



Solidarnosc protest against the referendum

Solidarnosc after the referendum

THE JARUZELSKI regime wants to begin the so-called second stage of the economic reform, which it proposed after the semi-official recognition of the failure of the first stage, launched after December 1981.

It wants to introduce market mechanisms into the economy on a very broad scale. The beginning of this, according to the regime, is necessarily a substantial sacrifice by the population — big price rises on essentials.

But even some official institutions have expressed reservations on this programme. In particular, the Social and Economic Commission of the Parliament has expressed the opinion that the conditions for such measures now are extremely unfavourable. It points to the danger of negative reactions from the workers and the population in general.

The Commission for Economic Reform — a group of economists chosen by the regime — had a stormy discussion on the programme. Many economists criticised the plan as inadequately worked out.

So there is a negative reaction to the regime's project even in the circles closest to it. And the groups I have mentioned are not the most conservative sectors of the bureaucracy. They are supporters of market-oriented economic reform who are warning the regime that the social situation is unfavourable for such reform.

Through the referendum the regime

On 29 November, Poland voted in a referendum on the government's market-oriented economic reforms.

The first question asked: 'Are you for the full realisation of the programme of radical cure for the economy submitted to Parliament that aims for a clear improvement in living conditions, being aware that this will mean going through a difficult two to three year period of rapid change?' The second was: 'Do you declare yourself in favour of the Polish model for the deep democratisation of political life, the aim of which is to strengthen self-government, to broaden citizens' rights, and to increase their participation in running the country?'

What they meant was this: the government was planning to increase prices drastically. To avoid rebellion, it tried to tie the price rises to liberal reform and to get a referendum vote in favour of the package.

In the event, 60-odd per cent of voters said 'Yes' to each question, but, with a lot of people not voting, that made less than the 50 per cent of the whole electorate which the government wanted.

The banned Solidarnosc trade union movement had called for a boycott of the referendum.

Here ZBIGNIEW KOWALEWSKI, a former leader of the left wing of Solidarnosc now living in exile, analyses the background to the referendum and the current position of Solidarnosc.

wanted to get a stamp of approval from society. It said that if the people would ac-

cept sacrifices, the reforms would not only get Poland out of its economic crisis but

cure all the effects of the crisis within three or four years. If the sacrifices were not accepted, then redressment would take longer — ten years or so. It was blackmail.

The regime was also trying to win the favours of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund — who, indeed, seem very enthusiastic about the government's programme.

Solidarnosc's leaders are also in favour of market-oriented economic reform. But they called for a boycott of the referendum. The regime tried to use this situation to say: 'We are trying to carry out a reform very similar to what the Solidarnosc leaders have been calling for. But they call for a boycott. These are not serious people. They are just trouble-makers and demagogues'.

The Solidarnosc leaders called for a boycott for two reasons. First: the government's programme meant, in the first place, big price rises — and only that! It meant a big cut in living standards, and there is a large part of the population in Poland which is on the margins of poverty. It is one thing for the leaders of Solidarnosc to make declarations in favour of market economic reform, and another thing to suffer a big attack on the living standards of the working class. Against that, there was a clear class reaction. Solidarnosc is a workers' movement, after all.

The second reason is that the Solidarnosc leaders have a position that a market-oriented economic reform is desirable, but it is *unrealisable* under the present political system. Real political democratisation has to come before economic reform.

It is good that Solidarnosc called for a boycott. But the Solidarnosc leaders have made a lot of propaganda in favour of market-oriented economic reforms, and that may have limited the scope of the boycott.

Support for market-oriented economic reforms exists not only among Solidarnosc's leaders but also in the rank and file. A whole series of sociological studies done in recent years have shown that — and the sociological institutes in Poland have had real autonomy for some time. They do real objective research.

According to them, the sectors which oppose the bureaucracy most strongly and most clearly support Solidarnosc are skilled workers in large-scale industry, technicians, and specialists with university education.

