

New Upsurge in Poland

After a several week lull in the upsurge of the workers and other sections of the Polish people, things are heating up again as Poland has begun to reverberate with fresh strike actions by workers in conjunction with protests by farmers. The memorial rally in Gdansk several weeks ago to commemorate the workers slain in the anti-government upheavals in 1970 had been the occasion of a massive, joint effort by the Polish Communist Party, the Roman Catholic Church and the top leaders of the independent trade union, Solidarity, to pour cold water on any sparks of rebellion as several hundred thousand Soviet troops remained poised to invade along Poland's borders. At that time, amidst thickly-layered appeals for peace, reason and common sense, Lech Walesa, national leader of Solidarity intoned "Our country needs first of all internal peace. . . We have to learn about conducting negotiations, not about striking" and indicated that if he had his way, the country would be free of strikes for some time to come.

But in the past two weeks the contradictions between the masses and Poland's revisionist rulers have come boiling to the surface again. On December 29, 70 workers and farmers occupied the city hall in the town of Ustrzyki Dolne in southeast Poland with their main demand for an independent farmers union (called Solidarity-Land which already claims 600,000 members) as well as demands for an end to local police repression against union members, investigation of money missing from the coffers of the old Party-controlled union, release of a state-owned hunting area for public use, and a permit to build a church. The next day, the Superior Court in Warsaw postponed indefinitely a decision on whether it would allow an independent farmers' union. By January 7, the number of occupiers had grown to over 200 and in the city of Rzeszow in the same region, 600 members of the "Union of Workers and Farmers of the Rieszczady Mountains" had also occupied the old official union headquarters there to support the protesters in Ustrzyki Dolne. Also, three factories in the area conducted short two-hour strikes to support the occupations.

Meanwhile, there was mounting opposition to the government announce-

ment in December that it was renegeing on its promise, agreed to during the strike wave last August, to introduce free (non-working) Saturdays beginning in 1981. The intensity of the battle over the five-day week is, among other things, a reflection of the sharpening economic crisis in Poland and the fact that the government would be hard pressed to grant this demand even if they wanted to in order to cool things out. Polish Deputy Premier Jagielski went on national TV to complain that the economy could not stand a five-day, 40-hour week and suggested that every other Saturday be free for the time being. The government has calculated that with only a 40-hour week the economy would lose about \$65 million in trade, \$50 million in construction, \$1.1 billion in agriculture and well over \$600 million in specialized and light industries, etc.—in all an estimated 10-15% loss to the economy over all. Jagielski also floated out another government proposal of free Saturdays, but with the work week increased to 42.5 hours. As these supposedly "socialist" government officials whined: "Even in the West, it took a long time to gain the 5-day week."

But clearly the handwriting was on the wall as it became increasingly apparent that the workers were in no mood for compromise on this issue and that the Solidarity leadership could not contain the growing demands. On January 9, the government put out an official release that Saturday, January 10 and 24 would be considered "legal workdays" and threatened violators with sanctions—wage cuts, loss of premiums, loss of childcare subsidies or loss of the 13-month wage (a bonus at the end of the year which is not part of the hourly wage). On Saturday, January 10, sixty-five percent of the Saturday early morning shift in Poland (about 5-6 million workers) did not show up for work as the workers openly defied the government's threats. Numerous key industries were shut down, with only vital public services and stores and shops functioning normally.

These latest actions are an indication that far from being able to convince the Polish workers not to "rock the boat," the bourgeois forces like Walesa in the leadership of the Solidarity organization are still being pushed strongly from



Silkscreening leaflets during the summer strike.

below into taking further stands against the government by the continuing militant actions of the masses. When the Solidarity leaders met in Gdansk on January 6, they were supposed to decide on the question of what stand to take towards the new spontaneous strikes and how to view the apparently growing confrontation with the government. Interestingly enough, there was no official announcement about *any*

decision having been made but the following day it was quickly announced, as momentum was already obviously building for the Saturday protests, that the leading presidium of Solidarity representing all local branches had voted unanimously that only a five-day, 40-hour work week would be acceptable. Walesa was further forced to come out and declare that the government was "trying to destroy the union"

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and is not living up to its commitments from last summer and various Solidarity spokesmen stated that if sanctions are imposed there would probably be a "new stage" in the confrontations with the government.

