

## RESPONDING TO THE CRISIS IN POLAND

The next issue (February 1982) of CHANCES will be completely devoted to the counterrevolution in Poland. It will take up a number of aspects of the crisis, the meaning of the military coup, the resistance, the significance of the struggle for the overall world crisis, and put forward our views on building an effective movement in solidarity with Solidarity.

The special issue will be both an organizing tool and a piece of literature we can use for a long time. Unfortunately, because of our publishing schedule, it will not be out until the final week in January. Solidarity activities around the Polish crisis cannot wait that long. We will be in touch with all branches to discuss what work may be possible in their cities. Here is a summary of what we know about activities so far:

\* In New York, the Solidarity With Solidarity Committee in which we are active has succeeded in broadening itself to some extent. It is now supported by a number of left tendencies, and individuals including the staff writer for the Guardian who has written the paper's coverage of Poland for the past year. The coalition held a demonstration which drew according to accounts we heard, about 250 people. This made it larger than the turnout for the demo called by the Shankerite United Federation of Teachers leadership (extreme right-wing social democrats). Of course, this is all miniscule in comparison with the demos called by the Polish organizations.

\* In Detroit and Chicago, we participated in left pro-Solidarity demonstrations of essentially the same political character as the NY demo (i.e. defense of Solidarity, anti-intervention, opposing U.S. imperialism in Central America) but smaller and without the prior organization. In Detroit, about 65 people from the RSL, I.S., News and Letters, a couple of Trotskyist splinter organizations (SWP did not participate) and some activists from Latin America solidarity committees demonstrated. The RSL initiated the demo and we worked to bring people to it. Because it was the first demo in the city on Poland it got reasonably good media coverage. We do not see the ad hoc coalition that sponsored this demo as having potential for ongoing activity. So far the AFL-CIO has sponsored one demonstration at which a number of officials spoke. However, most of the turnout (a couple of hundred) were from the Polish American Congress.

The Detroit District Committee decided to try another initiative: to bring together a press conference of union, church and political figures in the city around a progressive statement in defense of Solidarity. The planning meeting, hastily called, consisted of ourselves and several members of Detroit DSOC/NAAM. The political focus was shifted somewhat from what we had originally proposed, to give considerable weight not only to supporting Solidarity but also to call for humanitarian aid to Poland. This was OK with us; the real problem was that there was insufficient time to pull the press conference together and too many of the "big name" union officials we had hoped would endorse were out of town. However, through the excellent cooperation of the Christians for Socialism and Latin America Task Force we succeeded in getting the endorsement of a couple of progressive and active church figures and hope to build on this. We will most likely try to resume this effort following the holidays.

In Chicago, our members helped to bring together a left coalition that sponsored a small demonstration on Sunday, December 20 at the Polish consulate, on Michigan Avenue -- i.e. on the lakefront in minus-ten wind chill conditions. The bitter cold, and the sudden arrival of several thousand Poles for a demo called for the same location an hour later, effectively buried our demo although

Dan L. reports that several Polish people did come to our demo because they had seen the leaflet. The Revolutionary Workers Headquarters are also working on Polish defense work and we will be continuing to meet with them.

A meeting was scheduled in the Bay Area at the IWW hall this past weekend. The Bay Area solidarity with Solidarity committee organized it. I do not yet have the information on attendance or what may come out of it.

There are several political problems in getting effective work started. First, we must find organizing handles to break out the ghetto of the sectarian left. With the best will in the world, tiny left demonstrations on Poland lead nowhere. They are worth doing once in each city, in my view, to see who's there and make the record. But they are strictly one-shot affairs and incapable of even getting much media, let alone respond effectively to events. We need broader coalitions and organizing efforts that reach out to (a) the anti-war and anti-nuclear missile movements, (b) church ~~figures~~ constituencies, (c) left trade union activists.

The PC has decided to make the suggestion to groups and individuals we know that a defense campaign around Solidarity be a serious priority. We feel that perhaps a campaign around the arrested people, as names, charges and conditions of confinement become public, could have good organizing potential. We are open to other ideas. The point is that there must be a vehicle for organizing a progressive campaign in defense of Solidarity and not just a "propaganda bloc" of left forces parading around with ideologically oriented slogans.

Second, we are somewhat surprised at how slow any defense of Solidarity has been in taking shape. For nearly a week, the consensus of the media, the U.S. government and prominent Congressmen seemed to be that the only crucial issue was a Soviet invasion. As long as the Soviet Union stayed out, what happened inside Poland was of secondary importance. There were even statements from people like Senator Percy that Solidarity had provoked the crisis by being "too radical." It must be admitted that the same sentiment penetrates deep into the "soft left" and will be directly spoken to in our special CHANGES issue. (I will also be separately drafting a brief summary of events showing who really precipitated the crisis).

In Poland, contrary to the expectations of most foreign observers who were stunned by the enormous scale and precision of the crackdown, the workers' movement remains alive and fighting. The prospects are now for protracted resistance -- perhaps the least desirable scenario from the standpoint of the western banks as well as the Kremlin. We must not delude ourselves: Solidarity was gravely weakened and many of the proletarian strongholds of the resistance were pit out of commission by the arrest of layer after layer of leadership. However, the resistance in the mines, the shipyards, a few industrial plants, the farmers, and "passive resistance" in many plants that are working (especially outside Warsaw) are enough to create a profound political and economic crisis if they continue for another week or so. Almost any outcome is still possible although conditions of struggle have been enormously set back. The stakes for the international working class in this battle are enormous and historic -- perhaps the greatest since the Spanish Civil War. It is not going to be over in a week, a month or two months. It is our responsibility to defend the survival and independence of Solidarity, and to organize others to do the same.