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TITLE: INDUSTRIAL WORKERS AND POLITICAL DEVELOPMENT IN THE SOVIET UNION AND EASTERN EUROPE

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Executive Summary

Events in Poland over the last twelve months have demonstrated in dramatic form how workers can become a major force for political change in Communist states. The formidable power wielded by a reform-seeking labour movement has been underscored not only by the unprecedented concessions made by the Polish government, but also by Moscow's continuing reluctance to intervene under circumstances that seem fully to qualify for 'fraternal aid'. If in one sense what has happened in Poland is part of a pattern of Polish politics, aptly described as 'a Party Congress every five years and a catastrophe every ten', the events of 1980-81 also have a direct bearing on the broader question of the relationship between workers and regime which has been the focus of our research.

Because of the highly integrated nature of Communist states, we examined this relationship in society, the economy, the enterprise and the national political arena. We found that marked variations occurred not so much between these settings as between states. In order to be able to gauge the importance of different national environments we compared patterns of interaction between workers and system in Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary and the Soviet Union. Major differences separating Poland from the other states in terms of blue-collar protest action seem to be associated with variations in workers' expectations, previous patterns of assertiveness, and political management rather than with contrasts in social and economic conditions. Similarly, the political quietude of Hungarian workers in social and economic circumstances closely parallelling those of Poland, stems from different political experience and far more sensitive government. Explanations from Czech and Slovak blue collars unassertiveness, on the other hand, lie in social equality, stable economic development and responsiveness to workers' needs. Finally, the lack of any overt unrest among Soviet workers seems to be associated with relatively low levels of social tension, cross-cutting ethnic and regional cleavages, the integration of workers within the enterprise, economic stability and relatively high blue-collar tolerance for what is a very effective authoritarian state.

These country variations notwithstanding, we found major cross-national patterns relating to the dynamics of workers' role in industrialized Communist states over the last two decades. Throughout the region tightening economic conditions are making the satisfaction of blue-collar welfare expectations more burdensome while an expansion in workers' material expectations places additional pressures on already over-taxed economies. More importantly, the last 10-15 years have been the emergence of a more cohesive, demanding, assertive generation of industrial workers intent on higher material rewards and a greater control over their immediate environment.

Workers in Society. Officially defined as the leading class in socialist society, workers rank systematically below the intelligentsia in consumption, education, prestige and power. The distance separating the two groups is greater in Poland and Hungary than in the Soviet Union or Czechoslovakia. While considerable differences along all major dimensions continue to distinguish skilled workers from unskilled, slowing rates of social mobility plus rising education levels of education are producing a homogenization of blue-collar ranks. Perhaps more important for our purposes is how workers

themselves see their social location and, in particular, the extent to which they have developed any kind of social consciousness that might underpin collective action. The survey evidence points to the relatively widespread existence among workers of status consciousness-awareness of sharing similar material, educational, prestige and power attributes - which is increasing with the growing impermeability of the social walls surrounding them. Structural consciousness - how workers view their place in the stratification structure - is less well developed. Most commonly East European workers, particularly the skilled, have a dichotomous image of society and see it split into a privileged elite and a mass of ordinary working people among which they class themselves. Cleavages of wealth, education, social status and power divide workers from the elite. While only in Poland has workers' collective self-image developed to any fullness, throughout Eastern Europe there is a growing tendency for blue collars to identify themselves in contra-distinction to a privileged 'command' elite centred around the higher echelons of the intelligentsia and the apparatchiki. As a result workers think of themselves as members of a labour class whose interests coincide with those of the ordinary working population, of all those who obey rather than command. In Poland through the seventies clashes with the authorities accelerated the growth of a corporate labour consciousness associated with the attribution of social inequality and disadvantage to structural rather than individual factors. Elsewhere, individual performance is still held largely responsible for workers' social disadvantages though this 'fatalistic' outlook is far less common among younger, skilled manuals who see their own prospects as tied up with those of collective labour. In the Soviet Union perceptions of blue-collar - elite conflict are probably far less developed than in Eastern Europe. Nonetheless, even in the USSR there are signs of an emerging labour class identity.

Workers and the Socialist Economy. Closer to daily blue-collar concerns than social conflicts, workers' economic involvement remains pivotal to their general orientation toward the system. What anchors most Soviet and East European workers' attachment to 'real existing socialism' is full employment, a welfare wage, low income differentials and stable food prices. In a sense workers' acceptance of strong state control is conditioned by that state's delivery of the above package of security-welfare benefits. The situation may be seen as a tacit social compact which underpins the relationship between workers and regime in all industrialised Communist states. This social compact has come under increasing pressure from two sets of inter-related developments: changing economic conditions and rising blue-collar expectations. In Poland the strains produced by this pressure helped precipitate the protest of 1980 which compelled the regime to sign a new, written social contract giving workers not just welfare and security, but also institutional power and control through independent trade unions. Elsewhere the social compact remains largely intact though the strains upon it continue to grow. Over the last two decades the shift from extensive to intensive patterns of economic growth has made once relatively cheap security-welfare benefits increasingly costly. For economies faced with a tightening manpower crunch, the overmanning and high turnover rates associated with guaranteed job security and full employment have become ever more burdensome. Further, attempts to raise productivity by improving labour discipline and tying wages more closely to performance have been hampered by social compact expectations of a lax work pace and an egalitarian allocation

of pay. On the consumption front, the traditional commitment to stable prices of food and other basics has swelled budgetary subsidies to enormous proportions.