In light of these developments Poland's rulers have begun to take a tougher stance against the demonstrators in an effort to bring the situation more under their control and convince the Soviets that they are in command. This was signaled by stepped-up attacks in the party's newspaper, *Trybuna Ludu*, on "noisy forces attempting to destroy a slowly created atmosphere of calm and reason" and those who were "instigating anarchical incidents." The newspaper specifically singled out "some provincial activists" of Solidarity for attempting to force the resignation of local officials. Over the weekend of the massive work stoppage, Stanislaw Kania—the leader of Poland's revisionist "Communist" party—denounced the farmers attempts to form an independent union and railed against "those who make no secret of their anti-socialist or, to put it more bluntly, counterrevolutionary designs."

Kania's statement was double-edged, and, no doubt, true to some extent. The political contradictions are extremely complex in Poland today, the opposi-

tion to the government consisting of both elements directly supported by the west, as well as spontaneous struggles of the masses of people which are still out of control.

Shortly after Kania's statement Polish police carrying shields broke down the doors of the city hall in the southern town of Nowy Sacz where 60 members of Solidarity had been sitting in with demands similar to the occupations in other cities, including a demand for an investigation of public funds spent on a new party headquarters and a sanitorium for party leaders. While it was stressed that there was no violence, the eviction was significant in that it was the first direct use of force against protesting workers since the turmoil began last summer. (An indication of just where Walesa actually stands in relation to the renewed upsurge of protest was a report by ABC correspondent Peter Jennings that Walesa had expressed support for the eviction.) The following day the demonstrators occupying the town hall in Ultryki Dolne were also forcibly removed by 20 police in riot gear backed up by another 200 in reserve. In response, two days later workers in southeast Poland staged a one-hour strike protesting the use of riot police to break up the occupations, an action that affected more than 100 factories.

Not surprisingly these attacks by the government corresponded with a "surprise" visit by Soviet Marshal Victor Kulikov, commander of the Warsaw Pact military forces, to Poland to meet with Polish party leaders. In fact, there has been a flurry of activity this past week with various bourgeois forces from the Soviets to the Polish party leaders to

Lech Walesa jockeying behind the scenes. The maneuvering is a reflection of the fact that there are sharp and real contradictions at play here—between the Polish bourgeoisie and the Soviets, between imperialism East and West, between the masses of people and revisionist rule.

The government's tougher stance coincided with Walesa's visit to Rome to confer with Pope John Paul II, who conveyed the unmistakable message that it was time to cool things down. After Walesa fell on his knees before the Pope and kissed his hand, he was told: "May you always be accompanied by the same courage as at the start of your initiative, but may you also be accompanied by the same prudence and moderation."

According to the German magazine, *Der Spiegel*, Walesa is not the only one who has visited the Pope to discuss the Polish crisis. They report that in September a high Russian official—a leading member of the CPSU's foreign department—met with Cardinal Agostino Cassarolli and that, according to insiders, Cassarolli supposedly assured the Soviet representative that the Pope and the Vatican would try to prevent any disasters or harm to Poland. *Der Spiegel* also noted that in December right after the Warsaw Pact meeting in Moscow, a Soviet official of "stronger political caliber"—Vadim Sagladin, First Vice Chief of the International Department of the CPSU Central Committee, who is known for his missions to the West when sensitive issues are concerned—was rumored to have met with the Pope directly. The Italian newspaper, *La Stampa*, also reported an unusual head-to-head discussion be-

tween Sagladin and "someone in the Vatican" in which the Soviets said they would withdraw the possibility of an invasion if the church would help to "pour cold water on the Polish strikers."

While this may seem strange considering the fact that the Catholic Church has generally played the role of assisting U.S. penetration of the eastern bloc (and not a small role in backing the independent trade union movement in Poland itself), it is not the least bit out of character. It is not at all in contradiction to U.S. desires since, for the moment, the U.S. imperialists would just as soon see things calm down in the hopes that the gains that pro-U.S. forces are making in Poland will not be set back by a Soviet invasion.

But while the bourgeoisie is maneuvering desperately to contain things, the struggle of the Polish people—reflecting the continuing political ferment in Poland and the intensifying contradiction between the masses and imperialism generally—is flaring up once again, erupting from the bottom up and forcing the top Solidarity leadership into motion. While Walesa was in Rome, a statement signed by a "working group" of the national leadership of Solidarity threatened more strikes as streetcars and buses in downtown Warsaw flew flags and displayed placards protesting any reprisals that may be planned by the government against those who participated in the Saturday work stoppage and condemning the evictions of the farm union demonstrators. On January 14, workers in Rzeszow conducted a second day of two-hour "warning strikes" reportedly involving some 600,000 employees at 30 state factories. Obviously, Poland is still a powder-keg that could blow sky-high at any time.