

Poland and the struggle for power

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In the next several weeks, the Guardian will publish a number of differing perspectives on the declaration of martial law in Poland. The following opinion in support of the Polish government is by Ralph Beitel, a contributing editor of Line of March, a Marxist-Leninist journal.

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It is remarkable that the Guardian viewpoint (Dec. 16) opposing martial law in Poland failed to provide even so much as a hint about what’s at stake in the current crisis.

In fact, the fundamental issue before the Polish working class is whether socialism will be re-consolidated in Poland or whether the existing socialist base will be further eroded in the direction of restoring capitalism throughout the economy. This issue has been posed, not in the abstract, but in the most concrete possible form: the political struggle for state power. The forces in contention—the Polish United Workers Party (PUWP) and Solidarity—have fundamental differences on virtually every important question in Polish life.

CONTENDING FORCES

An analysis of the crisis in Poland, including the imposition of martial law, which fails to recognize that these differences bear directly upon the fundamental issue of the class nature of Poland cannot hope to provide much understanding, much less serve as a guide to action.

For Marxist-Leninists, one’s stand must be based first of all on a Marxist analysis of the political lines and forces that are contending for state power in Poland. The key issue is: compared to the PUWP, would the political and economic program advanced by Solidarity lead toward the consolidation of socialism in Poland, or would Solidarity’s policies, once implemented, open up new prospects for the restoration of capitalism? Our approach to this issue focuses on the three sources that threaten to restore capitalism in Poland—the ousted bourgeoisie, petty commodity production, and international capital.

ROLE OF THE CHURCH

How has the PUWP fared in the struggle against these threatening sources? First of all, negative concessions have historically been made to the Catholic Church—the main force representing the ousted bourgeoisie—which have reinforced its ideological and political role in Polish society. In the realm of petty commodity production, unprincipled concessions were made after 1956 to private, farmers,

effectively undermining most of the program for the collectivization of agriculture, forcing the workers to subsidize the enrichment of petty bourgeois farmers, and allowing those farmers to hold the socialist economy hostage to their will. With respect to international capital, Polish industrial development has been tied to massive borrowing from Western banks. As a result the Polish economy is tied to the vicissitudes of the international capitalist market, contributing in turn to the crisis in Poland. Thus, operating under a revisionist general line since 1956, the PUWP has made negative concessions in each of these areas which have led to the present crisis.

At the same time under the leadership of the PUWP, Poland has indeed been transformed into a socialist country. Completely devastated by World War 2, socialist Poland has risen to 10th in the world as a producer of industrial goods and has provided the working class with a rapidly rising standard of living and extensive social services.

Compared to the record of the PUWP, how would the program of Solidarity fare if it was implemented? First of all, it would lead to additional concessions to the Catholic Church. From the beginning, Solidarity has linked its demands for democracy to the unrestricted right for the Church to promote its ideological and political views. This is a thoroughly bourgeois conception of democracy which is tantamount to a demand for the right to propagate anti-socialist views. At the same time Solidarity supports the demand of its student counterpart to end the teaching of Marxism-Leninism in the basic curricula.

SOLIDARITY'S PROGRAM

On the question of petty commodity production, Solidarity embraces the program of Rural Solidarity which proposes to strengthen capitalism in the countryside by further restricting and eventually eliminating collectivized agriculture. Finally, with respect to negative concessions to international capital, Solidarity would make a maximum offer. While couched in ambiguous concepts ("decentralization," "workers' control," etc.), Solidarity's program for industry is little more than a proposal to insure that market forces rather than stale plans regulate the economy. This not only involves a deepening dependence on imperialism: it would also lead to typical capitalist anarchy of production, cyclical crises, unemployment, etc.—in other words the restoration of capitalism.

A more generous possibility could hardly be conceived by the representatives of international capital, who in appreciation have become Solidarity's major cheerleaders.

From this analysis it is clear that although Solidarity emerged "objectively" in opposition to a revisionist party, it is not an anti-revisionist political alternative to the PUWP. With or without the conscious understanding or approval of its mass base, Solidarity's national program and leadership would reverse every gain of socialism (in the name of "workers' rights"). While the PUWP is a revisionist communist party which has seriously erred in the struggle to build and protect socialism, Solidarity's program is consciously anti-socialist and pro-capitalist. While the PUWP has led Poland into the world socialist camp and anti-imperialist front, Solidarity would ally with imperialism.

Despite its proletarian base, Solidarity can no more represent the long-range interests of the Polish working class than, say, the Democratic Party can represent these interests for the working class in the U.S. Solidarity's popularity in Poland is principally an expression of the backwardness of the Polish working class. Undoubtedly this backwardness is a result of the PUWP's irresponsible policies and practice—however, Solidarity clearly intends to deepen and institutionalize that backwardness, not combat it.

Still, it must be acknowledged that martial law in a socialist country is unprecedented, and that the principal responsibility for the crisis that led to this extraordinary situation must be placed on the PUWP. Have the Polish communists overreacted, or was this step a necessary move?

DUAL POWER

In the months preceding the declaration of martial law, Solidarity had achieved the status of a second center of state power in Poland. However, such situations of “dual power are inherently unstable, and must be resolved. Attempts to end the stalemate through negotiations failed because the two forces were fundamentally at odds. Solidarity demanded that the PUWP share power with Solidarity and the Catholic Church, thus qualitatively eroding the dictatorship of the proletariat in Poland. The Polish party and government, meanwhile, were prepared to recognize Solidarity but, only on the basis that Solidarity accept communist leadership and socialism in Poland.