Such problems show no sign of diminishing in the near or mid-term future. Young workers seem to be no less attached to social compact rights than their parents, indeed they take them for granted. Instead of substituting a new set of values for the old, the young blue-collar generation has added to the social compact new expectations that place yet more exacting demands on the socialist economy. The more interesting jobs that they expect are simply not available in sufficient numbers to satisfy demands. Hence, work satisfaction has declined as educational standards among blue collars have risen. At the same time, the young worker expects higher wages and living standards - his is a far more acquisitive egalitarianism than that of the older blue-collar generation. Such acquisitiveness burgeoned under the influence of the consumption 'boom' of the early seventies when East European leaders positively encouraged workers to think in consumerist terms. The subsequent slowdown and recession opened up a substantial gap in all these states between blue-collar expectations and economic performance. Widest in Poland and narrowest in the Soviet Union, where expectations have risen slowly from a relatively low base-line, this consumption gap continues to place a strain on relations between workers and regime throughout the region.

Workers in the Enterprise. Many of the problems stemming from workers' economic role have to be dealt with in the enterprise. Occupying a more central place in workers' lives than the factory does in the West, the enterprise is also important as a key political unit. Together with management, the factory trade union and Communist Party committees constitute a 'composite employer' who represents and wields state power at enterprise level. How labour relations are managed, in the factory, therefore, reflects directly on the general relationship between workers and regime. A continuous 'frontier of control' extends from the shop-floor to the national political arena.

The task of managing labour relations has become complicated both by economic pressures and by the more exacting attitudes of a better educated, skilled workforce. Aware to a far greater extent than their parents of the links between their own material rewards and organisational efficiency within the enterprise, these younger workers are far more critical of management performance and more likely to become involved in disputes over conditions and pay. Soviet workers seem to take a more favourable view of management than their East European counterparts, though this may be due as much to differences in expectations as to real variations in management conduct. A similar combination of factors may account for Soviet workers' more positive appraisal of the representative role performed by Party and trade union organisations within the enterprise. For while Soviet and Hungarian unions do seem to articulate blue-collar interests more effectively than the Czechoslovak or Polish (prior to 1980) counterparts, many workers would still like them to devote more energy to defending their members rights rather than promoting production. In fact workers in all these states share a preference for defence-oriented unions untrammelled by labour management responsibilities. Recent regime efforts to upgrade the unions' protective role signal a general concern that pressure for a more radical Polish-type unionism might develop. Exactly how much pressure builds up for truly independent unions hinges partly on continued scope being

available for the operation of informal pressure group activity within the enterprise. Even in the Soviet Union, let alone Hungary, small group bargaining with management helps defuse tension and pre-empt larger-scale industrial conflict. At any rate, the commonplace use of informal methods to press for improvements in conditions and pay helps to account for the otherwise surprisingly low incidence of strikes. The markedly higher frequency of strikes in Poland, particularly during the 1970s, should be attributed not so much to that country's poorer enterprise relations as to differences in the relationship between workers and higher political authorities.

Workers and National Politics. Our overall findings in this area were outlined in the first part of this summary. In addition it should be stressed that our comparative analysis of the nature and sources of blue-collar assertiveness pinpointed the key importance of the role played by workers' images of legitimacy of political authority on the one hand and of protest action on the other. Such images, as well as expectations of collective political efficacy have been decisive in transforming economic dissatisfaction into protest action in Poland. To be sure, the performance of national representative institutions, communication between leadership and workers, the size of the consumption gap and the depth of economic crisis cannot be ignored. Yet were similar economic conditions to prevail in Hungary the USSR, or even Czechoslovakia, the differences in images of legitimacy would in themselves make a 1980 protest highly unlikely.

Conclusions and Policy Implications. If in form the Polish events of 1980 are unlikely to be replicated elsewhere in the region, their substance and roots reflect major trends that are re-shaping workers' role in industrialised Communist states: the effects of growing social differentiation on blue-collar perceptions of their labour identity; the increasing strains placed upon the social compact by the requisites of economic rationalisation; the emerging salience of economic management and policy for workers whose notions of well-being embrace values of material acquisitiveness and self-realisation and lead them to press for a greater say at enterprise and national level.

These developments, and the changes in worker-regime relations which they are effecting, have several important implications for US policy. As implied by a recent Soviet Politburo statement on the Polish situation, economic interdependence with the West played a significant part in the developments leading to 1980. Exports to the West intensified pressures for higher productivity and thus placed additional strain on the social compact. Imports from the West helped to inflate workers' consumption expectation while Western credits contributed to the eventual gap separating those expectations from economic performance. By maintaining as high a level as possible of economic and other contact with Eastern Europe, the US and the West would undoubtedly help to promote the evolution in blue-collar thinking that has produced the events of 1980 and which will continue to advance the current transition in the role of labour in Communist states from a pillar of continuity to a force for change.

INDUSTRIAL WORKERS AND POLITICAL DEVELOPMENT IN THE SOVIET UNION AND EASTERN EUROPE

BY

Alex Pravda

What role do workers play in the worker's states? What kind of relationship do they have with the regime? How and to what extent have workers affected the political development of the industrialised Communist states and what is their impact likely to be in the eighties? These are some of the questions we have addressed in this project. Given the highly integrated nature of Communist systems, in order to assess workers' political role one must examine their location in society, in the material and positional economy, and within the enterprise, as well as in the national political arena. In all these dimensions our concern has been to assess not merely workers' objective position but mainly how they perceive their situation, for this above all else determines the politically relevant conduct in which we are principally interested.

To try and gauge the impact of different national environments on the overall pattern of interaction between workers and regime, we have focussed on four industrialised Communist states: Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary and the Soviet Union. These provide a wide range of political and economic settings as well as a broad spectrum of blue-collar behaviour. One of the most obvious yet one of the most important questions here is to the extent to which Polish workers' self-assertiveness is systemically or nationally determined. Put simply, which

has been more important through the seventies: that Polish strikers have been workers or that they have been Poles? Recent developments in Poland also provide a useful benchmark against which to assess the dynamic aspects of the relationship between workers and regime. If in extreme form, Polish events highlight some of the fundamental changes that have taken place in all industrialised Communist states over the last 15-20 years. One of our major findings, and one of the threads running through this summary report, is that in all domains of interaction with the system, the last two decades have seen the emergence of an increasingly self-conscious, demanding and assertive generation of workers - the generation of 'developed socialism.'

