

Poland 1981: Acid Test for Trotskyists

Theses on Solidarnosc

The following theses were adopted by the fusion conference of the Bolshevik Tendency and the Left Trotskyist Tendency.

1. Prior to its September 1981 Congress, Solidarnosc could not be characterized definitely; although the absence of a genuine Marxist leadership rooted in the proletariat, the identification of “socialism” with the policies of the discredited, privileged and anti-socialist Stalinist regime and the concomitant growth of clerical-nationalist sentiment, prepared the basis for its subsequent consolidation around a program and leadership committed to capitalist restoration.

2. The conduct of the leadership of Solidarnosc in preparation for the September 1981 Congress indicated its pro-capitalist character.

a) The draft program presented by Walesa & Co. in the 17 April 1981 issue of *Solidarnosc Weekly*, in effect, proposed to substitute market relations for centralized planning. This program was seemingly contradictory because the counterrevolutionary leadership had to take into account the aspirations of millions of Polish workers and Communist Party members who wanted to reform or smash Stalinism and keep the planned economy. Therefore the program was decorated with a bit of socialist rhetoric. It called for “workers control” (against the Stalinists) together with free market economics, clericalism and Polish nationalism.

b) The main programmatic document produced by the September Congress called for an end to the monopoly of foreign trade.

c) Lane Kirkland, head of the overtly pro-imperialist AFL-CIO and Irving Brown, a notorious CIA labor operative in Western Europe, were invited to the Congress while the Stalinist unions of the Eastern bloc were snubbed.

d) The Congress deliberately adopted the transitional slogans of imperialist counterrevolution in Eastern Europe: for “free elections” and “free trade unions” (i.e., anti-communist unions).

3. Taken in conjunction with the predominant influence of the anti-communist Catholic hierarchy within Solidarnosc; the growth of reactionary-nationalist, and even openly anti-Semitic currents; the pro-capitalist sentiments expressed by leading elements (e.g., Walesa’s comment that Reagan’s election in 1980 was a “good sign” for Poland) and the support extended to the demands of the small capitalists of Rural Solidarnosc; the September 1981 Congress must be seen as a confirmation of the political transformation of Solidarnosc into an organization openly supporting capitalist restoration. The question of defense of the working-class property forms, upon which the Polish economy rests, was therefore directly posed. The attitude of revolutionists toward Solidarnosc changed accordingly, i.e., to recognize that it had become necessary to suppress the restorationist leadership and its counterrevolutionary followers.

4. This is not to suggest that Trotskyists would wish to suppress the ten million workers affiliated to Solidarnosc—a large section of whom did not wish to return to the conditions of capitalist “free market” wage slavery, unemployment, etc. A Trotskyist organization in Poland in the fall of 1981 would have opposed intransigently the pro-capitalist course of Walesa & Co. while continuing to intervene in mass workplace meetings of Solidarnosc and in every other arena where it would be possible to get a hearing from the working class in order to crystallize a pro-socialist, anti-Stalinist opposition to the Solidarnosc tops.

5. It is an axiom of Marxism that social and political movements must be judged by their leadership, program, trajectory and class composition—not by the illusions of the base. The mass mobilizations against the Shah of Iran in 1978-79 provide a case in point. Despite the hopes and intentions of many thousands of Iranian workers and leftists who participated (as well as the sundry fake-Marxist currents which hailed this supposedly “objectively revolutionary” movement), the fact was that the leadership was firmly in the hands of the theocratic reactionaries around Ayatollah Khomeini. The objective contradiction between the base and the top indicates that a key task of Marxists was to struggle to shatter the illusions which the masses had in the eventual outcome of a movement with such a leadership and program and to rally the workers in opposition to the mullahs, as well as the Shah. Just as in Iran, revolutionary Marxists could not determine their orientation to events in Poland simply on the basis of hostility to those who currently hold power—it is also necessary to evaluate the positive program and direction of those leading the opposition.

