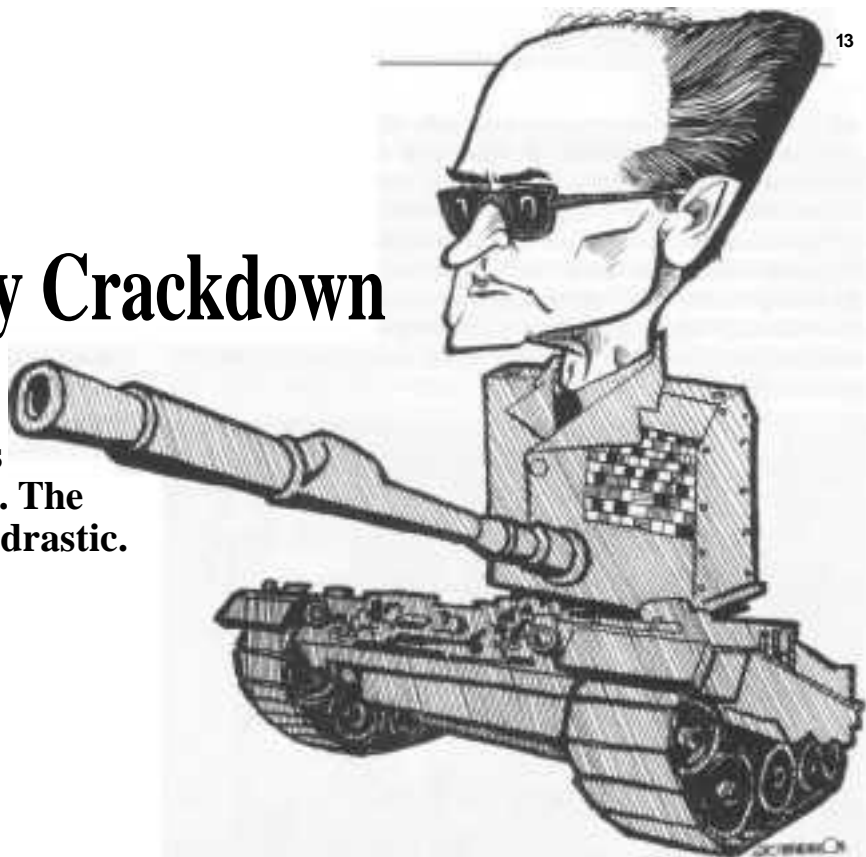


Monty Johnstone

Poland's Military Crackdown

The military have taken power in Poland. Never before has this happened in a socialist country. The implications for the Left are drastic.



The assumption of power on December 13 by General Jaruzelski and his Military Council of National Salvation brutally ended the process of democratic socialist renewal initiated by the workers' struggles of August 1980 and approved by the Polish United Workers' Party congress last summer.

For the first time since December 1970, the Polish army has shed the blood of Polish workers. Trade union activities and democratic rights have been suspended. Free movement and communications are restricted. Thousands of members of a legal trade union, Solidarity, are held prisoner without trial; others are threatened with dismissal from their jobs if they refuse to sign a document renouncing the union. Tens of thousands have been charged under martial law regulations, especially for exercising the right to strike; some have already been sentenced to years of imprisonment on this count. Once again hopes of seeing a combination of socialism and democracy have been cruelly dashed as they were in Czechoslovakia in August 1968 with the military intervention there. Predictably all this has played into the hands of Reagan, Thatcher and the imperialist forces who are using it not only hypocritically to attack socialism, but also to undermine detente.

At the time of writing (January 14) we do not know how long or in what form the 'state of war', in force for the last month, will continue. What has however been made abundantly clear is that Poland's military rulers only envisage making relaxations to the extent that they feel that they have crushed all effective opposition and 'normalised' the country. Moreover, whatever role may again be played by the Polish United Workers' Party — at present totally overshadowed by the military — or representative institutions — whose activities are officially suspended — the power of the army, which was already increasing before December 13, is liable to remain decisive.