Workers in Society

How are workers located in these societies and how do they conceive of their place and role? The official Communist Party answer to these questions is simple: as members of the working class, industrial workers occupy a leading position in society, distinguished from that of the intelligentsia by minor material and cultural distinctions arising from a division of labour that is fast being eroded by technological progress. Even the more sophisticated stratification analyses favoured by many East European sociologists stress the overlap in attributes between workers and intelligentsia and the differentiation within blue-collar ranks that preclude any fixed worker indentity, let alone any antagonistic class consciousness. Yet 1980-81 has shown Polish workers apparently acting as a solitary social class, almost as a proletariat. In reality, industrial workers in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe do not fall into either category. Neither are they so differentiated and close to other groups as to lack any social cohesion nor do they qualify as a proletariat.

Defined in occupational terms as manual workers outside agriculture, workers constitute a majority, or near majority, of the population in all these states. The large core of industrial workers, with which we are concerned, differ in social composition between countries. Czechoslovakia and the USSR have a majority contingent of hereditary industrial workers while in Poland and Hungary every second blue-collar is of peasant origin.

Materially, workers are relatively well-off. Blue-collar incomes exceed those of office staff and overlap with professional salaries, particularly in the Soviet Union and Czecholsovakia. Standards of living and consumption patterns distinguish blue-collars from the intelligentsia more clearly, but really marked differences appear only when one looks at the distribution of education and prestige. Here workers do worse than all non-manuals - with the exception of clerical groups - and over time are becoming systematically more disadvantaged. For with the slowing of social mobility and the closure of access to higher education, both intelligentsia and blue-collar ranks are increasingly being replenished from within. And as the correlation between education and occupation becomes closer so the association strengthens between education on the one hand and authority, influence and power on the other.[1]

Enclosed by ever more impermeable social walls, blue-collars' standing in the material, prestige, educational and power hierarchies is making workers more clearly identifiable as a group with clustering global attributes. To be sure, attributes of education, life-style and power are more closely clustered than ones of income and consumption. Workers continue to be internally differentiated along lines of education and skill. Nonetheless, as the older unskilled worker contingent shrinks in size and is replaced by a hereditary, skilled and better educated group, so blue-collars will become increasingly homogenous.

More important for our purposes than workers' objective social location is how they see their position in society, what kind of social consciousness they share. Given the scale of recent mobility, levels of workers' social self-assignment are relatively high. Even skilled workers, some of whom think of themselves as employees, feel closer to unskilled blue-collars than to technicians and engineers with whom they share many objective attributes. More significantly, younger skilled workers display an increasing sensitivity to distinctions of social origin and behaviour. Consciousness of worker-status, of what may be called status identity, is thus fairly widespread among blue-collars and is strengthening as mobility slows.

Structural consciousness - how workers see themselves within the social structure - hinges on blue-collar images of society. While most workers do categorise themselves as members of the working class, they do not share the intelligentsia view of these societies as trichotomous class structures. Instead East European workers - unfortunately there is no reliable evidence for the Soviet Union - tend to see society in dichotomous terms, split into a privileged elite and a mass of ordinary working people. Defining and dividing the two groups workers see inequalities of wealth reflected by consumption rather than income - education, social origin and, finally, authority and power. Perception of such cleavages is stronger in Poland and Hungary - objectively the most unequal of these societies - than in the USSR or Czechoslovakia. Among workers the unskilled are most sensitive to inequalities of wealth and education, while the skilled see cleavages of power and authority as equally or even more salient. The younger blue-collars tend to identify education, social origin and life-style distinctions as most important. Thus wealth, education, power and social status are coalescing in workers' minds to form an image of a privileged elite that

includes large sections of the intelligentsia and the great majority of the apparatchiki - the political and administrative officials. It is in contra-distinction to this privileged elite that workers are finding their own social identity as a labour class, representing ordinary working people.[2]

Recent Polish developments suggest that the more frequently workers clash with the authorities, the more crystallised this labour identity becomes. The question remains, to what extent does such a labour identity, and the structural consciousness with which it is linked, itself provide grounds for collective blue-collar action?

Social cleavages are more widely perceived in these societies than social conflict, even though approximately one in every three East European workers do think that considerable tensions exist. Further, a large majority consider material and power inequalities, in particular, to be excessive. While there are no Soviet data on these issues, workers' perceptions of such cleavages and conflicts are probably more obscured in the USSR by cross-cutting sectoral, regional and ethnic divides. In Czechoslovakia some of the salience of social divisions has probably been reduced by the political levelling of the pre-1968 intelligentsia. Even in Poland and Hungary, where blue-collar consciousness of conflict is highest, it does not automatically lead to collective class action. For collective action to be seriously contemplated workers have to attribute the inequalities they resent to aspects of the system that would be susceptible to such action. Most workers are fatalistically-inclined here and ascribe social disadvantages to failings of personal performance. Only a minority link inequality with the system and attribute its existence to the actions of those in power. This minority, however, is a crucial one. For it consists of highly skilled workers, the group from which most opinion leaders and organisers are

drawn. Polish developments show how in certain conditions a small core of skilled workers can organise solidary action that envelops workers who share neither their causal notions of social inequality nor the corporate labour class consciousness associated with such a view. Yet even without the catalyst of Polish-type solidary action, corporate consciousness is likely to grow. Individualistic fatalism is found largely among older unskilled workers while their better educated skilled juniors are prone to take a more structural view of the roots of inequality. And with individual exit from manual labour a vanishing option, workers' personal prospects for advancement will become increasingly tied to those of labour as a whole. So it is very likely that labour class identity and corporate consciousness will strengthen through the eighties.

