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SOLIDARITY AND THE SOVIET UNION

By
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HIS 490 Honors Thesis

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Table of Contents

Acknowledgements……………………………………………………………………………iv

Chapter One: Introduction…………………………………………………………………..1

Chapter Two: "Our Only Guarantee is Ourselves": Gdansk 1980…………………………19

Chapter Three: "The Polish Germ": Registration Crisis, Martial Law, and Underground Solidarity………………………………………………………………………………………34

Chapter Four: Relegalization and Soviet Collapse…………………………………………55

Chapter Five: Conclusion…………………………………………………………………..73

Bibliography………………………………………………………………………………..76

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I. INTRODUCTION

In August of 1980, Oxford historian Timothy Garton Ash was on his way to Poland. He'd studied the domestic German resistance movements against Hitler, and was now interested in the burgeoning resistance movement against the Polish Workers' Party and the greater Soviet Union in Poland. Garton Ash recalls that upon his arrival in Poland, the visa form asked the purpose of his journey. He wrote: "'Polish resistance,'" and "The visa clerk grinned as he stamped the form." The next day, Garton Ash arrived at the Gdansk shipyards, and noted "the blue-grey shipyard gates festooned with flowers and photographs of the Pope, a cheerful crowd before the loudspeakers blaring out patriotic hymns, farmers bringing baskets of food." Religion, nationalism, mutual aid, local organizing - all traditions that had become anathema under the Soviet rule of Poland. And yet, these staples of Polish culture were alive, vibrant, and well in a Gdansk Shipyard, thanks to the infant Solidarity movement which would over the course of the next nine years seal the fate of the Soviet Union.

Historiography

The Solidarity movement and its progression in Poland was of immediate interest to historians as it was one of the first successful moments of resistance against a Communist power. Set against the backdrop of the Cold War, the movement had broad domestic and international implications. However, as the movement progressed, historians began to situate it within the larger conflict of the Cold War differently. A. Kemp-Welch describes these two schools in his work *Poland under Communism: A Cold War History,* writing that "Western historians have interpreted Solidarity in two main ways. Minimalists view Solidarity simply as the culmination of workers' protests, begun in 1970, against the Party's repressive and incompetent management of the

economy…Maximalists see Solidarity as the start of the Soviet Union's collapse."[1] Initially, most historians took a maximalist approach, believing that the movement contributed largely to the collapse of the Soviet Union as a whole, whereas in the later stages of the movement and in its aftermath, some historians chose to take a more minimalist approach, believing that the Solidarity strike and trade union was merely one aspect of the collapse of the Soviet Union, which was already doomed to fail. More recent scholarship fits into a maximalist viewpoint, though it is mostly concerned with the ethical and social function Solidarity played in Polish society.

The first two works were both written in 1983, contemporaneous with the strike itself. *The Polish Revolution: Solidarity* by Oxford historian Timothy Garton Ash. The work focuses on the early stages of the strike, including the events immediately preceding the birth of Solidarity, Lech Walesa's rise to leader of the strike, and the initial negotiations with the Communist government. Garton Ash's work relies heavily on first-hand accounts of the strike, drawing largely on his experience while on the ground in the Gdansk Shipyards. Though his first-hand accounts are incredibly valuable, it is important to note that Garton Ash was an outsider to the movement, and thus has a different point of view than the strikers themselves. *Soldiarity: Poland 1980-81* by Alain Touraine is a deeper dive into the birth and early years of the Solidarity movement. Touraine's work is drawn largely from interviews of members of the strike. This provides a deep look into the minds of the strikers themselves.

Both works are marked by the optimism that is consistent with the historiographical trend of maximalism. Though both were written at a time where the union was driven underground by authorities, they both speak to profound social and psychological changes within the Polish people. For example, Garton Ash argues that "Beyond the single, monumental organizational fact of

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[1] A. Kemp-Welch, *Poland under Communism: A Cold War History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008): 237.

Solidarity's existence, the most fundamental changes were all in the realm of consciousness rather than being. But the Polish workers, in contradiction to Marx, believed that ultimately consciousness (*Bewusstsein*) would determine being (*Sein*)."[2] Unlike Garton Ash, Touraine viewed the Solidarity movement as all but destroyed. Though the course of history would prove him wrong, he notes the psychological importance of the movement in a similar way to Garton Ash. Touraine writes that "The Polish movement has been defeated and destroyed; it will continue to suffer repression, but it cannot disappear, not only because it corresponds to the deepest convictions of many people, but because it is impossible to uproot the free trade union Solidarity from the factories and from the minds of the workers."[3] Touraine goes further, indicating his maximalist viewpoint when he notes that the Solidarity movement was essential in providing a blueprint for confrontation between Communist governments and their citizens.

Garton Ash was more optimistic about the future of Solidarity, whereas Touraine was pessimistic about its ability to bounce back while at the same time avoiding being dismissive of its impact. This is likely because of a difference in their focus and training. Garton Ash is a trained historian, whereas Touraine is a sociologist. His focus is thus naturally more on the societal impact of Solidarity and internal group dynamics as opposed to contextualizing it within earlier resistance movements as Garton Ash does. Poland has a long history of resistance movements, of which Solidarity is only one part.

In Search of Poland: The Superpowers' Response to Solidarity, 1980-1989 by Arthur R. Rachwald examines the response of both the USA and the USSR to the Solidarity movement throughout the 1980s. Rachwald discusses the initial Soviet response, their attempt to restore the

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[2] Timothy Garton Ash, *The Polish Revolution: Solidarity* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1983): 279.

[3] Alain Touraine, *Solidarity: Poland 1980-81* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983): 195.

status quo in Poland, and the process of negotiations and militarism, as well as the support of the United States for Solidarity and the economic sanctions imposed by the USA on Poland. The work uses a variety of Soviet and American sources, such as Party journals and internal memos, and gives an analysis of the international view of Poland. The work also subscribes to the maximalist viewpoint earlier expressed by Garton Ash and Touraine. The focus of the work is the destabilizing effect that the Solidarity movement had on the Communist government in Poland and the Soviet structure. Though this book is well-researched and draws on many useful sources, there is a significant drawback. As it was published in 1990, the analysis is somewhat incomplete, as a significant number of archival sources and previously classified documents are now available. Despite this, the overall analysis remains sound and in line with the maximalist tendencies of the 1980s and early 1990s.

In the 1990s, there was a growth of the minimalist viewpoint regarding the role of Solidarity in Soviet collapse. Mary McAuley's *Soviet Politics 1917-1999*, published in 1992, is a good example of this. Despite the book mainly focusing on internal Soviet politics as opposed to the satellite states the Solidarity movement and the role of workers in Poland, is mentioned. However, their role is minimized and portrayed as less important than the already collapsing social, economic, and political structures that were occurring within Soviet Russia.

A somewhat more neutral source is *Poland under Communism* by A. Kemp-Welch. The work is a comprehensive overview of the history of Poland from Yalta to the conclusion of the Round Table talks. Though *Poland under Communism* does not take a minimalist or maximalist stance overtly, it does share a common factor with many minimalist historical works, which is a willingness to be critical of Lech Walesa and other important Solidarity figures. As opposed to

elevating these figures, Kemp-Welch notes their shortcomings, both in political realms such as policy and other realms such as their education, or lack thereof.

In more recent years, scholarship has begun to drift back to the maximalist perspective. Andrzej Korbonski's article "East Central Europe on the eve of the changeover: the case of Poland" published in the *Journal of Communist and Post-Communist Studies* in 1999 examined both the sociopolitical factors in Poland surrounding the fall of the Soviet Union and also notes the presence of a "'domino effect' which ultimately affected the entire region."[4] This is a notable shift away from the view of Poland and Solidarity in the background of the fall of the Soviet Union to an interpretation in which Poland and Solidarity played a significant role. Though Korbonski acknowledges the role of social and economic factors, he places a great deal of the credit for the collapse of the Soviet Union on the shoulders of Solidarity.

Though it is a more nuanced approach, Elzbieta Matynia also views Solidarity through a maximalist lens. In her article "The Lost Treasure of Solidarity," Matynia writes about different spheres of life in Communist Poland, and notes Solidarity's ability to shift from the private to the public as needed. She notes that this ability to move between spheres of public and private allowed Solidarity to fill a function in society that the government had failed to fill and provided for increased discourse and social change. Though she does not say so directly, her analysis of the movement fits better within the maximalist framework than a minimalist one.

This trend of works that subtly fit better within a maximalist framework continues with both "A theoretical appreciation of the ethic of Solidarity in Poland twenty-five years after" by Gerald J. Beyer and "The paradox of Solidarity's legacy: contested values in Poland's transitional politics" by Jack Bielasiak. Both authors argue that Solidarity created a specific set of values and

[4] Andrzej Korbonski, "East Central Europe on the eve of the changeover: the case of Poland," *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 32 (1999): 139.

procedures that Poland has not been able to replicate in the years after the moment. Both articles also argue that it was precisely these values, such as self-sacrifice, the value of hope, and the dignity of the human person that filled an ethical void created by the Communist state of Poland and by the Soviet Union as a whole. This clearly fits them better into a maximalist framework, though their focus is more on ethics as opposed to strict politics and history.

A general trend to note is that minimalist scholars do not disagree that Solidarity played a role in the collapse of the Soviet Union; they merely argue that there were other, far more significant factors behind the Soviet collapse. A strong example of this is McAuley's work on Soviet politics. She attributes much of the Soviet collapse to what she calls a "paralysis of decision-making" caused by the bureaucracy.[5] While Solidarity was a problem that the Soviet government failed to answer, she points out many other problems such as corruption and bribery. This is in strong contrast to Korbonski's "domino affect" interpretation of the movement.

Generally, historians studying the Solidarity movement are most concerned with the role that the movement played in toppling the Communist government in Poland as well as the Soviet Union as a whole. This is most present in the works by Garton Ash, Rachwald, Kemp-Welch, McAuley, and Korbonski. All authors agree that Solidarity was important in the collapse of the Soviet Union, however, they disagree on the extent. There is also a significant degree of scholarship regarding the internal operations and ethics of the movement, most notably the works by Touraine, Bielasiak, and Beyer. Many of these works, particularly the article by Beyer, note the significance of the Catholic Church and ethos in the success of the movement, which stood in stark contrast to the atheism and repression of religion characteristic of Soviet rule. Beyer's article has perhaps the most overt religious language, as he describes the ethic of Solidarity as containing the

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[5] Mary McAuley, *Soviet Politics 1917-1991* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992): 81.

following: Unity among difference, an ethic of hope, self-sacrifice and heroism, the equality and dignity of all, participation as the linchpin of respect of human dignity, bread and freedom, the option for the poor, and life in truth.[6] Bielasiak arrives at similar conclusions, albeit with more secular language.

Another point of research in the field is the answer to the question of how Solidarity was allowed to exist in the first place. There are a variety of different approaches to this question. Kemp-Welch and Garton Ash answer this question by situating the Solidarity movement in the historical context of previous strikes and resistance movements in Poland. Previous strikes in the 1970s are mentioned in both works, as well as the international backlash to the brutal execution of these strikes by the Soviet-backed government. Garton Ash takes this a step further by linking Solidarity to the Home Army's resistance to Nazi occupation and notes a trend in Polish history to resist unjust occupation, particularly when that occupation is spearheaded by Russia. McAuley takes an entirely different approach, arguing that Solidarity was able to exist for so long because the Soviet system was far too fractured and bureaucratic to handle Solidarity before it became a formidable social force. Touraine takes a sociological approach to this question, nothing that the ethos and goals of Solidarity had become so deeply entrenched in the minds of Polish workers that it would have been dangerous for the Soviet Union to crush it with brute force. Clearly this topic is still a source of avid historical debate.

The aim of this work is to dive deeply into the Solidarity movement from 1980-1989. How important this movement was for the liberation of Poland from the Soviet Union is still a subject of scholarly debate.This work argues that, while the preexisting political, social, and economic conditions within the Soviet Union as a whole were certainly trending towards collapse, it was

[6] Gerald J. Beyer, "A theoretical appreciation of the ethic of Solidarity in Poland twenty-five years after," *The Journal of Religious Ethics* 35 no.2 (2007): 209-224.

Solidarity's exploitation of this situation that made the de-Sovietization of Poland possible. Solidarity was a social movement, meaning that its impact was widespread throughout all aspects of Polish society, not purely the political sphere. Its trade union facet is particularly important, as Solidarity challenged the longstanding notion that the Soviet-backed Communist party was the only legitimate voice of the people. Furthermore, this work argues that Solidarity has implications for future trade unions and worker's activism, as it was a genuine movement by workers and for workers.

Historical Background

In order to understand the Solidarity movement, its popularity and rapid growth, and its overall goals, one must begin with Stalinism. The Soviet Union had gained control of Poland after the expulsion of the Nazis. The formal beginning of the Stalinist period is considered to be in 1948, when two major political parties in Poland, the Polish Socialist Party (PPS) and the communist Polish Workers' Party, unified to form the Polish United Workers' Party (PZPR) . Journalist Michael Kaufman describes this period in Poland, writing that

> With the formation of this party [the PZPR] the period of Stalinist consolidation and terror gained momentum. After the apostasy of Tito in Yugoslavia in the early 1950's, waves of purges and show trials shook the army and bureaucracy. Education became patterned after the Soviet model, with pupils being encouraged to join groups of Young Pioneers. Real power was largely exercised through the security apparatus. Yet even this Stalinist leadership refrained from fully nationalizing agriculture on the Soviet model in what was one of the first deviations to appease Polish feelings and resentments.[7]

The decision not to fully nationalize Polish agriculture would have significant consequences in the future, particularly with regard to the agricultural offset of the Solidarity union, Rural Solidarity.

[7] Michael T. Kaufman, "40 years of Communism in Poland: Stalin's house on a soft foundation," *The New York Times*, August 18, 1989, https://www.nytimes.com/1989/08/18/world/40-years-of-communism-in-poland-stalin-s-house-on-a-soft-foundation.html. The phrase "the apostasy of Tito" refers to President Josip Broz Tito of Yugoslavia, who left Cominform in 1948 to create a socialist system unique to Yugoslavia which included elements of market socialism.

The Stalinist period in Poland, as in many other countries, was one filled with uncertainty and repression by Soviet security forces. Wladyslaw Golmuka, who led Poland from 1947-1948 and again from 1956-1970, raised frequent issues with Stalin regarding the actions of Soviet security forces, the economy, reparations, removal of raw resources to the Soviet Union, and industry.[8] Furthermore, there were signs of discontent among the population. One notable example of this is the Peasant's Self-Help Organization, *Samopomoc Chlopska*, which poor farmers had created to aid each other. Despite the fact that this organization was pro-Communist, it operated outside of the Party apparatus, and is an early signal of a tradition of local organizing that would continue in Poland throughout the Cold War.[9] The government made many moves to consolidate the power of the PZPR and break down the resistance to Communism, such as the displacement of Poles from lands that were subsequently given to the USSR, the arrests and deportations of many Home Army leaders by the Red Army, the Cultural Revolution (*Kuznica*), and the attempt to neutralize the Catholic Church.

