

---

**OTHER NATIONS**


---

for jobs in urban factories. Workers today are largely city-born, highly trained, and more self-assured than their predecessors were. Permitted to travel abroad, millions have seen the good life enjoyed by Westerners. And the workers have learned from past mistakes. In 1980, rather than confront the government in the streets, they occupied factories, putting the onus of violently ejecting them on the authorities. They eschewed the traditional hodgepodge of short-term economic demands and unrealistic political goals to focus on one aim—union recognition—designed to give them permanent leverage with party leaders.

Finally, the alliance between Poland's dissident intellectuals and the working man (with the latter firmly at the helm) was unique. Unlike the Hungarian Revolution of 1956 or the Czech heresy of 1968, contends Bialer, Poland's unrest cannot be quelled by imprisoning a few writers and academics.

### *Peace Dividend*

"Vietnam in 1980: The Gathering Storm?" by Douglas Pike, in *Asian Survey* (Jan. 1981), University of California Press, Berkeley, Calif. 94720.

Vietnam's communist rulers won their wars against France and the United States, but they are losing the peace. Economic and diplomatic blundering has stirred discontent in the party and among the populace, reports Pike, a U.S. Foreign Service information officer.

Vietnamese living standards have plummeted since the communists took Saigon in 1975. Food production has averaged between 15 and 20 percent below the country's needs. The basic monthly rice ration for civilians has shrunk from 15 kilograms (during the Vietnam War) to 10 kilograms. Since 1975, consumer goods have become scarcer by half; even coffins are in short supply. Only an annual \$900 million worth of Soviet economic aid keeps the economy afloat.

Pike blames the aging leadership in Hanoi for too hastily collectivizing the South's agriculture, dismantling its capitalist commercial system, and making refugees of skilled ethnic Chinese and middle-class Vietnamese. The regime's bellicose approach to foreign affairs (war with China, periodic threats to Thailand), he adds, has alienated potential Western aid donors. Vietnam's economy has been hamstrung by military outlays. Hanoi's \$3.8 billion 1980 military budget represented 47 percent of government spending. The country maintains a 1.1-million-man Army (fourth largest in the world). Nearly 200,000 soldiers are bogged down fighting ragtag, tenacious Khmer Rouge forces in Kampuchea (Cambodia).

According to Pike, 1980 witnessed the first signs of major public unrest in communist Vietnam's history. Antigovernment graffiti appeared on public buildings in Hanoi. Food demonstrations, strikes, rising crime, and other "counterrevolutionary activity" were discreetly reported by the state press. Meanwhile, the party replaced 20 Politburo-level officials last winter (mainly in economic, military, and police

**OTHER NATIONS**

---

posts), probably to mollify local leaders.

Filled with hubris after their victory over the United States, Vietnam's rulers will probably continue their belligerent policies abroad. The Vietnamese people themselves seem too accustomed to "submitting to history" (in the words of government propagandists) to revolt. But a "blowup" at the top is, for the first time, possible, says Pike. Either way, he concludes, for the ordinary Vietnamese, "more suffering seems inevitable."

### *Labor Politics in Mexico*

"Porfirian Labor Politics: Working Class Organizations in Mexico City and Porfirio Díaz, 1876-1902" by David W. Walker, in *The Americas* (Jan. 1981), P.O. Box 34440, Washington, D.C. 20034.

Historians often depict Mexican President Porfirio Díaz (1830-1915) as brutally antilabor. But for most of his 35-year rule, writes Walker, a historian at the University of Illinois, Chicago Circle, Díaz was the workingman's hero.

Long before Díaz overthrew President Sebastián Lerdo de Tejada in 1876, labor leaders had cultivated a symbiotic relationship with state and local politicians, delivering votes in exchange for donations to the unions. The new President moved quickly to destroy existing workers' organizations and replace them with groups loyal to himself. Soon, union chiefs such as Pedro Ordoñez and Carmen Huerta were echoing Díaz's dictum that "profits must be guaranteed to foreign capitalists in order to sustain national progress." In return, their organizations received government-financed night schools and printing presses, and access to such luxuries as running water for meeting halls. Díaz and his labor allies also promoted establishment of the *mutualistas*—blue-collar groups that sponsored medical care and pensions out of workers' dues, thereby avoiding claims on government or business.

Between 1877 and 1898, industrial wages in Mexico climbed 15 percent—due mainly to a spurt of foreign-financed railroad construction—while prices stabilized. As long as the economy remained robust, most workers appreciated Díaz's suppression of trouble-making dissidents. At the same time, prosperity allowed the President to tolerate sporadic labor unrest and even to mediate strikes to the workers' benefit. Then the economy soured. From 1901 to 1910, food prices jumped 100 percent and rents 500 percent, while wages stagnated. In 1907, pressured by foreign mill owners, Díaz imposed a strongly probusiness settlement of a nationwide textile dispute. After bloody clashes between federal troops and unarmed workers, his labor support vanished.

Mexican blue-collar workers overwhelmingly backed reformer Francisco Madero in his unsuccessful 1910 presidential campaign and joined his movement that toppled the Díaz regime in May 1911. But the strategy of paternalism and coercion that Díaz perfected, says Walker, has colored government-union relations in Mexico ever since.