

# ENDURING THE DARKNESS OF MARTIAL LAW

*The present Government of the people in Poland rests on the alliance of workers and working peasants. In this alliance the leading role belongs to the workers, who are the leading class of society....* These are the words of the preamble to the Constitution of the Polish People's Republic.

Poland today is a country oppressed by a regime responsible for an economic fiasco, divided internally, fearful of its citizens, and accountable only to the Soviet Union. Its lone success has been the forcible repression of Poland's first postwar mass workers' movement.

The Soviet Union attempts to rationalize its constant meddling in Polish affairs by endlessly stressing Poland's "fraternal ties" to Moscow. As part of this effort, Polish and Soviet authorities have tried to exploit four myths about recent events.

First, that Solidarity, through its "excesses," was responsible for its own downfall. The facts are otherwise. The claim that strikes by Solidarity created Poland's economic turmoil ignores the simple truth that much of the labor unrest arose as a result of the economic chaos caused by decades of government ineptitude and corruption.

Lech Walesa and other Solidarity leaders worked continuously to halt strikes and encourage a return to work following the August 1980 accords. Strikes affected only a small proportion of workers after March 1981, and the government's own statistics showed a steady increase in overall production. By contrast, the Jaruzelski regime never accepted Solidarity as a legitimate union, and it heightened tensions when it attempted to repudiate the heart of the Gdansk agreement by introducing a law to forbid strikes.

A second myth is that the Soviet Union did not intervene in Poland. Any impartial review of the record reveal a continuous Soviet campaign of threatening military maneuvers, verbal intimidation, and fabricated accusations directed at Solidarity. Western observers agree that secret preparations for martial law began as early as March 1981; the martial law decree itself was printed in the Soviet Union in September; and the Warsaw Pact Commander-in-Chief, Viktor Kulikov, and other senior Soviet military officers, were in Warsaw when martial law was declared.

As one Soviet speaker admitted

publicly: Martial law had been "brilliantly conspired."

A third myth is that Poland's rulers acted out of patriotism, to pre-empt a Soviet invasion. This particular example of double-think requires one to laud the Jaruzelski regime's high-mindedness in doing the Soviets' dirty work for them in returning the Polish people to the oppression that they had struggled so valiantly to escape.

Fourth, the myth that events in Poland are purely an internal matter. This assertion ignores an inconvenient fact: Poland and the Soviet Union are signatories to the Helsinki Final Act of 1975, which obligates all parties to respect each nation's right to develop its own political and economic system without interference. The establishment of martial law, the imprisonment of thousands, and the deprivation of freedoms for all is the clearest possible example of a deliberate and conscious violation of the Helsinki Final Act.

Poland is a challenge to the principles of civilized international conduct, and to the political will of independent nations everywhere. In meeting this challenge, the United States has joined with the nations of the Atlantic Community, and many others around the world, to demand the lifting of martial law, the release of all political prisoners, and the reestablishment of dialogue and reconciliation among all sectors of Polish society, including Solidarity and the Church. In short, the Polish people must be allowed to determine their own future, free from fear and outside coercion. To underline its condemnation of martial law and Soviet interference in Poland, the United States, along with other nations, has imposed a series of economic sanctions—including trade and credit restrictions—on both countries.

If the Polish regime undertakes a program of genuine reconciliation, the United States, together with Western Europe and other nations, stands ready to aid Poland in eliminating agricultural shortages and reducing its foreign debt. And the American people, as in the past, will continue to provide food and humanitarian aid directly to the people through private agencies. But the United States will not supply credits or other forms of assistance that serve only to prop up a regime imposed on the Polish people against their will.

*The restoration of an independent, strong Poland is a matter which concerns not only the Poles but all of us....For the workers of all the rest of Europe need the independence of Poland just as much as the Polish workers themselves.*

Friedrich Engels wrote those words in the introduction to the Polish edition of *The Communist Manifesto*. Those outside Poland can cite such passages, acknowledging the heavy irony of a nation that oppresses its workers in the name of a workers' state. But Poles cannot afford the luxury of irony. They live the tragedy of Communist failure every day.

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