Two particular moves by the Soviets are worthy of closer consideration. Firstly, in 1949, there was the combination of all Polish trade unions into a single Federation, with independent trade unions deemed illegal. This action "split the working class into an aristocracy of labour, with well-publicized heroes, and an amorphous and impoverished majority."[10] This action triggered the beginning of the *nomenklatura*, a new social class in Poland that came about as a result of the state unions and party control. The *nomenklatura* were originally literal lists made by the PZPR of those deemed deserving of high level leadership, but it was soon expanded into a "client ruling class"

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[8] Kemp-Welch, *Poland Under Communism*, 20.

[9] Ibid.

[10] Ibid., 35.

that controlled the means of production.[11] This resulted in under qualified workers rapidly rising to high-level managerial positions and an overall downturn in productivity. Secondly, the Sejm passed the Law on Socialist Work in 1950, which targeted strikers. This law imposed severe penalties for striking. The law "in effect classif[ied] recalcitrant or slack workers as enemies of the state." Furthermore, "Those going on strikes were punished under this new legislation," and forced labor camps were created throughout Poland.[12] This lessened support and duration of strikes and made striking nearly impossible. Despite the efforts of the government during the Stalinist period, the culture and ideals of the Polish people were kept alive through students, historians, and the Catholic Church, which despite attempts at subjugation, still remained an important social force.

Though this period of Stalinism would officially come to an end in 1956 with "the October springtime,"[13] the damage had already been done. Despite surviving Stalinism with their sense of national identity intact, the Poles were frustrated, frightened, and furious with Soviet occupation. Worker protests broke out in the Poznan region, though discontent was initially quieted by the reappointment of Wladyslaw Gomulka as first secretary. Gomulka "admitted party mistakes of the past, pleaded for sacrifices from workers and promised significant changes," and it seemed that the Polish people were willing to listen.[14] Gomulka's promises coupled with the concessions made to the Catholic Church and Polish political prisoners as well as the beginnings of a thaw under Khrushchev bought the Soviets more time and patience.

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[11] Garton Ash, *The Polish Revolution*, 7.

[12] Kemp-Welch, *Poland Under Communism*, 35.

[13] The 'October springtime' was a period of de-Stalinization in which Kruschev publicly admitted the crimes of Stalin, the Catholic Church was granted greater freedoms, and political prisoners such as Gomulka, Cardinal Wysynski, and many former members of the Home Army were released.

[14] Michael Kaufman, "40 years of Communism in Poland."

This period of relative peace would not last long, however. 1968 brought turmoil and protest to Poland in response to events both domestically and abroad. In the domestic sphere, student protests were triggered in March of 1968 by the banning by authorities of the drama *Dziady* (Forefathers) written by classical Polish poet Adam Mickiewicz. The play was to be put on at the Warsaw National Theatre to mark the fiftieth anniversary of the Russian Revolution beginning November 25, 1967. Why the play was allowed to be put on in the first place is unclear - the subject of the play was "Poland's struggle for freedom under the Russian partition" - but regardless, the play was banned by authorities from January 30, 1968 onward.[15] This did not sit well with the audience of the play, mainly made up of students, who marched on closing night to a nearby statue of the author and adorned it with flowers and banners. Over the next few days, the student movement grew out of Warsaw University. Students wrote a powerful two-sentence petition to the Sejm, or Parliament, stating that "'We, Warsaw youth, protest against the decision to ban performances of Adam Mickiewicz's *Dziady* at the National Theatre in Warsaw. We protest against a policy cutting us off from the progressive traditions of the Polish nation.'"[16] This simple statement triggered massive support, both domestically and abroad. The Polish Writers' Union called an emergency meeting where they harshly attacked the Party's cultural policy, with one member calling the actions of the state a return to Stalinism.[17] This was the most vicious attack on Party policy in nearly a decade.

As student protests began to spring up across the country, the Communist government was determined to crush any dissent. Police brutality was common at peaceful student protests, where students were "beat[en] and clubb[ed] indiscriminately" and mass arrests were made, along with

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[15]Kemp-Welch, *Poland Under Communism*, 148.
[16] Ibd., 149.
[17] Ibd.

student activists having their mail read and phone lines tapped.[18] This brutality only sparked more protests, and the student protesters were not deterred until they were ultimately crushed by state forces.

1968 was a year of international tensions as well, most notably for the Polish government the Prague Spring occurring in neighboring Czechoslovakia. This only exacerbated the student protests springing up over Poland, as "Polish protestors were keenly aware of events across the border" and often chanted "Long Live Czechoslovakia" at rallies, impressed with the calls for reform and nationalism from their student neighbors.[19] This was a major concern for the Polish Communist Party. Polish leaders were concerned about "contagion" from the Prague Spring early on.[20] The international tensions seem to be a clear reason for the brutal repression of student protests, as well as the sudden change in position regarding *Dziady.* With nationalism, protest, and calls for reform already springing up along the border, the last thing Polish authorities needed was for these ideas to spread into Poland.

Though the Polish government had successfully stopped the largest student protest in regime history, they would not be able to rest for long. The 1970s would only bring more dissent. The government raised the prices of meat and other staple goods in the early 1970s, which triggered massive worker outrage. This was an attempt by the government to aid in the economic problems that had plagued Poland for decades, as the country lagged behind Western Europe in terms of agricultural production. This price rise, when coupled with the general cost of living in Poland at the time, would have caused a decrease in real wages for workers by 45%.[21] Workers

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[18] Ibd., 152-153.

[19] Kemp-Welch, *Poland Under Communism*, 163.

[20] Ibid., 152.

[21] "1970-71: Uprising in Poland," Libcom.org, October 31, 2008, https://libcom.org/history/1970-71-uprising-poland.

marched on Party offices in Gdansk, who burned the offices to the ground after a clash with police. After the violence on the ground, Gomulka authorized the use of firearms against the protestors, who were gunned down at the Gdansk Shipyards by the security police. The strikes spread to other areas, most notably Szczecin. There, a democratic strike committee was formed that demanded "free and democratic elections to the shipyard union branch, pay for the duration of the strike, an apology and correction of the falsified news reports in the media, no victimisation of strikers, the publication of strikers demands in newspapers, and reversal of the price rises," all of which were granted by the regime.[22] These strikes were important for several reasons. Firstly, it granted workers experience with organizing, which would become essential for the formation of the Solidarity strike and union throughout the 1980s. Secondly, it was the first time that striking had been used successfully to bring about government reforms in Poland. Thirdly, the strike itself would eventually become an important talking point for Walesa and other Solidarity leaders when it came time for their historic strike.

Pre-Solidarity Opposition in Poland

Pre-Solidarity dissent in Poland can be divided into three categories: "fundamentalist national opposition", "loyalist opposition", and the "class of '68."[23] The nationalist opposition was focused on Polish national independence and identity. Several groups formed, both openly and underground. The Polish League for Independence (PPN) followed a sense of "romantic idealism," working underground to achieve the goal of a peaceful union with Europe, and advocating also for a reunited Germany.[24] The movement condemned regime propaganda against Germany and also

[22] Ibd.

[23] Garton Ash, *The Polish Revolution*, 21-22.

[24] Ibd, 21.

published an irregular publication called *PPN: Polskie Porozumienie Niepodległościowe,* or the Polish Independence Agreement, where writers anonymously critiqued the regime and advocated for Polish nationalism.[25] There were also nationalist organizations in Poland which worked more openly, most notably the Movement for the Defense of Human and Civil Rights (ROPCiO) and the Confederation for an Independent Poland (KPN). ROPCiO was established by 18 Warsaw dissidents, and was less of a political movement, instead focusing their ideology on opposition to both Sovietism and Marxism.[26] Furthermore, as their name implies, ROPCiO "linked...long-term goals to the short-term demand for respect of the Helsinki Agreements," in which the United Nations outlined basic human rights.[27] KPN, on the other hand, "came closest in words to the unconditional, insurrectionary defiance of the nineteenth century," with their open goal being "a Polish Third Republic freed from 'Soviet domination' and 'the dictatorship of the Polish United Workers' Party."[28] Despite the slight difference in focus between the two groups - ROPCiO had more of an international dimension whereas the KPN focused on domestic nationalism - the two groups were distinctly nationalist in character.

At the opposite end of the spectrum from the nationalists was the so-called "loyal opposition." This category of opposition is defined by its acceptance of "both Poland's position within the Soviet bloc and the basic principles of the communist system."[29] The most prominent group of these loyal oppositionists was the government sponsored discussion club "Experience

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[25] Richard F. Starr, "The Opposition Movement in Poland," *Current History* 80, no. 65 (April 1981): 150.

[26] Ibd., 149.

[27] Garton Ash, *The Polish Revolution*, 21-22.

[28] Ibd., 22.

[29] Ibd.

and the Future" (DiP). The group was composed of approximately 100 scholars, writers, artists, and economists, as well as Catholic and other non-party intellectuals, who had been invited by the government to discuss social problems in Poland.[30] These oppositionists were not interested in de-Sovietization or anti-Marxism; instead, they focused on internal reform. As Timothy Garton Ash notes, "Its proposed remedies were mostly structural reforms and policy changes, arrived at by negotiation and compromise *within the Party, initiated by* the Party, and controlled *from above*," marking it as a Marxist revisionist group in the trend of the October Springtime.[31] This form of dissent was more palatable to both the Polish and the Soviet authorities, as the members still advocated for a centrally controlled Polish system that was loyal to the Soviet Union.

The final opposition trend, the "class of '68", was focused on pressure from below. These groups believed that "Poles should organize themselves outside the structures of the Party-state," which would then naturally expand the areas of "self-determination open to the citizen."[32] The strongest manifestation of this tendency came in the Committee for the Defense of Workers (KOR). This group was organized by intellectuals in the aftermath of the strikes of the 1970s, and their initial aim was to provide financial support for the victims of the strikes and their families, as well as releasing said strikers from prison and forced labor camps. After their initial success in these areas, KOR "expanded its activities to include publications, demands for civil and human rights in Poland, and concerted appeals in cooperation with dissenters from other Communist-

[30] Starr, "The Opposition Movement in Poland," 151.

[31] Garton-Ash, *The Polish Revolution*, 22.

[32] Ibd., 23.

ruled states like the USSR and Czechoslovakia."[33] This organization of a parallel society would be essential for the birth of Solidarity.

The immediate historical conditions that triggered the birth of Solidarity were primarily economic and social. At the end of the 1970s, the Polish economy was in crisis. There were shortages of the most basic supplies, long queues, deteriorating working conditions, terrible medical care, a plague of alcoholism, and a dramatic wealth gap. According to a report by DiP, there was a wage difference of 1:20 by 1979; in other words, the rich continued to get richer at shocking exponential speeds while the poor only got poorer.[34] Furthermore, the corruption of the communist ruling class only grew. For example, state funds were appropriated to build villas and other luxury goods, and "corruption on an unprecedented scale spread from the top down."[35] The PZPR, which claimed to represent all workers in Poland, had been transformed into a corrupt and wealthy ruling class.

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[33] Starr, "The Opposition Movement in Poland," 149.

[34] Garton Ash, *The Polish Revolution*, 27.

[35] Ibd.

Fig. 15.1: Pope John Paul II greets the faithful gathered on the Jasna Gora meadows. *Source: Poland Institute for National Remembrance*

Furthermore, there was the Polish “miracle”; in October of 1978 Cardinal Karol Wojtyla, Archbishop of Krakow, was elected Pope and took the name John Paul II. This was a huge morale boost to Polish Catholics, and Poles in general, and also triggered a resurgence in the prestige and power of the Catholic Church in Poland. Garton Ash writes that the election of John Paul II as Pope “left thousands of human beings with a new self-respect and renewed faith, a nation with a rekindled pride, and a society with a new consciousness of its own essential unity.”[36] Lech Walesa himself wrote in his memoir that “Solidarity’s survival was due largely to the Church, which not only provided moral support, but also it literally opened its doors so that we could hold both public and secret meetings….without the Church there would be no Poland!”[37] This resurgence triggered

[36] Ibd., 30.

[37] Walesa, *The Struggle and the Triumph*, 8.

a psychological shift in the Polish people, preparing them for the Solidarity movement to come. In fact, Garton Ash attributes the upcoming Solidarity movement to this very psychological triumph. He writes that

> The economic crisis was thus a necessary, but by no means sufficient, cause of the revolution. The decisive causes are to be found in the realm of consciousness rather than being...the basic shift of political self-confidence and will from the rulers to a section of the ruled is familiar from the pre-history of earlier revolutions.[38]

By the end of the 1970s, the Polish people had begun to organize extralegally, as is seen by the various opposition movements mentioned earlier. They had a renewed sense of faith and national pride inspired by the election of John Paul II, which would be extremely significant in the coming years of Solidarity. By 1980, it was clear that Polish society was ready for a massive change that would soon become a peaceful revolution.

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[38] Garton Ash, 32.

II. "OUR ONLY GUARANTEE IS OURSELVES": GDANSK 1980

On August 7, 1980, longtime employee Anna Walentynowicz was dismissed from her job at the Lenin Shipyard in Gdansk, a mere five months before she planned to retire. Walentynowicz was fired for her activity in unofficial unions and her role in distributing unofficial newspapers around the shipyard.[39] She was also known to defy both her supervisors and authorities by being outspoken about labor rights and free union organizing, but she was well liked by workers. Her termination, especially so close to her retirement, struck a chord with workers at the Lenin Shipyard. An address in the unofficial journal *Coastal Worker* tells of Anna's long employment and her popularity among the workers, reading:

> If today we fail to make our opposition felt, there will be no one to contest the increase in working hours, the violations of security rules, or the compulsory overtime. *The best way of defending our own interests is to defend one another.* That's why we are calling on you to defend Anna Walentynowicz!...Signed: Founding Committee of the Free Trade Union and the editorial board of the *Coastal Worker*.[40]

A week later, Anna's colleagues heeded the call of the *Coastal Worker.* August 14, 1980 witnessed workers arriving for their shifts demanding the reinstatement of Walentynowicz and a cost-of-living wage increase for all workers.[41] By that evening, the strike included the entire Gdansk Shipyard, Repair Yard, and other smaller enterprises in the region. Walentynowicz described her experience of the strike in a 2011 audiobook, saying

> I have my heart in my throat. I see innumerable masses of people. I see a digging machine. People want to see me. I climb on the roof of the digger. Somebody gives

[39] A. Kemp-Welch, *Poland under Communism: A Cold War History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008): 237.

[40] Lech Walesa, *A Way of Hope* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1987): 116-117. Emphasis is my own.

[41] Ibd., 238.

> me a bouquet of red roses. I stand on the roof of the digger with the roses and the sea of heads. On a banner, I see the words: Rehire Anna Walentynowicz and a 1,000 zloty salary raise. I would like to say something but I cannot. My head is spinning.[42]

The workers of the Gdansk Shipyard had rallied to support their fired coworker, but they made additional demands as well. These initial demands were fivefold; the reinstatement of Walentynowicz and Lech Walesa, who had also been fired, a 2,000 zloty raise, family allowances that were on par with those paid to the police, security from reprisals for all strikers, and a monument to the murdered strikers of December 1970.[43] Other industries from the 'Tri-City' area began to join the strike.