Workers and the Socialist Economy

If social location is impinging more importantly on workers' attitudes to the status quo, their role in the economy remains pivotal to relations with the regime. While it is difficult precisely to estimate levels of blue-collar support for the principles on which the socialist economy is built, it is relatively easy to identify which of its aspects attract workers' approval. East European workers are sufficiently close to capitalism, both historically and geographically, to be able to compare centrally-planned economies with ones based on the market. Most recognise the higher living standards offered by capitalism but equally they consider socialism superior in its security and welfare provisions. Exactly the same features of the socialist economy are strongly endorsed by Soviet workers. 'Cradle-to-grave welfare' identified some thirty years ago as the key attachment underpinning Soviet public support for the socialist system, remains central to workers' support today. From the official ideology of Marxism-Leninism, to which they are generally indifferent, workers have 'salvaged' notions of security,

welfare and equality, and see full employment, a welfare wage, low income differentials and stable prices as basic socialist rights. The provision of these rights has long been the corollary of blue-collar acceptance of the socialist system, including strong central state control. In a sense, this exchange of support for security and welfare benefits may be seen as a tacit social compact on which relations between workers and regime largely depend.

Established during the period of rapid industrialisation - the construction of socialism - the social compact since the mid-sixties has come under pressure from two sets of associated developments. Changing economic circumstances have made the security-welfare provisions increasingly difficult to maintain. Affordable under conditions of extensive economic growth, when labour and raw materials were plentiful and planners concerned with fulfilling quantitative targets, the concomitants of social compact rights - overmanning, a lax work pace, low pay differentials and subsidised prices - rocketed in cost in the far tighter economic circumstances of the seventies.

At the same time, the expanded expectations of younger workers have been a second source of pressure. To a far greater extent than their parents, who remember unemployment and the privations of the Stalin period, these second generation blue-collars take social compact rights for granted. It does not follow, however, that they are prepared to forego them for a measure of improvement in living standards. The greater flexibility on welfare and security political leaders probably hoped would follow assured employment and promises of increased prosperity has not materialised. Instead workers have broadened their expectations to include ones typical of a better educated generation raised in a climate of promises of plenty. Interesting jobs, more control over their environment, and higher living standards are all goals characteristic of the blue-collar generation

of 'developed socialism.' By contrast with their Western peers, whose focus on self-realisation is associated with Post-Materialist values, Soviet and East European workers remain very concerned with material well-being. Indeed, expectations of material improvement overlap and coincide with ones of self-realisation. Thus the Communist authorities have found themselves confronted with a cumulative expansion of blue-collar expectations. While the social compact rights continue to constrain economic growth,newer blue-collar demands for material improvement and self-realisation make such growth a sine qua non of continued labour satisfaction. To clarify the specific problems involved, we will survey four key areas of concern to authorities and workers alike: employment, job performance, wages and consumption. In each case, of course, the problems involved cannot be attributed exclusively to blue-collar attitudes and expectations; rather, these exacerbate structural and other difficulties and limit the range and effectiveness of countervailing policies.

In the employment sector two components of the social compact have long proved burdensome. The first is full job security. Communist governments are notoriously reluctant to close inefficient plants or redeploy underemployed labour. As a result all these economies suffer from chronic overmanning, amounting to 15%-20% of the labour force. Admittedly, this is due in part to management inclinations to hoard labour as insurance against the vagaries of the planning system. Yet one of the main reasons for directors' reluctance to slim down their labour force, financial incentives such as those offered in Shchekino-type schemes notwithstanding, is their obligation to find all dismissed workers alternative employment. And this provision stems directly from the social compact commitment to full job security.[3]

On the other side of the employment security coin is the expectation and

established practice of changing jobs at will. In systems where all economic activities are closely controlled by the state, there is a remarkably free market in labour. For the most part workers leave jobs of their own accord and find new ones themselves. And they do so frequently - annual labour turnover exceeds 20%, approximately five-fold the U.S. level. Quite apart from the productivity losses involved in such frequent shifts, uncontrolled turnover typically generates flows of labour that compound the problems of planners trying to cope with growing labour shortages such as exist in Hungary, Czechoslovakia and the USSR.[4]

As well as affecting manpower deployment, social compact expectations also influence workers' on-the-job performance. To be sure, performance levels are influenced by a multiplicity of factors, yet guaranteed security tends to undermine work discipline while a welfare wage outlook encourages a lax attitude to productivity and quality. Absenteeism, malingering and shop-floor drunkenness - affecting perhaps a tenth of the workforce - reflect and compound a pervasive lack of conscientiousness and pride in the quality of work. With labour productivity virtually the only source of economic growth, it is hardly surprising that politicians constantly call for a more disciplined attitude to work.[5]

In trying to deal with poor performance and higher turnover the authorities are also hamstrung by the social compact commitment to full employment. A small pool of unemployed might well stabilise the labour situation and help discipline, but any such notion remains politically out of the question. Administrative sanctions are plagued by management reluctance to apply them and anyhow cannot improve the quality of performance which is the most urgent problem. As Soviet and East European academics repeatedly stress, the real solution lies in improving conditions and instilling a more positive commitment to work.

This is easier said than done. For it is not simply a matter any longer of

educating ex-peasants into industrial work habits. Now the main problem is to meet the far more exacting requirements of better educated workers. If anything the difficulties are ones of over-rather than of under-education - as education levels have risen among workers, so job satisfaction has declined. Unable to enter white-collar professions, large numbers of blue-collar secondary school graduates still expect interesting, complex jobs offering a substantial degree of autonomy. But as production remains largely unautomated, the availability of such jobs lags far behind burgeoning demand. To close the job expectation gap would require automation and restructuring on a scale that is presently well beyond the capacities of these states.[6]

A more immediate and practicable solution to mobility and productivity problems lies in improving material incentives and tying rewards more closely to performance. After all, pay continues to figure prominently in motivating young and older workers alike, particularly in Eastern Europe where the social utility of labour seems to be less salient than in the USSR. Yet blue-collar values hamper the effective use of material incentives in systems anyhow ill-suited to their proper operation. Sharing a welfare concept of wages, and inclined to perceive technical revisions of production norms as a way of exacting more effort for less reward, workers tend to resist attempts to tie pay more closely to productivity. Further, blue-collars are strongly egalitarian. While economists and many politicians criticise existing pay differentials - especially those separating manual workers from technical and engineering personnel - as irrationally low, East European workers consider them excessively high and would like to see overall maximum to minimum ratios of pay reduced to between 1:3 and 1:4. Indirect evidence points to similar egalitarian trends in the USSR. Despite constant official criticism of 'levelling tendencies,' egalitarianism remains one of the most

deep-seated of blue-collar values. Hence, Hungarian workers' objections to certain bonus incentive schemes and Polish strikers' demands for redistributive measures to equalise incomes.

