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As Superpowers Move Towards War

POLISH STRIKERS JOLTED WORLD

The largest strike wave to hit Eastern Europe in more than a decade has finally subsided. The nearly half a million Polish workers who had gone out in the past two months have, for the most part, now returned to their jobs. But the uprising of the Polish workers has left turbulent waters in its wake and will not soon be forgotten.

The strike began to wind down on Saturday, August 30 when, after repeatedly labeling the strikers' demands as "preposterous," and after several un-

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Despite a government ordered news blackout, the strike spread from workplace to workplace, city to city—eventually reaching into the Silesian coal mines. Above, strikers from the Lenin Shipyards in Gdansk march across the waterfront to the docks to support the walkout there.

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successful attempts to lure the strikers back with wage hikes, the Polish government finally yielded to the Interfactory Strike Committee in Gdansk on most of their 21 demands, including the right to strike, independent trade unions, reinstatement of workers dismissed during the strikes in 1970 and 1976; and relaxation of restrictions on access to the media. The shaken chiefs of the Polish United Workers Party quickly ratified the agreement. However, their hopes of restricting the terms of the agreement to the Baltic industrial region were dashed when strikes involving close to 200,000 coal miners which began the day the Gdansk strikers started back to work, forced the extension of the agreement to include the Silesian coal-mining region as well.

The power of the working class shown in Poland was clearly a force to reckon with. The near shutdown of the entire country rocked Poland's capitalist rulers. Groups and organizations among Poland's petty bourgeoisie intellectuals, many of them strongly inclined towards and influenced by the West, saw this movement of the working class as a chance to break open more opportunities for their own activities. Indeed, several of these groups had been active in support of many of the demands of the workers since the 1976 strikes and had considerable influence on the formulation of the strike demands and on the course of the strikes themselves. And the Catholic Church in Poland, which has long had its claws into the workers' backs, moved into very calculated positions, designed to ride this upheaval to a further strengthening of its own role and influence in the country.

In the U.S. and other countries of its bloc, the treachery of the so-called labor leaders was once again excelled only by their opportunism. The militant strike of the Polish workers jolted these slack-jawed lackeys of U.S. imperialism, and the likes of Lane Kirkland (president of the AFL-CIO) and the UAW's Doug Fraser suddenly discovered "international solidarity" with their brother workers in Poland. These are the same "internationalists" and "defenders of free trade unions" who have promoted the most disgusting chauvinism in "hate-Arab" campaigns in the unions, the same men who have overseen the use of AFL-CIA money to aid agents of U.S. imperialism in the "free trade unions" of Latin America, which are in reality nothing more than tools to sabotage the struggles of the toiling masses and tie them to a life of misery under the boot of puppets of U.S. imperialism like Pinochet in Chile, Garcia in Brazil, and the former dictator Somoza in Nicaragua.

But while the Polish workers' strikes riveted the attention of the world, sent scum of all varieties scrambling to try to turn things to their own advantage, and above all gave a glimpse of the potential of the working class, the significance of this struggle was not due to the goals and leadership of the strikes themselves but to the context in which they took place and the effect they had on millions worldwide. This fact was underscored by the somewhat shadowed events that were taking place at the same time. For as the strikes were developing, the Warsaw Pact armies prepared to send troops across parts of Poland and into East Germany for special war maneuvers called "Operation Brothers in Arms." And at the same time, U.S. bloc armies were moving into West Germany for their counter-maneuvers called "Autumn Forge." Western columnists were quick to recall that it was across Poland's broad plains that the tanks rumbled in the opening salvos of both World Wars I and II.

And so it was that under the banner of reform, the Polish workers marched into the arena of superpower war preparations and maneuvers.