Given the internal logic of this situation of dual power, it was almost inevitable that Solidarity would eventually mount a challenge for state power, a fact that the conscious elements on both sides were aware of from the outset. The so-called “moderate” Lech Walesa admitted that Solidarity’s public posture that “we love socialism and the party and, of course, the Soviet Union” was only a ruse until “all social groups were with us. . . and then we would “overthrow those parliaments and councils and so on.” While Walesa originally wanted to “reach the confrontation in a natural way” he now admitted that “I have miscalculated so we are choosing the way of making a lightning maneuver.”

Clearly then, the declaration of martial law was a forceful step by the Polish government and military authorities to end dual power by restricting the political power of Solidarity. Given the objectively anti-socialist program and leadership of Solidarity, this was an absolutely necessary step in the class struggle to defend Polish socialism. Consequently, it is necessary, to support these extraordinary measures.

The Guardian, throughout its coverage of the Polish crisis, has failed to confront these realities squarely. Rather, the Guardian abdicates responsibility to make a frank political analysis of the actual class forces in motion today and the consequences of a victory for Solidarity. Content to tread in safe waters, the Guardian (correctly) identifies the PUWP as chiefly responsible for the crisis in Poland, and on that basis alone demands an immediate end to martial law, presumably in favor of the political and economic chaos that existed prior to December 13.

The Guardian is forced to admit that. Solidarity’s recent actions were provocative, that it has contributed to the deterioration of the economy, that antisocialist elements have come to the fore in its national leadership, and that this movement has the backing of U.S. imperialism. However, it conveniently drops these crucial factors out of its conclusions in favor of the wishful thinking that any movement of workers in a country led by a revisionist party must be progressive by definition.

GUARDIAN’S POSITION ANTI-SOVIET

To buttress this shallow reasoning, the Guardian relies on that old saw of anti-Sovietism, a political and ideological stance which retains significant influence on the U.S. left in general and the “anti-revisionist” movement in particular. However, this legacy of “Maoism” is thoroughly negative. Despite the revisionist line of the Soviet Communist Party and the flaws and contradictions within Soviet society, the Soviet Union exists objectively as a socialist country and an anti-imperialist force—and in particular, as a major force defending socialism in Eastern Europe. To raise the specter of the “Soviet superpower” in the context of the crisis in Poland, a crisis in which the survival of the socialist system in Poland is at stake, is a completely backward concession to the bourgeoisie’s counterrevolutionary

propaganda and its dangerous cold-war policy, a concession which is not mitigated one bit by terming it “anti-revisionism”.

Hopefully, the emergency measures now in force in Poland can be replaced in the shortest possible time by a program to end the political and economic crisis, and by a genuine campaign to end corruption and favoritism within the Polish government and the PUWP at all levels. The determined assault on reactionary, anti-socialist forces and the arrest of hundreds of former party officials are a necessary first step in that direction. But the PUWP obviously has some major obstacles yet to confront—i.e. the imperialist debt and private agriculture—if it is to rectify its revisionist line and step-by-step reestablish its links to the Polish working class.

Given the historical weakness and serious errors of the PUWP, this will undoubtedly be no easy task. However, the continued hegemony of forces who are prepared to defend socialism in Poland, even revisionists, is far preferable, from a class point of view, to the surrender of power to the anti-socialist, imperialist-supported leaders of Solidarity or the Polish Catholic Church.

Line of March Editorial Board

Turning Point in Poland

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I. The Crisis is Joined

The Polish communist party has crossed its Rubicon. . .the fate of Polish socialism and the dictatorship of the proletariat hang in the balance. The international lines of the class struggle have been drawn sharply and there is no longer any middle ground. The line-up contains few surprises; the adversaries face off grouped either behind the Polish party and government or behind Solidarity.

Recent events in Poland have come as no surprise to serious political observers across the spectrum from left to right. In the weeks immediately preceding the declaration of a state of emergency by a special military council supported by the Polish United Workers’ Party (PUWP), the political contradiction between Solidarity and the government had intensely accelerated. For months there had been a situation of growing dual power—a situation which had virtually paralyzed Poland’s economic, social, and political life. Increasingly it became clear that the political crisis would be resolved only when one of

the two main political forces, either Solidarity or the PUWP, forcefully asserted its authority over the other.

Then, after months of agonizing hesitation, the Polish government finally took decisive measures in early December, 1981, to do what had clearly become inevitable: smash the political power of Solidarity.

All efforts to mediate the crisis through negotiation between Solidarity and the government had failed—indeed they had to, since a negotiated settlement acceptable to both parties was impossible. Solidarity’s proposal for a system of “shared power” between itself, the Catholic Church, and the PUWP was nothing but a demand for the PUWP’s political surrender. Likewise, the government’s proposal, that Solidarity be accorded a recognized status at the trade union level and that its representatives cooperate in a joint effort to resolve the Polish crisis under the leadership of the PUWP, ran counter to the political aims of Solidarity’s leadership, who would have seen agreement as a surrender of the de facto power which they had already achieved.

The reason for this impasse is obvious. On all the fundamental questions of Polish life, the leadership of Solidarity and the PUWP are at odds with each other. While Solidarity’s strength in the Polish working class has been based in its role as “champion” of the workers around immediate economic issues, the perspective of its leadership has been profoundly political from the very beginning of the confrontation. Sometimes stated openly, but more often masked, the goal of Solidarity’s leadership has been to fundamentally restructure Polish society politically and economically, a process which all leading political forces in Solidarity acknowledged would have to take the form of a consciously organized “revolutionary” upheaval.