Even were the welfare wage and egalitarianism obstacles removed, the escalating cost of material incentives stemming from workers' rising demands, would still present a problem. The considerable growth in real pay experienced by Soviet and East European workers over the last fifteen years has transformed aspirations of the early sixties into expectations and demands. As wages rise so the gap widens between what workers earn and what they think they deserve. In Poland, for example, real wages have grown by over 50% since the mid-sixties yet the amount by which workers consider themselves underpaid has increased from 40% to 50%.[7] Once associated if not with asceticism, then with modest material aspirations, blue-collar egalitarianism has now been married with marked acquisitiveness.

A similar combination of welfare and acquisitive values has also emerged in the consumption sphere. Price stability has long been one of the most visible components of the social compact. Throughout the region changes in the level of food - especially meat - prices are a coefficient of economic anxiety among workers and population alike. To maintain the stability workers have come to expect, prices are subsidised by anywhere between 25% and 75%. Despite the increasing burden this imposes on the economy only the Hungarians have successfully raised the prices of basic commodities by substantial amounts though they have had to give workers conpensatory wage increases. With Poland's disastrous attempts to increase food prices as a constant reminder, Communist governments typically continue to devote a growing proportion of their budgets to maintaining this element of the social compact.

At the same time, all governments have come under greater pressure from new

consumption expectations fuelled by rising living standards. To some extent the governments have further stimulated blue-collar ambitions here by consumption-oriented policies. In the late sixties and early seventies all these states went through a period of consumption boom. Having set consumer expectations on an upward spiral, by the later seventies boom had turned into recession, thus opening up a widening gap between blue-collar demands and economic performance. It was in large part the disappointment resulting from this consumption gap that conditioned Polish workers' response to the attempt to increase meat prices in July 1980. To be sure, the scale of boom and recession in Poland made Gierek's consumerist strategy more premature than those of his fellow leaders. No other Communist state has gone through such discontinuous development; nowhere else has the consumption gap reached such proportions. Yet even in the Soviet Union, where expectations have grown more slowly and from a lower base-line, this gap exists and is likely to widen as economic slowdown continues.[8]

Workers in the Enterprise

Most of the problems stemming from workers' economic role are transmitted directly into the enterprise. Because of the special place the enterprise occupies in industrialised Communist states, shop-floor industrial relations in key factories have an immeasurably greater political significance and impact than in the West. To begin with, enterprises are often very large units on which the development of an entire sector may hinge. As employers they dominate the life of the whole communities, making them company towns. Further, the political significance of industrial relations is ensured by the fact that the company is the state. Quite apart from the ideological prominence of large industrial enterprises as the flagships of proletarian power, they are also the organisational base of the Communist Party, trade unions and all other social and political bodies.

Together with the management the Party and union executives form what would be called the 'composite employer,' to workers this employer represents proximate state authority. So how tensions between labour and management are handled impinges directly on the broader relationship between workers and regime; there is a continuous 'frontier of control' extending from shop floor to the national political arena. Changes in power relations anywhere along its length can easily affect other segments. The disparity between the frontier of control at enterprise and at higher levels in Poland in the late seventies, for instance, was an important factor leading to the 1980 crisis.

The task of managing tensions within the enterprise has become more difficult over the last twenty years. When workers were peasants straight off the farm, and the fulfillment of quantiative plans all that mattered, directors could alternate toughness during storming periods with relative indulgence the rest of the time. Now they have to accommodate superiors pressing for consistent high quality production and deal with workers less responsive to sergeant-major methods. Not only are the younger, skilled workers more demanding about conditions and job interest, they are also far more critical of plant management. As their pay packets have become more dependent on bonuses and premiums, so workers, once indifferent to how management operated, have focussed their critical attention on issues such as the organisation of labour in the enterprise. Faced with these new problems, managers still tend to resort to well-tried authoritarian methods. And if the younger, better qualified directors may be more efficient on the technical side, they are also more socially distanced from workers and handle human relations more technocractically than the old school of worker-directors. Soviet workers seem to be more satisfied with management than their East European counterparts (four out of five think that labour-management relations are good compared with

between a third and a half of Poles and Czechs). It does not necessarily follow that management is more sensitive in the USSR as such assessments may stem as much from variations in blue-collar expectations as from differences in management performance. In any case, it is worth noting that throughout the region the younger, skilled worker tends to be more conscious of tensions within the enterprise and more frequently involved in industrial disputes.[9]

Howeffectively conflicts are resolved depends not only on directors but also on the performance of those organisations which exist to help articulate and mediate blue-collar grievances. Authoritarian management methods notwithstanding, enterprises, particularly in the USSR, seem to offer considerable scope for the airing of complaints. Grievances can be expressed and processed through formal and informal channels. It is the balance between the two that determines the maintenance of the 'frontier of control' at enterprise level.