Both superpowers recognized the potential volatility of the situation in Poland, and both were determined that the actions of the Polish workers would



The Polish workers' strikes had international significance far beyond the workplaces that were shut down. Above, people gathered at the Lenin

Shipyards in Gdansk eagerly grab up leaflets containing news of strike developments that were tossed over the gates by strikers.

not force them into premature reactions, i.e., both were determined that the struggle of the workers would not get out of bounds deemed "acceptable" at this stage of moves towards war. Since it was the Soviets' ox that was being gored, their aim was to minimize the damage they suffered due to the uprising. The Soviets limited themselves to attacks in their press on "anti-socialist elements" and "subversives tied to Western intelligence agencies" who, *Tass* claimed, were manipulating the strikers. But although the Western media did much to raise the spectre of a Soviet invasion, and the memory of Hungary and Czechoslovakia was surely never far from the minds of many in Poland, the threat of a Soviet invasion to quell the strikes was never much of a likelihood, certainly as long as the upheaval did not threaten Soviet domination of the country or its membership in the Warsaw Pact. Even the rumored further purges of top leadership of the Polish party seemed improbable for the moment, as the Soviets announced a large hard-currency loan to the Polish government to help it cover the cost of the settlement of the strikes.

The U.S. imperialists, as Carter put it, were "inspired and gratified" by the outcome of the strikes. For, beneath the heavy armor of their superpower rival, a vulnerable spot, the nationalism and discontent spawned by the heavy yoke of Soviet imperialism, was exposed, and could be exploited by the U.S. While anti-Soviet sentiment was not publicly inscribed on the banners of the strikers, it was obviously unleashed as a powerful force. There was no mistaking, for instance, the relish with which the workers welded Moscow-bound trains to the tracks when it was discovered that they contained large shipments of scarce meat and sugar.

The U.S. imperialists obviously consider that they have made considerable progress in the course of the strikes towards their goal of undermining Soviet control of Poland and driving the wedge of U.S. influence in a bit deeper. In large measure this was accomplished through the enhanced role and influence of the Roman Catholic Church, the principal promoter of U.S. interests inside Poland. Through this strike the Catholic Church seems to have forced what one Western journal-

ist described as an "historic compromise Polish style." For the Soviets, from Europe to Chile the "historic compromise" has been seen in the past as a tactic for gaining a foothold in countries clearly within the U.S. sphere of influence. The analogy does not seem that far off. While the Church was far from impotent prior to the strike, the wedge has been driven in a little deeper, as noted. All this also shows what a master stroke the U.S. imperialists must consider the elevation of a Pole to head the Church in Rome.

While the Church has been a tremendous aid to U.S. penetration of Poland, overall the main form that U.S. penetration of Eastern Europe has taken in recent years is financial, and this is true in Poland also. In the aftermath of the strike, the U.S. imperialists are stepping up their loans and aid to Poland, which already has a debt in Western currencies of some \$20 billion, the result of the Polish government's efforts to buy modernization and technological advancement from the West in the last decade. The shambles of the Polish economy, not unrelated to the fact that it has become closely tied to the economic chaos afflicting the U.S. bloc—as well as its domination by the Soviets—has put great pressure on the Polish government to impose austerity measures like those being taken by capitalist governments all over the world as the economic crisis grows more severe. But in the last two months the aims of the Polish government to tighten down the screws on the Polish working class were confronted head-on by the striking workers.

It was a particularly sharp blow to Gierek & Co. when, just as the shipyard workers went back to work, the coal miners walked out. Coal, which accounts for over 30% of Poland's hard currency earnings, had been the centerpiece of the government's plans to arrest the deepening crisis. In an effort to ensure labor stability and increase output, exceptional treatment was given the coal miners, including the highest wages of any workers in Poland, supermarkets so well stocked that people drove hundreds of miles across to Poland to shop there, and—the strictest labor discipline in Poland. Mining is so critical to the revisionists' plans that it is the only occupation which qualifies a youth for exemption from the draft.

So when 30,000 coal miners walked out on Monday, Sept. 1, Gierek considered it close to treason. And when nightfall brought news of the deaths of eight miners in an accident at the Halemba mines in Ruda Slaska, provoking another 150,000 miners to walk, Gierek immediately responded with a televised plea, complete with an emotional recounting of how his own father and grandfather had been killed in the mines. But the coal miners did not budge until the government extended the Gdansk settlement to the coal-mining area of Silesia and ended the round-the-clock rotating shifts that the revisionists had considered so necessary to achieve higher output.