This perspective has been most explicitly articulated by the leadership of the Committee for Self Defense (KOR). Since, as the Wall Street Journal has aptly noted, “many of Solidarity’s key advisers come from KOR ranks and much of the union’s basic ideology and organization originated in KOR”^[1] any estimate of Solidarity’s actual political goals must give appropriate consideration to the perspective of the KOR leadership.

A sympathetic commentator, writing in the Monthly Review, summed up that KOR perspective as follows: “The existing form of society in Poland constituted a new type of class domination in which a ‘central political bureaucracy’ exercised exclusive control over the means of production and the disposal of the surplus product. Such a system could be overthrown only by revolution and the establishment of direct democracy with a system of workers’ councils and a central council of elected delegates.”^[2]

Hardly anyone doubts that the fundamental orientation and direction of Solidarity, either spontaneously or consciously, would bring it to mount a challenge for state power. This is precisely why Solidarity’s most enthusiastic supporters—whether in the central councils of U.S. imperialism or in the ranks of the left—have rallied around its banner,

while espousing differing ideas on the exact nature of the restructuring, all agreed on the need for fundamental restructuring.

The PUWP, on the other hand, while explicitly self-critical and willing to make numerous concessions to Solidarity and the Catholic Church in terms of their participation in the organization of Polish life, has been obliged to defend the fundamental elements of the present social arrangement in Poland. Supporters of the Polish government, whatever their differing degrees of criticism of the errors of the Polish party, are united in the recognition that the fundamental property relations in Poland are socialist, that they are seriously threatened, and that they deserve to be defended.

In these circumstances, a confrontation was inevitable. In the weeks before the declaration of martial law, both sides inexorably pursued the logic of their positions and moved toward a showdown. Immediate strikes called or abetted by Solidarity over every major and minor dispute in the country put the Polish economy on the verge of collapse. The PUWP proposed legislation banning strikes until all other avenues for the resolution of disputes had been exhausted. Solidarity, sensing that such a move would deprive it of its main instrument of power, called for a general strike in the likely event that such legislation passed the Polish parliament.

The Solidarity leadership apparently well understood that Poland had reached a historic crossroads. On December 7, the Polish government released tape recordings of a secret meeting of the Solidarity leadership.^[2a] Confirmed as accurate by Solidarity itself, these left little doubt as to the intentions of the union. “The confrontation is unavoidable,” Lech Walesa said on the tapes, “and the confrontation will take place. We have to awaken people to that. I wanted to reach the confrontation in a natural way, when almost all social groups were with us. But I made a mistake because I thought we would keep it up longer and then we would overthrow those parliaments and councils and so on.” Walesa went on to declare that the union should not say these things “aloud” but rather should say “we love you, we love socialism and the party and, of course, the Soviet Union, and by the accomplished facts we should do our work and wait.” ^[3]

Others in the Solidarity leadership were even less restrained than Walesa. Zbigniew Bujak, head of the Solidarity branch in Warsaw, is recorded declaring that “The government should be finally overthrown, unmasked and deprived of credibility.” Solidarity leaders in other parts of the country were voicing similar sentiments. From all appearances, the general strike would be the condition for Solidarity to make its move for seizure of the government.

It was in this setting that the Jaruzelski government made its move, utilizing military force to arrest the leaders of Solidarity and to break up the strike movement. The Polish party (or some sections of it) had obviously preplanned this move carefully, tactically waiting for a sufficient provocation as a pretext to implement it. Solidarity’s leadership

provided the provocation, and the Polish military and party executed the plan fairly smoothly.

The confrontation is filled with all the anomalies which have characterized the Polish crisis from the beginning. Solidarity first emerged as a political force built on the anger of the Polish working class—much of it justified—at the consequences of the disastrous policies pursued by the PUWP. But, as we shall attempt to demonstrate, the program and objectives of Solidarity, in the name of correcting abuses of the past years, would have actually undermined the socialist foundations of Poland and, therefore, the real interests of the Polish working class. The PUWP, however, is clearly responsible for an economic policy which has instituted grave and totally unnecessary distortions into Polish socialism. At the same time, the present PUWP leadership quite correctly (in our opinion) has refused to concede that the system of socialism itself is at fault. Ironically, the party, for all its weaknesses and relative isolation from the mass of Polish workers, has emerged as the main political force in Poland trying to defend socialism and the dictatorship of the proletariat.

Only those who have worked their way through this maze of contradictory surface phenomena have the basis for arriving at a serious objective understanding of the real politics of the Polish crisis. Those who have not (or will not) do so are either dilettantes or still politically motivated principally by scattered prejudices and confusion. Yet even clarity on the forces and stakes internal to Polish society does not exhaust the full significance of what is involved in the Polish crisis.

The Polish crisis must, of necessity, be placed in an international context. In our opinion the stakes involved can be crystallized in two clear-cut questions: Would a Poland in which Solidarity held power remain part of the socialist camp? Would Poland under Solidarity remain part of the world front against imperialism?

We believe that the answer to both these questions is “no.”