Walesa, Walentynowicz, and the other strikers quickly found themselves at a crossroads. On August 16, 1980, many of the older workers had settled for a compromise on wages. At the same time, the government sent militia reinforcements to Gdansk and the army reserves were put on alert, and there were nearly 50,000 people on strike in the region.[44] Walesa was initially willing to settle for the compromise. However, Walesa's meeting with delegates from other striking factories as well as with Walentynowicz and another female striker Alina Pienkowska rapidly changed his mind. The two women "called for transforming this protest for economic issues into a solidarity strike with other striking companies."[45] After the request from Walentynowicz and Pienkowska, Walesa turned to the workers. Garton Ash writes that "if they wanted it, the strike

[42] T. Jastrun, *Wieklkie klopoty I rozmowy z Bogiem,* id, *Zycie Anny Walentynowicz*, Warszawa 2011, audio book, quoted in Anna Muller, "The Mother of Solidarity: Anna Walentynowicz's Quest in Life," *Rocznik Antropologii Historii* vol. 4 no. 2 (2014): 71.

[43] Timothy Garton Ash, *The Polish Revolution: Solidarity* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1983): 39.

[44] Kemp-Welch, *Poland under Communism*, 241.

[45] Anna Muller, "The Mother of Solidarity: Anna Walentynowicz's Quest in Life," *Rocznik Antropologii Historii* vol. 4 no.2 (2014): 71

would continue, he said, and now as a solidarity strike."[46] Though the numbers had shrunk to approximately one thousand workers, the strike at Gdansk lived on.

The two next steps taken by Walesa and other leaders were essential in the birth of Solidarity. First, the Interfactory Strike Committee (MKS) was formed, which would eventually grow into the Solidarity trade union. Its function was to coordinate demands and actions taken amongst the different striking bodies. A communique describes the role of the MKS as such: "The Interfactory Strike Committee is empowered to conduct talks with central authorities," it stated, and that "after the ending of the strike the Interfactory Strike Committee will not dissolve itself and will control the realization of the demands as well as organizing Free Trades Unions."[47] The works clearly anticipated a successful strike, as they had already begun to plan for the future. The future framework of Solidarity had been established as an organization that would negotiate with the government on behalf of the workers and, furthermore, would ensure that the government was holding up their end of the bargain.

After the formation of MKS came the publication of the 21 Demands. These demands were widespread and touched on nearly every important issue in Polish society at the time: work life, labor unions, political and press freedoms, working conditions, self-expression, and economic justice. The Demands begin with the ideological concerns of Solidarity, which were:

1. Recognition of the Free Trade Union, independent of the Party and of employers, based on convention No. 87 of the International Labor Organization, referring to the freedom to form trade unions, which has been ratified by the Polish People's Republic.
2. Guarantee of the right to strike, and of the indemnity of strikers and their supporters.
3. Guaranteed freedom of expression and of publication as set forth by the Constitution of the People's Republic of Poland, and consequently, an end to the suppression of independent publications and the opening up of the mass media to representatives of all political and religious persuasions.

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[46] Garton Ash, *The Polish Revolution*, 41.

[47] Ibd., 42.

4. Restoration of rights to persons dismissed for having defended workers' rights, particularly those who took part in the strikes of 1970 and 1976, and those students excluded from higher education because of their opinions. Liberation of all political prisoners (especially Edmunt Zadrozynski, Jan Kozlowski, and Marek Kolodziej), and an end to repression for crimes of conscience.
5. Access to the mass media to inform public opinion of the creation of the Inter-enterprise Strike Committee and to make its demands pubic.
6. Initiation of efficient measures for relieving the country's economic crisis by mass circulation of all information relating to the socioeconomic situation, and granting, at every social level, the opportunity of citizens to take part in discussions concerning economic reforms.[48]

Each of these first six points contained a significant challenge to the Soviet system operating in Poland at the time. The first, fifth, and sixth points challenged the system of the *nomenklatura*. Originally, the *nomenklatura* were physical party lists of approved candidates for high-ranking jobs. However, this meaning was soon expanded to mean "a client ruling class" that collectively controlled the means of production, and "enjoy[ed] power, status and privileges (in varying degrees) by virtue of simply belonging to it."[49] This frequently resulted in both underqualification and corruption. The concepts of a trade union independent of employers, free media access, and the participation of all citizens in discussions regarding policy were a direct challenge to this system.

The right to strike and the presence of independent trade unions were also major challenges to the status quo in Poland at the time. In 1949, all existing Polish trade unions had been combined into a single federation, and unaffiliated unions were illegal. This had the effect of "split[ting] the working class into an aristocracy of labour, with well-publicised heroes, and an amorphous and impoverished majority."[50] This allowed the Polish and Soviet authorities to keep the vast majority

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[48] Walesa, *A Way of Hope*, 131-132.

[49] Garton Ash, *The Polish Revolution*, 7.

[50] Kemp-Welch, *Poland Under Communism*, 35.

of the working-class downtrodden and oppressed, while still maintaining the appearance of a worker's state. In 1950, the Polish government passed the Law on Socialist Work. This legislation created penalties for absenteeism and unsatisfactory work, and punished strikers as well, classifying them as enemies of the state.[51] The legality of the union was not the only concern of Warsaw and Moscow. The union assumed an inherently political identity in that it effectively replaced the Party as the representative of Polish workers. This was particularly frightening for Moscow, as their "biggest fear was that pluralism would undermine the myth of the communist party's historical right to speak for the working class."[52] Grassroots pluralism threatened the belief that the Party enjoyed the support of workers and had the exclusive right to speak on their behalf.

The first six points of the 21 Demands were significant challenges to the existing social, political, and economic order in Poland. The rest of their demands shifted from broader societal demands to more specific material desires of the strikers. Timothy Garton Ash provides an excellent summary of these more focused demands, writing that

> Only after these six general demands does the list move on to the specific, sectional material interests of the Tri-City strikers: payment for the strike period at holiday rates from the funds of the Central Council of Trades Unions (CRZZ); a 2,000 zloty wage rise 'as compensation for the price rises.' Yet even the economic and social points reflect the common grievances of most of the Polish people, indeed of most of the peoples living under Soviet regimes anywhere: food shortages, pricing and distribution inequalities (points 10 to 12), the preferment given to Party members irrespective of their abilities (i.e. *nomenklatura*) and the privileges enjoyed by the Party and security apparatuses (point 13), inadequate pensions (14 and 15), poor medical care (16), insufficient creche and nursery places for working mothers (17), inadequate maternity leave (18), insufferably long waiting-lists for housing (19), having to work on Saturdays (21). This was far more than a charter of demands for the workers of the Tri-City; it was, at the least, a charter for all Poland.[53]

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[51] Ibid.

[52] Arthur R. Rachwald, *In Search of Poland: The Superpowers' Response to Solidarity, 1980-1989* (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1990): 4.

[53] Garton Ash, *The Polish Revolution*, 43-44.

Even these specific material concerns can be traced back to the overarching themes of the social, political, and economic critiques expressed in the first six points. The indictment of the political ruling class, the lack of basic worker's rights such as sufficient pensions and childcare for working mothers, and the pricing and distribution inequalities all expanded on the social, political, and economic issues initially expressed in the first six points, despite their more specific and targeted nature. Furthermore, there was a distinctly moral character to many of the demands. Sociologist Elzbieta Matynia argues that "The dependent status of workers and intellectuals with regard to the state, and the conviction that the Communist authorities would do everything to humiliate them, prompted the demands for dignity…most of the arguments had an overwhelmingly moral character.[54] The 21 Demands were not merely focused on political or material concerns; there was also a clear and distinct concern for human dignity and the dignity of work, which was being ignored by Communist leadership.

The inside of the shipyard at this time was a hub of political discussion and action amongst the workers. Garton Ash observed that

> The tables were littered with duplicated strike announcements (run off by the 'Free Printers of the Shipyard'), copies of *Robotnik* and the Young Poland paper, *Bratniak,* doodle sheets, bottles of mineral water, ashtrays, half-eaten rolls….The hours and days of waiting passed in an orgy of discussion. Workers clustered in small, excited groups from which you caught the words 'democracy,' 'equality', 'freedom', and 'shit'. [55]

A clear pro-democracy attitude was beginning to develop amongst the striking workers. The strike leadership, however, was less concerned with a democratic revolution. Though they continued to focus on their two main points, the presence of independent unions and the right to strike, they

[54] Elzbieta Matynia, "The Lost Treasure of Solidarity," *Social Research* 68, no.4 (Winter 2001): 931.

[55] Ibid., 46-47. *Robotnik* was the title of an underground workers newspaper, and *Bratniak* was the nationalist Young Poland paper, named after the title of the pre-war university student corps.

also knew that they needed to remain realistic. Walesa recalls that "I knew at this critical juncture, as we articulated the 'twenty-one demands' and prepared to present them to the government negotiators, that the strike leadership, and by that I now mean the MKS, had to remain moderate. We had many tricky questions to resolve, and we could not afford to be sidetracked by unrealistic demands."[56] The vast majority of MKS leadership agreed with Walesa; the potential consequences of unrealistic demands were far too risky to pursue.

This self-limiting nature was a core facet of the identity of Solidarity, mainly because there were serious and real threats and pressures on the union. Alain Touraine defines these limits as the external threat (the Soviet Union), the Party, the Church, and the economic crisis.[57] All of these limits influenced Solidarity's actions in unique ways. Touraine notes that "the militants were always conscious of an external threat…The majority were explicit in saying that Poland's alliances must not be tampered with…The Soviet threat is not seen as a danger just for Solidarity: it concerns the whole of Poland."[58] At these early stages, directly threatening the Warsaw Pact was not even considered; such a move would threaten Poland's security as a whole, and it was too much of a risk for the strikers to take. Despite their attempts at caution, Solidarity's existence was viewed as a threat to the Soviet Union nonetheless. This threat was managed by yet another limit – the Polish Worker's Party. Despite the fact that the Party itself was a threat to the goals of Solidarity, it was also understood that "the real danger was an international one and that Solidarity must beware of weakening a political force which, despite all its failings, nevertheless protected

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[56] Walesa, *A Way of Hope,* 130.

[57] Alain Touraine, *Solidarity: Poland 1980-81* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983): 65-70.

[58] Ibid., 65.

Poland from the excesses of 'Soviet friendship.'"[59] In other words, despite their hostility towards Communist officials, Solidarity was nonetheless forced to accept that the Party was Poland's shield against total Soviet domination, as it had negotiation powers, however limited, as a result of its status as a fraternal country.

The Catholic Church also limited excesses within the movement, most notably in regard to the close link between Catholicism and Polish national identity. The Catholic Church's "identification with the national consciousness makes it back away from any nationalist confrontation with the authorities…the sense of attachment to Poland is so strong that it is seen as far more important to avoid the catastrophe of the destruction of the Polish state than it is to embark on a struggle for political power."[60] This resulted in the Church's dual status as both a supporter of Solidarity and a force which moderated it. However, as a result of intense criticism, this form of direct moderation by the Catholic Church faded away throughout the course of the movement, and was more visible in general guiding principles, such as the commitment to nonviolence.

The final external limiting force that profoundly affected Solidarity was the ongoing economic crisis in Poland. The severity of this crisis was constantly on the minds of the strikers and informed many of their demands such as increased public participation in economic policy making as well as better childcare and state services for workers. They felt that "the situation was so serious that it would not be enough simply to replace a few leading figures, and that everyone's cooperation would be needed," but also "saw themselves as the only force capable of mobilizing the nation in the rebuilding of the economy". Despite this optimistic view of economic change, the strikers also admitted "that they would have to accept unemployment and some price increases"

[59] Ibid., 66.

[60] Ibid., 69.

in the pursuit of a stronger economy.[61] The economic crisis limited the strikers in the sense that they had to arrive at the best economic outcome possible while also understanding that the severity of the situation would naturally result in adverse outcomes for some.

On August 22, 1980, the new deputy premier Mieczyslaw Jegielski arrived in Gdansk to meet with the delegates from the MKS. Walesa describes this moment as a "major victory for the simple reason that our government was ready to negotiate," a historic first, as workers had never before been negotiating partners with a Communist state.[62] At this time, the Polish Communist Party felt backed into a corner. The Polish economy, already in crisis, had taken a sharp downturn, as almost the entire Baltic region of Poland was now on strike.[63] Aside from domestic economic concerns, there was significant pressure from Moscow as a result of the strike. In a series of meetings a few days earlier, Polish government and Party officials as well as members of the Politburo suggested that Moscow believed that Party leadership had lost touch with Polish workers and society.[64] General Secretary Stanislaw Kania, believing local intelligence that the strikers were becoming fatigued, authorized Jegielski to receive the MKS for negotiations.

The main points of negotiation for the MKS were free trade unions, the right to strike, freedom of expression, release of political prisoners, and economic reform. Walesa explains this tactic as advice from experts, who "made it clear that if the authorities were pushed too far in any one session, they might end up by accepting some demands while eliminating others, establishing trade-offs that would be disadvantageous to us."[65] The negotiations by their very nature were a

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[61] Ibid., 70.

[62] Walesa, *A Way of Hope*, 133.

[63] Kemp-Welch, *Poland Under Communism*, 247.

[64] Walesa, *A Way of Hope*, 129.

[65] Ibid., 133.

tense and fragile process, and leadership agreed that the demands should be prioritized. All of these points of negotiation were nonetheless extremely contentious for the Polish and Soviet authorities.

Free trade unions meant relinquishing the authority that the Polish government, and by extension Moscow, had over the working class. It is for this reason that the legalization of free trade unions was perhaps the most controversial point in the eyes of the government negotiators. Prior to Solidarity, all Polish trade unions were organized by industry and federated in a Central Council, "to which 95 percent of the labour force compulsorily belonged." All unions were required to join the Federation; if they did not, they would be dissolved.[66] This ensured that the Polish Communist Party, and by extension Moscow, retained all authority to speak for the Polish working class, and kept up the illusion of a state run for workers by workers. In fact, the very first mention of the Solidarity strike was an attempt to discredit the involvement of workers themselves. In the official Soviet newspaper *Pravda*, the strike was called an "effort to make use of work stoppages to serve hostile political goals…by irresponsible, anarchistic, and anti-socialist elements."[67] From the perspective of the Soviets, there was nothing wrong with the Polish system, other than the fact it had been hijacked by anti-Communist forces. This redirection allowed the Soviets to cling to their authority to speak for the working class, despite the presence of the Solidarity movement in Poland.

The next point of contention regarding the negotiations was the issue of the right to strike. What made this demand so problematic was that the Soviet theory of work "treated strikes as a weapon for securing the liberation of the working class from capitalist exploitation," meaning that,

[66] Kemp-Welch, *Poland Under Communism*, 248.

[67] *Pravda*, August 20, 1980, quoted in Rachwald, *In Search of Poland*, 5.

in a Communist society, there was no need to strike.[68] The Soviets viewed strikes as an outdated product of capitalism that could be discarded in a socialist society, whereas members of Solidarity viewed striking as a channel to express their frustrations with a state that had become both government and employer. There was also the fact that "The Soviet leaders had very little understanding and no sympathy for the Polish workers, who were seen as no more than an obstacle to Soviet global ambitions."[69] Despite the fact that the Soviets viewed themselves as the vanguard of the proletariat, there was a clearly exploitative attitude towards the Polish working class by Soviet elites.

