

International unions fund the dissidents

by Lonnie Wolfe

Edmond Maire, director of the French trade union confederation CFDT, responded to news of the agreement between the Polish government and striking shipyard workers with fervor. "Nothing is definite in Poland," he said on French radio, "and the struggle should continue to fight against the centralized bureaucratic functioning of power and against the obligation of the independent unions to recognize the leading role of the party."

Maire belongs to a network of international trade-union figures and their political operatives who have been meddling in Polish affairs for some time. When Maire's personal representative, M. Sardai, arrived at the Lenin Shipyard in Gdansk Aug. 26 and handed over a check for 11,000 French francs to strike leader Lech Walesa, it was the culmination of months of preparation. Maire and others, including American trade union leadership, had been backing the self-styled "free trade union" movement in Poland and sent representatives to consult with Lech Walesa's mentors in the dissident group "Workers' Defense Committee" (KOR) months before the strikes broke out.

Now that the settlement achieved in Gdansk has given some breathing room to cool out the Polish crisis, Walesa has openly called on Western trade unions to send money for his movement. Escalation of this intervention, however, practically guarantees a harsh Soviet response that could boomerang against Polish workers—the very people whom the transferred funds are ostensibly to assist.

There are two overlapping networks involved. One centers on the international affairs department of the American trade union federation, the AFL-CIO. This department, run until recently and for over 30 years by former Communist Party U.S.A. "Right Opposition" leader Jay Lovestone, coordinates with other national European trade union federations through its Paris office, headed by Irving Brown. Under the direction of Trilateral Commissioner and AFL-CIO president Lane Kirkland, this operation has extensive contacts within the East bloc and has admitted to funding dissident Polish trade unionists through covert channels.

A second network operates from the American United Autoworkers Union through the International

Metalworkers Federation. Historically, the IMF is run by the UAW and is presently controlled by former UAW International Affairs director Herman Rehban. The UAW-linked network has ties to the more radical dissident organizations but otherwise works in total congruence with Lovestone's AFL-CIO operation. UAW president Douglas Fraser last week on U.S. TV openly admitted conduiting funds and other assistance to the Polish strike leadership through the Geneva-based International Metalworkers Federation. Maire's CFDT is linked to the UAW since the days of its late president, Walter Reuther.

The AFL-CIO and the UAW operations also work through the Geneva-based International Labor Organization, which has "been monitoring the developments in Poland" and talking to Polish strike leaders, according to its officials.

AFL-CIO officials have boasted privately that the recent strikes would not have been possible without their financial and political support, organized through these networks. This assertion is supportable. In May, the ILO, under prompting from the AFL-CIO and UAW, dispatched a special fact-finding mission to Poland to discuss "grievances" with Polish workers. Contact was made with individuals who became strike leaders.

For nearly the entire month of June, Lane Kirkland, Irving Brown and other top AFL-CIO leaders were in Europe for the ILO meeting, where, sources report, the "Polish situation" was one of the topics under discussion and decisions were made to send additional monies to Poland through "discreet" channels.

Herman Rehban, whose IMF has direct contact with the metalworkers in the Gdansk shipyard, stepped up communication and "support" operations in consultation with UAW headquarters in Detroit, Michigan. Jay Lovestone, who now operates out of an office in the International Ladies Garment Workers Union in New York City, was reported to be in constant communication with his extensive international network and was "fully aware" that a strike action was imminent.

When the Gdansk strike finally broke out, these networks intensified their activities. The AFL-CIO Executive Board discussed the situation extensively at its Aug. 20-21 meeting in Chicago. A public statement of support was drafted and additional funds were dispatched through the Lovestone-Brown operation. Doug Fraser, in consultation with Rehban in Geneva, drafted a similar support statement. Lane Kirkland bid European unions to intervene directly to promote disruption of Poland's economy by adopting a boycott of shipments to and from Poland. A similar action was put into effect in the U.S. through the International Longshoreman's Association and the International Association of Machinists, both member unions of the AFL-CIO.