Spokesmen for the Military Council allege that the declaration of martial law was necessary to forestall a counter-revolutionary coup and prevent civil war. No evidence is adduced for this claim, which is in fact totally at variance with the actual state of affairs prevailing in the country. Solidarity, at its congress in the autumn and in subsequent negotiations with the government, had increasingly pressed for free contested elections, enabling 'all political parties, social organisations and groups of citizens freely to put forward candidates'.¹ With the great majority of the

population supporting Solidarity and expressing lack of confidence in the PUWP, such elections would have been able to usher in the democratic changes desired by Solidarity. For Solidarity to have chosen under such circumstances to have organised a coup would have been utterly senseless. Indeed it is contradicted by a recent report in the PUWP daily, *Trybuna Ludu*, which spoke of the Solidarity National Commission meeting in Gdansk of December 12, the day before the proclamation of martial law, being preoccupied with items to be included in a national Solidarity referendum, a new electoral law and the making up of electoral lists.² Talk of the possibility of a new provisional government — however ill-considered — was clearly related to this rather than to plans for a coup. However the proximity of the local elections, due this February, and the fear of their outcome was no doubt an important factor in producing the only coup that actually took place — that of the generals on December 13, which appears to have secured the postponement of the elections.

The meeting of Walesa, Archbishop Glemp and General Jaruzelski opened up the prospect of a historical compromise between Solidarity, the Catholic Church, the government and the PUWP, which was the only possible basis for solving Poland's problems.³ Such an agreement, though requiring prolonged and difficult negotiations, was possible, but only if the Party had been prepared to relax its privileged positions of control over the state, industry and the media and make genuine concessions to Solidarity commensurate with the support given to it by the majority of Polish society. It is now clear that entrenched forces, backed by the Soviet leadership, were determined to block such concessions whatever the cost. Quite understandably, Solidarity was not ready to make the concessions entailed in entering the Front of National Accord proposed by the Party on the latter's terms with nothing of substance in return.

Breaking Solidarity

The decision of the Party's Central Committee at the end of November to

¹ Solidarity's Programme Resolution, Thesis 22/2, in BBC, *Summary of World Broadcasts*, Part 2 (Eastern Europe), 30 October 1981.

² *Morning Star*, 14 January 1982.

³ For a fuller analysis, see M Johnstone and A Westphal, 'The Polish Crisis: is there a way out?', *Marxism Today*, January 1982, pp 14-21.

ask the Sejm (Parliament) to suspend the right to strike effectively made such co-operation impossible. It came at a time when, following substantial efforts by Walesa in particular, there were no industrial workers on strike. However it is hardly surprising that Solidarity would not agree to the suspension of one of the most important rights recognised the previous year in the Gdansk Agreement. Moreover it was a fact that far more production was lost through shortages of spare parts and raw materials than through strikes, which according to official statistics had averaged only approximately one hour per Solidarity member during the previous year.



'If the workers had protested several years earlier, we wouldn't be in such a catastrophic economic mess. That's why the workers themselves bear direct responsibility for the country's present situation.'

(Andrzej Krauze, *Kultura*)

From then on the situation escalated, with the government on December 2 using force to end the sit-in by fire brigade cadets in Warsaw. The harder line from the Party and government strengthened the hand of the extremist forces in Solidarity, hitherto a minority, and forced Walesa to make concessions to them. This was the background to the meeting of the Solidarity leadership in Radom on December 3, of which edited tape recordings were broadcast with Walesa himself speaking in terms of confrontation. 'Radicals' like Bujak and Rulewski were heard talking of the need to organise workers' defence guards. This was however in a defensive not an offensive context — and one which, after December 13, was by no means to have shown itself to be so fanciful.

The military take-over, on the night of December 12-13, was said in the Polish press to have been occasioned by the decision of the Solidarity leadership, which had just been meeting in Gdansk, to organise a day of protest on December 17 'against the use of force in solving social conflicts'. (It has even been alleged that that was the day fixed for the 'counter-revolutionary coup'.) However the comprehensive and detailed nature of the martial law regulations immediately broadcast and posted up suggest that they had already been prepared well in advance.

