

PERSPECTIVES

Support for PATCO must come from the bottom

By Suzanne Gordon

IT HAS BEEN FIVE WEEKS NOW since the Professional Air Traffic Controllers Organization (PATCO) started its nationwide strike. While rank-and-file members and local officers of other unions have acted to support the controllers, the national leadership of organized labor has not taken strong, united action on PATCO's behalf. Nor has the left shown much concern for the union's fate. This is because of PATCO's supposedly unreasonable wage demands, its endorsement of Ronald Reagan last year, and its failure, in the past, to display much solidarity with other airline industry unions or support for left causes.

In the face of the Reagan administration's union-busting attack on PATCO, these excuses for inaction now seem paltry. The issue is no longer PATCO—it's the future of the whole labor movement.

Reagan's response to PATCO's strike is sending a message to every public and private sector employer in the country that they should stand fast in bargaining and bust unions, if necessary, to achieve their goals. It is a message that will in-

hibit labor's efforts to organize the unorganized and will accelerate the trend toward union acceptance of wage cuts and other contract "give backs" in many basic industries.

We can't wait for national leaders to act. Nor should we wait for PATCO



Striking air traffic controllers and families picketing Chicago's O'Hare field.

leaders to contact us. The controllers are all too often inexperienced. They have had little previous contact with other labor and community groups. Local unions and citizens' organizations around the country must initiate strike support activity themselves.

In Massachusetts, for example, local union officers and staff from 16 different unions have sent a letter soliciting funds, picketing help and resolutions of support for PATCO to every local in the state affiliated with the AFL-CIO.

An ongoing PATCO labor support group is being formed following a rally in Boston on Aug. 22 that attracted more than 1,000 PATCO strikers, their families and supporters from other unions and groups like Massachusetts Fair Share.

PATCO supporters are writing newspaper articles and letters to the editor and are appearing on radio talk shows to

explain the issues involved in the strike to air travelers and other members of the public. Local unions are inviting PATCO members to speak at general membership meetings to increase the size of plant gate and office collections and to help raise funds for PATCO's two Boston area locals.

A grassroots campaign like this is needed in every city in the country. Such a campaign could help change public opinion about the PATCO strike and give material aid to the strikers. Equally important, it can demonstrate to labor's national leadership that the rank and file isn't going to wait until Sept. 19 (Solidarity Day) to start displaying the kind of support needed in this country if labor is to survive the next three years under Ronald Reagan.

Suzanne Gordon is an editor of *Working Papers*.

The one-party state is breaking down in Poland

By Herbert Semmel

THE EMPEROR'S NEW Clothes is playing daily in Poland. When Soviet President Brezhnev met Polish First Secretary Kania and Prime Minister Jaruzelski Aug. 15, they issued a statement reaffirming the adherence of Poland to Marxism-Leninism, which translates into one-party rule by the Communist Party. At the same time, Lech Walesa, the leader of Solidarity, publicly disclaimed any desire of Solidarity to governmental power, saying, "Let the government govern the country, but we will govern ourselves in the factories."

The outward form of government re-

mains the same, but in fact Poland is no longer a "one-party" state. It is governed by a de facto coalition of the Communist Party and the "social forces" that are led by Solidarity and include the Catholic Church and Rural Solidarity. It is the first Communist nation in which the monopoly on power of the Communist Party has been altered.

The Communist Party in Poland decided to govern by consensus and to compromise on numerous social and economic issues because of the Party's almost total loss of public confidence, as shown by its own public opinion poll in June 1981. The poll showed that the public placed its highest confidence in the Catholic Church and in Solidarity. The Communist Party ranked lowest. This result was universally accepted. It was

acknowledged by leading Party officials and by the report of the outgoing Central Committee. As a result, a new social contract had to be developed or the government had to resort to violence, which would certainly be met with massive opposition—probably a general strike—and which would eventually provoke Soviet intervention.

In order to govern and to institute the widespread and painful changes needed to stabilize and improve the shattered economy, the Polish Communist Party and its government must obtain the cooperation of Solidarity, whose members include more than 75 percent of the working class, of the Polish farmers and of the Catholic Church. Solidarity has demanded a high price for the cooperation it will offer the government in stabilizing the country and rebuilding the economy—nothing short of a sharing of decision-making power on domestic issues. The government has informally accepted the terms. At present, most major decisions are negotiated between the government and study commissions of the "social forces" in which Solidarity usually plays the leading role. When the government tries to move without prior agreement, the result is strikes and demonstrations that bring the government to the bargaining table.

