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REVIEW & OUTLOOK

Communists and the AFL-CIO

Poland's Solidarity movement is holding the second stage of its national convention in Gdansk without the presence of one of its best known invited-guests: Lane Kirkland, president of the AFL-CIO. Mr. Kirkland had prepared a speech to deliver to the Solidarity meeting, but at the last minute the Communist government of Poland refused to grant visas to him and his AFL-CIO delegation. This is no big surprise, really; American labor's support for Solidarity has gravely embarrassed Warsaw, and the Polish government keeps trying to discredit the effort. It is also sadly unsurprising that the Polish Communists are getting help here in the U.S.

You can get an idea of how the anti-AFL campaign is working by taking a look at a recent issue of *Counterspy*, a Washington-based magazine that proclaims itself devoted to exposing the nefarious work of the CIA and its agents of American imperialism wherever they roam in the world. An article in the magazine is straightforwardly titled "AFL-CIO: Trojan Horse in Polish Unions." A special editorial introduction to the article put the thesis just as straightforwardly: In country after country, "AFL-CIO aid has invariably had the ulterior motive of establishing, securing and expanding U.S. corporate and strategic interests."

How do we know this is true? For one thing, says *Counterspy*, we have before us the record of American labor's reactionary efforts in Latin America. In Guatemala, George Meany worked with CIA-connected organizations to undermine the properly progressive, truly "labor-oriented" forces in the country. In the Dominican Republic, the AFL-CIO set up an organization that "ran propaganda units as well as goon squads against the legitimate unions."

And, comrades, this is no accident. *Counterspy* tells us that AFL-CIO officials have always denied working with the CIA or taking CIA money for their activities, but these denials "ring hollow." After all, do we not have the testimony of a former CIA official who says he actually handed over bucks to an AFL representative? Do we not know that the CIA read the mail of high labor personnel "in order to monitor their handling of CIA money"?

So when we see American labor at work in Poland, we should know that we're not viewing anything like an expression of genuine solidarity among the working classes. Instead, what we've got is just another variation on a decades-old American capitalist plot.

Counterspy was not the last source to strike this theme. Just a little while ago, broadcasts from the Soviet Union could be heard denouncing Solidarity's American connection and cutely referring to Lane Kirkland as among the "chief stockholders" in the Polish dissident movement. Over on this side of the ocean, when Solidarity recently opened an office in New York, a respectably-sized group of demonstrators was organized to picket the opening in protest against the American imperialism it allegedly represented.

American labor is indeed aiding the Solidarity movement, openly and unashamedly. It has a long history of fighting Communist domination of labor movements. It learned early in the game that Communist parties and free unions are natural mortal enemies, more violently so because free unions, more than any other free institution, threaten Communist claims to legitimacy. When American labor goes head to head with Communists, the obvious counterattack for the Communists is to claim that American labor is an arm of the American gov-

ernment, manipulated by the CIA. How easy it is to make lists of the CIA connections: the parallel aims, the instances of collaboration, the communications and shared acquaintanceships. How easy to use the list to try to discredit the AFL-CIO enterprise in Poland, and more important, to try to expunge the colossal embarrassment Solidarity represents to world-wide communism.

This is a very dirty business we are dealing with. American labor has been active on the international scene in order to further its own perfectly legitimate purposes. One result of its activities has been to expose, time after time, the gulf between Communist interests and worker interests. This exposure has often worked to the benefit of an activist U.S. foreign policy, and opponents of such a policy have reason to want to tarnish the whole connection.

But they should not be allowed to do so easily. While the American labor movement has at times in recent years identified itself too closely with political parties and administrations for our liking, on the whole it remains a free and independent force pitting its weight against state power both in the U.S. and abroad. Its efforts on behalf of political freedom are thus significant. Anyone seeking to delegitimize its performance in this realm should be aware of just how serious an attack he is launching.