There are three major formal agencies through which blue-collar complaints can be channelled: bodies of workers' participation and Party and union organisations. Participation comes in two forms. Output participation consists of socialist competition movements which are thinly disguised ways of mobilising workers to greater efforts without a great deal of financial reward. Input participation, or involvement in the running of the enterprise, is supposedly facilitated through an array of production meetings, conferences and councils. In the USSR and Hungary, at least, such meetings seem to be appreciated by most workers as forums in which they can raise complaints and make suggestions. However, many also complain that too much time is spent on management production reports and not enough on issues of direct interest to workers, namely wages and bonus distribution. Nor do workers generally feel that these bodies give them a greater say in enterprise management. And while older unskilled workers seem largely indifferent

to this question, younger skilled groups show increasing interest in exercising a greater influence over policies that ultimately determine their own conditions and material reward. To try and meet such needs Hungarian and Soviet authorities have recently expanded input participation. But while Soviet brigades and brigade councils may heighten workers' sense of self-determination, they cannot give them the control over management they seem to want.[10]

In theory control over management is already exercised on the workers' behalf by the enterprise Party and union organisations. Both supposedly represent workers' interests by blending them with those of the enterprise and state. Underlying this concept of dual representation is an assumption that workers' best interests invariably coincide with those of production. In practice the two often conflict and in such situations, production is usually given precedence. Such representational bias notwithstanding, the enterprise Party organisation seems to provide a useful forum for airing blue-collar grievances. Many workers, particularly the 10%-20% who are communists - see Party activists as being on their side; indeed, a large number of communist activists do seem to sympathise with blue-collar needs. The Party executive, on the other hand, is regarded by workers as part of the 'composite employer.' They assume that in any serious conflict between labour and management, the Party's responsibilities will align it with management.

In a sense, the trade unions are more suited to represent workers' interests. They have a special brief to protect their members' rights against management arbitrariness and possess an impressive array of powers ranging from approval of all dismissals to a consultive say in management appointments. Hungarian unions even have a suspensory veto over any management decisions they consider infringe workers' rights. The actual use unions make of these powers to defend blue-collar

interests is less impressive. Soviet and Hungarian unions do seem to be quite sensitive to members' needs and have somewhat less of the exclusively welfare administration and labour management image that prevails in Czechoslovakia or Poland (prior to 1980). Certainly Soviet and Hungarian workers view their unions more favourably. But even in these states unions remain hamstrung by their dual representation responsibilities for labour discipline and productivity. Closely subordinated to the Party executive, union officials also typically side with management in any serious conflict. Clearly even Soviet and Hungarian unions do not measure up to their members' expectations. Throughout the region workers want unions to play a more active role in defending them in disputes with management and in obtaining favourable wage and bonus deals. The recent upgrading of unions' protective role is apparently an effort to try and pre-empt groundswell for radical union restructuring along Polish lines. There Solidarity unions operate currently untrammelled by the Party subordination or production responsibilities that are part of the dual representation role. Solidarity represents the interests of its members and not those of the 'composite employer.' It sets a dangerous precedent precisely because it embodies the more Western-style bargaining unionism that corresponds most closely to the preferences of East European workers.[11]

How much pressure builds up within enterprise for unions to move in the Polish direction depends not just on the performance of Party or union committees but also on the opportunities given workers to express and settle their grievances through informal channels. Absenteeism, noncompliance with management orders and job changing are all forms of individual dissent that provide useful safety-valves for blue-collar discontent. Interestingly, as the workforce has become more educated and skilled, so such individual forms of

nonconformity have given way in blue-collar preferences to more organised methods, capable of improving conditions rather than merely registering disaffection.

Collective actions of this kind tend to centre around a core of informal opinion leaders who can use their influence over a workgroups' output to pressure management for concessions on norms, pay or conditions. Such pressure group activity is common in East European enterprises and particularly well-developed in Hungary. Similar tactics are probably used in the Soviet Union. Typically, the opinion leaders involved are skilled workers in their thirties and forties who constitute a 'shadow aktiv' parallelling that made up of elected Party and union officials. How this shadow aktiv affects enterprise relations hinges on its relationship with the enterprise establishment. Where management is responsive to pressure group tactics - as is the case in Hungarian enterprises - or opinion leaders have good access to the official aktiv, small group actions can help to defuse tension, particularise grievances and thus prevent large-scale conflict. If opinion leaders are alienated from union and Party and hounded by management, however, they can become a focus of conflict. This is what happened in key Polish enterprises during the late seventies when groups of opinion leaders, often ex-union and Party activists, fostered a corporate labour consciousness within the workforce and organised protests that frequently erupted into strike action.[12] Generally strikes are extremely rare events in these states - even in Poland, between peak crisis years, they can be counted in dozens. More often than not strikes are directed at higher state or Party authorities, either as appeals against enterprise management, or as means of pressing for concessions that lie beyond the local director's competence.

To sum up, labour-management tensions are absorbed remarkably effectively within the enterprise, partly because workers know that management has a limited

range of decision-making powers. Official channels for the articulation and mediation of workers' grievances operate fairly well on a day-to-day basis and are usefully supplemented by informal channels. Trade unions are perhaps the weakest link in the industrial relations chain - that is why Party leaderships are devoting attention to upgrading their defence role. Union performance will have to improve to enable the 'composite employer' to cope with a more exacting young workforce whose demands for a greater say in enterprise affairs will increase as pay packets become more contingent on management performance. There is no doubt that through the course of the seventies perceived management inefficiency plus weak union representation, fuelled enterprise conflict which spilled over into national worker-regime confrontation. In spite of the part played by this 'frontier of control' linkage, the similarities between enterprise relations in Poland and those elsewhere in the region are greater than the differences dividing them. Where Poland stands out is in the relationship between workers and political authorities at regional and national level.

Workers and National Politics

Workers are usually seen as a passive component of national politics in Communist states. Their security-welfare concerns are associated with an economic conservatism that makes them a pillar of political continuity. And until recently this interpretation seemed to be borne out by events. During the period of rapid systemic change in Eastern Europe, workers were typically slow to react and wary of reform programmes, particularly where these involved economic rationalisation. Only when political reform was linked with the national cause by outside pressure or intervention did workers rally to its defence. Yet the weakness of such blue-collar commitment seemed highlighted by the facility with which workers

were quieted by economic concessions in the first years of regime restoration. Similarly, the occasional strike-cum-riot of the fifties and early sixties hardly testified to an active blue-collar political role since these were essentially protests against a deterioration in workers' material position; the demands put forward were defensive and the goals narrowly economistic.