On Solidarity's end, they were plagued with a distrust of the government and Communist authorities. Matynia points out that "For historical reasons the state tended to be regarded by Poles with suspicion, as an external force and not a form of political self-organization by society."[70] Solidarity itself was viewed as an authentic form of political-self organization, whereas its negotiating partner, the Polish Communist State was viewed as an imposed artificial authority. This resulted in a unique phenomenon, wherein "Solidarity did not work against the regime in most cases, but rather in spite of the regime, or simply aside from the regime."[71] This phenomenon was to come to an end, however, upon the start of negotiations, which required working in conversation with the regime as opposed to aside from it. Furthermore, there was the fact that the implications of the demands "in a few instances were unmistakably political" despite Walesa and strike leadership's attempts to remain unpolitical.[72] To put it bluntly, with demands such as

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[68] Kemp-Welch, *Poland Under Communism*, 249.

[69] Rachwald, *In Search of Poland,* 17.

[70] Matynia, "The Lost Treasure of Solidarity," 928.

[71] Ibd, 929.

[72] Walesa, *A Way of Hope*, 136.

increased access to the mass media and greater public roles in decision-making, it would have been impossible for Solidarity to remain entirely apolitical. Despite this, Walesa and other leaders still desired to remain moderate. As Garton Ash puts it, "They were there to sell a deal to the government; but also to make a deal which the government could sell to Moscow."[73] The specter of Moscow was ever-present in the minds of both Solidarity and Polish government negotiators.

Moscow watched the tense negotiations unfold with fear and trepidation. On August 25, 1980, the Soviet Politburo created a Special Commission on the events unfolding in Poland. The first product of this Commission was a document detailing a possible military response should the negotiations between the government and Solidarity deteriorate. The dossier reads

> The situation in the PPR remains tense…the Ministry of Defense requests permission, in the first instance to bring three tank divisions…up to full combat readiness as of 6:00 pm on 29 August to form a group of forces in case military assistance is provided to the PPR…If the situation in Poland deteriorates further, we will also have to fill out the constantly ready divisions of the Baltic, Belorussian, and Transcarpathian Military Districts up to wartime level. If the main forces of the Polish Army go over to the side of the counterrevolutionary forces, we must increase the group of our own forces by another five-seven divisions.[74]

The Soviet view of the situation in Poland was glaringly pessimistic. They believed that military intervention could possibly be necessary. Whether or not the Soviets would have followed through on said intervention is unclear, though it seems unlikely after the invasion of Afghanistan in December 1979, but the presence of a military plan speaks volumes about the Soviet view of the situation. Furthermore, the Soviets were even concerned that they would lose the support of the

[73] Garton Ash, *The Polish Revolution*, 52.

[74] "Special Dossier on the Polish Crisis of 1980," August 28, 1980, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Dmitrii Antonovich Volkogonov papers, 1887-1995, mm97083838, Reel 18, Container 27. Translated by Malcom Byrne. https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/111230.

Polish Army to the "counterrevolutionary forces," showing both their dismissal of the concerns of Solidarity as anti-socialist and their paranoia surrounding the movement's massive popularity.

Fortunately, this envisioned Soviet doomsday never became a reality. The Gdansk Agreements were agreed upon on August 30th, and officially signed August 31st, 1980. The agreements were a major win for the striking workers. As a result of these agreements, "the government accepted the formation of free trade unions to be self-governing and independent of the state. They would have the right to strike and access to the mass media. Political prisoners were to be released and the public would have the opportunity to influence economic policy."[75] The major goals that Walesa and Solidarity had chosen to push for had been achieved in a historic victory for workers under the Communist state. After the signing of the agreements, an elated Walesa ended the strike with a victorious speech:

> Kochani! [a word meaning literally 'beloved']. We return to work on 1 September. We all know what that day reminds us of, of what we think…of the fatherland…of the family which is called Poland…We got all we could in the present situation. And we will achieve the rest, because we now have the most important thing: our INDEPENDENT SELF-GOVERNING TRADES UNIONS. That is our guarantee for the future…I declare the strike ended![76]

Walesa's official conclusion to the strike marks the jubilant mood of the strikers. The very existence of the self-governing trade union was a historic accomplishment; the access to the mass media, release of political prisoners, and the public influence on economic and public policy were all major blows to the authoritarian Communist system.

Solidarity merged different aspects of society, which was another threat to the Communist system. Matynia and other sociologists have noted a "psychological withdrawal of people away

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[75] Kemp-Welch, *Poland Under Communism*, 268.

[76] Garton Ash, *The Polish Revolution*, 66. When Walesa speaks of the significance of September 1st, he is likely referring to September 1st 1939, the day that the German Army invaded Poland which prompted the subsequent Soviet invasion.

from organizational structures and into a sphere of personal goals" in pre-Solidarity Poland as a method of coping with Communist domination.[77] In pre-Solidarity Poland, the private and the public realms were sharply and intentionally divided. Much of this is a result of the subtle resistance to Communist control that existed before the birth of Solidarity. Sociologist Alain Touraine argues

> That the country [Poland] has been ruled by an all-powerful Party, imposing its political monopoly and demanding the right to dominate the whole spectrum of social life, and therefore totalitarian in inspiration, is self-evident. But Polish society has almost never submitted to this domination, and the primary reason is that the Polish sense of nationality, formed by more than a century's experience of being denied the status of nation-state, has its roots in consciousness and culture rather than in institutions and government, and that Poland since Stalinisation has continued, as at the time of partition, to live through its national consciousness… Poland has always had two faces: the real country has never been entirely obscured by the official one, intellectual life has never been reduced to the dominant ideology, and the subjection to socialist realism, however brutal were the pressures which sought to impose it, was only a brief, black episode. Above all, the working class has never identified with the institutions, particularly the official trade unions incorporated into the state apparatus, which claimed to speak in its name.[78]

This was the tradition of resistance prior to Solidarity, a national consciousness that internalized the identity of Poland regardless of external factors. Solidarity, however, changed this pattern. Matynia points out a combination of private and public interests that occurred during this phase of the movement. She notes that "In the course of the sixteen months of Solidarity's legal existence, the private – as in the images of praying workers – was almost totally merged with the public. Suddenly people were truly engaged in all their roles outside the family: as employee, consumer, resident of a region, member of a nation, and citizen of the state."[79] Solidarity allowed for a public

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[77] Matynia, "The Lost Treasure of Solidarity," 920.

[78] Touraine, *Solidarity*, 15.

[79] Matynia, "The Lost Treasure of Solidarity," 926.

expression of Polish national identity in various forms - religious, economic, regional, and national – as well as a renewed interest in state participation.

The Solidarity movement and the Gdansk Accords had secured new rights and liberties for the Polish people. Poles now had the freedom to create trade unions free from government intervention, to access the mass media, to strike, and to influence economic policy. Furthermore, political prisoners were also scheduled to be released. Despite the initial success, there was only so much compromise that the Communist authorities, in both Warsaw and Moscow, could stomach. In the coming weeks, Solidarity would find itself under attack once again, both at home and abroad.

III. “THE POLISH GERM”: REGISTRATION CRISIS, MARTIAL LAW AND UNDERGROUND SOLIDARITY

Introduction

This chapter discusses the partial victories of Solidarity after the Gdansk Shipyard strike, namely the solution to the registration crisis and the government’s acknowledgement of the Bydgoszcz Affair. This chapter also discusses how this alarmed the Soviet authorities, pushing Jaruzelski to declare martial law to appease the Soviets, Finally, the chapter covers Underground Solidarity and its survival from martial law to the general amnesty of 1986. This chapter argues that the early partial victories were alarming to the Soviets, indicating the influence and power of the movement. This chapter also argues that the survival of Underground Solidarity points to the significant impact that Solidarity had on Polish society.

Registration Crisis

Though Solidarity had been granted the legal right to exist by the Gdansk Accords, its legal status would not come easily. In November of 1980, a crisis began when Solidarity attempted to register itself with the Warsaw District Court. The Court made changes to the Solidarity statutes that gave the PZPR internal control of union affairs; in other words, Solidarity would no longer be a self-governing union. The judge of the District Court additionally “inserted statements about the Party’s leading role in the state…The Court also weakened paragraphs referring to the right to strike: ‘If the union, in defending the basic interests of workers exhausts all other possible methods, it may decide to call a strike.’ It added, however, that ‘a strike must not run counter to the laws in force’” even though Polish law prohibited the strike as a legitimate form of protest.[80] This created a contradiction, with strikes being both legal and impossible at the same time. The actions of the Warsaw District Court were likely in direct response to Soviet pressure. On October 30, 1980,

[80] Kemp-Welch, *Poland Under Communism*, 280.

First Secretary Stanislaw Kania and Chairman of PPR Council of Ministers Jozef Pinkowski visited Leonid Brezhnev in Moscow. During this meeting, Brezhnev, Pinkowski, and Kania discussed the "raging counterrevolution under way" in Poland, which, in the view of Brezhnev, was not being properly addressed by Polish leadership.[81] The result of this meeting was the Polish government being forced to "face up to the true situation in Poland and [gave] a proper evaluation of the way things develop from the Party's perspective" in order to "help them…to be more energetic in carrying out measures designed to combat antisocialist elements and protect the gains of the socialist order."[82] There was a clear exertion of Soviet pressure on the Polish government to control perceived anti-socialist groups such as Solidarity, likely influencing the decision of the Warsaw Court to ensure continued Party control over the internal affairs of the union.

A national strike was set for 12 November 1980 in response to the registration crisis. The authorities briefly considered instituting martial law at this time. Furthermore, the Polish government considered expanding the powers of the government under martial law to include mandatory work by employees, a ban on strikes, easier prosecution, stricter penalties, providing mandatory supplies to the state, and general restrictions on consumer goods.[83] This expanded martial law power would take away Solidarity's greatest bargaining chip: economic pressure in

[81] "Session of the CPSU CC Politboro on 'Materials for a Friendly Working Visit to the USSR by Polish Leaders'", October 29, 1980, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, TsKhSD, F.89, Op. 24, D.34, first published in CWIHP Special Working Paper 1. Original available in the National Security Archive RADD/READD Collection. https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/113578.

[82] "Session of the CPSU CC Politburo, "On the Results of a Visit to the USSR by the First Secretary of the Polish United Workers Party, Cde. S. Kania, and the Chariman of the PPR Council of Ministers, Cde. J. Pinkowski, 31 October 1980," October 31, 1980, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, TsKhSD, f. 89, op. 42, d. 35, first published in CWIHP Special Working Paper 1. Original available in the National Security Archive RADD/READD Collection. https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/113580.

[83] "Proposals Regarding the Introduction of Martial Law for Reasons of State Security and the Underlying Consequences of Introducing Martial Law.," October 22, 1980, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, published in CWIHP Working Paper no. 21. Translated from Polish by Leo Gluchowski. https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/117854.

the form of strikes. This proposal for martial law was eventually scrapped in favor of negotiations between Walesa and other Solidarity leaders and the Council of Ministers. Kania would eventually fold to Solidarity pressures, mostly due to a phone call with Brezhnev on 9 November. In this phone call, Kania

> …drew attention to 'new elements in the situation' among which the threatened strike was undoubtedly paramount. Around this time, Moscow reminded Warsaw of its economic dependence on the USSR for fuels and raw materials. Specifically, the Soviet Union threatened to reduce supplies of natural gas, phosphorous, iron ore and cotton by 50 per cent and petrol exports by even more. Thus, while urging Poland to put its house in order, the Soviet Union was also threatening to bring about economic and social dislocation on a massive scale.[84]

The Soviet Union put the Polish government in a difficult position, as they were both instructed to fix the damaged economy while also being threatened with further economic woes. The shift in Soviet attitude towards Solidarity, while not explicitly stated, is likely due to the threat of the strike coupled with the rapidly deteriorating economic situation in Poland. Poland owed the West alone $20 billion, despite emergency Soviet aid of $550 million in hard currency.[85] A strike would not only further destabilize the already weakened economy, but also had the potential to spread to other Warsaw Pact states.

On November 10, 1980, the registration crisis ended with the approval of Solidarity by the Supreme Court. Kemp-Welch outlines the new union structure, with a few minor changes agreed upon by both negotiating parties:

> An appendix included the ILO Conventions on Freedom of Association (87) and on the Right to Organise and to Collective Bargaining (98), both ratified by Poland. It also appended seven Points of the Gdansk Agreement, including the First Point delimiting the union's political role. The structure of the union thus formally emerged. Membership was open to all those who did not belong to any other union. Its overall purposes were defined in paragraphs 6 and 7 as 'to protect the jobs, dignity, and interests of workers in a variety of ways including strikes 'in especially

[84] Kemp-Welch, *Poland Under Communism,* 285.

[85] Ibd., 276.

justified cases.' Once all other remedies had been exhausted, a real strike would be preceded by a warning strike of not longer than half a working day. There were several safeguards against preemptive action against union activity. Repression for strike action or of its leaders empowered the employees to strike immediately. If strike action in one factory was ineffective, union officials could call on other enterprises to start a strike in solidarity. All members could become union officials, unless they held executive posts at the workplace, such as enterprise directors and their deputies. Also disbarred from office were those who 'fulfilled managerial functions in political organisations.'[86]

The influence of both negotiating parties can be clearly seen in the new structure of the Solidarity union. Solidarity emerged from the crisis with freedom of association and organization, protection of collective action and workers' rights, solidarity strikes, and clear pathways to union leadership. The Polish government emerged with the ability to limit striking and a warning strike system which would allow them to minimize economic damage done by strikers. The resolution of the crisis was a win for both groups.

Despite the peaceful resolution of the Registration Crisis, the general unrest was felt by neighboring countries and was a cause for concern for members of the Warsaw Pact. At a meeting of the Warsaw Pact on December 5, 1980, Bulgarian Chairman Todor Zhivkov emphatically stated that "We all understand that what is happening there [in Poland] is above all a Polish question and concerns the development of socialism in Poland. But we also understand quite well that it is not solely a Polish question. The developments in Poland concern all socialist countries, the entire socialist community."[87] Leaders of other Warsaw Pact countries, such as Hungary and East Germany, further discussed the impact and concern the situation in Poland has had on their nations. The actions of Solidarity had begun to have significant international implications beyond just

[86] Ibd., 285-86.

[87] "Stenographic Minutes of the Meeting of Leading Representatives of the Warsaw Pact Countries in Moscow," December 05, 1980, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, SAPMO-BArch, J IV 2/2 A-2368. https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/111232.

Russia itself. Now, the fraternal governments of the Soviet Union were beginning to grow anxious. Moscow's anxiety would only continue to grow; by early 1981, Soviet officials "thought it 'impossible to overstate the dangerous to overstate the danger posed by Solidarity. Solidarity is a political party with an anti-socialist bent'" and that they "'must constantly remind the Polish leadership of this point.'"[88] It was clear that Kania's government was failing to respond to the threat of Solidarity in a way that was satisfactory to Soviet leadership, and that a leadership change was required.

