

EDITORIAL

Solidarity

The “martial law” operation of mid-December 1981 that robbed Poles of the meagre rights they had struggled for was a triumph for the Soviet Union. At a stroke, the most severe internal threat to Marxist-Leninist rule and legitimacy that has arisen since the 1920s was extinguished. Moreover, the skilful operation, internal at least in appearance, achieved the primary Soviet aim at minimal cost. West Europe was disturbed in its sleep, but not awoken, so the process of subversion there through peace offensive and pressure continues. Moreover, divided Western reactions have been exploited by Moscow to weaken Alliance cohesion, while Soviet propaganda eases liberal consciences by shifting the blame onto Solidarity’s “unreasonableness”, Radio Free Europe and, of course, the CIA. Poland, it is argued, is in no worse condition now than Turkey, and Polish workers are lucky to have escaped the cruelties inflicted on striking American air traffic controllers. Whether or not these absurdities are really believed by Western audiences is immaterial. In Canada, as elsewhere, selfish people automatically adopt comforting fantasy in preference to disturbing reality. Evidently, we have our full share of selfishness.

For the Polish regime, the security crack-down had multiple aims. They wished first of all to reestablish the communist party in monopoly control of every aspect of national and private life. Since that party is in popular disgrace and organizational ruin, the Polish army has been made to front for it, thus confusing world opinion and diffusing domestic resistance. The army neither led nor conducted the operation: it merely provided a shield behind which the party’s surviving agents — the national police (*milicja*), the special police (ZOMO), and the KGB-controlled secret police (SB) — could go about their business. Their objectives have been to arrest, isolate, discredit and, if possible, compromise trade union leaders and those intellectuals formerly of the Committee of Social Self-Defence (KOR); to remove hope from people’s hearts and replace it with fear; to impose worker discipline and prevent strikes or occupations; and to block the passage of truth. So far they have not dared mount a full attack upon the Catholic Church, but considering the important role of that institution in Polish life, this may be only a matter of timing.

A second aim must be to turn Poland into a coherent, functioning state. This will require the *willing* cooperation of workers, the *efficient* operation of the bureaucracy, and continued Western economic assistance. It seems rather unlikely that a return to monopoly party rule can be compatible with the first two ingredients, yet the West is being urged by the regime, and by many observers, to provide its contribution now. There is urgent reason for private and non-governmental aid to the Polish people. As for governmental help, the West should surely wait for signs of power-sharing and organizational renewal before bolstering a regime that is blatantly hostile to its own people.

This continued hostility has thrown doubt on what was at first assumed to have been a third aim of the operation — the prevention of an otherwise inevitable Soviet invasion. We must ask ourselves whether General Jaruzelski acted for his people's sake out of fear of Soviet frightfulness, or used this fear for his own and his party's sake, as a justification for domestic repression. Since an internal security style operation served Moscow's wider interests so well, we can see that a deal may have been made. If this was the case, our leverage is greater than may have been thought. The West should stand together to persuade the Jaruzelski regime to restore free trade unions (not puppets) and freedom of speech and media, as prior conditions of help.

Solidarity was a labour union and it was also an inspiration. It provided a non-violent, effective means of opposition in a state where individuals counted for nothing, the party, everything. The union may be, for the time being, smashed, but the inspiration lives. Eighteen months ago, this Journal's editorial warned that "we can share the excitement of the (Polish) strikers' initial victory but, remembering that wars are won by the side which wins the last great battle, we cannot afford complacency".¹ Solidarity has suffered a severe reverse, but the last great battle upon which Poland's future hangs is being fought in the West. We have a bounden duty not to desert the Polish people in their time of need. This calls for solidarity on the part of the West, and the common decency to serve Poland's people, not her oppressors.

Footnote

1. Editorial: "The Struggle for Europe's Soul", in *Conflict Quarterly*, vol. 1, no. 2 (1980), p. 3.