Of course, Walesa and other Solidarity leaders have publicly argued that they would not attempt to pull Poland out of the Warsaw Pact or the Eastern European Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (CMEA). But it is hard to have confidence in such statements. First, all the leaders of Solidarity obviously have been prepared to say whatever they deem necessary in public while biding their time with their real intentions. Even more telling, however, is that the internal logic of the Solidarity program would inevitably weaken socialist relations of production in favor of a market economy and lead to a rupture with the Soviet Union and the other socialist countries of Eastern Europe, a process which could only lead to a strengthening of Poland's economic ties to the imperialist countries. And, from a military point of view, such a development would gravely jeopardize the military security of the socialist countries. In fact, the continued functioning of the Warsaw Pact becomes inconceivable if the Polish representatives are the political leaders of Solidarity with all their manifest ties to the Catholic Church and other agents of imperialism.^[3a]

The likely policies of a Poland under Solidarity's leadership on political, economic, and military support for national liberation struggles against U.S. imperialism leave little room for illusions. Would a Solidarity-led Poland allocate a portion of its industrial production to aid Nicaragua or the struggle in Namibia? Unlikely. Where would a Walesa government stand as the complexities of the international class struggle tested the unity of the anti-imperialist forces? In fact, Walesa, whose top political adviser is none other than the Pope, offers us a rare insight into his pledge to defend socialism in Poland when, as Newsweek has noted, "he has cited Japan as a model of the sort of economic development that he believes is possible in Poland." [4]

Granted, the PUWP itself has not been a paragon of internationalism; nevertheless, it can be, and has been, held accountable to the concrete politics of proletarian internationalism. For all the hesitations and vacillations of the PUWP, Poland under its leadership has never made common political cause with imperialism. It would, however, take a thoroughly unwarranted confidence in Solidarity's political leadership to believe that a Poland under its rule—in alliance with the Catholic Church and with political and financial backing from the West—would long remain in a front against imperialism.

We would argue that the interests of socialism, both internationally and internal to Poland, and of maintaining the united front against imperialist assaults and maneuverings require a stand in opposition to the Polish Solidarity movement as it is presently constituted and led—and a stand in support of the Polish government and party.

Ironically, both the international bourgeoisie (and its host of reactionary ideological and political servants) and the international communist movement actually agree on where the battle lines are drawn and on the stakes involved in the Polish crisis. Zealous Polish-Americans, the AFL-CIO officialdom, the Pope, and Ronald Reagan acknowledge that Solidarity is up against the "forces of communism." All their actions, from U.S. economic sanctions against the USSR and Poland to the Christmas candle vigil, are expressions of support for the trend of moving Poland toward "Western-style democracy." Their political posture toward the communists and their supporters is, if nothing else, refreshingly straightforward—"we want different things, so we're on different sides; the best social system will win out in the end!"

Consequently, the raging controversies over the nature of the Polish crisis are not with the right, but rather on the left. For more than a year U. S. imperialism has made a cause celebre of Solidarity; it has become, without exaggeration, the central feature of the anticommunist ideological campaign accompanying the imperialist military build-up. Disarmed by their own prejudices, many on the U.S. left have found themselves in lockstep with the labor lieutenants of capitalism and their own bourgeoisie on the question of Poland.

There are numerous convoluted and belabored explanations to justify this obvious political predicament—the jealously held belief that although they march alongside reactionaries of all stripes, they march to a different drummer, with a different set of

slogans, etc. But facts are stubborn things. Support in the U.S. for Solidarity is an ideological assault on socialism; the leading banner is anticommunism; and to march at all one must march beneath that banner. Whatever the subjective intentions of this assortment of leftists, they are doomed to be overshadowed and swept along in this “movement,” and to be looked upon as little more than political curiosities. As a result such leftists are qualitatively compromised and in no position to explain to the U.S. working class the real underlying objectives of U.S. imperialism in the present Polish crisis.

Of course, within the safe confines of left circles this political position can gain a much greater hearing than in the rough-and-tumble of the “mass” pro-Solidarity movement. Here the political argument goes something like this: Imperialism would like to make Solidarity serve its interests, but it has miscalculated, not realizing that “real” workers’ power in Poland will actually harm the interests of imperialism. By the same token, the PUWP is not defending “genuine” socialism but only “Soviet socialism.”

Such an argument, admittedly simplified, merely reveals that those who advance it have not yet learned to think politically, but are still content to indulge in wishful thinking. They behave as though a political movement can be characterized simply by its self-proclamations or by the numbers of workers who follow it. They also fool themselves into thinking that they can dismiss the urgent question of the defense of socialism in Poland merely by labelling it “Soviet socialism.” But a political movement can only be assessed by the actual role it plays in the world, not by its intentions or proclamations. This simple fact, which has been so readily grasped by the international bourgeoisie, seems to have eluded much of the left, which refuses to face the unpleasant realities that the enthusiasm of the agents of imperialism for Solidarity implies.

Similarly, since “Soviet socialism” is the only type of socialism that actually exists in real life in the USSR and Eastern Europe, any attempt to diminish the significance of its defense— at a time when the fundamental precepts of the socialist system and the actual institutions of state power are being challenged—is nothing but a thin political smokescreen to hide vacillation in the face of imperialism. This constitutes class collaboration no matter how much such surrender is masked by a thoroughly unfounded optimism in the capacity of Solidarity to build a “new and improved” type of socialist system.

Not surprisingly, the major ideologically motivated currents spreading political confusion on the left concerning Poland are the Trotskyist and social democratic trends. The present Poland controversy is only the specific form of the ongoing polemic and struggle between Marxism-Leninism and those established opportunist currents within the socialist movement. By now it should come as no surprise to communists to find Trotskyists and social democrats of all stripes on the other side of the barricades, attempting to provide a “left” cover for imperialism in the name of “genuine” or “democratic” socialism. However, of more immediate concern is the fact that a number

of forces in and around the Marxist-Leninist movement have also taken centrist and opportunist positions on the Polish crisis. It is to this quarter that we principally direct our polemic.

