Various Authors
Poland, 1982
January 10, 1982

Scanned from a 22 by 28 inch poster designed and folded to resemble a roadmap.
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of this, the "Polish experiment" should inspire further experiments — experiments in going beyond the existing framework of things, beyond the domination of things and those who administer their production. A genuine renewal of social possibilities cannot occur within only one country; it requires international perspectives and actions. In the meantime, it is not a question of lighting candles but of setting fire to the structures, routines and authority which imprison contemporary life.

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> "We are now in an interim period, moving from anarchy and poverty on the way to order and overcoming the crisis."
> — Radio Warsaw 12/18/81

> "Many Western bankers privately applauded the move because they believe the army's action will end the political impasse that has developed between the government and Solidarity and that has paralyzed the economy."
> — *Business Week* 12/28/81

> "The resistance, like the movement that led to the now-suspended Solidarity union, has come from the workers themselves."
> — *The New York Times* 12/24/81

I

The current suppression of the Polish workers' movement has assumed the proportions of a global tragedy: the radical dissidence of an entire class is being eliminated by military power. This loss is made doubly tragic by the cynical use to which it has been put by the forces of order everywhere. While the soldiers of General Jaruzelski impose "normalization" at gun-point, Commander-in-Chief Reagan has mobilized his ideological troops in an attempt to turn the defeat of Polish workers into a victory for the "free" world, whose superiority has supposedly been demonstrated by the army's coming to power in Warsaw. As if on cue, the American media intone a dirge about the descent of "darkness" in Poland, while conveniently turning a blind eye to the night of authoritarian domination which reigns internationally — and as an international system.

That righteous indignation of American authorities is quite calculated: while Reagan and Haig piously denounce the violation of human rights in Poland, they actively assist in the murderous repression of workers and peasants in El Salvador and Guatemala. But duplicity about the Polish events does not end with such obvious examples. Poland has suddenly become all things to all people, and the word "Solidarity" drops from the lips of the most unlikely mouths, from tired AFL-CIO bureaucrats to the power brokers of the Italian Communist Party. Ideologists more sophisticated than the White House speech-writers decry the abuses of authorities in both Poland and elsewhere as they attempt without any trace of irony to link their own reformist projects to the cause of Polish workers, a connection that conveniently ignores the truth that these same rebellious workers often challenged Solidarity's reformist leadership. Other liberals find it necessary to be even more judicious: they deplore Jaruzelski's crackdown while also regretting the "excesses" of Solidarity.

It is precisely the importance of what has been taking place in Poland during the past 16 months that is lost in this loud chorus of "concern" and "outrage." If the silence of Polish workers, students and intellectuals has been ensured by tanks and mass arrests, the silence here is no less deafening about a crucial fact: Polish strikers have been engaged in a struggle for an alternative society, one different from both the imperial "rationality" of Western capitalism and the state capitalism of Eastern "socialism." The Polish movement has been an inspiration to the extent that, however tentatively and confusedly, it broke the conformist mold of social organization in the world. Its defeat is a matter that involves not simply the fate of the "Polish nation," which showed itself to be divided like all other nations, but the way people live everywhere. Now, as Polish workers are physically prevented from speaking for themselves, it is not a question of speaking on their behalf but of confronting the implications of what they have already done. The shortcomings of the Polish movement — and the role of Solidarity in its defeat — are no less important to analyze.

The declaration of a "state of war" on December 13th only gave official status to the social war that has been taking place in Poland for over a year, a war fought essentially between workers and the bureaucratic class which rules over them in their name. The military solution now being pursued by Jaruzelski is an attempt to forcibly put an end to this conflict and to do so on behalf of the bureaucracy, even though the latter may have had to surrender some of its formal authority. The present Military Council of National Salvation has made clear what it intends to save: state power. That power will be preserved even if it has to be reduced to the most primitive administrative machinery, that of the state-in-arms.

evidence of an equally instructive refusal to submit to authority. This resistance is no more due to the "Polish spirit" than the conflict itself can be said to concern only Poles.