General Jaruzelski & The Bydgoszcz Affair

On February 7, 1981, General Wojciech Jaruzelski was named Prime Minister of Poland, in addition to serving as Minister of Defense. Jaruzelski's methods of dealing with Solidarity would mark a rapid shift in Polish government policy towards the union. Initially, however, Jaruzelski took a more conciliatory approach, as is exemplified with his handling of the Bydgoszcz Affair. After being evicted from a council meeting in Bydgoszcz, two Solidarity leaders and one Rural Solidarity member were badly beaten by the secret police. Solidarity's National Coordinating Commission "demanded an independent inquiry, punishment of those responsible and a commitment from the authorities to renounce coercive measures in the future," to which the government responded by attempting to shift the blame to the Solidarity members themselves, arguing that the militia and secret police had been verbally abused by the Solidarity activists.[89] Walesa described the affair as "reflect[ing] the divisions, political confusion, and internal contradictions that marked the whole period" leading up to martial law.[90] It was clear that tensions

[88] Kemp-Welch, *Poland Under Communism*, 307.

[89] Ibd., 311.

[90] Walesa, *A Way of Hope*, 186.

in Poland had reached a boiling point. The National Coordinating Commission held a warning strike on March 20, 1981, and the Soviet authorities responded by beginning to plan for martial law.

Before this plan could come to fruition, however, the Polish Government and Solidarity settled on March 30, 1981. Under this settlement, known as the Warsaw Agreement, the government "admitted mishandling the Bydgoszcz incident and accepted demands that security forces should not be used to resolve social conflicts by political means. It agreed to withdraw militia units from the Bydgoszcz region. Legal recognition for Rural Solidarity would be facilitated by a change in the law on trade unions or a new draft on rural self-management. Moreover, the issue of freedom of expression would be the subject of further negotiations."[91] With this agreement, Solidarity had won a partial victory: the Polish government had admitted that it was wrong.

The Soviet reacted to Jaruzelski and Kania's conciliatory approach with fury and frustration. At a meeting at the CPSU Politburo on April 2, 1981, Brezhnev stated that "All of us are deeply alarmed by the further course of events in Poland. What's worst of all is that the friends listen and agree with our recommendations, but in practice do nothing. In the meantime, the counterrevolution is on the march all over."[92] Moscow perceived Jaruzelski and Kania as dragging their feet and not being hard enough on Solidarity, which they viewed as a threat to future stability. Brezhnev expressed these frustrations to Kania in a telephone call, saying "'Well, how many times have we insisted to you that you need to take decisive measures, and that you can't keep making

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[91] Kemp-Welch, *Poland Under Communism*, 315.

[92] CC CPSU Politburo, "On the Matter of the Situation in Poland," 2 April 1981, Cold War International History Project, *Virtual Archive*, as cited in *Making the History of 1989*, https://chnm.gmu.edu/1989/items/show/257.

endless concessions to 'Solidarity.'' You always speak about a peaceful path, but you don't understand (or at least don't wish to understand) that a 'peaceful path' of the sort you're after is likely to cost you blood." After reporting this conversation, Brezhnev added to the Politburo that "The friends succeeded in preventing a general strike. But at what price? The price of a subsequent capitulation to the opposition."[93] The frustration and general sentiment that the Polish leadership was failing to listen to Soviet directives resulted in a decision by Moscow to become more closely involved with Polish affairs. At the same meeting, Brezhnev and other officials stated that "We of course must continue working with the friends and searching for new ways of influencing the situation in Poland," admitting that "Indeed, what we're trying to find now is some way of exerting greater influence and greater pressure on the leadership of our friends."[94] The precarious state of the Polish economy was frequently exploited by the Soviet Union as a pressure tactic, but Brezhnev also frequently called Kania to express his displeasure with the state of affairs in Poland personally.

"Message to Working-People in Eastern Europe": Solidarity on the International Stage

The problems of the Soviets would only get worse. On September 8, 1981, at the First National Congress of Solidarity, Vice President of Solidarity Andrzej Gwiazda made a statement which would be passed by the Congress, known as the "Message to Working-people in Eastern Europe." The statement read:

> Delegates gathered in Gdańsk at the 1st Congress of the Independent Self-Governing Labour Union "Solidarity" send their greetings and expressions of support to the workers of Albania, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, the German Democratic Republic, Romania, Hungary and all nations of the Soviet Union.
>
> As the first independent labour union in our post-war history, we deeply feel the community of our experiences. We assure that, contrary to the lies spread in your

[93] Politburo, "On the Matter."

[94] Politburo, "On the Matter."

> countries, we are a real organisation of ten million workers established as a result of workers' strikes. Our aim is to fight for improved living conditions for all working people. We support those of you who have decided to join the fight for a free union movement. We believe that your representatives and our representatives will soon meet to exchange their union experiences.[95]

The brief statement sent shockwaves through the Warsaw Pact countries for several reasons. Firstly, Solidarity and the National Congress had expressly addressed and involved workers throughout Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union. Solidarity, which had previously been focused on Polish internal affairs, now had an explicitly international dimension. Furthermore, this international dimension was organic, coming from within Poland itself, as opposed to a characteristic imposed upon Poland by outside forces. Secondly, the statement expressly called out the lies of Warsaw Pact governments and named them as such. The Solidarity National Congress made sure to emphasize that they were an authentic workers' movement, not a group of antirevolutionaries who had been influenced by the forces of Western imperialism as the Soviet government liked to suggest. The statement granted the movement a legitimacy that Moscow had long tried to destroy. Finally, the statement called for the creation of free trade unions throughout the Soviet Union as well as a partnership between Solidarity and these unions.

This statement by the Solidarity National Congress enraged not only the Soviet officials, but other Warsaw Pact leaders as well. In their September 10, 1981 session, the CPSU CC Politburo called the statement "dangerous and provocative" and accused its authors of "creat[ing] confusion in the socialist countries and stir[ring] up groups of

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[95] Andrzej Gwiazda, "Appeal of the 1st National Congress of Delegates of Solidarity to the working people of Eastern Europe," September 8, 1981, https://polishfreedom.pl/en/document/poslanie-i-krajowego-zjazdu-delegatow-nszz-solidarnosc-do-ludzi-pracy-europy-wschodniej.

different types of turncoats" as well as openly mocking the Soviet authority.[96] The attention soon turned to the Polish government, with Brezhnev and others noting that "The situation is getting worse all the time," even going as far to say that "little now remains of the regime."[97]

The frustration of Moscow and other Warsaw Pact nations was not lost on the Polish government, particularly Jaruzelski. He knew that the situation needed to be controlled, and he began to consider Martial Law. In a protocol meeting, it was noted that

> He [Jaruzelski] emphasized that the essential strategy of current activities should be the unmasking of the endeavors of enemy forces, appealing to undecided forces on the side of socialism, neutralizing elements in the opposition camp, as well as taking advantage of public support for the political line of the party and government, including also the kind of measure for eventual political action by the authorities like the introduction of martial law.[98]

Despite his willingness to entertain the possibility of martial law, it was clear that Jaruzelski still preferred a public relations approach to handling the crisis. His focus was propaganda and public support. However, Brezhnev and the authorities in Moscow would begin to push him to a military method of handling Solidarity.

Rising Tensions

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[96] "Session of the CPSU CC Politburo, 10 September 1981 (excerpt)," September 10, 1981, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, TsKhSD, f. 89, op. 42, d. 46, II. 1-3, first published in CWIHP Special Working Paper 1. Original available in the National Security Archive RADD/READD Collection. https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/112798.

[97] "Session of the CPSU CC Politburo, 10 September 1981."

[98] "Protocol No. 002/81 of the Meeting of the Committee for the Defense of the Homeland," September 13, 1981, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, Published in CWIHP Working Paper No. 21. Translated from Polish by Leo Gluchowski. https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/117855.

The concerns in the Soviet Politburo about Solidarity were only growing. Brezhnev rejected the statement by Solidarity at the National Congress. On a phone call to Kania, Brezhnev said that

> I believe it is important to emphasize, once again, that in today's complicated world situation, the course of events in Poland is forcing the socialist commonwealth to confront the ever-thornier question of how to maintain security in the center of Europe. If Poland is ruled by Solidarity, who will guarantee the inviolability of the commonwealth's vital lines of communication...The fate of socialism in Poland and the outcome of the political struggle in your country profoundly affect all the fraternal countries.[99]

Brezhnev's comments to Kania clearly indicate his concern over the events in Poland, and his fear that the counterrevolution he saw in Solidarity would spread elsewhere. This concern was not lost on leaders of the fraternal countries. In East Germany, Chairman of the State Council of East Germany Erich Honecker told Erich Mielke, head of East Germany Ministry for State Security, or the Stasi, that "one could not completely dismiss the possibility 'that the Polish germ could spread to East Germany.'"[100] The concern over the Solidarity movement was clearly widespread.

United States Intelligence began to take an interest in the events in Poland. The National Intelligence Daily noted the disconnect between Moscow and Warsaw, suggesting that "Moscow may believe Warsaw is still too inclined toward persuasion, rather than action."[101] United States intelligence analysts also noted the volatility of the

[99] "Transcript of Brezhnev's Phone Conversation with Kania, 15 September 1981," September 15, 1981, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, SAPMDB, ZPA, J IV 2/202-550, first published in CWIHP Special Working Paper 1. https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/112799.

[100] John Koehler, *Stasi: The Untold Story of the East German Secret Police* (Boulder: Westview Press, 2000): 77.

[101] National Intelligence Daily, Friday 18 September 1981, September 18, 1981. CIA-RDP83T00296R000400020073-6, CIA General Records, CIA FOIA Electronic Reading Room, Accessed 13 July 2021, https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/home.

region, stating that "The risk of unpremeditated, rapidly escalating confrontation is increased by over-confidence on the party of both Solidarity and the government and danger of spontaneous regional explosions and radical pressures within Solidarity and the government."[102] United States intelligence viewed the situation in Poland as a ticking time bomb, especially concerned with the presence of radical Solidarity members and hardline communists within the Polish Worker's Party, which could lead to civil war.

Martial Law

The pressures from Moscow and rapidly escalating tensions within Poland herself pushed Jaruzelski to declare martial law on December 13, 1981. Appearing on national television, Jaruzelski declared a "state of war" in Poland, announcing that "Our homeland was on the edge of a precipice…., we found ourselves facing a difficult test. We must show ourselves equal to this test, we must show that 'We are worthy of Poland.'"[103] A 1987 interview with Col. Ryszard Kuklinski of the Polish Army, who defected to the West shortly before martial law was declared, confirmed that "the decision to impose martial law in Poland was made under direct Soviet pressure. The Polish regime was warned that if the Polish military and police forces failed to destroy Solidarity, Poland would be invaded by Soviet, Czechoslovakian, and East German forces…They believed that counterrevolution should be exterminated regardless of the price."[104] Government documentation confirming this statement has not been declassified at this time, but

[102] Intelligence Community Views on Events in Poland, 27 October 1981. Prepared by Robert M. Gates. CIA-RDP89G00720R000100050034-8, CIA General Records, CIA FOIA Electronic Reading Room, Accessed 13 July 2021, https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/home.

[103] General Wjoiech Jaruzelski, Declaration of Martial Law, quoted in Gregory F. Domber, *Empowering Revolution: America, Poland, and the End of the Cold War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2014): 11.

[104] Rachwald, *In Search of Poland*, 20-21.

considering the rapidly escalating tensions in the months leading up to martial law and United States intelligence concerns about the situation, it is safe to assume that Kuklinski is telling the truth.

The crackdown of the secret police and military forces on the strikers was immediate and harsh. The Romanian Communist Party exuberantly reported that "Scores of cars with militiamen, military cars of the army and common vehicles filled with uniformed troops patrol the streets of the capital city" and that "All phone and telex communications had been abruptly interrupted at 23:00 local time."[105] Armed with lists prepared by security forces, many union activists were detained when encountered by security forces, including Lech Walesa and Anna Walentynowicz.[106] The army and secret police did not stop at mere detentions, and soon turned their attention to the Solidarity offices themselves. The focus of the destruction was mainly on printing equipment and other office supplies and infrastructure, in other words, anything that was essential for the daily operations of Solidarity and the propagation of their message.[107] Despite this attempt at destruction, there were smaller Solidarity committees that were able to form some degree of resistance to martial law, at least initially. United States intelligence stated that "A war of attrition has developed between security forces and those Solidarity factory committees that have been able to reconstitute themselves, with the security forces moving in and out

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[105] "Shorthand Record of the Meeting of the Executive Political Committee of the CC of the RCP," December 13, 1981, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, ANIC, Fund CC of the RCP-Chancellery, File no. 101/1981, ff. 2-15. Translated by Delia Razdolescu. https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/111802.

[106] Kemp-Welch, *Poland Under Communism*, 328. Lech Walesa would be released 11 November 1982. Anna Walentynowicz would be arrested and released three times: first from December 1981 to July 1982; second from August 1982 to March 1983; and finally from December 1983 to April 1984. She spent a total of nineteen months in prison.

[107] Kemp-Welch, *Poland Under Communism*, 328.

of the factories and occasionally arresting union leaders."[108] American intelligence was extremely concerned with these developments and was particularly worried that the violence would continue to spread across Poland.

The reality of the situation, however, was that the severity of the conflict varied across Poland. The worst was in Wroclaw, where troops armed with machine guns patrolled the street and public transportation was at a standstill. A general strike was set for Monday December 14th; the strikers held out until Wednesday December 16, before ultimately being crushed by the Motorized Reserves of the Citizens Militia (ZOMO), highly specialized paratroopers that frequently suppressed protest and dissent on behalf of the government.[110] After this, the strikes were over for the time being, with Walesa himself recalling that he "knew that our movement had been stopped cold, for the time being."[111]

Solidarity and Resistance Under Martial Law

Though it could no longer organize openly, Solidarity continued to plan and coordinate underground, and survived thanks to a variety of factors; the Catholic Church, remaining Solidarity leadership that remained outside of prison, and the imagination and values of the public.

On December 18, 1981, Pope John Paul II implored General Jaruzelski to end the violence, writing

> During the past two centuries, the Polish nation has endured great wrongs, and much blood has been spilled in the struggle for power over our Fatherland. Our history cries out against more bloodshed, and we must not allow this tragedy to

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[108] Situation Report: Poland, 15 December 1981. Prepared by Central Intelligence Agency National Foreign Assessment Center. CIA-RDP84B00049R000200310007-4, CIA General Records, CIA FOIA Electronic Reading Room, accessed 15 July 2021, https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/home.

[110] Maciej Lopinski, Marcin Moskit, Mariusz Wilk, *Konspira: Solidarity Underground*, trans. Jane Cave (Berkely: University of California Press, 1990): 19-34.

[111] Walesa, *A Way of Hope*, 206.

> continue to weigh so heavily on the conscience of the nation. I therefore appeal to you, General, to return to the method of peaceful dialogue that has characterized efforts at social renewal since August 1980…It is demanded by the good of the whole nation.[112]

Within the letter, the Pope simultaneously called for a cessation in the violence and subtly showed his approval for Solidarity endorsing their tactics and involvement in political discourse after the Gdansk Agreements. It is almost impossible to overstate the significance of the Pope's statement and support, particularly in a country as deeply Catholic as Poland. In the years to come, Walesa would relate stories of Catholic churches in Poland acting as meeting places for secret Solidarity meetings.[113]

It became quite clear that Solidarity was "woefully unprepared for a State of War."[114] Much of this had to do with the fact that many leaders of the movement, most significantly Walesa and Walentynowicz, had been arrested and interned.[116] Much of this had to do with the Solidarity strategy of passive (non-violent) resistance. Solidarity's commitment to nonviolence, which earned mass support in the West, particularly in the United States, meant that they continually faced brutal state violence and repression and frequently did not defend themselves. After the initial chaos, however, Solidarity was able to reorganize itself in a three-tiered national structure.

