

# Polish People Can Win

On Dec. 13, when the Polish government declared martial law, one of the wire service reports that escaped censorship reported,

"In Warsaw, as many as 1,000 people defied a ban on public meetings and gathered outside Solidarity's regional office, jeering troops and hurling snowballs at army trucks surrounding the six-story buildings.

"A few Solidarity leaders who escaped arrest unfurled banners from the building's windows calling for a general strike before troops moved in and took them away."

This is the spirit of the Polish working people--defiant even as they are repressed. They are not beaten; they know their suffering and the justice of their demands for a better life and democratic rights. They will fight and resist, and the questions are, can they win? how?

The mass of the Polish workers created Solidarity as their own organization, and they used this weapon freely for a year and a half following the strikes that began in summer 1980. In a country of 35 million people, Solidarity's

10 million members with their families represent nearly all workers.

Time after time Solidarity voiced and won the demands of the people against those who stood over them. The press began to report some realities of Polish public life. Working conditions improved. Hated, corrupt provincial governors and factory directors were sacked. The government attempted to get over the economic crisis by raising food prices, but the workers prevented it.

## PROBLEMS COME FROM EXPLOITATION

To explain the conditions that led to this new and vital activity by Polish workers, it is not enough to catalog the problems. Even the official government press admitted many of the difficulties. The party newspaper, Trybuna Ludu, acknowledged that one in every six people and 40 percent of the children live below the poverty line. "We are facing a situation which is in painful discord with the principles of social justice," it concluded. Hospitals became new sources of illness because of shortages of soaps, disinfectants and antibiotics. The average waiting period for an apartment in 1985 is projected to be 20 years. In the meantime, people are living like Tadeusz Mucha, a worker at the Ursus tractor factory in Warsaw. He, his wife and their daughter live in a tiny outbuilding behind a bandshell in a park. In spring it floods and they wear boots inside. The daughter, who is seven, has rheumatism.

The country's economy is on the verge of collapse. Appalling conditions like these do not simply happen, nor are they the result of any mystical "Polish mentality" nor any lack of skill and effort by Polish workers. The horrors of everyday life persist because exploiters pursuing their class interest make life miserable for the people.

Poland is one of many countries dominated by the Soviet Union. Eastern bloc countries and other Soviet clients are members of the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (CMEA). Under slogans as hypocritical as that name, "international division of labor" and "specialization of production," Poland and other CMEA countries produce what the Kremlin wants them to produce. Their lopsided economies are channeled into dependence on Soviet-supplied raw materials and fuel. Eastern bloc countries are even forced to provide men and material for development projects deep in Soviet Siberia when capital construction is badly required in their own land. No wonder Poles joked bitterly about the fraternal internationalist dairy cow; she straddled the border so that her mouth was fed on the Polish side while the udder was milked on the Soviet side.

In the 1970's the Polish ruling class, serving as the junior partners of the Soviet bosses, ran wild looting the country's wealth. Architects revealed that the average cost of a villa for a top party official ran to \$500,000. The politicians diverted public funds to hold fancy banquets and scratched each others' backs to get their children into the best schools.

The government went on a borrowing spree in the West, encouraged by bankers and governments who now hold \$27 billion of claims on Poland. Western investment did not bring economic progress to the country; it made things worse because this was imperialist investment. For example, Massey Ferguson put up a tractor factory for \$1 billion. The tractors are too expensive to sell in Eastern European markets, while the Western monopolies refuse to license the tractors to compete with them in the West. (Time, Jan. 8, 1982)

### THREE WEAPONS NEEDED

Solidarity seemed to be winning for 15



months after the victory of August 1980 in the Gdansk shipyards, when the government officially recognized the organization. It came to a sudden, although perhaps temporary end, on Dec. 13, 1981. The Jaruzelski government declared martial law. Solidarity's leaders were arrested. In Warsaw, several hundred detainees were kept outside in subzero weather. Every hour during the night, guards hosed the prisoners with ice-cold water.

As this magazine goes to press, a series of factory and mine sit-ins have been broken up. The government still holds thousands of detainees, while on the other side, unknown thousands of Solidarity leaders have gone underground. Passive resistance will continue in the factories, since the military government hardly inspired the workers to labor when it raised food prices and lengthened working hours.

Solidarity is a great organizational weapon  
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# Polish Workers

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of the masses, but it alone is not enough. The Polish events confirm what revolutionaries have seen in country after country. The three magic weapons are armed force, a vanguard core of revolutionaries, and the organization of the masses. Solidarity is the last, but the other two are still missing.