If the struggle which has been taking place in Polish factories, mines and shipyards has yet to find an echo in Eastern Europe and the USSR — where authorities have successfully turned Polish nationalism against itself — the international repercussions of this movement have not ended. Polish workers themselves refer to their go-slow disruptions of production as "Italian strikes," showing an implicitly internationalist recognition of forms of rebellion elsewhere. Others may come to emulate Polish workers and not simply in terms of tactics. Even in. the U.S., where events in Poland have been viewed by many as those involving a remote place of poverty and hardship, Polish-style realities and aspirations may be brought closer to home.

As Polish workers contradict Jaruzelski's announcement of a glorious "return to work," the ideas and experience of their movement have become a force in the world. However much interpreters elsewhere attempt to discredit or manipulate the legacy of the Polish rebellion, its content cannot be entirely repressed and its issues and conflicts remain at the center of social history everywhere. It is fitting that there is similarity in the views on Poland advanced by leaders East and West: Brezhnev accuses the Polish workers of wanting to "restore capitalism"; Reagan seeks to reduce their movement to the level of a militant Junior Chamber of Commerce, declaring "their cause is ours." In both cases, the antiauthoritarian dimensions of the Polish movement are deliberately censored. Yet, in their actions, in their expression of a desire to assume direct control over the social world that dominates them, the participants in this rebellion challenged capitalism, both corporate and bureaucratic. It was not simply Leninism which was buried by the workers of the Lenin shipyard in Gdansk. The assertion by Polish workers of their collective power was also the explicit negation of private enterprise.

The immediate conditions of life in Poland today — material privation and powerlessness — are reproduced in varying degrees throughout the world. As the current crisis of advanced capitalist economies intensifies and is internationalized, austerity and discipline will be the order of the day, arid will inaugurate the day of order, everywhere. In the face and nationalist components seem ironic. Not only was the counterrevolution conducted by a Polish army and its general, who until then had appeared as a "patriot" in the view of Solidarity, the Church was the first to counsel appeasement and compromise in the face of the military occupation it rhetorically condemned.

IV

In view of the present forced conscription of the Polish workforce, Jaruzelski's assurances about the continuation of "renewal" acquire a different significance. What is being renewed in Poland is a violent, direct form of class conflict. While the possibility of an eventual understanding between a rehabilitated Solidarity and a demilitarized government cannot be ruled out, and Jaruzelski may yet borrow from the repression-and-reform school of Tito and Kadar and indeed create a "new model" in Poland, such an outcome depends on a semblance of popular legitimacy for state power, a credibility which would appear to be forfeited at present. Rather, the imposition of "normalcy" in Poland more resembles the "sanitizing" operations conducted by other military regimes from Argentina to Turkey, and the shouts of "Gestapo!" which greeted security forces seem all the more appropriate given the government's crude use of anti-Semitic themes against its opponents. The desperation of the authorities is such that among the ruins in contemporary Poland can be found not only the collapse of the economy but the complete disintegration of official ideology. It is the argument of force — and not the force of argument — which is persuasive in Poland today.

Jaruzelski's stabilization measures also reveal something of the general methods of state power in the present era and the possibilities of opposing them. The relative speed with which the Polish military secured its initial objectives showed the fatal consequences which await a revolutionary movement which is unarmed and demobilized on a practical level, being incapable of organizing and coordinating its own defense because it has ceded power to its so-called "representatives." At the same time, the resistance of workers and students in Gdansk, of miners in Silesia, and the generalized sabotage conducted against military rule are

In an unthinking homage to Trotsky's concept of "war communism," Polish Stalinists have resorted to the militarization of society and the brutal reimposition of a command economy.

II

Jaruzelski's enforcement of a labor discipline in which workers are presented with the alternative of work or death seeks to resolve the twin crises of Polish state capitalism, those of social power and economic production. The two are obviously and necessarily related: now, as in 1980, 1976 and 1970, the real barrier to the accumulation of capital in Poland appears as the resistance of Polish workers themselves to austerity and authority. Moreover, as a result of the increased integration of the Polish economy (via massive indebtedness and a dependency on Western export markets) within world capitalism, the Polish workers face another set of masters in the form of Western banks. Thus, if the present conflict in Poland is most certainly a social conflict, it is also a graphic manifestation of economic crisis.

