have all declined. In 1979, for the first time since the formation of the People's Republic of Poland, national income actually dropped, with industrial production growing only 2.8%. Investment in the economy dropped 8.2% from the previous year (which dropped .2%) and agricultural production dropped 1.4%

Agriculture in Poland is now clearly a disaster area. In 1980 food production fell an estimated 300 million tons. Trying to make up for it, the Polish government had to import 1,000 million tons of grain, some 400 million tons over the previous year. One observer noted that Poland, now the largest food importer in Europe, "is never more than a shipload away from agricultural crisis."

Because Poland is not self-sufficient in feed grain, there will be distress slaughter of livestock if the government cannot raise the necessary foreign exchange to buy feed. Lack of foreign exchange—caused the Poland's tremendous debt and interest payments on Western loans—has already caused massive cutbacks in Common Market butter imports and led to shortages.

Tightness in the meat supply sparked the strike waves in 1970, 1976 and this past year. One of the reasons why the government has to raise meat prices last year was the tremendous expense of subsidizing food costs. These have averaged \$2.12 billion annually, a full 20% of the government's budget. In an attempt to cut these costs, the government kept prices stable in state-owned stores while reducing quantities of meat available. At the same time, they allowed the prices in the commercial markets to rise. Since July, prices for the best meats have doubled. Beef went from \$1.15 to \$2.27 a pound, smoked ham from \$1.30 to \$2.50 a pound. These price rises, on top of shortages, fueled the latest storm of resistance from the Polish workers.

Why the Brezhnev Doctrine Would Bring Disaster

There are two Soviet divisions stationed inside Poland and today tens of thousands of Warsaw Pact troops are at Poland's borders. As everyone knows, they are poised to invade Poland if in the eyes of the CPSU leadership things get out of hand.

The precedent for violation of Poland's sovereignty is the Prague Spring in Czechoslovakia in 1968. At that time the infamous "Brezhnev Doctrine" was coined. This according to the Soviet revisionists, gave them the right to intervene at will anywhere socialism is "threatened." According to this line, which represents a social-imperialist policy, socialist nations have only a "limited sovereignty."

It is under this concept of "limited sovereignty" that the Soviet revisionists justify invading other countries in Eastern Europe. Not only is it another example of the revisionists' great-nation chauvinism, it is a concept in fundamental opposition to the interests of socialism in the era of imperialism.

In essence, the Brezhnev doctrine represents a *revisionist programmatic cover-up* of the source of the problem—all in the name of "imperialist plots." It sidetracks attention from the internal basis of the problem—the revisionist line inside the PUWP and in fact justifies the lack of thorough-going self-criticism and rectification in practice.

The line of "limited sovereignty" also represents out-and-out opportunism in the relations between socialist states.

Just as important, in the era of imperialism, the fight against imperialism is tightly linked to a socialist state's foreign policy. This includes relations between socialist states based on mutual assistance and proletarian internationalism, the support of national liberation struggles and countries' independence and the policy of peaceful coexistence. The imperialists are driven by their economic systems to constantly violate the sovereignty of other countries in order to export their capital and find new markets and sources of raw materials. The socialist policy of peaceful coexistence between countries with different social systems exposes the imperialists who can never follow this policy. The imperialists are the ones who never uphold the principle of sovereignty of all countries and look for any excuses to violate countries' independence.

The concept of "limited sovereignty" in fact undercut the socialist foreign policy of peaceful coexistence and the Soviet revisionists have in fact helped the imperialists off the hook.

Line of March has stated that to oppose the right of the Soviet Union to intervene in Poland is to negate the liberation of Eastern Europe from the Nazis by the Red Army and the People's Volunteers from China in the Korean War. This is shameless sophistry. Where are the fascist armies in Poland? Where are the U.S imperialist troops invading the country? This is nothing but another attempt to prove themselves better flunkies to the revisionists of the CPSU than the CPUSA—over the bodies of Polish workers.

If the Soviet Union did invade Poland—under whatever pretext—it would utterly destroy the PUWP's chances to regain its moral authority. It would play right into the hands of the reactionaries and imperialist agents

continued on page 13

NEW
BOOK!

The Socialist Road Character of Revolution in the U.S. and Problems of Socialism In the Soviet Union and China

By Jerry Tung, General Secretary
Communist Workers Party

Send \$4.95 plus 70¢ for postage and handling to:
Cesar Cauce Publishers and Distributors
Box 389, 39 Bowery
New York, N.Y. 10002

... Poland

continued from page 8

inside Poland. The Line of March revisionists blast the PUWP and the Polish masses for "nationalism." They resort to national nihilism to cover their support for the social-imperialist policy of the Soviet Union. The utter stupidity of this line is clear: in fact a Soviet invasion would arouse anti-Soviet nationalism to levels unseen in Poland's history.

One argument the Line of March makes for saying that the Polish workers' movement is reactionary concerns the role of the Catholic Church in Poland. An estimated 80% of Poles consider themselves Catholic and the Church has extensive organization in the country. Lech Walesa, the recognized leader of Solidarity, considers himself Catholic.

The truth is that the Catholic hierarchy, including Cardinal Wysznski, has been calling on the workers for "moderation." In early December, according to Time, the Church called for "internal peace," citing a "threat to the freedom and statehood of the Fatherland." A Church spokesman, the Rev. Alojzy Orszulik, later criticized the "noisy and irresponsible statements which have been made against our eastern neighbor," and singled out Jacek Kuron, a leading dissident, for censure.

The Church knows very well that whatever its ideological influence, it is weak politically. Government control over the church is extensive, with the power of veto over church appointments to key posts. Though the government refrains from attacking it openly—which would be politically incorrect as well as fuel the fire of resistance at this point—the government control of resources and the threat of repression keeps the church in check.

Lech Walesa and other leaders of Solidarity have been using the contradiction between the church and the government as a bargaining chip. As Solidarity is barely beginning to get organized, this is definitely correct. Solidarity has to use everything it can to protect its own existence.

A Soviet invasion, as called for by the Line of March, would prevent any real rectification of the revisionist line of the PUWP leadership. As one PUWP member said, "There are a lot of people who are going to lose their fur coats and Mercedes cars. They will do anything to restore the status quo—even welcome the Russians." If the Soviet Union in league with the revisionists do succeed in crushing the workers' movement, what would make the revisionist leadership change their line? Why would they even have to bother? □