The power to strike, even to hold general strikes, cannot substitute for armed force. The Polish ruling class came down with martial law, and after several weeks the strikes were largely defeated. Every successful revolution requires that people create their own armed force, whether it is factory-based brigades as in the October Revolution of 1917 or the guerrilla armies of China. Conditions vary, but in every society it is possible and necessary for the people to seize arms and fight the military side of the class war when the enemy counter-attacks, as he inevitably will.

Solidarity is ten million people, and it cannot help but have different tendencies. It cannot follow a firm ideology and theory. As a Western observer reported, "Many of its members evidence outrage at...inequalities... Others favor an expansion of private enterprise that ...would lead to further inequalities." (NY

Times, Dec. 14, 1981) Its leaders have different outlooks. Lech Walesa, darling of the Western press and governments, is a religious pragmatist who feels his way step by step. Advisors to Solidarity include intellectuals who favor Trotskyism (a phony left theory that always fails in revolution) or who have illusions about freedom in the West.

Besides a mass organization, a people in revolution must have a vanguard core. Every successful revolution has been led by a theoretically advanced cadre group hardened and disciplined by years of struggle. It is no accident that the great figures of successful revolutions, like Lenin and Mao, were leaders of such vanguards.

## IT CAN HAPPEN HERE

Martial law could happen in the United States. The U.S. government has a long history of imposing equally stiff repression, only in specialized instances. Federal troops have broken strikes. The Palmer raids on Jan. 2, 1920 saw 10,000 people rounded up in one night; one-third of them were deported soon after. The Reagan administration attacked the air traffic controllers' union, PATCO, with jailings, confiscation of assets, blacklisting, and even seizure of members' cars.

The U.S. economy is in bad shape. Unemployment keeps growing; it becomes harder and harder for most people to keep up, let alone make any economic advances. Discontent is justifiably rising among black and other oppressed minorities, among workers tossed on the scrap heap by recession and plant closings, among youth without prospects except perhaps war, and among women denied both family aid and the opportunity for jobs at wages comparable to the same work by men.

As in Poland, these difficulties are not problems shared by all. The wealthy still get

their luxuries. Class war is sure to increase in scope and intensity in the United States. If you were an air traffic controller, you may not have thought it would come to your occupation, but it did. As the struggle for a better world develops, let us study the events in Poland as lessons for our own fight to get rid of monopoly capitalism and create a labor republic in its place. ■

## **American Nightmare**

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is going into the financial craze for condominiums. Forbes, the self-proclaimed magazine for capitalists, says that a developer can turn a big profit in three to six months. For example, American Invesco, the country's biggest condo converter, bought a 30-story apartment building in Chicago for \$10 million. After spending \$250,000 on superficial remodeling, the firm resold it for \$14 million.

In an age of scarcity and energy shortage, condominiums are sold as the modern form of the traditional desire to own a home. Real estate operators associate ownership with security and freedom. Today, this can be true only for the 15% of Americans who can afford to buy. Most renters cannot afford to buy their apartments when a landlord cooks up a condominium deal. Renters can barely pay the high monthly rent charged in most cities, let alone shell out a big down payment. In fact, many tenants pay 50% or more of their monthly income for shelter. Tenants hit with conversion frequently must move, forced out to inferior places and higher prices awaiting them in the tight rental

market. Once they resettle, there is no guarantee that their new apartment will not be sold out from under them again.

The housing shortage is a product of the capitalist organization of the economy. Lots of people need new housing, and there are millions of unemployed people who, in a society where working people would labor for their own needs, could be employed to build homes.

Between the demand and the potential supply of new production, however, capitalism allows the owners of wealth to impose their profit motive. With high interest rates, new construction is choked off because money costs too much. With growing unemployment and declining incomes (after inflation adjustment), fewer people can afford to pay profitable rents. Consequently, the housing situation gets worse, landlords complain about low profit rates, and tenants are forced to find and accept terrible places to live. New housing is not built, and the existing supply is converted into more expensive condominiums for the better off few.

### **WHAT CAN PEOPLE DO?**

Landlords in the past relied on tenants accepting rising rents and unbearable living conditions without complaining. That is changing. Tenants are angry, frustrated, and they are getting together to fight back. Struggle pays off. In Bethesda, Md. tenant groups picketed the 18-story Promenade Apartments for five months, frightening off potential buyers and forcing a pack of condo converters to renegotiate the terms of conversion. In Boston, 800 tenants of a building about to be turned into condominiums organized a rally of 1000 people. The protest forced the City Council to pass an ordinance requiring landlords and condo operators to give tenants one year's notice before being evicted. In San Francisco, a group in the Mission and another one in the Haight-