How will we proceed?

In the next section (II) we will review and deepen the basic analysis we made more than a year ago on the fundamental causes of the Polish crisis. Here we attempt two things: first, to develop an assessment of the objective roots of the troubled post-World War II history of Eastern Europe, which has experienced major confrontations, with clear anti-socialist implications, in Hungary (1956), Czechoslovakia (1968), and Poland (1970 and 1980); second, to extend our analysis of what we hold to be the principal subjective cause of the Polish crisis, the revisionist general line of the PUWP since 1956.

In Section III we offer a concrete analysis of the politics of Solidarity as they have been revealed in the developing crisis in Poland over the past year and a half. Our point here is that the anti-socialist direction of Solidarity can be demonstrated through an analysis of its actual programmatic goals and of the actual political forces who comprise the majority of its leadership.

Finally, in Section IV, we take up some consideration of what the resolution of the Polish crisis might involve, and we try to locate this concern in the broader historical process of the intersection of socialist construction and proletarian revolution.

II. Fundamental Causes of the Crisis

The root cause of the present crisis in Poland rests in the incorrect general line of the PUWP which has guided the practice of the Polish communists for the past 25 years. The net result of implementing that opportunist line has been the inability to consolidate socialism and the proletarian dictatorship in Poland. Vacillation, hesitation, and a nationalistic and pragmatic outlook on the process of socialist construction have long characterized Poland's communist party and resulted in widespread corruption and abuse of power within the communist ranks. Together with negative concessions to non-proletarian forces, this has created conditions for a political challenge to proletarian power to take root in Polish society and grow to the point that the danger of capitalist restoration has become real, concrete, and impending.

This is not to deny that Poland, along with the other Eastern European countries, faced certain objective difficulties flowing from its particular history and the efforts by imperialism to undermine the socialist camp. Any analysis which does not take these objective historical factors into account is bound to be subjective and one-sided. Nevertheless, we hold the view that the opportunist response of the PUWP to these objective difficulties—and not simply the objective conditions themselves—set in motion the gravest challenge to proletarian power in Eastern Europe since the end of World War II.

A. Historical Particularity of Eastern Europe and Poland (Prior to 1956)

Capitalism developed unevenly in Europe, taking root first in certain Western European countries (England, France, Holland) and, in time, encompassing the rest of the continent. This uneven development had a profound effect on the relations between the capitalist powers and on the historically specific tasks of both bourgeois and proletarian revolutionary forces in the various countries of Europe.

As a result, the economic and political history of Eastern Europe is significantly different from that of the Western European countries. Politically, Eastern Europe was characterized by the existence of multinational states: Russia, Germany, the Austro-Hungarian and Ottoman Empires between them incorporated the vast majority of the peoples and nations of the region. The strivings of the bourgeoisies of these oppressed nations gave rise to movements for national independence and an accompanying nationalist ideology which have played a powerful role in shaping both the politics and culture of much of Eastern Europe. In certain countries—Poland and Hungary in particular, where Catholicism remained the dominant religion—the church grew to be an institution that expressed not only the religious sentiments of the masses but their nationalist aspirations as well.

Economically, Eastern Europe lagged in industrialization so that significant feudal remnants in agriculture persisted well into the twentieth century. A reactionary landlord class thus exercised substantial political power and influence compared to Western Europe. Likewise, the peasantry remained a numerically larger class than the proletariat in most Eastern European countries right up through World War II.

These historical particularities of Eastern Europe clearly have shaped the actual social conditions and ideological currents confronting the communists in this region in the post-World War II period. To this history we must add the particular international circumstances under which the tasks of socialist construction were undertaken in Eastern Europe.

After Eastern Europe was liberated from Nazi rule in World War II, the questions which had to be answered concretely in each country were which political forces would rule and what would be the fundamental property relations. The form that developed—People's Democracy—was an attempt to speak to the historically concrete conditions of proletarian power in Eastern Europe under circumstances framed by the pressing necessity to reinforce and extend the political and military security of the Soviet Union. The first chilling intimations of the Cold War against socialism followed quickly on the heels of the Nazi surrender, a situation rendered all the more formidable by the U.S. possession of the atomic bomb and its bellicose posture of nuclear blackmail.

Initially, the governments of the People's Democracies were viewed as popular fronts of genuine anti-fascist forces under the leadership of reconstituted workers' parties which were usually formed by mergers of communist and social democratic parties. (In Poland,

the leadership of the Catholic resistance refused to participate in the popular front government on the ground that as the dominant political force in the country, the church would not subordinate itself to a communist-dominated government. This further aggravated for Poland what was generally a relatively unstable and delicate class alliance in the region.)

Economically, the People's Democracies were explicitly oriented toward socialism but not yet socialist. Since the largest landlords and capitalists had invariably collaborated with the Nazis, there was little political problem in expropriating their property. The huge landed estates were broken up and distributed among the peasantry. Major enterprises and banks were nationalized; however, sizeable sectors of industry and commerce remained in private hands. Since significant sections of the bourgeoisie and petit bourgeoisie had participated in the anti-fascist struggle, it would have been a political error to expropriate them and thus narrow the base of the revolution. The prospect at that time was a gradual step-by-step evolution of the economy toward socialism, a process deemed possible by the fact that the fundamental question of political power had in the main been settled—the proletariat already held power both as the leading force in the popular fronts and through the internationalism and military might of the Soviet Union.