The prime purpose of the proclamation of the 'state of war' was to break the back of Solidarity, which embraced 9.5 of the 12³/₄ million Polish workers, as a genuinely independent force. At the same time it was hoped to preserve Solidarity as an organisation with its wings clipped and its leadership purged performing strictly circumscribed functions not dissimilar to those undertaken before August 1980 by the former PUWP-controlled trade unions.

To this end the co-operation of Lech Walesa, with his great national and international standing, appears to have been counted on. Here, however, there was a serious miscalculation, for Walesa has refused such

co-operation and insisted that he will only speak to Poland's military rulers if he is joined by his colleagues in the Solidarity Presidium, most of whom have been interned. Nor has any other national Solidarity leader agreed to such co-operation. All reports indicate that, after the initial protest actions of industrial workers in a number of parts of the country, the mood is now one of sullen resentment from all the main sections of the population.

A dangerous new trend

The subordination of the Party to the military constitutes a new and dangerous phenomenon in a socialist state and makes a mockery of the talk of asserting the leading role of the Party, however this may be conceived. A month after the coup, there has been no meeting of the Party's Central Committee. The last one was held on November 27-28, and was concerned with approving proposals to be put to the meeting of the Sejm due to convene on December 15 (but subsequently cancelled by the coup). Hence it can safely be said that the decision to establish military rule was taken by Jaruzelski and a small group of leaders (mainly or exclusively in the armed forces) behind the back of the collective leadership of the Party. If, as is now suggested, a Central Committee meeting will soon be called, it will be confronted by an accomplished fact which it will be asked to approve. It will also be presented with the results of a purge now underway in the Party but which it has had no part in initiating. The Sejm itself, if it meets later this month, will likewise be faced with the consolidated power of the military.

This situation contains the elements of military rule of a Bonapartist type, classically analysed by Marx in his *Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*. He showed the tendency of the military, after having been extolled as the guardians of the existing order in a time of social unrest, eventually to 'hit upon the idea of rather saving society once and for all' and proclaiming a 'state of siege in their own interest and for their own benefit'.⁴

In Poland, which experienced the Bonapartist rule established by Marshal Pilsudski's coup in 1926, the army enjoyed very considerable prestige, as against the unpopularity of the PUWP. Moreover its efficient organisation contrasted with the ineffectiveness of the Party and with other branches of the state administration. We are already finding lipservice paid to the importance of the Party as an ideological and political force in society, and this will probably be emphasised more strongly. However the situation created by the December 13 coup is incompatible with any genuine increase in the Party's influence, which demands quite different conditions, so in practice the military are likely to remain *de facto* if not *de jure*, the dominant force in society for a considerable time. Such a situation is ideologically embarrassing for the Soviet leadership, which will however no doubt continue to give its blessing and support, since its overriding concern is for a strong leadership to hold Poland under firm control.

However, despite this support, which has already expressed itself in increased Soviet credits, reliable reports indicate that Poland's economic situation has deteriorated since December 13. The only aspect of the economic reform, which was due to come into operation from January 1, that is now being carried into effect is a reform of the price structure, in the shape of the quadrupling and even quintupling of the prices of important basic commodities and services.

Back to the monolithic state

General Jaruzelski and his administration speak of continuing the course of reform, but no more credence can be given to this than to similar declarations of intent to continue the 'January course' of democratic reform in Czechoslovakia after August 1968. The fact is that the whole operation is aimed at controlling, disciplining or suppressing the pluralistic structures and organisations that have developed in the last eighteen months. This has been made very clear by Jerzy Urbanski, head

of the Party Control Commission, who recently denounced political pluralism as a 'bourgeois concept'.⁵

Yet it was precisely the absence of political pluralism that was responsible for the repeated moves into the concentration and abuse of power that have characterised post-war Poland, as well as other socialist countries. Urbanski and his colleagues have indicated their intention, after martial law is repealed (and indeed as a condition for its repeal), of 'ruthlessly eliminating' from political life all 'opponents of our system'.⁵

Once again all social and political organisations will be subordinated to control from a single unchallengeable and irremovable centre, albeit this

