

the entire Polish community. The statement emphasized that: "Our union has always stressed that it does not claim the right exclusively to represent the entire Polish community."

The tension mounts

The question of just what Solidarity could be seen to represent was, and remains, as important as what views they determined to put forward in the talks they requested following the tripartite meeting. Solidarity put a formal proposal to the government for talks which would focus on the idea of a Social Council for the National Economy. The talks began on November 19, last year. It had been agreed specifically to discuss the Social Council. Following the first session, Borislaw Geremek expressed the view that the government was not really serious. Solidarity wanted this body to be independent of government control but to have the right of veto over government economic decisions. The government wanted a purely advisory body. During the session, Solidarity dropped the demand for veto power.

The second round of talks about the Social Council began on November 26, the same day that Politbureau member Stefan Olszowski said that Solidarity could not have a right of veto in a Front of National Accord either. Walesa had suggested that the Government, the Church and Solidarity would each have a veto in the Front, which would bring socio-political forces together to handle the major problems facing the country. At the re-convened talks on the Social Council, the government welcomed Solidarity's abandoning the veto, and asked for the same with respect to the right to strike. The union refused. On December 1, the union's press spokesman pointed out that for a month there had been virtually no economically-damaging strikes, due to appeals from Solidarity and the Parliament.

On the very next day, the militia attacked the Warsaw Fire Officers' Academy. Force was used, in as public a manner as possible. Lech Walesa had offered to mediate, but his offer was not taken up. Only seven hours after the attack, Stefan Olszowski said that all possibilities for mediation had been exhausted, and declared: "The Party' leadership will implement such a decisive policy more and more often."

Solidarity changed the agenda of a meeting scheduled to discuss higher education on December 4 in Radom, and its leaders met there to assess the situation following the attack on the Fire Academy. In its public statement, the union lamented that the authorities had used talks and the idea of national agreement to mislead society. It was convinced that the government wanted price increases but not economic reforms. The union was not prepared to decorate the facade of the old system with the Solidarity logo. The leaders did still call for a national agreement, to fight the economic crisis effectively, but it must incorporate major elements of Solidarity's program. These included a Social Council with the power to influence economic policy, democratic elections to People's Councils which would control the local authorities, and an end to secrecy in managing food supplies.

As the world knows, the discussion was taped, and the authorities soon revealed their version of the Radom meeting. The authorities wanted Polish society to believe that

the union had "assumed the position of a political opposition force embarking on open struggle against the socialist authority and a struggle for power. The Solidarity national presidium has actually proclaimed a struggle to undermine and paralyze the legal authority."

The government strikes

In response, Solidarity appealed for social calm and reaffirmed their fundamental task of reaching the vital national accord. The union had been engaged in that very task on the day of the Radom meeting. Their representatives spent December 4 with a parliamentary sub-committee discussing a draft bill on trade unions. The sub-committee amended parts of the bill after hearing from Solidarity, and it was expected that the bill would go before the Parliament on December 15. The Church had a strong interest in the bill. Archbishop Glemp published a letter from all of his bishops. It warned Parliament against removing the right to strike, and praised the efforts of Solidarity in counteracting unofficial strikes. Against this background, Solidarity's National Commission met in Gdansk. Many of its members were arrested as they left the meeting hall to find that martial law had been imposed.

There seems little evidence, if any, of an unwillingness on the part of Solidarity to negotiate. To trade unionists, this term inherently denotes the possibility of compromise in order to reach an agreement. Solidarity understood this, and they clearly wanted to negotiate in good faith. That their government was not prepared to do so relates not so much to the bargaining demands of Solidarity, as to the stark fact that those demands were being put forward on behalf of the Polish worker.

The history of worker rejection of Communist Party claims to be their sole representative is as old as the Party, and will outlast it, in whatever country. In the 1970s, workers revolts on a localised scale occurred throughout the Soviet bloc. These were put down, bought off, denied, and, by most Western observers, ignored.

Dissidence was thought of primarily as an intellectual pursuit, and though Sahkarov and Solzhenitsyn could earn the Soviet Union an odious reputation in some circles, they could not undermine its pretensions to international legitimacy as a champion of workers everywhere. Solidarity was not bought off, or ignored, and it stripped the pretensions to the bone. Its impact has been world-wide already, possibly as much because of the imposition of law as of the period before it. Workers around the world will want, and will have, free trade unions, which will remain what the history of industrial revolution and the end of colonialism have shown them to be, the best guarantors, and creators, of free societies.

The Solidarity logo would not adorn the old system; it may disappear, but it will be succeeded and succeeded until the logo of a free trade union in Poland adorns a new system, even if it is within a political framework managed by the heirs of General Jaruzelski. The General himself must be concerned by the growing ability of Solidarity to maintain a leadership structure, a network of information, and the loyalty of millions of members. Observers outside Poland would be ill advised to ignore the signs of the continued existence of Solidarity as a major deviant of the Polish social fabric. □