By 1948, however, it had become clear that the political and economic realities of the international class struggle would not permit a relatively pacific and protracted process of socialist transformation in Eastern Europe. Winston Churchill's infamous 1946 "Iron Curtain" speech had virtually called for a concerted military effort to "liberate" Eastern Europe, on behalf of Western capital and roll back the boundaries of socialism to the Soviet Union. Reactionary centers in the U. S. spoke openly of the virtues of using U. S. military supremacy to accomplish this objective through the integrated command of NATO. In addition, to the east, the imminent victory of the Chinese Revolution further fueled imperialist anxieties. The danger of a Western military strike against Eastern Europe, with the Soviet Union held in check by nuclear blackmail, was quite real.

Fortunately for the international proletariat—and, indeed, for all humanity—the Soviet Union was able to produce its own atomic weaponry. (Just how remarkable an achievement this was in light of the extensive destruction of the Soviet industrial plant during World War II is still not fully appreciated within the U.S. movement) The threat of Soviet atomic retaliation in Western Europe was sufficient to dampen the ardor of all but the most reckless sectors of U. S. finance capital. Nevertheless the danger was hardly over. The imperialist strategy of "cold war" intensified. As a result, the working class in Eastern Europe had to brace itself for a massive campaign of subversion, sabotage, and ideological assault (short of outright military invasion) aimed at destabilizing and reversing the socialist gains.

These were some of the circumstances which led the communists in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe to effect a major refinement in their strategic conception of how

socialism would be built. The imperialist threat required a much more systematic and elaborate coordination—not just of military matters, but economic and political policies as well—between the People’s Democracies and the Soviet Union. As a result, the timetable for the gradual evolution from People’s Democracy to socialism had to be accelerated.

The failure to step up the tempo of socialist construction could have had serious negative consequences during the Cold War. Tendencies toward capitalism inherent in a sizeable bourgeois class and in widespread petty commodity production (especially in agriculture) would have provided the imperialists with a receptive class base for its ideological, political, and economic offensive. Systems of political pluralism based solely on the anti-fascist past would have maintained at the centers of political power bourgeois forces whose basic ideological allegiance with capitalism could seriously destabilize the regimes in a period of intensified class struggle between the two social systems. Consequently the process of socialist construction and integration of Eastern Europe into a socialist camp was accelerated. Major steps toward the collectivization of agriculture were taken in all the Eastern European countries. Measures to restrict more drastically the private sector of the economy were proposed and enacted. The popular front political alliances were subject to the pressures of a stepped-up program for socialist transformation. The Communist Information Bureau (Cominform) was founded, and shortly thereafter an integrated system of economic and military cooperation between the Soviet Union and the East European countries was established.

Noteworthy among the opponents of the new program were Tito in Yugoslavia and Wladyslaw Gomulka in Poland. The case of Yugoslavia offers us at least a partial glimpse at what might have happened in the rest of Eastern Europe had the timely adjustment in the line on People’s Democracy not been made. First, Yugoslav “socialism” is, to say the least, a highly dubious proposition. The Yugoslav working class is subject to all the uncertainties of capitalism: high unemployment, migrant labor, inflation, cyclical crisis. The Yugoslav economy remains tied to the vicissitudes of the market (especially the world market) rather than to scientific planning motivated by social need. Second, the role of Yugoslavia in the struggle against imperialism and in support of national liberation and proletarian revolution is, at best, vacillating, occasional, and incidental. In fact, it is frequently conciliatory and even sometimes outright collaborationist.

Gomulka was not able to do in Poland what Tito had done in Yugoslavia, but not for want of trying. As early as 1948 he was advancing his line on the “Polish road to socialism” which, in effect, meant remaining tied to the politics and social arrangement of the People’s Democracy period, including the legitimization of the political and ideological role of the Catholic Church and only token steps toward collectivization of agriculture. However he was isolated and temporarily purged from the Polish party, apparently through considerable Soviet pressure.

With the exception of Yugoslavia, then, the new political line on socialist construction was implemented in Eastern Europe. Closer economic coordination between the Eastern European countries and the Soviet Union was established and the joint military defense of the region was undertaken by the Warsaw Pact. Given the surrounding circumstances, we believe that this was a correct line essential for the defense of proletarian power in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union.

Nevertheless a political price was paid for this necessary adjustment. In several countries—Hungary and Poland especially—the ideological transformation of the masses was far from complete. The reactionary political influence of the Catholic Church was still quite strong and was reinforced by those bourgeois class forces who rightly saw the accelerated program of socialist construction as a form of class struggle directed against them. Even within the working class itself (with large numbers of people maintaining ongoing family ties to the countryside and only one step out of the peasantry themselves) there was ideological resistance to accelerated socialist transformation. In addition to these objective difficulties, the parties made numerous errors, some of which were provoked by capitalist agents, others not. However, every error—whether historically avoidable or not—was quickly seized upon by reactionary class forces and utilized to fuel mass resistance to the new line.

It is this complex set of historical contradictions which has framed the periodic rebellions, strikes, and oppositionist political actions which have erupted at one time or another in almost every Eastern European country in the course of consolidating socialism. Despite these difficulties and shortcomings, the fundamental socialist transformation has been successfully accomplished. The attempts by imperialism to dismantle proletarian power in Eastern Europe have failed. The aggressive imperialist policy of “rollback” soon gave way to the more passive policy of “containment.” By 1956, the imperialist powers had signalled the de facto recognition of the existing borders and political realities of central and Eastern Europe.

In the case of Poland, the gains were dramatic. By 1953 the Polish economy had almost quadrupled its prewar level. Poland became the tenth most industrialized country in the world. Most industry had achieved a high level of socialization of the work process. Centralized planning of industrial production and distribution had been introduced. The working class enjoyed absolute job security, a wage level far above its prewar income, and an extensive social wage in the form of a broad system of free health care, education, old age protection, etc.

