



NO BREAD WITHOUT FREEDOM

***Solidarność* (or Solidarity) emerged in Poland in 1980** as the first free, independent labor union in the so-called Eastern Bloc, i.e. the Soviet sphere of influence, which included the USSR and much of Central and Eastern Europe.

Solidarity, born as a workers' union, soon transformed into one of the largest peaceful resistance movements in world history and became instrumental in toppling the communist government in Poland, inspiring those living behind the Iron Curtain to seek democratic change and paving the way for democracy in much of Central and Eastern Europe.

This is a brief history of Solidarity that sheds light on its most steadfast and unwavering allies in the United States – American civil society and its robust organizations – without whom the peaceful revolution that began in Poland four decades ago would not have taken place.



© Zygmunt Malinowski
A pro-Solidarity march on Madison Ave., NYC, January 30, 1982. Police cars clearing the way for demonstrators.



Embassy
of the Republic of Poland
in Washington, D.C.

In 1945, decisions made at the Yalta Conference forced Poland under Soviet domination. The newly restored country, as a Soviet satellite, was placed under mounting ideological pressure by the new communist authorities.

Polish workers repeatedly rebelled against the one-party system, falsified elections, the suppression of human rights, and the crippling social policies of the communist state. The first large-scale workers' protests took place in the city of Poznań in 1956, and, in the following decades, in other industrial centers of Poland, including Gdynia, Radom, Ursus, and Szczecin, among others. These demonstrations saw thousands of peaceful protesters killed, heavily wounded and imprisoned.

In March 1968, Polish students from all major academic centers in Poland staged a series of protests demanding freedom of expression. These protests were also brutally crushed by security forces, and accompanied by a virulent anti-Semitic campaign, prison sentences and repressions against the budding Polish dissident movement.

Poznań, 1956. The banner reads, "We want bread."



March 1968. (Forum)



With time, the anti-communist opposition came to realize that there needed to be a more structured means for Polish society to organize itself. After the workers' protests in 1976 were again violently suppressed, the victims came to be supported by the organized efforts of the Polish intelligentsia – the Worker's Defense Committee, established in Warsaw in 1976; invoking the 1975 Helsinki Agreements, other dissident organizations were formed as well.

The Workers Defense Committee (in Polish: KOR) disseminated information about the International Labor Organization's conventions and other international instruments guaranteeing workers' rights. The information KOR and other organizations gathered was being transmitted back to Poland and other countries behind the Iron Curtain via the u.s.-funded Radio Free Europe.

In 1978, Karol Wojtyła – the archbishop of Kraków – was elected Pope John Paul II. His first visit to Poland in 1979 was a great revelation to Poles – the first time in decades when people felt like a community and not just alienated individuals. Millions from all walks of life gathered to listen to the Pope encouraging them to act with dignity and transform Poland through their acts. The visit became a direct catalyst for change that manifested itself a year later.

THE BIRTH OF *SOLIDARNOŚĆ*

Gdańsk Shipyard Strike in 1980.
(Zenon Mrzoda, ICS)



In July 1980, workers in Poland organized a series of strikes, protesting price increases and expressing anger at the regime; unlike earlier protests, these strikes were well-prepared. Workers' organizations had, for several years, functioned clandestinely to promote the idea of workers' rights and the observance of International Labor Organization (ILO) Conventions, especially those guaranteeing freedom of association and the right to strike and collectively bargain – something that the Polish People's Republic consistently disregarded.

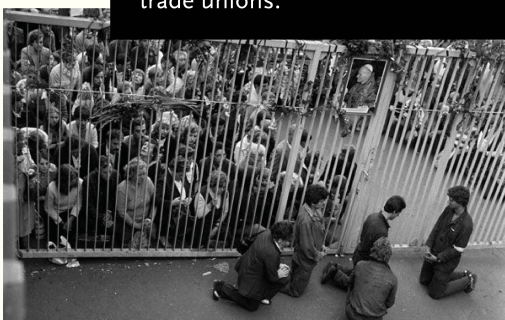
The scale of these protests surprised the regime – by the end of August, over 2 million workers all across Poland were striking. Despite the government's campaign of intimidation, the workers remained united in their demands, organizing a joint strike committee and proposing the so-called 21 Demands, including the right to form independent trade unions, freedom of association and expression, the right to strike, improved working conditions, a commemoration of workers killed by the authorities in 1970, wage improvements and the right to influence basic state economic decisions. Facing an ever-growing resistance, the communist government reluctantly agreed to the demands.

The August Agreements were signed on August 31, 1980 in the Gdańsk Shipyard.

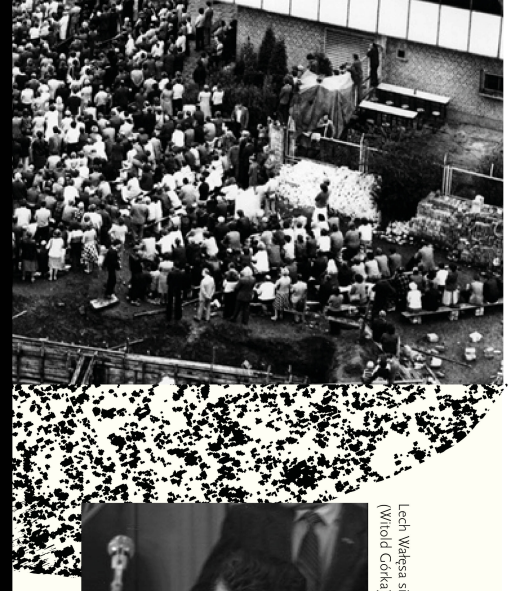
***Solidarność*, the first free trade union in a communist country, was born.**

Soon, Solidarity had 10 million members. 2 million farmers joined Rural Solidarity. Students, writers, artists, and members of other free professions created new organizations and transformed old ones.