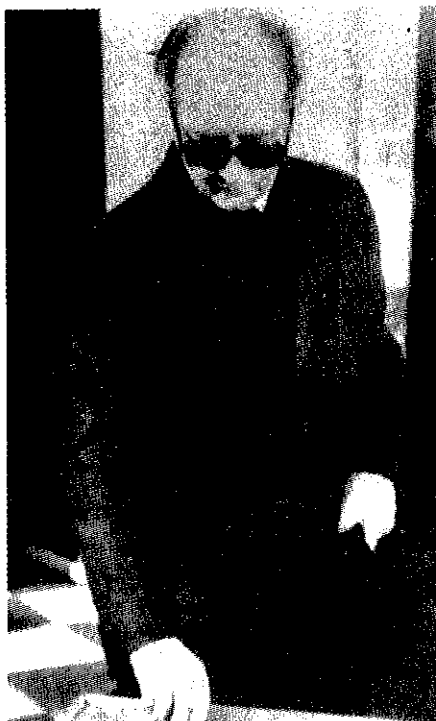
In this social base there is also strong support for market-oriented economic reforms. But support for egalitarian demands is weaker than in the worse-off sections of the working class. These more highly-qualified workers tend to support pay differentials and the idea that better, more qualified workers should have better wages.

They feel that they could achieve a high level of productivity, but they are blocked by the economic situation, the condition of the industrial plant, and so on. The sociologists call it an aspiration to

'meritocracy' in these sectors.

But the demand for a market-oriented economic reform from these workers is not necessarily very serious. It is very contradictory when those workers demand the elimination of superfluous workers in the factories and uneconomic factories but — as the sociological studies found — they absolutely oppose unemployment. The sociologists reckon that all the talk about market economics is a way of using economic language to express political opposition, and should not be taken at face value.

But the most fundamental reason for



Jaruzelski casts his vote

workers supporting market economics is that the economic system in Poland and elsewhere in Eastern Europe is seen today by the workers as a system in ruins. It is identified as 'the planned economy', so workers see this as the bankruptcy of 'the planned economy'. They do not see any positive example of a planned economy anywhere in the world, so workers turn to what seems to be more rational and more productive and to give a higher standard of living — the Western market economies.

For socialists in the West and in the East, it is very important to understand this. In the past, the 'planned economy' of the Soviet Union was a positive reference for large sections of the working class in the West. In Poland today, the workers see that 'planned economy' as finished — bankrupt everywhere.

This was true in 1980-1, on a smaller scale than today; but we must not see it through ideological spectacles. In 1981 I came across workers' councils in many factories with programmes where point 1 said 'The enterprise should be autonomous and work for profit', and point 2, that the output of the enterprise should be determined by social need!

It's difficult to know exactly how Polish workers see the Western market economies. My impressions are limited. But it seems that there are big illusions.

An average Polish worker sees Western capitalism as West Germany, France, Britain, or the US, not Bolivia. Its main attraction is political democracy — pluralism, trade-union freedom, and so on. Polish workers also see a much higher level of mass consumption in the Western market economies. The difference in levels of consumption is bigger than the difference in general level of industrial development. The Polish workers are absolutely right about this: there is permanent under-investment in the consumer goods industries, the quality of the goods is very bad, and the poverty has got worse in recent years with the economic crisis.

Polish workers distrust the information they get from the official press about unemployment and so on in the West. Such propaganda is discredited, because the official press has always said the same thing about mass unemployment in the West, even when there was in fact relatively full employment. When Poles began to travel to the West, following the liberalisation in the late '50s, the official line was discredited in their eyes by what they saw for themselves.

Polish workers are beginning to become aware that there really is mass unemployment in the West now, but the awareness lags behind the reality. Many Polish workers have travelled to the West to try to find work and have been disillusioned.

There is a minority in the Solidarnosc leadership which does not support market-oriented economic reforms. Over the last year or so a 'syndicalist' current has re-emerged. These are worker-leaders of Solidarnosc, including leaders from 1980-1, who have the following position: Perhaps market-oriented economic reforms would be a good thing, but that's an abstraction. We can't do anything about it anyway. If there is economic reform in Poland, it will be carried out in the interests of the regime and not of a socially useful economic revival. We should not get involved. We can only discuss economic reforms usefully when there is democracy. Solidarnosc's job today is not to advocate economic reforms but to defend the immediate material interests of the workers.