Nevertheless there were numerous unresolved contradictions in Polish society which would become pitfalls in Poland’s path toward socialism. To begin with, the petit bourgeois social base was substantial, aggravated by the fact that a relatively small degree of collectivization of agriculture had been achieved. The Catholic Church, which had always functioned in a thoroughly conscious and manipulative fashion, remained a powerful influential political force, particularly in the countryside. Polish nationalism

(with its particular antagonism toward Russia) remained a potent bourgeois ideological force which readily lent itself to anti-Sovietism. And, most importantly, the PUWP itself was quite weak ideologically, never fully succeeding in consolidating a firm Marxist-Leninist foundation and leadership core for the party.

It was in this somewhat contradictory and complex reality of Poland that the situation went from bad to worse in the wake of the anti-Stalin campaign of the late '50s. Khrushchev's revisionist formulations concerning a new, peaceful strategy for completing the world revolution went hand in hand with an attempted Soviet rapprochement with Yugoslavia and Tito. The confusion this stirred up contributed to a major upheaval within the PUWP resulting in the consolidation of a nationalist deviation in the Polish party—symbolized by Gomulka's dramatic re-entry into the party and emergence as its head. From this point on a qualitatively new general line on socialist construction was to shape the policies of the PUWP over the next quarter of a century.

B. The Line and Practice of the PUWP (1956-1980)

To highlight fully the significant revisionist turn taken by the PUWP in 1956 we utilize Lenin's framework on the three main sources of the threat of capitalist restoration after the proletariat has succeeded in taking state power. Lenin notes that these are: the ousted bourgeoisie, the power of petty commodity production, and international capital. By the same token, the consolidation of socialism is completely bound up with the proletariat's success in vanquishing capitalism on all three of these fronts. When Lenin speaks of the intensification of the class struggle under socialism and, therefore, the centrality of the dictatorship of the proletariat, he is referring precisely to these struggles.

The ousted bourgeoisie cannot help but dream and scheme of their return to power and property. In the very moment of their defeat they are a hundred times more bitter and determined than ever before. And they still retain a significant social base among the masses, for there are always bound to be sectors which never completely unite behind the revolution. In particular, the bourgeoisie's social base is most likely to be found among those who themselves were in close proximity to power and property previously; their influence is stubborn and far exceeds their numbers. By virtue of both wealth and experience in the uses of power the bourgeois elements are capable of turning every contradiction and shortcoming of the new society into support of their own revival.

Petty commodity production is an even more stubborn force obstructing socialist transformation and fostering the restoration of capitalism. Unlike the ousted bourgeoisie, who can (and must be) physically and politically suppressed, petty commodity production cannot be eliminated through suppression. It must be replaced by large-scale, socialized production through the step-by-step development of the forces of production. In the meantime petty commodity production, by its very nature, remains the breeding ground of capitalism, generating capitalist relations in both production and trade as well as bourgeois individualism and ideology.

But even when these two sources for the restoration of capitalism have been substantially overcome, socialism cannot let down its guard and rest content. Its social system cannot be completely consolidated until the capitalist system has been defeated on a world scale. This is not essentially a military question. The continuing threat of imperialist military assault on socialism is only the most concentrated expression of the insurmountable and antagonistic economic, political, and ideological contradictions between the two opposing social systems. Socialism cannot be deemed secure anywhere until this last contradiction is resolved, a point which Stalin underscored in noting the distinction between building socialism in one country and “the final [worldwide] victory of socialism [as] the full guarantee against attempts at intervention and hence against restoration.”^[5]

The success of the proletariat in resolving these three struggles does not, of course, exhaust the tasks of socialist construction (whose laws must be grasped in their own right). But these particular tasks do capture the function of the dictatorship of the proletariat and the essence of the class struggle under socialism. Therefore, the way in which a party holding power takes up these particular tasks offers a good measure of whether that party is pursuing a proletarian line or an opportunist line in socialist construction.

On all three counts, the general line guiding the PUWP ever since 1956 must be judged thoroughly opportunist and revisionist. In each of these three areas, the PUWP has made incredible, negative concessions to non-proletarian classes and to their political representatives. These negative concessions, aside from weakening the socialist system in Poland, are the direct source of the present economic and political crisis.

1. Negative Concessions to the Ousted Bourgeoisie

On the surface it would appear that the old bourgeoisie has been completely ousted from Polish society. There are no capitalists worthy of the name in Poland today. The former owners of industry and the banks have lost their property and in this narrow, economic sense do not exist or function as a class. They nevertheless continue to exist as real people, as do their immediate families, offspring, and business retainers. They are also more than scattered individuals. Ties of tradition, ideology and former (but vividly remembered) status continue to hold them together.

Such a situation is normal and historically unavoidable in any socialist country. Any attempt to physically exterminate every member and retainer of the old ruling class is bound to have disastrous consequences for proletarian power since it would deny the proletariat access to much-needed skills and experience in economic management and would inevitably alienate large numbers of the non-party masses. The physical existence of large numbers of ousted bourgeois elements (and their continued international contacts) must therefore be seen as a reality of socialist society, especially in its early stages.