Solidarity is also insisting that the price of cooperation must be structural change to institutionalize the shift of political power and prevent a reversion to a slightly modified version of the '70s. Agreement has been reached on a new trade union law, including the right to strike. Agreement in principle also exists on decentralization of the economy, although difficult questions of implementation remain. But economic decentralization could mean only a shift in authority from the centralized planners to a local managerial elite, many of whom are already part of the privileged upper strata of Polish society. This justified fear has led to widespread discussion of a true system of worker control and self-management of enterprises. From the standpoint of the working class, worker self-management offers the best assur-

ance against a return to authoritarian and bureaucratic control.

Worker self-management is an explosive issue. It threatens the privileges and authority of a large body of managerial personnel who are, at the same time, mainstays of the system and advocates of reform. The managerial group looks to a decentralized economy for increasing their authority and satisfying their professional desires for more personal creativity and independence, but both are undercut by worker self-management.

There will undoubtedly be areas in which agreement will not be reached without considerable struggle, including strikes, demonstrations and threats of Soviet intervention. But a complete breakdown of the current working arrangement between Solidarity and the government now seems unlikely. Lech Walesa's current theme, repeatedly voiced by him, of a time for consolidation, stability and hard work, supports such a conclusion.

If the Soviets continue their grudging tolerance of the Polish experiment, and if the Western powers refrain from using Poland as a pawn in the renewed cold war, the Poles may succeed in putting together a combination of economic and political democracy. New forms of democratic participation have evolved in Poland from the difficult special circumstances of the development of socialism in the Soviet zone of influence. Without democracy, the Polish people will not put forth the effort and sacrifices necessary to rehabilitate the deformed limping economy. If the effort is not made and the economy sinks further, the newborn democracy will likely fall as well. As a Polish farmer put it so well at the Party Congress, "there can be no democracy without food and no food without democracy."

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SCHOOLING

See Dick and Jane read, see if they understand

This is the first of a series of articles by Norm Fruchter on public schools in the United States. After filing the second part of his report on New York schools, Fruchter will travel to Los Angeles, Atlanta and Chicago to report on public education in those cities.

By Norm Fruchter

TWO EVENTS DOMINATED public education in New York City this spring and summer: the results of the citywide reading test, which indicated that the reading achievement of New York's students equalled the national average; and School Chancellor Frank Macchiarola's new promotional "Gates" policy, which denies promotion to 4th and 7th graders whose reading levels are significantly below grade.

After falling for more than a decade, New York's reading scores started to rise three years ago, at the onset of Macchiarola's appointment. But the 10 percent increase achieved during the past two years has startled everyone. Both Mayor Koch (who uses the results as a spur to his re-election campaign) and Albert Shanker (president of both the local and national Teachers' union) have saluted the results as a turnaround in the city's schooling.

The test scores say that half of New York's public school children in the 2nd through 9th grades are reading on or above grade level. But the test scores can't tell us the relationship between statistical gain and real improvement in the ability to read. There is widespread doubt about the meaning of the increase in test scores; many critics have challenged the validity of the scores themselves. Emphasis on test results during the past few years has encouraged various forms of teaching to the test, test-readiness drills and a variety of test-preparation exercises used throughout the system. These practices undoubtedly increase scores. The implementation of the city-wide test by the Board of Education is also under attack. Wayne Barrett, in a June 17 *Village Voice* article, demonstrated that significant numbers of children have been excluded from the testing pool. He charged that a flawed test distribution system allows considerable access to the tests both before and after testing. Barrett argues that high school testing shows no comparable increase, although this year's 10th grades contain most of last year's 9th graders who achieved significant gains on last year's tests. (Because high schools are centrally administered, high school students are tested separately from the elementary and intermediate school pupils in New York City's 32 community school districts.)

It seems evident that once Chancellor Macchiarola made a determined decision to improve test scores, the scores would improve. There has been an increased emphasis on reading and math, with a gain in "time on task" as well as in achievement levels, accompanied by an insistent rhetoric that "all children can learn." This emphasis on basic skills improvement, coupled with an increasing emphasis on the school, rather than the child, as the focus of improvement, is welcome relief from the emphasis on "background factors" (race and class) that schoolpeople have used throughout the past two decades to explain school failure. But whether these new emphases and the resulting score improvement mean permanent gains in the ability to read is unclear.

Evidence from several national studies indicates that increased reading scores may not reflect improved ability to understand what is read. Students who

master discrete vocabulary, syntax and grammar operations have increasing difficulty synthesizing overall meaning. If these trends continue, the emphasis on basic skills may have to include more stress on comprehension as well as mastery of segmented reading components. The kinds of standardized tests we currently administer may then seem increasingly irrelevant.

Passing the qualified.