At the national level, Underground Solidarity was led by the Temporary Coordinating Commission (TKK). During and immediately after Walesa's imprisonment, when he was

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[112] Walesa, *A Way of Hope,* 224-5.

[113] Lech Walesa, *The Struggle and the Triumph: An Autobiography* (New York: Arcade Publishing, 1992): 8.

[114] Kemp-Welch, *Poland Under Communism*, 330.

[116] At this point, Walentynowicz had fallen out of favor with much of the leadership of Solidarity due to her personal disagreements with Walesa as well as her view that he was centering himself too much in the movement. Regardless, she remained an important symbol for the Polish people. Walentynowicz and Walesa would reconcile before Walentynowicz's death in 2010.

restricted to acting as a private citizen only, the 5-7 member TKK set "general policies and guidelines for action" for Underground Solidarity.[117] At this time, Walesa functioned mainly as a "symbol," and though he was in touch with Underground Solidarity, his leadership role was minimal at this time.[118] The TKK had a 70-100 person staff who "coordinate[d] relations between TKK members and the rest of the underground, provide[d] logistical support and information, and produce[d] the most important underground newspaper, Tygodnik Mazowsze."[119] Also at the national level was the Committee for Education, Culture, Science, and Health (OKNO), which carried out social, cultural, and educational activities on behalf of Solidarity, and was funded by the US National Endowment for Democracy.[120] Underground Solidarity was, in effect, a parallel organization that provided services to citizens that would traditionally have come from the government.

The second tier of Underground Solidarity was comprised of "approximately 24 regional executive commissions."[121] These executive commissions received directives from the TKK and make decisions on how best to implement them. Executive commissions would also "coordinate the movement's activities among the factories in their regions and represent their constituents before the TKK."[122] The final and lowest tier of the Underground Solidarity movement was the

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[117] The Opposition Movement in Poland, 10 June 1986. Prepared by East European Division, Office of European Analysis. CIA-RDP86T01017R000404050002-7, CIA General Records, CIA FOIA Electronic Reading Room, Accessed 13 July 2021, https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/home.

[118] Ibid.

[119] Ibid. Translation is Mazowsze Weekly.

[120] Ibid.

[121] Ibid.

[122] Ibid.

factory committees themselves. They paid membership dues and “participate[d] in anti-regime activities” and were also involved in cultural and educational activities coordinated by OKNO.[123]

Underground Solidarity leader Eugeniusz Szumiejko reflected on the importance of rebuilding official Solidarity structures in a 1990 interview, noting that “people wanted to hear that Solidarity, or at least the leadership, had recovered from the shock” as well as the fact that official Solidarity structures would allow for better coordinated resistance and prevent other activists from “represent[ing] Solidarity in negotiations with the government behind the backs of those who’d been interned and imprisoned.”[124] The Underground Solidarity structure would allowed the movement to survive, albeit in a limited capacity, through the duration of martial law.

[123] Ibid.

[124] Lopinski *et al.* , *Konspira*, 50-51.

Fig. 3.1: Demonstrators mark the anniversary of Poland's independence and 1791 Constitution on 3 May 1982. Front banner reads "Free political prisoners!", back banner reads "Freedom, Independence". Source: Jerzy Ochoński, photospoland.com

Despite Solidarity's shift to underground activism and organizing, the general population of Poland still believed in the mission and ideals of Solidarity, on occasion even demonstrating despite martial law still being in place. Underground Solidarity leader Borusewicz stated that the people marched despite leadership's advice to stay home, even going as far as saying "They were more radical than we were. It is certain that, had we called for demonstrations, they would have been larger than they were. But they were already large enough to shake the authorities and demonstrate the degree of social solidarity."[125] This "social solidarity" observed by Borusewicz is best demonstrated during the marches on May 2nd and May 3rd of 1982. Polish citizens took to the street carrying banners that called for the release of political prisoners, freedom, and independence (fig. 3.1). Moments such as these clearly show that the Solidarity movement was still alive in the hearts and minds of the Polish people. The response of ZOMO indicates the longevity of Solidarity and its ideals as well; protestors and ZOMO clashed in sixteen cities, and the demonstrators experienced "unprecedented police brutality."[126] The extreme response of the state police illustrates their concern that the ideals of Solidarity had survived, even though the figureheads of the movement had been interred.

This public response, even in the middle of martial law, is extremely significant. Many historians view the martial law period as a "dead period," where the ideas of Solidarity mattered significantly less, and lay dormant until the beginning of power-sharing talks in the late 1980s. However, demonstrations such as the May Day demonstrations indicate quite the opposite; while

[125] Lopinski *et. al, Konspira,* 89.

[126] Kemp-Welch, *Poland Under Communsim*, 331.

Solidarity as an institution had certainly gone underground and shifted much of their efforts to social and cultural enrichment, the ideals that had started the movement in 1980 – freedom of expression and association, freedom of political prisoners, and limited independence – were still alive and valuable in the hearts and minds of the Polish people.

The 1983 Pilgrimage of Pope Saint John Paul II

Aside from Underground Solidarity leadership, Pope Saint John Paul II was the most influential force that helped Solidarity survive Martial Law. The "Polish Pope" was born Karol Jozef Wojtyla on May 18, 1920, in the Polish town of Wadowice, and was baptized on June 20th of that year. Under Nazi rule, Wojtyla was accepted as a "clandestine seminarian," and was forced to study philosophy and prepare for the priesthood in secret.[127] In November of 1946, the early years of Soviet occupation, he was ordained as a priest and left for more theological studies in Rome. After years of priestly service and teaching, he was granted the rank of Cardinal in June of 1967, and elected to the papacy in October of 1978, taking the name John Paul II.

Despite his ascent to the papacy, Pope Saint John Paul II kept his homeland close to his heart. The Holy Father was a self-avowed Polish patriot. In 2005, he wrote on the distinction between patriotism and nationalism, arguing that "Whereas nationalism involves recognizing and pursuing the good of one's nation alone, without regard for the rights of others, patriotism, on the other hand, is a love for one's native land that accords rights to all other nations equal to those claimed for one's own."[128] This sense of patriotism was strongly visible in the Pope's 1983 pilgrimage to Poland, an ostensibly atheist workers' republic.

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[127] George Weigel, *Witness to Hope: The Biography of Pope John Paul II* (New York: Harper Collins, 2001): 40.

[128] Pope John Paul II, *Memory and Identity: Conversations at the Dawn of a Millennium* (New York: Rizzoli, 2005): 67.

It is hard to overstate the importance of this 1983 pilgrimage to the survival of the Polish people. In the days before, the Polish people adorned the streets of Warsaw with different colored banners – the Polish flag; light blue and white for St. Mary, patron saint of Poland; and yellow and white for the Vatican – served as visible expressions of the nation's excitement for the Pope's visit.[129] The pilgrimage was a politically charged event for several reasons. First, a visit by the Pope was an inherently political act in defiance with the state-enforced atheism characteristic of the Soviet Bloc. This political nature takes on a new dimension when one considers the relationship between Polish nationalism, Solidarity, anti-Sovietism, and Catholicism.[130] Polish national identity is deeply linked to the Catholic culture of the nation, so it is no wonder that the pilgrimage immediately took on a political meaning. Furthermore, Solidarity Catholic imagery by holding Masses in the Gdansk Shipyard, closely linking the movement, which had been driven underground, to the Church. The Communist authorities also hoped to use the Pope's visit for their political gain, with Deputy Prime Minister Mieczyslaw Rakowski stating that "'The visit could become a factor that will positively influence the stabilization process in the country'" and that '"If Pope John Paul takes a stand that would encourage stability, this would be a positive contribution towards the abolition of martial law.'"[131] Hopes for Saint Pope John Paul's visit were clearly high, both among the government and the people.

Walesa himself was also keenly aware of the significance of the Pope's visit, particularly of the impact that would be felt if the two of them were to meet. He recalled a feeling of closeness

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[129] John Kifner, Special to the New York Times, "AN UNSURE POLAND AWAITS JOHN PAUL," *New York Times*, June 16, 1983, https://www.proquest.com/newspapers/unsure-poland-awaits-john-paul/docview/424652913/se-2?accountid=13320, (accessed October 29, 2021).

[130] Ibid.

[131] Ibid.

with Pope Saint John Paul, stating that "In deciding to strike we had undertaken a moral commitment to pursue our aims in accordance with the teachings of the church: it was by putting its teachings into practice that we would achieve those aims."[132] The meeting was a cause for concern for the Polish authorities, as they feared Walesa's meeting with the Pope would legitimize Solidarity and lead to a resurgence of the movement.[133] All members of Polish society waited with bated breath for the arrival of the Polish Pope.

Walesa and Pope Saint John Paul II did meet, despite the disapproval of the authorities. Although the meeting was private, Walesa noted that what he remembered most was "the atmosphere of openness and simplicity" and that "his words were like an invitation to remove the daily mask one wears to cope with life." Furthermore, Walesa recalled that meeting with the Pope "gave [him] back [his] strength" that had been sapped from him during his internment and the criminalization of Solidarity.[134] As a result of his meeting with the Pope, Walesa emerged reinvigorated and ready to continue the Solidarity struggle.

Not only was the Pope's meeting with Walesa significant, but the masses he performed had subtle political undertones as well. Many of the homilies he gave during his pilgrimage mentioned Polish national history, Poland's nature as an expressly Catholic country, labor rights, and the importance of looking out for one's neighbor, even mentioning Solidarity briefly by name while in Poznan.[135] The very presence of the Pope as well as his homilies had a deep and profound effect

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[132] Walesa, *A Way of Hope*, 276.

[133] Kifner, "AN UNSURE POLAND."

[134] Walesa, *A Way of Hope*, 278.

[135] See especially the following homilies: "Solemn Concelebration in Honor of Our Lady of Grace in the 'X Year' Stadium"; "Eucharistic Liturgy in Jasna Gora for the Closing of the Jubilee Celebrations"; "Solemn Beautification of Mother Urszula Ledochowska"; "Marian Celebration of Thanksgiving and Imploration"; "Coronation of Our Lady of the Snow"; "Messa Della Santa Croce Nella Cattedrale Di Varsavia." All available on the Vatican website.

on the Polish people, re-igniting the flame of Solidarity. The Pope repeatedly referred to the "sad day" when Solidarity was crushed by martial law, as crowds of people chanted "Solidarity, Solidarity."[136]

Based on the reaction of the Polish people, the continued existence of Underground Solidarity structures, spontaneous protests, and the invigorating presence of Pope Saint John Paul II, it is clear that although Solidarity was operating in a reduced capacity during martial law, the assertion that it was a dead period is reductive. Though the union was forced underground and needed to shift its focus to social programs and the occasional protest, the ideals of the union were still alive. Perhaps most importantly, Solidarity and the persons of Lech Walesa and Pope Saint John Paul II as symbols were still at the forefront of the public imagination and kept the hope of the movement alive and well. This hope and inspiration would be incredibly important after the announcement of the general amnesty in September of 1986.

[136] "MAJOR NEWS IN SUMMARY; John Paul Cheers Poland and Poles Cheer Him," *New York Times*, June 19, 1983, https://www.proquest.com/docview/424657916/61DD3AD005F248D0PQ/2?accountid=13320 (accessed October 31, 2021).

IV. RELEGALIZATION & SOVIET COLLAPSE

Introduction

This chapter discusses the path to relegalization for Solidarity and the creation of a government based on the principle of power-sharing. Beginning with the general amnesty of 1986, the chapter discusses the impact that the election of Michael Gorbachev as Soviet Premier as well as his policies of *perestroika* and *glasnost* had on the Solidarity movement and the attitudes of the Polish government towards the union. The chapter then covers Pope Saint John Paul II's third pilgrimage to Poland and how this pilgrimage served as a boost to the morale of Solidarity activists before moving to the strikes and demonstrations of 1988. The chapter will conclude by describing the process and achievements of the Round Table talks, which created a far more democratic and pluralist government in Poland. This chapter argues that the popular Solidarity movement, coupled with weakening Soviet authority as a result of *perestroika* and *glasnost*, allowed for a Poland independent of Soviet control.

Perestroika, Glasnost, and Soviet Policy

On 11 September 1986, the Polish government announced a general amnesty. The general amnesty was largely a product of the election of Michael Gorbachev as Soviet Premier in March of 1985. Gorbachev set policy in Moscow that would trickle down to Warsaw and unintentionally trigger the decline of the Soviet system. The two most significant policies were *perestroika* (restructuring) and *glasnost* (openness). Both reform programs challenged fundamental aspects of Soviet Communism and would have significant effects for all Soviet Bloc countries, particularly Poland.

Perestroika was a program of economic and political restructuring. The period of *perestroika* is generally considered to run from the XXVII Party Congress in 1986 to 1989. The goal of the program was to introduce aspects of a market system, as the central planning system previously used by the Soviet Union had come under intense criticism.[137] Gorbachev and other officials began to subscribe to the idea that "a combination of different property forms – state, co-operative, and private" was a more effective method of economic management.[138] Furthermore, the Communist Party itself was reformed. Despite still being in firm control of the state, the party was now, to a degree, accountable to bodies whose members were publicly elected.[139] This small degree of public accountability was primarily meant to combat the complacency and corruption that had plagued the Soviet bureaucracy.

Glasnost reforms were more socially oriented. These reforms introduced more political accountability and allowed for "greater freedom of discussion, and scope for autonomous social groups".[140] These reforms were based on the idea that diversity of opinion was an essential aspect of a modern state, and that "The principle, whatever is not forbidden is permitted, should be applied rather than only permitting what had been officially sanctioned."[141] Gorbachev believed it was "time to adopt a more flexible approach to social initiatives."[142] This is not meant to imply that all

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[137] McAuley, *Soviet Politics 1917-1991*, 90.

[138] Ibid.

[139] Ibid. For more details about these publicly elected bodies, see McAuley 95-96.

[140] Ibid., 90.

[141] Ibid., 91.

[142] McAuley, *Soviet Politics 1917-1991*, 90-91.

social restrictions were completely removed; rather, that there was more flexibility for social groups that remained in a socialist framework.[143]

This requirement of course begs the question – what exactly did socialism mean? This is a complicated question to answer, as there was no official statement about what was and was not considered socialism released by Communist Party leadership. Socialism came to be defined by the state – that is, socialism "simply meant whatever the political leadership decided was appropriate," and was mainly defined by centralized political control under the undisputed rule of one single party.[144] Gorbachev himself made this very clear. Pluralism of ideas did not mean political pluralism: the rule of the Communist Party was indisputable and absolute.[145]

Concerned with possible trouble from Eastern Europe, Gorbachev outlined new policy towards the region as well as strengthened the Warsaw Pact, which was renewed in April of 1985 for another thirty years.[146] The new policy, laid out in *Pravda*, included the following: the requirement that Eastern Europe "defend the 'fundamental principles of socialist economic management'" which included "socialist ownership rather than revisionist attempts to extend the private sector…and central planning"; the strengthening of Marxist-Leninist laws and theory; containment of nationalism; and unity of foreign policy between member states and the Soviet.[147] However, this policy did not last long, mainly due to the increased pluralism that began to infiltrate the Soviet Union and the fraternal nations. This resulted in damage to the Party's legitimacy which was ironically caused by the very reforms meant to restore its prestige. This infiltration of pluralism

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[143] Ibid.

