

Poland: towards a showdown

'...A fresh upsurge of the revolution in the USSR will undoubtedly begin under the banner of the struggle against social inequality and political oppression... The struggle for the freedom of trade unions and the factory committees, for the right of assembly and for the freedom of the press, will unfold in the struggle for the regeneration and development of Soviet democracy.'

The Transitional Programme

THE MOVEMENT of the Polish workers over the last eight months has once again confirmed Trotsky's perspective for the political revolution. And, unlike the shortlived movements of 1970-1 and 1976 in Poland itself, or the upheavals in Hungary and Czechoslovakia, the Polish movement has now unfolded with increasing breadth for nearly eight months.

As Poland's external debt mounted and exports faltered, the bureaucracy had turned to an even more direct attack on the workers' living standards.

While workers were bound hand and foot, hindered from fighting back by the bureaucratic police state unions, and unable to have their voice heard in a press and mass-media censored into a morass of lies, the inequalities between the 'Communist' Party flunkies and the mass of workers increased.

For the Polish workers, it was a stark prospect of physical and moral degradation. But that working class, over the last decade, had shown its capacity to fight back. It had not won outright, but it had toppled a government, it had forced the bureaucracy to retreat, and most important it had developed leaders from its own ranks. Uniquely for a Stalinist state, those leaders had been able to organise in a limited way, discuss, and publish papers. The repression was severe, but not completely crushing.

Last summer the explosion occurred. Workers struck against the withdrawal of foodstuff subsidies. The bureaucrats initially tolerated the strikes, and even encouraged them by speedy concessions. They hoped to provide a safety valve for the anger against the food price rises. They miscalculated. The workers sensed their strength. The sit-in strikes along the Baltic coastline were the climax of the earlier waves of strikes and occupations, and also represented a more radical departure.

The 21 demands formulated by the Lenin shipyard workers were no longer simply to do with wage increases, but posed explicitly political demands. Above all, the previous experience of the bureaucrats reneging on agreements made the workers determined to insist on their own independent organisations to safeguard and extend their victories. This was the most bitterly contested of all the issues at the negotiating table.

Solidarnosc is now perhaps the largest single union organisation in the world. Through a series of partial confrontations with an obstructive and recalcitrant bureaucracy, it has succeeded in toppling governments and ministers, replaced local apparatchiks, and achieved

its official registration as a legal entity. It is clearly seen by the overwhelming mass of the oppressed in Poland as the only true representative of their interests.

Within the few months of its existence, it has gained a legitimacy in the eyes of the workers which no Stalinist institution can ever have claimed to have. Even if its leaders intend it to be 'only a trade union', it is in fact an opposition political party.

Its existence and its unshakeable popular support have thrown the Stalinists into disarray. Leaderships come and go, the internecine conflict between different factions in the leadership gets worse, and the clamour of the CP's rank and file for greater democratisation and a special Party Congress meets deaf ears. Such a Congress, the leaders know, would wreck the 'unity' of the CP.

Although the CP is not a political party in any real sense, but a bureaucratic/police apparatus, its large membership among workers means that ferment and revolt are expressed in the CP's ranks too, seriously weakening the CP as an instrument of police-state rule.

Yet the formation of Solidarnosc, and the substantial victories it has gained, was also a defensive retreat from the possibilities opened up during the summer strikes.

A national trade union structure whose aim is to barter within the existing system is a step backwards from the Inter Factory Committees (MKS) which the workers had thrown up over the summer.

These workers' councils, on the Baltic, in Silesia, in every major urban and industrial centre of the country, grouped millions of workers, from factory committees right up to larger regional councils. They represented the beginnings of an alternative genuine workers' state power, contesting the political might of the Stalinists.

The fear of Russian intervention (many strike-hit regions were only miles from the Russian border), the bitter memories of the massacres in Gdansk in 1970 and the defeats of the Hungarian and Czechoslovak workers, held the Polish workers in check.

So the road of piecemeal reform favoured by the Solidarnosc leadership seemed more appealing.

Solidarnosc's strategy is apparently to try and allay the fears of the Polish bureaucrats, by insisting somewhat unconvincingly on their non-political and purely 'trade unionist' nature. Meanwhile they contest partial struggles, and with every victory they whittle down the bureaucrats' power even more. At the same time they bring international pressure to bear, through foreign trade union confederations, the Polish diaspora, and the Church, and hope to avoid an intervention.

This strategy requires keeping the mass movement within bounds so that the situation does not immediately become too desperate for the Stalinists. It is not at all clear that this is possible. The impatience of the rank and file has already on occasions outstripped the moderation of the leaders.

But most dubious is the idea that a

fairly lengthy 'transition' period of ever-great democratisation is possible, and that the USSR will count the cost of direct intervention to be too great.

The Party cannot allow the uncertainty which surrounds its existence to continue indefinitely. Its political system cannot accommodate even ordinary trade union bargaining. Nor can the Russians allow the contagion of Poland to spread without decisive action to stop it. A showdown is clearly mapped out. The situation must either be resolved in favour of the Stalinists and the Western bankers, or in favour of the workers.

Thus the perspective of political revolution is not 'adventurist', but the only road forward for the Polish workers to safeguard the precious conquests they have gained so far.

The beguiling suggestions, coated in nationalist rhetoric, about 'social peace' and greater discipline, which the new prime minister is trying to peddle, will be rejected by a working class which has been excluded from any effective control of the economy. Responsibility for the economic chaos rests squarely with the Stalinists.

A complete end to the secrecy surrounding economic decisions is necessary. Only the working class, by its active involvement in the planning of the national economy according to its own class needs, can prevent economic disaster and eliminate the parasitism of the bureaucracy.

Factory committees, housewives' committees, and committees of consumers must plan the allocation of resources. The foreign debt, which the Stalinists and the bankers are using as a stone round the neck of the workers, must be repudiated.

For a real debate to occur, and information to be spread as widely as possible, an end to censorship is essential. The Party's monopoly of the media must be smashed, permitting free access by the workers to newspapers, radio and television.

All workers' and peasants' parties must be free to operate.

The advanced workers must forge a worker-peasant alliance, and support trade union recognition for the small farmers and rural workers. Worker-farmer committees should allocate supplies and determine agricultural prices beneficial to both workers and the small producers.

All the oppressed in Poland must find their voice and representation in workers' councils, the basis of a new democratic socialist Poland. Under the leadership of a new, revolutionary, genuinely communist party, the political power and social monopoly of the bureaucrats must be completely broken, their privileges abolished, their apparatus smashed. The violent resistance of the bureaucrats and their Kremlin paymasters must be met by the armed force of the workers and peasants, backed up by an appeal to the international working class, and above all the workers of the East European states, to defend the Polish revolution.

ALEXIS CARRAS