The Chancellor's new promotional "Gates" policy is designed to force improvement in reading skills (and eventually math skills), by halting the policy of social promotion—automatically advancing children, in spite of skill deficiencies, to keep them with their age-



mates. In the Chancellor's version of minimum competency standards, the 4th and 7th grades are cut-off points, or "gates," and students scoring more than a year below level in 4th grade, and more than a year and a half below level in 7th grade, are automatically denied promotion. These students are offered six weeks summer remedial instruction, with specially trained teachers, followed by a second chance at the test. Students who fail a second time, as well as those students choosing not to attend the summer session, will be assigned to repeat the 4th and 7th grade in remedial classes with a projected level of 20 students per class. The Board of Education has appropriated additional funds for both the summer remedial program and the smaller remedial classes for the coming academic year.

Approximately 25,000 children have been held back—about 11,000 4th graders and 14,000 7th graders. About half these students have enrolled in the summer program. Unlike so many Board of Education policies that allow a large degree of flexibility to community districts, the Gates program mandates stiff standards. Exceptions to denial of promotion can only be made by a district superintendent, after an appeal from the local principal.

Like the emphasis on test score results, the Gates program focuses dramatically on the need for skills improvement. The issue is whether real reading improvement will result. Critics question whether the remediation can repair the damage already inflicted by the system's previously inadequate preparation. What kinds of remedial programs can transcend the stigma of failure that most children denied promotion will undoubtedly face?

Will funds be sufficient to provide a range of truly effective programs? Will remedial funds be diverted from other grades and other necessary support efforts? What teachers will teach these new remedial classes and what kind of training will they receive? What happens to handicapped students and to those not fluent in English?

According to a recent issue of *Advocate*, the newsletter of Advocates for Children (AFC), a citywide educational student advocacy and support organization, the Chancellor's staff is sensitive to these questions and is implementing the Gates with a priority on effective remedial programs. But as AFC maintains, effective teaching and remediation programs in the earlier grades would greatly reduce the need for such a punitive program in the 4th and 7th grades.

To explore the effects of the rise in test scores and the Gates program, I spoke with administrators, parent activists and community board members in my own area, District 15 in south Brooklyn. Our public school population of about 19,000 elementary and intermediate school students is about 65 percent Hispanic, 20 percent white and 15 percent black. Though neighborhoods range from high-

tracted a 60 percent enrollment rather than the 50 percent the Board projected. Yet Glassman sees the Gates as ill-conceived. "What I don't like is that the measurement device is a group paper-and-pencil test that was not devised for this purpose." Standard error of measurement was not considered. "The grade, to me, is terrible. If we want to help kids, we should help them in the first grade."

Like many administrators throughout the system, Glassman prefers the Chancellor's first innovative program, transitional classes for first graders with skills problems. As Judy Hoffman, a member of District 15's Community School Board elected by an insurgent coalition, points out: "At various times in our history we've come up with good answers and good programs and then we've dropped them along the way. The transitional classes, which identified children with significant reading difficulties early on, met one of our strongest needs. Now that program has not been dropped entirely but the funding has been cut back."

Chancellor Macchiarola seems in danger of developing a traditional style of educational leadership that constantly

promotes new programs while abandoning older ones. Had the Chancellor consistently funded and implemented his transitional classes for first graders with skills difficulties, there would be far less need for the more drastic Gates program. Who can blame those administrators, teachers and parents who wonder how long the Gates program will last?

Meanwhile the system's basic problems fester. The 50 percent of the almost one million public school children who are reading below grade level are often very far behind. Though the test scores indicate improvement for many poorly-achieving schools in minority and poor areas, class and race still seem to be the major determinants of reading achievement throughout the city. Though many individual school results indicate that the linkage between "background factors" and poor achievement can be broken, most schools are not breaking that linkage. Haydee Ruocco, president of the President's Council of District 15's PTA, sees educational achievement as a result of parental class power. "In this district, as in any social situation, the majority who get what they want or what they expect are more verbal and more articulate than individuals who might have greater need but are not as verbal. We do not have the representation we need for the majority of children in this district."

Test mania.

Dr. Jerold Glassman, our newly appointed Community Superintendent, defines the low reading levels as one of the district's main problems, and is somewhat troubled by the celebration of test score increases. "We are teaching to the test. We spend more and more time giving exercises of types of examples on the test. The same test has been used too often and in some cases, as in the second grade, the same form of the same test has been used. But as a rough indication, I think that the tests show that many of the efforts taken in the city are beginning to pay off. There is more concern with reading improvement than ever before."

Glassman thinks the Chancellor's Gates program will work in District 15. He has implemented the summer program on a wider scale than the Central Board recommended, spreading his 11 allocated remedial teachers across eight school sites, rather than two, to maximize the program's outreach. He's at-

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A subsequent article will examine three District 15 elementary schools that are meeting the needs of almost all their students.

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