[144] Ibid., 92.

[145] Ibid.

[146] Kemp-Welch, *Poland Under Communism*, 332.

[147] Ibid., 333.

can clearly be seen in Gorbachev's own words. By 1987, he even spoke of the value of different interpretations of socialism, noting that the Soviet had "become convinced of there being no 'model' of socialism to be emulated by everyone."[148]

Gorbachev's election as Soviet Premier was not only important because of *perestroika* and *glasnost*, but also because of his commitment to non-intervention. Part of his new approach included a change in the way that the Soviet would interact with satellite states. Gorbachev outlined his plan at a speech marking the anniversary of the Bolshevik revolution in 1987. The guiding principles of his policy were "'unconditional and full equality, the ruling party's responsibility for the state of affairs in the country, concern for the common cause of socialism, respect for one another, including voluntary and diverse cooperation, and a strict observance of the principles of peaceful co-existence by all.'"[149] Gorbachev had made a clear policy shift, from strict uniformity and Soviet dominance to a more equitable relationship. While socialism was still the guiding force of policy, the interpretation of socialism was left with a degree of state interpretation, and military intervention was off the table.

General Amnesty

After the announcement of the general amnesty on September 11, 1986, the Polish authorities released around 225 political prisoners. These officials included high-ranking Solidarity leaders and advisors. Kemp-Welch notes that at this point, "Although Solidarity still had no legal basis, it had re-emerged as a political fact."[150] Walesa himself describes 1986 as "a

[148] Philip Taubman, Special To the New York Times, "SOVIET WON'T PUSH POLICY ON ALLIES, GORBACHEV SAYS," *New York Times*, Nov. 5, 1987, https://www.nytimes.com/1987/11/05/world/soviet-won-t-push-policy-on-allies-gorbachev-says.html.

[149] Ibid.

[150] Ibid.

turning point for Poland," writing that "While the government was still baring its teeth, those teeth were already showing numerous signs of decay."[151] This was not mere optimism; in 1986, Solidarity reorganized itself in order to better negotiate with the government and emerged once more as a political player.

In November of 1986, the Solidarity trade union was admitted to the International Conference of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU) as well as the World Confederation of Labor (WCL). This was particularly significant as both were western organizations. These major accomplishments both boosted the movement's credibility and dispelled any rumors that it had completely collapsed.[152] That same year saw the formation of the Solidarity Provisional Coordinating Board and Solidarity's Legal Defense Committee, formed because despite the formal end to the state of war, Solidarity activists still faced arrest and repression.[153]

Pope Saint John Paul II's Third Pilgrimage to Poland

In 1987, Pope Saint John Paul II announced his third pilgrimage to Poland. This caused immediate concern among Polish government officials who feared general unrest spiked by nationalist sentiment would be triggered by the Pope's visit. On January 12, 1987, General Jaruzelski arrived at the Vatican to visit the Pope to discuss his upcoming visit to Poland and "social entente."[154] Solidarity took advantage of the renewed international attention in Poland and began to operate more openly. For example, Solidarity went public with ideas for economic reform in April of 1987, which would later be presented at the Round Table talks. In addition, Walesa and

[151] Walesa, *The Struggle and the Triumph*, 108.

[152] Ibid., 109.

[153] Ibid., 108-109; Kemp-Welch, *Poland Under Communism*, 336.

[154] Walesa, *The Struggle and the Triumph*, 110.

62 other notable Polish figures released a statement May 31, 1987 "articulating the Poles' right to independence, democracy, freedom, and truth, and a right to shape their own economic destiny."[155]

The Pope's third pilgrimage lasted from June 8-June 14, 1987. To combat more political dissent, Jaruzelski sent government aids to meet with Vatican advisors "in an attempt to steer the Pope away from the contemporary political situation" onto more neutral topics, such as world peace and citizen's rights in general.[156] The Vatican also refused offers by the Polish Secret Police to provide protection to the Pope, and the Polish Episcopate was frequently warned that "any 'anti-state slogans and banners must be eliminated.'"[157] True to the advice of the Polish authorities, Pope Saint John Paul II avoided explicit discussion of modern political issues. However, the Pope instead engaged in "clerical double-talk," and made his support for Solidarity and greater rights for the Polish people clear through his language. During an address to shipyard workers, sailors, and fisherman, the Pope said "In the name of mankind and of humanity, the word 'solidarity' must be pronounced…Today it fades away like the waves that extend across the world…This word was uttered right here, in a new way and in a new context…And the world cannot forget it. This word is your pride."[158] Though the Pope did not expressly mention Solidarity as an organization, his language made it clear that he was specifically referencing the trade union, not just solidarity as a concept.

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[155] Walesa, *The Struggle and the Triumph,* 111.

[156] Kemp-Welch, *Poland Under Communism*, 341.

[157] Ibid., 342.

[158] Roberto Suro, Special to the New York Times, "POPE CALLS SOLIDARITY A RIGHTS MODEL," *New York Times*, June 12, 1987, https://www.proquest.com/docview/426518393/fulltext/BE4DDA7EA5BC4068PQ/4?accountid=13320 (accessed November 13, 2021).

While on his third pilgrimage, Pope Saint John Paul II also met with Lech Walesa. Walesa kept most of the details of their meeting private. He reflected briefly on their political discussion, noting that the Pope asked how the Polish people were managing to live "in the grip of the government in which they played no part." Walesa answered by stating "that the energies of the nation needed to be liberated and that it could happen only by burying the hatchet; we needed to reform the system, but without violence," a statement that the Pope approved of.[159] The Pope's direct private and subtly public endorsement of Solidarity was a major morale booster for Walesa and the Polish people, observed even by outsiders. Journalist Michael T. Kaufman noted that "The Pope…raised the often sagging spirits of Solidarity supporters" and that Walesa's "mood has shifted in the last week…after the Pope told him to continue and added that Solidarity's achievements have inspired people all over the world."[160] The Pope's third pilgrimage to Poland was clearly a much needed morale booster for Solidarity activists, and also put Solidarity back onto the world stage. After the pilgrimage, Solidarity dissolved its underground bodies and reoriented their goals. Kemp-Welch notes that at this point, Solidarity's desire for state and economic reform was well-established. Now, the most significant questions involved whether a "democratic model of power holding" was possible within the Soviet system, whether the Gdansk Accords were still relevant, and what opportunities existed "for mobilization and self-organisation" of Polish social, professional, and individual society."[161]

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[159] Walesa, *The Struggle and the Triumph,* 118.

[160] Michael T. Kaufman, Special to the New York Times, "THE POPE IN POLAND: A LIFT FOR SOLIDARITY'S SPIRIT: [ANALYSIS]," *The New York Times* June 15, 1987, https://www.proquest.com/docview/426525104/BE4DDA7EA5BC4068PQ/1?accountid=13320 (accessed November 13, 2021).

[161] Kemp-Welch, *Poland Under Communism,* 346.

Strikes and Demonstrations of 1988

In 1988, Solidarity strikes began again in Poland. The economic situation in Poland continued to deteriorate. The external debt had reached $48 billion, and inflation was at a staggering annual 80%.[162] The government responded to this crisis with their standard policy of raising prices, increasing the cost of food and basic services by 40% in February of 1988.[163] The price increases mainly impacted small businesses and civil and social services, resulting in a visible increase in poverty within Poland.[164] Solidarity and the rest of Polish society responded to these increases with frustration. The increase of the basic cost of living triggered large-scale workers protests. On April 25, 1988, the Lenin Steelworks Strike began. The strikers demanded an increase in salary to compensate for the raised prices, as well as for fired workers to be reinstated. On April 29th, the management of the plant issued an ultimatum. The workers were required to return to work by 10:00 on April 30th or face termination and would not be paid for missed hours due to the strike.[165] When the strikers refused to return to work, the government sent divisions of ZOMO to take positions outside the factory. Though April 30th passed without violence, "spontaneous violence" erupted May 1st in 12 Polish cities, and a riot broke out after a Mass at Saint Brygid's in Gdansk.[166]

A solidarity strike erupted in the Gdansk Shipyard on May 2nd, 1988. The strike committee presented their general manager with five demands: "1. Raise wage substantially. 2. Legalize

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[162] Kemp-Welch, *Poland Under Communism*, 353.

[163] Kemp-Welch, *Poland Under Communism*, 353.

[164] Walesa, *The Struggle and the Triumph*, 137.

[165] Walesa, *The Struggle and the Triumph*, 139.

[166] Walesa, *The Struggle and the Triumph*, 139.

Solidarity's activities in the Gdansk Shipyards. 3. Free all political prisoners. 4. Rehire all workers fired for political reasons. 5. Refrain from any show of force against workers in the shipyards."[167] The demands of the Gdansk Shipyard strikers of 1988 were strikingly similar to the demands posed by the founders of Solidarity in the same Shipyard eight years earlier, particularly their demand for increased wages, rehiring workers who had been fired for political reasons, and security from reprisal for the strikers, though the strikers of 1988 were far more concerned with violent retaliation by security forces as opposed to financial retaliation. It was likely for this reason, as well as the demand that Solidarity resume legal activities within the shipyard, that the manager refused to meet with the strike committee.

ZOMO responded to the strikes at the Lenin Steelworks with violence. On May 4th, ZOMO and antiterrorist teams breached the gates of the steelworks. Walesa describes the events, relayed to him by members of the Church who had remained with the strikers, in vivid detail:

> After showering some of the buildings with small explosives and tear-gas grenades, they stormed the factory, wielding clubs, nightsticks, and hatchets. They ordered the workers to lie face down on the floor, where they were kicked and verbally abused. The women were treated no better than the men. Members of the Security Service, wearing combat uniforms and military caps, joined forces with the ZOMO…they went on a rampage, destroying light equipment, clothing lockers, the altars in the factory chapel along with their liturgical icons; they even trampled on the red-and-white Polish flags. Swinging wildly in every direction, and sometimes hitting the workers, they shouted "So you wanted to go on strike? Get back to work! Hey! You, and you, and you! Get back to work! Now!"[168]

The violence was not well received – advisors warned General Jaruzelski to avoid further violence against strikers.[169] Walesa and Solidarity sent advocates to assist the strikers at Gdansk and the Lenin Steelworks. Though the Gdansk strikes would not be resolved, the strike at the Lenin

[167] Walesa, *The Struggle and the Triumph*, 140.

[168] Walesa, *The Struggle and the Triumph*, 141.

[169] Kemp-Welch, *Poland Under Communism*, 357.

Steelworks and the violent state response would lead to Jaruzelski proposing a consultation between the Polish government and the opposition movements. On June 13th, Jaruzelski told the Party Plenum of his plan for reform. The core of the Polish government would still be the PZPR. However, there would be circles of "other partners" who would also be a part of the governing process. The second circle "would include Catholic and lay Catholic organizations and the Patriotic Movement for National Rebirth (PRON)" while a third circle "would include those 'ready to participate in reform and building an understanding.'"[170] The format of this reform would be a "Round Table", which would be "a discussion forum between various social groups."[171] The Round Table was initially imagined as an organization that would allow for reform through discussion, yet preserve the status quo by allowing the PZPR and other pro-government groups to hold the upper-hand.

In June, Walesa released his own statement regarding the state of Poland. Walesa stated that

> Poland is a country of unsatisfied needs…There is no doubt that the reasons for this are profoundly structural in nature…The current guardianship – for that is what it must be called – violates the fundamental rights of both the individuals and the groups that constitute this country…Today it is no secret to anyone that the most effective economic system is a free-market system…Poland needs a new system based upon respect for workers as individuals, and a system that recognizes their right to organize and to create associations that act collectively to defend their interests. This new system will emerge only when there is a return to union pluralism and, above all, when Solidarity is legalized once again…
>
> Solidarity and the activism it has given rise to have eliminated the government's monopoly on the organization and control of every form of social and cultural life…Any cultural change must consist of, and stem from, the right to free association and free circulation of ideas…
>
> The success of these critical changes in Poland will depend on dialogue between the government and the opposition – particularly between the Party and Solidarity. We are not trying to avoid the dialogue. Certain conditions must be met, however, for dialogue to be

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[170] Kemp-Welch, *Poland Under Communism*, 359. PRON was a left-wing popular political movement created to show support for the Communist government and the PZPR.

[171] Kemp-Welch, *Poland Under Communism*, 360.

> fruitful. First and most important is that all participants be accorded full recognition and meet as equals. Second, that we stop proposing specious solutions that are merely cosmetic. Third, that both parties be allowed to make their views public. [172]

This statement by Walesa is significant for several reasons. First, Walesa refused to refer to the Polish authorities as a government, instead calling it a "guardianship." In Walesa's mind, the only way for a government to be legitimate is if citizens are allowed to participate openly and freely. Second, Walesa openly called for the integration of free-market systems into the Polish economy. He blamed the failure of the Polish economy on central planning as a system, not poor economic policy, and he called for a free market based on trade union pluralism and respect for workers' rights. Finally, Walesa acknowledged the need for dialogue between the opposition and the government but asserted the rights of opposition movements to be treated as equals in the conversations, not secondary participants who should be happy to merely have a seat at the table. Finally, Walesa called out the government for its previous "cosmetic" reforms, and instead called for true, lasting change.

Early Attempts at Compromise

A brief summer truce in Poland ended with the strike at the Manifest Lipcowy coal mine on August 15, 1988, which then spread to other mines in Silesia and the Baltic region. The main demand was the legalization of Solidarity. By August 22, the strike spread to the Gdansk Shipyards, where the strike committee released a statement printed in *Rozwaga i Soldarnosc* (Courage and Solidarity):

> Because the rulers of the People's Republic of Poland have not undertaken to negotiate with the various strike committees and have not begun the talks with Solidarity announced by President Lech Walesa on August 21, the Gdansk strike committee…has declared that they will join the strike out of protest and solidarity.[173]

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[172] Walesa, *The Struggle and the Triumph*, 149-150.

[173] Walesa, *The Struggle and the Triumph*, 152. The term "President" applied to Walesa refers to his role as President of Solidarity. The talks had also only been proposed at this stage, not announced.

Though the Ministry of the Interior was told to prepare for another state of emergency and large-scale use of the Polish Security Services, the government shifted its focus to creating "a bold political initiative."[174] The desire for this new initiative had as much to do with the internal dynamics of Poland as the political situation in the greater Soviet. New reforms had been initiated in the Soviet Union, and Soviet policy had shifted away from intervention, making domestic unrest difficult for the Polish authorities to contain.[175] The pressure put on the Polish government coupled with the non-intervention policy of the Soviets forced the government to the negotiating table.