But what does not have to be accepted—indeed, must not be accepted—in socialist society is the reinforcement of the political institutions of the ousted bourgeoisie. This is a point which all the proponents of a “pluralist” political system under socialism are totally unable to comprehend. In Poland, this was precisely the area in which the PUWP made negative concessions to the ousted bourgeoisie. The form of these concessions was not in permitting a multiplicity of political parties, but rather in the legitimization and reinforcement of the main ideological and political force in Polish life which actually continued to represent the ousted bourgeoisie—the Catholic Church.

Historically, this is the role that has always been assumed by the church in Poland. The identification of the Catholic Church with Polish nationalism signified the fact that the aspirations of the nationally oppressed Polish bourgeoisie found their ideological reflection in the church’s defense of Catholicism against the dominant non-Catholic religions of the empires among which Poland was divided. The Catholic Church in Poland has always functioned as a political institution. During and after World War II, the contention between the Catholic-led government-in-exile in London and the communist-led government-in-exile in Lublin was the concentrated expression in the political realm of the underlying contention between capital and labor which would immediately confront postwar Poland.

Precisely because of the Catholic Church’s identification with Poland’s historic struggle for independence and its active role in the antifascist resistance, it could not be arbitrarily removed from the political and ideological life of Polish society. This presented a delicate contradiction that could only be resolved over a relatively long period of careful ideological education and remolding among the masses. The best the PUWP could do in the period prior to 1956 was to attempt to circumscribe and neutralize as much as possible the church’s role in secular society. It also had to recognize that so long as Polish agriculture was dominated by small-scale commodity production, the sizeable Polish peasantry would continue to provide the Catholic Church with a significant and viable social base.

A central feature of the opportunist line adopted by the PUWP in 1956 was a major adjustment in the party’s policy toward the Catholic Church. Recognizing the church’s continued influence among the masses, especially in the countryside, the party decided to enlist the church as a “junior partner” in its management of society. Political concessions to the church hierarchy were seen as a means of placating those sections of the masses who still looked to the church as their ideological divining rod. As a result, the role of the church in Polish society was qualitatively expanded. The government provided financial support through salaries for priests and funds for church construction. Church-run schools from kindergarten to the university level were not only permitted but supported by the workers’ state. A whole Catholic intellectual life expressed through daily newspapers, journals, and cultural institutions flourished from 1956 until today. In short, Catholicism remained the “unofficial state religion” and the goal of winning the masses to science and atheism was effectively surrendered.

Undoubtedly the pragmatist orientation of the PUWP leadership explained and justified this terrible arrangement. The party retained effective control over the economy and the state. In exchange, the church was given free rein in the realm of ideology. For the Catholic Church in Poland, besieged and suppressed for centuries, this was an offer too good to refuse, for it has never underestimated the power of ideology. Naturally, as the church extended its ideological influence among the masses, the price it exacted from the communists for promoting social peace and cooperation continued to go up. By the time the latest crisis unfolded, the Catholic Church had matured into a sophisticated political organization and was well-positioned to begin to operate in a more explicitly counter-revolutionary fashion which it quickly commenced to do through the personages of Lech Walesa and other leading figures in Solidarity. Meanwhile the international bourgeoisie knows full well that the existence of a Polish Pope is viewed in Poland as the highest and most significant national achievement in the long history of the Polish nation—a sobering and paradoxical expression of intense bourgeois nationalism in a socialist country and in the era of proletarian internationalism. Indeed, the Catholic Church in Poland has thrived under the opportunist benevolence of the PUWP!

2. Negative Concessions to Petty Commodity Production

While we live in a small-peasant country, there is a firmer economic basis for capitalism in Russia than for communism. ... Anyone who has carefully observed life in the countryside, as compared with life in the cities, knows that we have not torn up the roots of capitalism and have not undermined the foundation, the basis, of the internal enemy. The latter depends on small-scale production, and there is only one way of undermining it, namely, to place the economy of the country, including agriculture, on a new technical basis, that of modern large-scale production.[\[6\]](#)

This observation of Lenin made shortly after the Bolshevik Revolution has a universal significance for the tasks of socialist construction in agriculture. The failure to grasp this truth is, in our view, at the heart of the Polish crisis.

The main political difficulty bound up with the peasant question in the context of the proletarian revolution is that the main thrust of the class struggle in the countryside could be more precisely defined in a number of countries as the struggle against feudalism (or at least powerful feudal remnants) rather than as the struggle against capitalism. In such countries, the demand of the peasants who (given their numbers, etc.) had to be enlisted as allies of the proletariat, was not for socialism but for land. The realization of this demand, however, implies the proliferation of small, private plots and small-scale production. It also inevitably leads to a drop in the production of agricultural commodities since the peasants, now having their own plots, using relatively primitive methods on a narrowly circumscribed land base, directly consume a larger portion of their production than previously. In short, it results in a primitive form of capitalist commodity production.

The harnessing of agriculture to a socialist economy cannot proceed under such conditions no matter what country it is; although the process and the tempo of the

transformation from a private to a collective economy in agriculture is first and foremost a political question, extremely diverse from one country to another.

The problem confronting most of the Eastern European countries, especially Poland, was that, on the one hand, the full flowering of socialist construction required the elimination of a peasant-based, small-scale agriculture and its replacement by large-scale production based on state and collective farms. On the other hand, most peasants in Poland were far from enthusiastic about the prospects for collectivization. The Polish peasants were further reinforced in this outlook by the Catholic Church which saw in the transformation of the peasantry the erosion of its own social base.

As a result, the process and tempo of the changeover from private to collective agriculture had to proceed with considerable delicacy requiring a deft combination of ideological work by the party and step-by-step practical experience demonstrating that the majority of peasants as individuals (not as a class) would be far better off under socialist relations in agriculture.