

Poland, Britain - the same class struggle

In the last month we've seen the Polish state launch a new wave of oppression against Poland's working class. For all their talk about a 'planned socialist economy' the organisers of Polish capitalism have been hit by the world recession and have found themselves in serious difficulties. The working class in Poland had been refusing to accept that their living standards should be lowered in order to sort out the crisis. So the rulers of Poland responded in the way ruling classes always will in these situations. They declared martial law and since then strikers have been shot, many militant workers have been sent to prison camps and troops and riot police have been used to keep people off the streets and stifle any protest.

Western politicians have pretended to be outraged by the action of the Polish authorities - but they're no real friends to the Polish workers. They just want to use them in their game of political and economic contention with the Soviet Bloc. If this game developed into war, Reagan and Thatcher, or indeed anybody in charge of the Western war machine at the time, would have Poland and everybody in it reduced to ashes if it suited their purpose. And the Western governments are equipped to deal with workers' protest in the same way as the Polish government. Look at the way Reagan had trade unionists taken to prison in chains during the Air Traffic controllers strike last year. Look at the way the British state rapidly gave the police new weapons during last summer's riots. Look at the military dictatorships in Latin America and Africa that are kept in power by British, American and French capitalism to keep their profits flowing.

Over the past 18 months workers in Poland have fought for improved wages and social services, a shorter working week, for the right to engage in activity critical of the regime. Workers have demanded the right to elect - and sack - managers in all workplaces. Though we don't think this goes far enough - we want people to run the workplaces themselves without any separate 'managers' - it does show millions of workers wanting to gain a lot more control over how decisions are made. It shows workers in Poland want much more than just the extremely limited 'democratic rights' there are in the west.

Workers everywhere can learn much from the Polish events. In Britain and elsewhere workers, divided into separate trade unions, tend to strike separately. In Poland strikes have spread throughout entire regions, over the whole country - and thus have been much more effective.

Workers have frequently occupied their workplaces, taking control of them and thus preventing strike-breakers being brought in.

But a weakness of these struggles is that they've not spread beyond Poland. If workers in the rest of the Soviet bloc, and world-wide, were confronting the state in the same way as workers in Poland - then not only would the rulers in Poland find it much more difficult to crush the workers, but there would be the possibility of people everywhere overthrowing all rulers and taking over the running of society.

We can see from the actions of the 'Solidarity' union that trade unions, however militant at first, tend to act against workers' interests. By their nature trade unions accept the division of society into employers and employees. They agree with the bosses' aim of a 'profitable national economy'. Over the past year Walesa and other leaders of Solidarity frequently urged strikers to return to work. Sometimes they called off strikes themselves instead of the workers deciding. They aimed for a partnership between Solidarity and the state. The struggles of the workers in Poland were most effective in the summer of 1980 when they controlled the mass strikes directly themselves, without the restraints of the Solidarity union structure and leaders.

Poland, Britain, U.S.S.R., U.S.A..... in all countries, 'private enterprise' or 'mixed economy' or 'state capitalist', its the same struggle between rulers and ruled. Workers in Britain and elsewhere can aid workers in Poland by refusing to handle goods from the Soviet Union and Poland being imported into Britain and other countries. People could take action against Soviet and Polish Embassies, Consulates, airline offices, etc.. It can be proclaimed that these activities will continue until the Polish state lifts all the newly imposed repressive measures and frees all political prisoners.

These can be steps towards workers' struggles uniting across national frontiers, and challenging the entire system. At present the whole industrialised world is heading in the same direction as Poland - food rationing at gunpoint. If there's to be a future worth living workers will need to take over the workplaces, land, and resources everywhere. Decisions must be made by and for all, not by and for a privileged elite. Production must be for human need, not for profitable sale. This isn't a utopian dream, its the only alternative to a nightmare world of mass poverty and vicious state brutality.

This leaflet was produced by the Subversive Graffiti Collective. We also produce a news-sheet every other month in Aberdeen. Please write to us if you have any comments or criticisms about this leaflet, if you want to know more about our views and activities, or if you want a copy of our most recent news-sheet.
SUEVERSIVE GRAFFITI, c/o 163 KING ST., ABERDEEN. (15-1-1982)