Historical differences

The military coup in Poland and the differing reactions to it in the international Communist movement indicate, as in the case of Czechoslovakia in 1968, fundamentally different conceptions of socialism and its democratic content. This is not a new phenomenon. Already in Marx' and Engels' day there existed among Communists the two conceptions of socialism that we see today: the revolutionary-democratic and the paternalistic-monolithic, which has now acquired a new (but internally consistent) twist in associating itself with military rule. The League of Communists, which Marx and Engels joined in



photo: Peter Martin

centre may this time be army-dominated. People will once again be able to vote in elections — but only for a single approved list of candidates. Solidarity may even reappear legally on a ticket of good behaviour — if more of its members can be pressurised into repudiating it or signing loyalty pledges.

The paternalistic arrogance of the new regime is shown by the practised journalist, Wieslaw Gornicki, who donning a captain's uniform, has become a leading advisor to, and spokesman for, General Jaruzelski. Visiting Copenhagen to attend a meeting of the World Peace Council, he told a press conference there on January 6 that Walesa might once again be permitted to become a trade union leader, but was too uneducated to be allowed to play any part in politics! What kind of workers' state is it where the workers are only allowed to choose leaders who have been duly issued with certificates of educational adequacy by military leaders and establishment intellectuals?

1847, stressed that its members were 'not among those Communists who are out to destroy personal liberty, who wish to turn the world into one huge barrack or a gigantic workhouse'. In a declaration of policy in September 1847 they declared: 'There certainly are some Communists who, with an easy conscience, refuse to countenance personal liberty and would like to shuffle it out of the world because they consider it is a hindrance to complete harmony . . . We are convinced . . . that in no social order will personal freedom be so assured as in a society based upon communal ownership', in which 'each party would be able by word or in writing to win a majority over to its ideas'.⁶

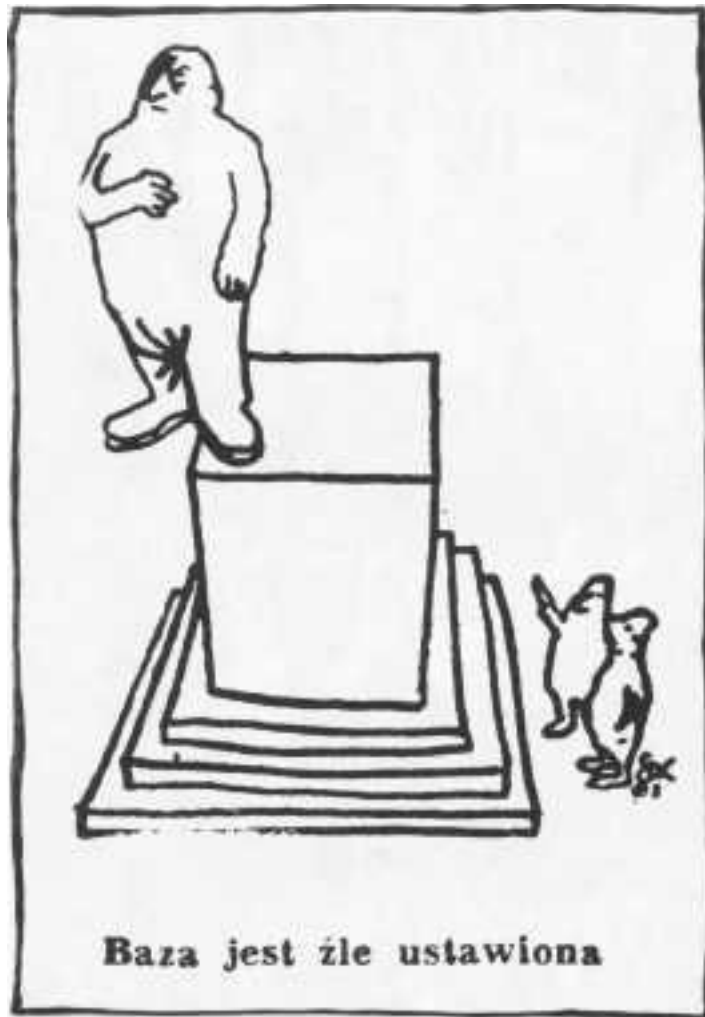
⁴ K Marx/F Engels, *Selected Works* (Moscow/London, 1950), p 239.