Poland in the seventies saw blue-collar self-assertiveness evolve from defensive protest into a coordinated and politically-oriented labour movement. In 1980, for the first time, political demands - for free trade unions - took precedence over material claims; workers even championed civil liberties, traditionally the cause of critical intellectuals. Nowhere else in the region has such a transition taken place, nowhere else has blue-collar self-assertiveness reached even the level Polish workers attained in 1970-71. Since in other domains of workers' location and role in real existing socialism, Poland differs in degree rather than in kind from the rest of the region, why is there such a stark contrast in the area of national politics?

This question must be addressed with the context of a broader one: namely, what determines workers' assertiveness in national politics? Four dimensions of factors are important here: the degree of blue-collar satisfaction with national economic policy; the links between policy and perceived authority and legitimacy of political leadership and regime; the effectiveness of formal institutional channels of representation; and finally the perceived efficacy of protest.

The strength of workers' policy opinions depend, in the first instance, on the salience of national politics. Although levels of professed political interest are remarkably uniform throughout the region, territorial size and diversity and the salience of the enterprise tend to make the Soviet worker more locally oriented, more parochial, than his Eastern European counterpart.[13] Not only do

ethnic and administrative boundaries distance most workers from Moscow, but to a greater extent than Poles or Czechs their lives revolve around the enterprise. Attentiveness to national policy also varies with policy continuity: a stable policy line, such as the Soviet or the Czechoslovak in recent years impinges far less on blue-collar consciousness than one full of dramatic shifts. It was difficult not to pay attention to national policy in Poland in the late seventies.

Which domestic policy areas arouse workers' critical attention depends partly on circumstances. Polish blue-collars' current championing of civil liberties originated as a response to government repression of worker protest. Persecution of labour activists fostered sympathy with intellectual dissidents and activated the strong blue-collar attachment to personal freedom that exists in latent form in all these societies. Paradoxical though it may seem, this attachment remains coupled with an inclination towards a strong state that will maintain order and social compact rights. If, however, the state fails either to safeguard security-welfare benefits or furnish the material improvements that workers have increasingly come to expect, then blue-collar opinion can quickly become critical of bureaucracy and authoritarianism, as happened in Poland in the seventies. Much hangs, therefore, on government performance in the economic sphere - this continues to be foremost among blue-collar policy concerns. While consumption remains the touchstone of government economic performance, increasingly the traditional focus on price levels has broadened to take in more general issues of economic management. Polish strikers in 1980 saw the consumption situation as symptomatic of deeper problems of economic structure and management. Hence their demands for economic reform, provided that it did not undermine full employment and material equalisation. Needless to say, the greater their perception of economic crisis, the more likely are workers to take some kind of action. Thus the

very size of the consumption gap in Poland in 1980 does go some way to explaining the strength of blue-collar feeling. Yet in Hungary a considerable consumption gap developed in the same period, and prices were raised without any Polish-like repercussions. Why?

A crucial difference distinguishing Poland from Hungary, and, indeed from the rest of the region, lies in how economic policy and performance have redounded on the popular standing and legitimacy of the leadership and regime. The Gierek leadership failed in its obligations in workers' eyes, not only by getting the country into economic crisis, but also by allowing an expansion of social inequality and an embourgoisement of rising elites. Further, the leadership allowed control visibly to slip out of its hands and into those of powerful corporate ministerial groups who effectively decided on the allocation of resources. By contrast, Kádár has taken a public stand against the burgeoning of material and social privilege and has controlled resource allocation far more closely. As importantly, Kádár has long possessed large reserves of non-performance legitimacy to cushion the effects of economic recession. Conversely, Gierek was particularly vulnerable to economic crisis because from the start he had mortgaged his political future heavily on consumption growth.

If these factors help us to account for differences in blue-collar perceptions, they do not explain the different ways in which workers respond to policies of which they disapprove. Obviously, the more effective the formal institutional channels of communication linking workers with national political authorities, the less likely open protest action becomes. When compared with his Hungarian counterpart, Gierek stands out for his neglect of timely public discussion of economic problems. Kádár has successfully offloaded some of the opprobrium of economic crisis onto the unpredictability of international economic

developments. If contrasted with Czechoslovakia or the Soviet Union, however, Polish communications in the 1970s appear impressive. So the crucial factor here, as in so many other areas, is not that of absolute levels of performance, but rather of how performance matches up to workers' expectations. Their hopes raised by Gierek's own promises about improvements in communication and representation of blue-collar interests, workers were highly critical of Party and trade union performance at national level.

Up to a point, this criticism was justified by objective realities. Polish unions were remarkably timid throughout the seventies in pressing blue-collar interests in Warsaw. Soviet unions, by contrast seem to have managed to exercise some influence over wages and prices policy. In Hungary, unions have adopted assertive and frequently highly critical stances on key economic and social issues, coming out successfully against excessive profits, large management bonuses and price increases. They held up price hikes for two years and then secured wage and social benefit compensation when the increases were introduced. Of course, the union's policy role is attributable as much to the receptiveness of Party officials as to the forcefulness shown by union chairmen. And while Hungarian or Soviet unions may well have safeguarded workers' security-welfare interests, they remain closely tied to the Party and largely defensive in their policy actions. In this sense, the new Solidarity unions go far beyond anything even the Hungarians would contemplate. They are totally independent of Party and government, exclude all officials from other organisations from elected bodies and insist on the right to bargain with the Party authorities on an equal footing.[14]

As far as Party representation of blue-collar interests was concerned, Polish workers were also ill-served through the seventies. While Party activists

at enterprise level often did take up workers' grievances, the major problem was that their reports to superiors were filtered out at the regional level of the Party hierarchy. Hierarchical blockage of this kind reduced the credibility of the Party as a nationally representative organisation as well as antagonising the most popular and energetic of communist activists on the shop floor - many supported the workers in 1980 and even helped to organise strike action. Their frustration was all the greater because their expectations of influence within the Party had been raised by a massive campaign to upgrade the standing of enterprise organisation and improve their contacts with central Party authorities. As in other spheres, Gierek's policy here points up the risks of half-hearted reform.