The strike has undoubtedly accentuated the economic problems of Poland's rulers. Already they have accepted one loan from the USSR and are upping their requests for agricultural credits from the U.S. to almost \$700 million. It is in this context that Carter sent his secret note to West Germany's Schmidt, Frances d'Estaing, and Britain's Thatcher, urging them to do whatever possible so that the Western bloc could meet expected requests from Poland for future loans.

The Soviet Union, while wary of this financial penetration, has been quite willing to accept Western loans and aid itself, and to see the same in Eastern Europe. Obviously they seek to turn the U.S. bloc efforts at financial penetration to their own advantage. The credits from the West are used to purchase more advanced technology and to expand production. In other words, the Soviets use the aid to strengthen their bloc in preparation for the showdown with the West. As for the problem of mounting debt to the West and the repayment schedules, the Soviet preference for long-term trade compensation agreements is an indication that they calculate that just who will be in debt to whom is a question that can be postponed and ultimately settled by World War III. The U.S. seems quite willing to gamble that its current strategy towards Eastern Europe will strengthen its chances of dictating the settlement of these debts and a lot more.

It is important to understand just what these two imperialist vultures are up to and to see through the blanket of bullshit each spreads in its efforts to

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take advantage of the rival's weaknesses. Despite the desire of the U.S. imperialists to subjugate Poland to a new slavemaster—i.e., themselves—and despite the fact that the U.S. bloc already has a significant hand in the worsening conditions of the Polish masses, it is not at all surprising that the overwhelming hatred and resistance of the Polish people is directed at the imperialists who dominate and most directly exploit and oppress them, the Soviet Union. Nor is it surprising that the U.S. would try to exploit this situation, to use those who come forward as leaders of the resistance to Soviet domination as their own spear bearers. The same thing is true in reverse: for example, in Central America, where the hatred of the masses is focused on the bloody plunder of U.S. imperialism and the puppet dictators it has installed and kept in power for decades. Here the shoe is on the other foot. The Soviets try to exploit this resistance to U.S. imperialism for their own advantage, particularly through the use of Cuba and Fidel Castro.

In this light, it is important to recognize the role of those like Leach Walesa, for example. Walesa is the strike leader in Gdansk who received so much publicity in the U.S. He may not be as conscious an agent of U.S. imperialism as Castro is of Soviet imperialism—at least not yet. But objectively, the role that he and others like him have played has had the effect of obscuring the real issues at stake. Like many Poles, Walesa himself may not be deeply religious, but in his first act in office—hanging up a large crucifix in

the strike headquarters and then proceeding to the signing of the agreement on nationwide TV using the foot-long pen that was an easily recognized and well known souvenir from the visit of Pope John Paul—old Leach essentially pledged *his* allegiance to the U.S. and *its* Catholic Church.

The demands of the Polish working class for an independent role and a voice in society were an exposure of the capitalist nature of the Polish regime. But more, they indicate the underlying contradictions within capitalist societies that are bound to emerge, in fact explode, and all the more so as the worldwide crisis of imperialism intensifies and world war approaches. The capitalists of neither the Soviet nor the U.S. bloc can feel comfortable with the curse of many Polish strikers that labeled government and party leaders as “the red bourgeoisie.”

For whatever colors they attempt to cloak themselves in, capitalists will reveal their true nature through the crimes they commit. And as these imperialists rush headlong to the perpetration of a crime of unparalleled barbarism, nuclear war, the Polish working class has demonstrated that these criminals are not the only actors on the stage, not the only forces capable of determining the course of events. They have, in a very powerful way, made known once again the presence of the working class on the stage of history and its potential to counter and defeat these new imperialist barbarians of both the East and the West. □

CORRECTION

In *RW* No. 68, August 22, 1980, the caption on page 19 incorrectly states that Soviet troops intervened in Poland during the widespread strikes of 1970.

Although Soviet troops were stationed in Poland at the time, they were not directly involved in the Polish government's efforts to suppress the strikes.