Despite Jaruzelski's willingness to negotiate, there were still conditions. Jaruzelski privately assured Gorbachev that there would be no trade union or political pluralism.[176] However, this promise by Jaruzelski was in direct contract to the proposals sent out by Walesa: restoration of rights outlined in the 1980 Gdansk Agreement, trade union, social, and political pluralism, and economic reforms.[177] The legalization of Solidarity was the most important discussion point for Walesa, with him even stating that there would be "No negotiations without Solidarity."[178] Despite the fact that the Politburo was strongly opposed to any talk of legalizing Solidarity, as they still viewed them as traitors and criminals, the continued pressure from the strikes forced the government to once again make concessions. On October 31, 1988, the strike was called off so that Walesa could meet with General Kiozczak who laid out two terms for negotiation: Solidarity's legalization would only be possible after talks with the government and that the strikes needed to

[174] Kemp-Welch, *Poland Under Communism*, 363.

[175] Kemp-Welch, *Poland Under Communism,* 360.

[176] Kemp-Welch, *Poland Under Communism*, 362.

[177] Kemp-Welch, *Poland Under Communism*, 364.

[178] Walesa, *The Struggle and the Triumph*, 157.

end immediately.[179] True to his word, Walesa ended the strikes. Though this decision was unpopular, particularly among the Silesian miners, Walesa viewed it as necessary to end the strike so that dialogue between Solidarity and the government could continue.[180]

The delay in the Round Table talks occurred because of a leadership change at the position of Prime Minister while the talks were still in planning stages. On September 19th, the Sejm, displeased with the lack of economic progress in Poland, voted to disband the government of Prime Minister Zbigniew Messner. They criticized Messner's "inconsistency" and accused him of "having undermined and delayed economic reform, despite the breadth of his special powers," citing the strikes and other social unrest as evidence for their decision.[181] Messner was replaced by Mieczyslaw Rakowski, who was openly hostile to Solidarity. Prime Minister Rakowski showed his disdain for Solidarity on October 31, 1988, when he announced that the Gdansk Shipyard would be closed, as it was no longer profitable. Walesa refers to this moment as a "contemptible act of political manipulation."[182] The abrupt closure of the Shipyard in the immediate aftermath of a major strike certainly indicates that Walesa's interpretation of the closure is closer to the truth and suggests that Rakowski was more concerned about eliminating a major symbol of Solidarity than closing an allegedly inefficient and outdated shipyard.

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[179] Walesa, *The Struggle and the Triumph*, 158.

[180] Walesa, *The Struggle and the Triumph*, 159.

[181] Walesa, *The Struggle and the Triumph*, 160.

[182] Walesa, *The Struggle and the Triumph*, 161.

The Round Table

The stalemate surrounding the Round Table meetings broke after the television debate between Walesa and OPZZ chairman Alfred Miodowicz on November 30, 1988. During the debate, Miodowicz stuck to the PZPR Party line, stating, "I am resolutely opposed to dividing the workers by introducing union pluralism" and criticizing Solidarity as a destabilizing factor in Polish society.[183] Miodowicz and other Party officials continually portrayed union pluralism as divisive and harmful to Polish workers, even though those workers were calling for the legalization of Solidarity only months before. Walesa retaliated by stating that Poland needed "better methods, legal methods" of expressing discontent and advocated for dialogue between the government and opposition movements, namely Solidarity.[184] The debate was a turning point for Solidarity – while Walesa came across as a "moderate and reasonable politician with constructive ideas for the future of Poland," Miodowicz came across extremely poorly.[185] In a poll of 250 Warsaw residents the day after the debate, only 1% thought that Miodowicz was the victor of the debate.[186] Immediately after, Jaruzelski resumed the plans for the Round Table talks.

The inaugural session of the Round Table opened on February 6, 1989. In this session, Walesa called for a re-building, or *przebudowa*, and for the state to become reconnected to Polish society.[187] The inaugural session also established the three main groups, also called "small tables" which were 1. Economic and social policy, 2. Union pluralism, and 3. Political reforms. Within the smaller groups, subgroups, nicknamed "end tables" were formed, and they worked on "legal

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[183] Walesa, *The Struggle and the Triumph*, 169.

[184] Walesa, *The Struggle and the Triumph*, 170.

[185] Kemp-Welch, *Poland Under Communism*, 379.

[186] Kemp-Welch, *Poland Under Communism*, 380.

[187] Kemp-Welch, *Poland Under Communism*, 395.

reform, the courts, the media, local government, associations, secondary education, university education, science and technology, youth, housing policy, agriculture and social policy in the countryside, mining, health, and ecology."[188] In other words, almost every aspect of Polish life was somehow represented at the Round Table talks.

The talks lasted 60 days, finishing on April 5, 1989. Solidarity's major objectives had been achieved. The key points of the agreements were: the legalization of Solidarity, Rural Solidarity, and the Independent Students Union; the creation of a 100 seat upper chamber of the Polish Parliament which was to be elected by popular vote in June; a lower-house of Parliament comprised of 35% opposition members, 38% Communist Party members, 22% members of "pro-Communist alliance parties", and 5% members of "pro-Communist Catholic parties"; the creation of the office of president, who would be elected by both houses of the Parliament for a six-year term, with the power to nominate or dismiss the prime minister, dissolve the parliament, veto legislation; greater freedom of association and political clubs; a daily newspaper and uncensored TV and radio time for Solidarity; and a commitment to "broad economic goals."[189] Walesa was pleased with the outcome, as he had left the negotiations with everything that Solidarity had asked for.[190] Even the Polish government was satisfied. General Kiszczak stated that "We have completed a truly collaborative piece of work. The experience was shared, and so should be the satisfaction…There's been only one victor: our homeland."[191] The result of the Round Table talks was a more democratic Poland based on the principles of power-sharing and pluralism as opposed

[188] Walesa, *The Struggle and the Triumph*, 175.

[189] Special Analysis Poland: Round Table Accords Signed, C06826738, The Collapse of Communism in Eastern Europe: A Thirty Year Legacy, CIA FOIA Electronic Reading Room, accessed 15 July 2021, https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/home.

[190] Walesa, *The Struggle and the Triumph*, 180.

[191] Walesa, *The Struggle and the Triumph*, 180.

to pure Party dominance. The very reforms that Walesa and Solidarity had called for since the beginning in 1981 had finally been realized.

In the promised elections, Solidarity won in a landslide. They won 160 of the 161 Sejm seats and won 92 seats out of 100 in the Senate.[192] With a solid grasp on the government, Walesa was able to announce that "the Party was the main source of the country's crisis" and "proposed the formation of a new government 'without communists'".[193] The strong domestic political position of Solidarity coupled with Gorbachev's desire to avoid intervention forced the Polish government into concessions. Though General Jaruzelski remained President, Poland elected the world's first post-communist Prime Minister, Tadeusz Mazowiecki on August 24, 1989.

The Soviet and Eastern Bloc Response

Many of the Eastern Bloc countries, most notably Hungary and Czechoslovakia, were moving towards pluralism and democratization prior to Solidarity's successful negotiations at the Round Table. As early as February of 1989, the Soviets had noticed the trend toward pluralism and democratization across Eastern Europe. A memorandum of the Soviet Ministry of Foreign Affairs noted that "A tendency toward political pluralism in the European socialist countries is being displayed everywhere and, judging from everything, will become more and more dominant…" and that, in nations such as Romania, the GDR, Czechoslovakia, and Bulgaria, which were still authoritarian regimes, "the ruling parties are experiencing growing difficulties in resolving social, economic, political, and ideological problems," as well as being forced to contend with "the creation of alternative associations…demonstrations, and strikes."[194] The spread of the

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[192] Kemp-Welch, *Poland Under Communism*, 404.

[193] Kemp-Welch, *Poland Under Communism*, 418.

[194] "The Political Processes in the European Socialist Countries and the Proposals for Our Practical Steps Considering the Situation Which Has Arisen in Them," February 24, 1989, History and Public Policy Program

"Polish germ" had been feared by authorities in Romania, the GDR, and the rest of the Eastern bloc since Solidarity's inception, and now it seemed that their fears were justified.

Gorbachev admitted in October of 1989 that Poland and Hungary were lost, warning the East German Politburo that reform was necessary, stating that "from our own experience, from the experience of Poland and Hungary, we saw that if the party pretends that nothing special is going on, if it does not react to the demands of reality, it is doomed."[195] These warnings from Gorbachev were too little too late. In November, popular protests broke out in East Germany, which led to the fall of the Berlin Wall, the symbolic end of the Cold War.

There is a good deal of evidence that the Solidarity movement and its success in forming a government was a major trigger for the collapse of Soviet authority in the Eastern Bloc. Perhaps one of the best examples is in Czechoslovakia. On August 21, 1989, the 21st anniversary of the Warsaw Pact invasion, people took to the streets, not only chanting "Long Live Dubcek," but "Long Live Poland and Hungary."[196] Solidarity resonated within the Soviet Union itself as well. When Solidarity's delegation arrived in the Ukraine, they unfurled a Polish flag with the Solidarity logo as the crowd cheered "Long live independent Ukraine, Solidarnosc, and Long Live Poland."[197] These two events show the value of Solidarity as a symbol to those in the Eastern Bloc and the Soviet Union itself who longed for independence and democracy. Furthermore, the

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Digital Archive, Donation of Professor Jacques Levesque; copy on file at the National Security Archive. Translated by Vladislav Zubok and Gary Goldberg. http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/112489.

[195] "Record of Conversation between M.S. Gorbachev and Members of the Politburo of the Central Committee of the Socialist United Party of Germany," October 07, 1989, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, Archive of the Gorbachev Foundation, Notes of A.S. Chernyaev. Translated by Svetlana Savranskaya for the National Security Archive. https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/120818.

[196] Kemp-Welch, *Poland Under Communism*, 426.

[197] Kemp-Welch, *Poland Under Communism*, 426.

relatively peaceful changeover from Communism to democracy can be seen as an imitation of Solidarity's commitment to nonviolence and negotiation.[198]

Conclusion

The relegalization of Solidarity started with the general amnesty of 1986. Further, the election of Michael Gorbachev and his policies of *perestroika* and *glasnost* created the possibility for Solidarity to become legal again. In addition, Pope Saint John Paul II's pilgrimage was a major morale boost to the Polish people and Solidarity activists, inspiring them to undertake the strikes and demonstrations of 1989. These tactics ultimately forced the Polish government to negotiate, resulting in the Round Table talks and subsequent power-sharing structure. These developments, coupled with the Soviet commitment to non-intervention, severely damaged the power of the PZPR, resulting in the fall of Communism in Poland. This created a domino effect, where neighboring countries began to break away from Communism and move towards pluralism and democratization.

[198] The most notable exceptions to this trend are Romania and Bulgaria. Romania's transition was particularly violent, involving a popular insurrection and internal coup, culminating in the massacre of demonstrators.

V. CONCLUSION

Solidarity was born as an independent worker's movement, made up of members of the Polish working class who were tired of the failure and oppression of the Communist government. Their negotiations were the first of their kind – never in history had an independent organization been equal negotiating partners with a Communist state – and they were successful as the government promised free trade unions, the right to strike, access to mass media, the release of political prisoners, and the opportunity for the public to have a say in economic policy. The greater Soviet Union was immensely displeased with these concessions, rightfully predicting that the influence of Solidarity could weaken the control of the PZPR, and by extension, the Soviet Union over Poland.

However, the Polish government failed to deliver on their promises exemplified by the registration crisis and the Bydgoszcz Affair. It was the "Message to Working-people in Eastern Europe," which called for unity and independent trade unions in other Eastern bloc countries, that angered the Soviet Union above all else. It was this document that significantly increased Soviet pressure on General Jaruzelski and triggered martial law and the criminalization of Solidarity. Despite intelligence predictions that martial law would destroy Solidarity, the movement survived in a limited capacity, kept alive thanks both to the Underground Solidarity organization and the actions of Pope Saint John Paul II, as well as the popular imagination.

Solidarity finally remerged after the general amnesty of 1986 and the third pilgrimage of Pope Saint John Paul II, which reinvigorated the movement. After reorganizing itself, Solidarity helped to coordinate various strikes which eventually pushed the government into negotiations. At the Round Table talks, Solidarity won various victories, including partially democratic elections,

which they won in a landslide. The popular support for the movement, combined with *perestroika* and *glasnost* as well as Gorbachev's commitment to non-intervention, so severely weakened the PZPR that they were forced to allow Solidarity to form a government, leading to the election of the world's first post-Communist Prime Minister. Not long after, the Berlin Wall fell, widely viewed as the symbolic end to the Cold War, and democratization and pluralism swept through Eastern Europe.

The question that remains to be answered is why exactly does Solidarity matter? Scholars of the maximalist tradition are correct their view that Solidarity as a movement matters because it was essential for the collapse of the Soviet Union. There is no debating that the Soviet Union was already trending towards collapse – Gorbachev's policy of *perestroika* and *glasnost* had weakened the authority of the Communist Party and served to delegitimize the government that the reforms had attempted to aid. However, Solidarity played a major role in, and accelerated, this decline.

The first important aspect of the movement that challenged and weakened the Soviet system was the fact that it was an authentic worker's movement. The movement challenged the monopoly that the CPSU and the local communist parties had in speaking for the working class.[199] Instead of relying on state apparatuses to represent their demands, workers in Poland were speaking for themselves, which was a natural threat to the legitimacy and authority of the Communist Party. This delegitimization along with the overall corruption and poor policy of the PZPR would allow Solidarity to strategically shift the blame for Poland's ills onto the party, giving them leverage at the Round Table in 1989.

The second important aspect of the movement in this regard was the ethic of Solidarity. The ethic of the movement was important in that it encompassed the following: a unity among

[199] Rachwald, *In Search of Poland*, 4.

difference, a commitment to hope, the value of self-sacrifice for others, the dignity of the human person, the value of government participation, and the importance of truth.[200] This ethic was lost under Communist rule, which was characterized by authoritarianism and propaganda. Solidarity resurrected these values, closely tied to the movement's Catholic identity. Furthermore, the ethic and successes of Solidarity provided a framework for other Eastern bloc countries (with a few notable exceptions) to make a relatively peaceful transition from Communism to pluralism, as I discussed at the end of Chapter 4. The ethic of Solidarity also carries with it important implications for Polish society today. When looking at the situation on the Polish border with Belarus, where hundreds of migrants are trapped in deplorable conditions, it is hard to see the traces of the ethic behind the movement that freed Poland from the oppression of Communism.[201]

Solidarity is not frequently studied in the West, partly because there are many sources that are difficult to access as they either have not been translated into English or are still in the process of declassification. Furthermore, the study of Solidarity has somewhat fallen out of style, both in the West and in Poland. Historian Elzbieta Matynia posits that this is due to the close connection between Solidarity and the Catholic Church, which is viewed with embarrassment in an increasingly secular world.[202] Both these areas are excellent topics for continued research and study.

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[200] Beyer, "A theoretical appreciation," 209-224.

[201] "Polish defence minister says Belarus border crisis could last months," *Radio Poland*, October 17, 2021, https://www.polskieradio.pl/395/7989/Artykul/2850005,Polish-defence-minister-says-Belarus-border-crisis-could-last-months.

[202] Matynia, "The Lost Treasure of Solidarity."

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