⁵ *Guardian*, 13 January 1982.

⁶ D Ryazanoff, Editor, *The Communist Manifesto of K Marx and F Engels* (London, 1930), Appendix E, p 292.

It was from this position that Marx and Engels consistently criticised the ideas of the French revolutionary Blanqui, who argued that it was necessary for an enlightened revolutionary minority to take and hold power on behalf of the working people until they could be taught to understand where their best interests lay. In contrast to this, Marx and Engels relied 'for the ultimate triumph of the ideas set forth in the (*Communist*) *Manifesto* solely and exclusively upon the intellectual development of the working class, as it necessarily had to ensue from united action and discussion.'⁷

Lenin repeatedly rejected Blanquism and the Russian October



'The base is badly placed'
(Szymon Kobylinski, *Polityka*)

Revolution was genuinely democratic in inspiration and intent. Subsequently however power was concentrated in the hands of a minority, which considered it had a historical right to enforce its will on the majority of the population.

The Twentieth Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in 1956 showed how, under Stalin, this led to mass repression and arbitrary rule. This came as a terrible shock to Communists throughout the world who had assumed that such things were impossible in a socialist country, in which capitalism and landlordism had been replaced by the social ownership of the means of production. The explanation of what went wrong in terms of the cult of Stalin's personality blocked a proper Marxist analysis. On the one hand it obscured an investigation into the structure of power and social relationships, of which the Stalin cult was only one expression. On the other, it encouraged acceptance of the Soviet claim that, with Stalin gone and collective leadership re-established, the

whole problem belonged to the past.

The last quarter of a century has shown that the tendency towards the concentration of power is present, to a greater or lesser degree, in every socialist country. Its damaging effects on all spheres of life, including the economy, have been periodically revealed.

Are the possibilities now closed?

The two major attempts to carry through thoroughgoing democratisation, in Czechoslovakia in 1968 and in Poland in 1980-81, have been brutally crushed. The first by direct outside military intervention by Soviet and other Warsaw Pact armies; the second by internal armed forces enjoying outside backing from the same quarters.

Earlier assumptions that the example of socialist democracy and economic prosperity predicted in the socialist countries would strengthen the appeal of socialism in the West have proved totally untenable. The overall effect of these countries has been rather the reverse, notwithstanding their many positive features compared with capitalism.

Moreover the problem is now posed with particular force: what chances do these countries have for democratic socialist renewal? Is it inevitable that all attempts at this will end as tragically as they did in Czechoslovakia and Poland? The conviction that the Soviet leaders, directly or indirectly, will make sure that this is so is very widespread in Eastern Europe now, and can only serve to discourage such attempts in the future. Yet the absence of democratic structures can only conflict with the needs of socialist development and contribute to the accumulation and aggravation of problems and dissatisfactions in all these countries — including the Soviet Union itself. It must inevitably bring the recurrence in one form or another of the dramatic crises that we have seen in so many socialist countries.

If, following the Russian Revolution of October 1917, the main revolutionary influence came from the East, that is no longer the position in the world today. As Enrico Berlinguer, general secretary of the Italian Communist Party has argued, for 'a new period of democratic renewal and development' in Eastern Europe, 'two conditions are necessary: the reduction of international tension and the emergence in the West of a new socialism founded on the principles of freedom and democracy.'

Urging the immediate release of all detained trade unionists in Poland along with the restoration of democratic rights and civilian rule, the Executive Committee of the Communist Party of Great Britain has emphasised the need for the combination of socialism and democracy, seen as a universal principle. The Polish experience creates the need for a deeper analysis of the causes of the violations and limitations of this principle to be sought not in conjunctural phenomena but in the structures of power prevailing in most socialist countries in the world today.

⁷ K Marx/F Engels, *op cit*, p 30.

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