The final dimension conditioning workers' national assertiveness involves the efficacy of protest action. Here Poland stands out most clearly from the region as a whole. The majority of Polish workers in the seventies considered protest through strike action and demonstration a legitimate and effective, if extreme, way of making their opinions heard. The same can hardly be said of Czechoslovakia or Hungary, let alone of the USSR. What accounts for the peculiar Polish situation?

Polish workers' practical experience of protest action might be part of the explanation - experience boosts ability and self-confidence. Yet this begs the question of why that experience was acquired in the first place. National traditions are an important factor, casting the workers as a group protesting on behalf of the nation as a whole. In most of Eastern Europe this role belongs rather to the intellectuals. This identity rests on a long tradition of working-class protest in Poland stretching back to the nineteenth century. More importantly, the tradition of the last twenty-five years has produced a series

of successful protest actions which have helped to make this method of articulating interests both legitimate and attractive. The existence of a self-perpetuating pattern of successful protest is confirmed negatively by Hungarian and Czechoslovak experience as the failure of mass movements there - in 1956 and 1968 - has had a sobering effect on workers and public alike.

How domestic authorities respond to blue-collar protest is also a factor that enters into the cost-benefit calculations that affect levels of protest participation. Alternation between permissiveness and half-hearted repression, as exemplified by Poland in the late seventies, is the pattern of response most likely to foment protest. One can hardly imagine even Kádár tolerating the distribution of intellectual dissident newssheets at factory gates. Whereas many Polish strike leaders were merely transferred to other factories in the seventies, in the Soviet Union all such individuals are systematically imprisoned or placed in mental institutions. Without doubt, consistency and thoroughness in repressing open protest does lower its incidence.

Conclusions and Implications for U.S. Public Policy

It should be evident from the foregoing that the exact path travelled by Polish workers in the seventies will not be trodden by their Czech, Hungarian or Soviet counterparts. Yet if the form of Polish developments is unlikely to be replicated, their substance and roots do reflect major regional trends that are re-shaping workers' role in industrialised Communist states: the effects of growing social differentiation on blue-collar consciousness; the increasing strains placed on the social compact by the requisites of economic rationalisation; the growing salience of economic management and policy for workers whose notions of well-being are expanding to take in values of material acquisitiveness and self-realisation; and finally, these workers' heightened interest in having a greater

say in and influence over policy and performance at enterprise and national level through more effective representative organisations.

Central to these trends and to the changing nature of relations with Communist regimes is a new blue-collar generation whose values and attitudes form the leading edge of a wider shift in workers' outlook. Consisting predominantly of hereditary workers with high qualifications but fewer opportunities for upward mobility than their parents, this generation exhibits a stronger labour identity and see the way to improvement lying through collective rather than individual action. Its standards of what constitutes improvement are more exacting than those of their parents. Better educated, they expect interesting and satisfying as well as secure jobs. Brought up in a period of rising prosperity, they are not grateful for welfare but want more pay and higher living standards - they are acquisitive egalitarians. Finally, raised in the climate of post-Stalinism, they are less intimidated by authority and more critical of the performance of managers and politicians alike.

It is because of the regional dimensions of current Polish events that neighboring regimes have responded to them so nervously. Even though early Czech and East German workers' attempts to establish free trade unions were effectively stifled, these governments' concern over Poland persists. The formidable nature of labour-led movements for change has been underlined by Moscow's combination of anxiety and indecisiveness. In a recent effort to prevent any spill-over from Poland, the Soviet Politburo issued an unusual statement warning its allies of the disastrous consequences of following the Polish pattern.[15] The statement also underlined the dangers of economic involvement with the West. Leaving aside their obvious propaganda points, Moscow's observations did point up some of the de-stabilising effects that the Western connection has had on worker-regime

relations in Eastern Europe. Competition in world markets has intensified the pressures for higher productivity and quality, thus increasing the costs of the social compact. Interestingly, export industry workers were in the vanguard of the 1980 labour movement. What Eastern Europe has received from the West has probably had greater impact than its export trade. Western credits, particularly in the Polish and Hungarian case, made possible the consumption boom of the early seventies; their repayment has posed serious problems for these economies, thus widening the consumption gap. Imports from the West not only have fed conspicuous consumption but they have also raised general levels of consumer expectations as has expanding tourist exchange.

Directly and indirectly, then, the Western connection has helped to catalyse ongoing changes in worker-regime relations. Since blue-collar pressures for higher living standards and more say is presently the most powerful source of democratisation in Eastern Europe, it is in the interests of the U.S. and of the West in general to maintain levels of contact and expand these wherever possible, notwithstanding the short-term economic costs of doing so. For in the long-term perspective, the Polish events herald a fundamental shift in the overall pattern of political development in the industrialised Communist states. Traditionally, political change in these countries has originated in movements from within the Communist Party or in pressures from intellectuals pressing for institutional reforms of the existing system. In 1980, for the first time, a self-mobilised labour movement pressured the authorities from outside the institutional framework not for old-style reform but for the establishment of social control mechanisms that would monitor the Party without participating in responsibility for government. This focus on social control coincides with the logical thrust of workers' general pressure for a greater say. In this sense,

1980 marks the coming of age of labour post-reformism in Eastern Europe. How and when workers elsewhere will take up the post-reformist cause is a matter for conjecture. What is certain is that 1980 signals the beginning of a transition in the role of labour in the industrialised Communist states from a pillar of continuity to a force for change.

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