This 'syndicalist' current exists in a scattered form, but sections of it have begun to express themselves collectively at a national level since September 1986, in particular in a letter signed by 21 former members of the national leadership of Solidarnosc. They spoke of a danger of Solidarnosc losing its working-class base through its passivity on workers' immediate material demands.

The 'syndicalist' current also identifies itself with the international workers' movement. It says that the current leadership, with its passivity on workers' immediate material demands, prejudices Solidarnosc's legitimacy in relation to the international trade union movement.

So this is a current which expresses an

elementary workers' class-consciousness. It is highly aware of something which is also noted in the sociologists' studies, that the lack of a sliding scale of wages [automatic wage rises in line with the cost of living] is the most explosive factor in Polish society today.

Members of this current argue that since martial law Solidarnosc's activity has tended to centre on the promotion of independent culture — the independent press and publishing and so on — activities chiefly concerning intellectuals. The workers in Solidarnosc have been reduced to the position of passive consumers of this independent culture.

They say that Solidarnosc is not recruiting enough among young workers, and this is a worry shared by much wider sections of Solidarnosc. Youth — mostly non-working-class youth — are a major source of political activity in Poland today, but mostly outside Solidarnosc, in the pacifist/ecologist movement Peace and Freedom. This movement is much more visible on the streets than Solidarnosc.

The socialist or Marxist left in Solidarnosc is very weak today. In 1983-4 we first saw a sort of left regroupment in Solidarnosc — a current which identified itself more or less with social democracy, or, more precisely, the old Polish Socialist Party, traditionally the dominant force in the Polish workers' movement.

In the same period, 1983-4, a very limited current also emerged further to the left, identifying itself with the revolutionary left.

The 'social-democratic' current then moved to the right, but now it seems to be moving back to the left, identifying with the Polish workers' movement of the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century — a period when Polish social democracy was much more left-wing and militant than it later became. This current is represented primarily by the group which publishes the journal 'Robotnik' ('Worker').

The revolutionary left current has had a very severe crisis in the last year, and is much more limited now. But it still exists.

The left in the West needs to have a clear position on the nature of a movement like Solidarnosc as a whole. It is a workers' movement. It should be supported irrespective of the ideological declarations of its leaders or even of its activists. At every major political turning-point, this working-class character of the movement makes its mark — as over the referendum, for example.

The left in the West needs to understand that all the ideological confusions that exist in movements like Solidarnosc are the product of Stalinism. They are the product of the bankruptcy of what is called 'actually existing socialism', in a world where there is no positive socialist alternative to be seen by those who mobilise against the bureaucratic regime.

We must not centre our analysis on the economic reform projects supported by Solidarnosc's leaders and forget the Polish revolution of 1980-1.

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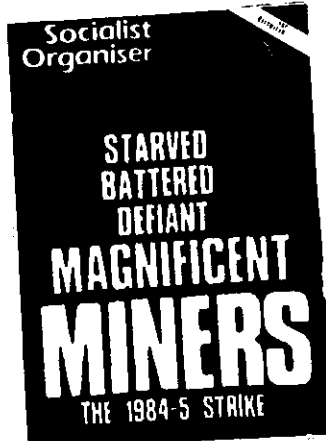
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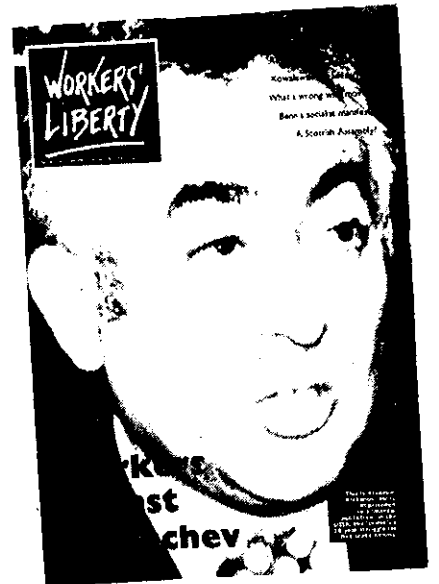
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