6. The counterrevolutionary intention of the Solidarnosc leadership was unambiguously revealed for those not willfully blind by the events of the period immediately preceding Jaruzelski’s counter-coup:

a) the attempts to extend Solidarnosc into the military and police;

b) the open discussions of the necessity to overthrow the state at the meeting of Solidarnosc’s top leadership at Radom on December 3; and

c) the 12 December meeting in Gdansk of Solidarnosc leaders which proposed “holding a national referendum on their own on a vote of confidence in General Jaruzelski and for establishing a temporary non-communist government and holding free elections” (*New York Times*, 14 December 1981).

7. The fact that Solidarnosc was consolidated around a pro-capitalist leadership and program is eloquent testimony to the complete political bankruptcy of the anti-working class Stalinist parasites who, in over three decades of administering “socialism” in Poland, only succeeded in driving a large chunk of the working class

into the arms of nationalist/clerical reaction. While Trotskyists took an attitude of critical support to the 13 December military suppression of the counterrevolutionary threat posed by Solidarnosc, it was necessary to maintain an attitude of irreconcilability toward Jaruzelski and the rest of the Stalinist bureaucracy.

8. Had the USSR intervened (as was widely projected) in the fall of 1981, Trotskyists would have critically supported this for the same reason they critically supported the actions of the Polish Army in December of that year. We would have supported only the Soviet Army actions directed against Solidarnosc's restorationist leadership and their base—not the entire Polish working class.

9. Our support to the suppression of Solidarnosc by the bureaucrats extends only to those blows aimed at the counterrevolutionary sections of the union, particularly the pro-capitalist cadres of the leadership. Had there been meetings of anti-restorationist workers, we would oppose their suppression in the course of the crack-down. Bolsheviks would have no interest in supporting measures which would make it more difficult for the Polish working class to assemble, discuss politics and recompose politically. The hold of religious obscurantism, poisonous nationalism and pro-capitalist ideology over a large chunk of the membership of Solidarnosc can only be eradicated by the political intervention of genuine Marxists—not by Stalinist police measures. To this end, after the counter-coup, Trotskyists would have sought to preserve the limited political space won by the strikes of 1980-81.

10. The privileged bureaucrats of the Polish United Workers Party are chiefly interested in preserving and extending their own caste interests at the expense of the working class. In September 1939 Trotsky proposed that the Fourth International defend the Soviet Union against the impending Nazi attack under the slogan "For Socialism! For the World Revolution! Against Stalin!" With the

immediate danger of counterrevolution posed by Solidarnosc, it was the duty of Trotskyists to defend the socialized property upon which the deformed workers state is based while making it clear "just *what* we are defending, just *how* we are defending it, against *whom* we are defending it." Despite the fact that they are obliged, in the last analysis, to defend the organism upon which they are parasites against restorationist currents (which their bureaucratic misrule inevitably engenders), the Stalinist bureaucrats pose a mortal danger to the preservation of working-class property forms in Poland and in every other country they rule. The defense of the deformed and degenerated workers states is thus inextricably linked to the necessity of *proletarian political revolution* to smash the bureaucracy and police apparatus by revolutionary mass action.

Democratic Rights and the Political Revolution

The following motion was adopted by the BT/LTT fusion conference.

We support the right to assemble and strike by workers in the deformed and degenerated workers states as preconditions for the political revolution because this would allow the Trotskyist vanguard to intervene and mobilize the workers against the bureaucracy in the direction of the political revolution. However, the defense of the democratic rights of the workers to strike and assemble is subordinate to the defense of collectivized property. We fully endorse comrade Trotsky's formulation that:

"the question of overthrowing the Soviet bureaucracy is for us subordinate to the question of preserving state property in the means of production in the USSR; that the question of preserving state property in the means of production in the USSR is subordinate for us to the question of the world proletarian revolution."

—*In Defense of Marxism*