However much the current struggle takes place — on both sides — under nationalist banners, its global context is crucial to its outcome. Jaruzelski's power is clearly circumscribed by factors outside Poland, namely, the power of his Russian superiors and Western creditors; but the fate of the Polish workers' movement is equally an international question. Polish workers face a material scarcity that, in addition to being the result of the inept policies of the bureaucracy, is concretely related to the cycles of international capitalism. And an eventual victory of the Polish opposition — beyond a mere reform of the existing power structure — could only be achieved through an internationalization of its struggle. Such a prospect, unlikely as it seems in the immediate situation of repression, puts into question the nature of Solidarity, the role of the Church and all the traditional characteristics of the Polish movement.

III

As the battle between the Polish opposition and authority enters its decisive phase, it is already fashionable in the Western press to lament the fact that the workers went "too far." This argument is contradicted both by the actual history of the workers' movement and by the unfolding of the current crisis. If anything, the official actions of Solidarity, including Walesa's prior negotiations with Jaruzelski about a "National Council of Understanding" and the interventions of Solidarity's national leadership against unsanctioned strikes, prepared the way for a defeat of Polish workers by disarming them in the face of a state offensive seeking to suspend the right to strike itself. This took place on both a figurative and literal level: in words, Solidarity's leadership promoted an exaggerated image of the strength of the workers' movement; in acts, it weakened the effective force of that movement.

In the months before December 13th, Solidarity's national executive was engaged in a double maneuver involving at once the disciplining of its own rank and file and the attempt on the part of the leadership to achieve legitimized power for itself in relation to the party and state. Thus, while it appeared "radical" in its ultimatums to the government, the Solidarity leadership moved to contain any autonomous action on the part of its members and directly opposed wildcat strikes and occupations such as that of the women textile workers of Zyrardow in October, 1981. If the army eventually arrives at an accommodation with a collaborationist wing of Solidarity, it will know with whom it is dealing.

The failure of the Polish movement cannot be attributed to a simple "betrayal," however; it resulted from a situation that had been developing for a long time. The period following the mass strikes of the Polish Summer of 1980 had already seen the development of Solidarity's organizational structure and the consolidation of its official leadership. Although this phenomenon was much heralded in the West as the emergence of a "free trade union," behind the rise of official Solidarity lay a significant erosion of the directly democratic power of the workers who had initiated the entire Polish movement. In the interval between the appearance of the first Inter-factory Strike Committee (MKS) in August, 1980 and the ratification of Walesa's leadership in its September, 1981 congress, Solidarity

had become an institution with its own elite, a counter-power rivaling the weakened party apparatus. Solidarity viewed itself as the official medium, as the only conduit, for change in Poland and acted as such. This pretended monopoly proved to be double-edged.

As long as Solidarity could function effectively as a trade union, i.e., as long as it could deliver the working class, the party was ready to recognize Solidarity in its role of official opposition. When Solidarity could no longer completely control its constituency, and when certain of its leaders wanted more power vis-a-vis the state, it became expendable in the state's eyes. The ensuing "Operation Three Circles," moreover, was directed not only against Solidarity but against all those — workers, students, intellectuals — who might contest existing authority. Jaruzelski's coup has been less a move against Solidarity's trade unionist aspirations as it has one against those in Solidarity's rank and file who saw it as a mass movement of social transformation.

Although the remnants of Solidarity have undoubtedly constituted the major part of the current resistance to the military regime in Poland, and despite the uncertain status of the actual organization itself, few illusions should persist about official Solidarity. It can be seen as an unstable formation which ultimately failed in its attempt to mediate that which could not be mediated, namely the conflict between Polish workers and the state. From the beginning, Solidarity's project of "renewal" presented contradictory aspects: Solidarity's leadership in alliance with the intellectuals of KSS-KOR sought to subsume the workers' rebellion under the reformist program of a "self-managed republic" in which a democratized civil society would coexist with the party; meanwhile, much of Solidarity's base pursued a more radical aim — the immediate and direct extension of an alternative social power in Poland. As the Polish conflict deepened in the latter part of 1981, workers proposed to administer social production themselves and undertook action against the state on their own initiative.

Even at its most radical, however, there were severe limitations to this movement: the real influence of Catholic and nationalist ideology allowed a genuinely right-wing element (associated with the Confederation for Independent Poland, KPN) to flourish within the confusion of Solidarity. In the aftermath of the events of December 13th, such Catholic