Never before in the area dominated by the USSR were authorities challenged by such a large scale, well-organized action of workers. In 1980–81, Solidarity was second in number only to the AFL-CIO (American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations) among the world's international trade unions.



Workers outside of the Gdańsk Shipyard. (Zbigniew Trybek)



Lech Wałęsa signing the August Agreements.
(Witold Górk)



At the time, the perception of the USSR was changing. The Soviet-Afghan War that began in 1979 and reports of the Soviet war crimes committed on civilians galvanized the international public. It was also a time of growing Soviet repressions against the increasingly visible and vocal dissident movement. This radical change of atmosphere had a direct effect on the understanding of events taking place behind the Iron Curtain, including the emergence of Solidarity in Poland.

FRIENDS OF **SOLIDARITY**

In the United States, the shift in policy towards the USSR came with the election of Ronald Reagan as the 40th President of the United States in November 1980. The cautious reaction of the Carter administration was replaced by Ronald Reagan's more direct approach to confronting Soviet communism. The Polish bid for freedom found a vocal supporter in President Reagan. Even within the Reagan administration, however, many argued for balancing intersecting interests of various groups, including investment banks that had given loans to Poland.



© Zygmunt Malinowski
Solidarity Day, NYC, January 30, 1981.

U.S. civil society proved particularly unwavering and generous with its strong material and moral support for Solidarity at its inception as well as when the communist authorities in Poland sought to crush the movement by declaring a state of war (martial law) on December 13, 1981, closely followed by the detention of thousands of activists and repressions against civil society in Poland.

Pro-Solidarity initiatives were championed by the U.S. trade union federation, the AFL-CIO, and union leaders, who played a key role in rallying the public and mobilizing the U.S. administration in support of Solidarity.



© Zygmunt Malinowski
Solidarity Day, NYC, January 30, 1981.



© Zygmunt Malinowski
One of the largest demonstrations organized by the AFL-CIO, December 19, 1981.



© Zygmunt Malinowski
St. Patrick's Cathedral. A demonstration with Polish banners and a multinational assembly.

With the creation of the Polish Workers Aid Fund on September 1, 1980, AFL-CIO President Lane Kirkland made clear that union solidarity was paramount; upon the declaration of martial law in Poland, Kirkland began establishing a secret distribution network linking American unions to the Solidarity underground and helping to meet its principal needs. The AFL-CIO and Lane Kirkland also organized a public campaign for a stronger response from the Reagan administration and greater pressure on the communist government of Poland – this led to more serious sanctions and the formulation of a series of conditions under which the sanctions against the Polish government could be lifted, including the relegalization of Solidarity and the release of political prisoners.

The AFL-CIO maintained steady financial, political, and moral support, helping to deliver greater public financial support for Solidarity through the Free Trade Union Committee and other organizations, such as the Committee in Support of Solidarity.



© Zygmunt Malinowski
A pro-Solidarity rally.



© Zygmunt Malinowski
Harry Van Arsdale – president of the New York City Central Labor Council, AFL-CIO speaks at a pro-Solidarity rally.

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A Solidarity banner atop a building on Fifth Ave., NYC.



© Zygmunt Malinowski
NYC Mayor Edward Koch addresses a pro-Solidarity rally, August 1982.

Public opinion in the u.s. was galvanized when martial law was introduced in Poland. American civil society stood with Solidarity in protest demonstrations, raising humanitarian relief funds and supporting resistance to martial law. A robust civic network of support for Solidarity was established in the u.s.; their activities were centered on protests, information campaigns and political pressure, including keeping u.s. public opinion abreast of developments in Poland, propagating the ideas of the Polish democratic opposition, fundraising to sustain its structures and offering aid to those persecuted and political refugees.

Protests against the repressions in Poland attracted top representatives of municipal authorities, defenders of human rights, and large and committed groups of political refugees from other communist countries, including Czechoslovakia, Ukraine, Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia, Afghanistan and Cuba.



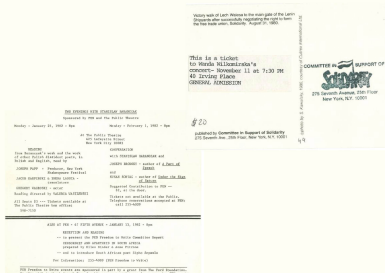
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© Zygmunt Malinowski
One of the largest demonstrations organized by the AFL-CIO, December 19, 1981.



Joseph Brodsky, Russian-American poet, political dissident, literary Nobel Prize laureate, with a copy of the *Solidarność Bulletin*, NYC, 1982. (IOEE)



Materials from cultural events organized to support Solidarity. (IOEE)

Many artists and public intellectuals joined in. At a pro-Solidarity rally in Manhattan, Susan Sontag – an icon of the intellectual left – declared communism to be morally and politically bankrupt, chastising intellectuals who refused to take a public position against the persecution of oppositionists and the bloodletting that had gone on from Poland to Cuba to Cambodia. Joan Baez – a legendary folk singer and an icon of civil rights and peace movements – visited Poland to express her support for Solidarity.

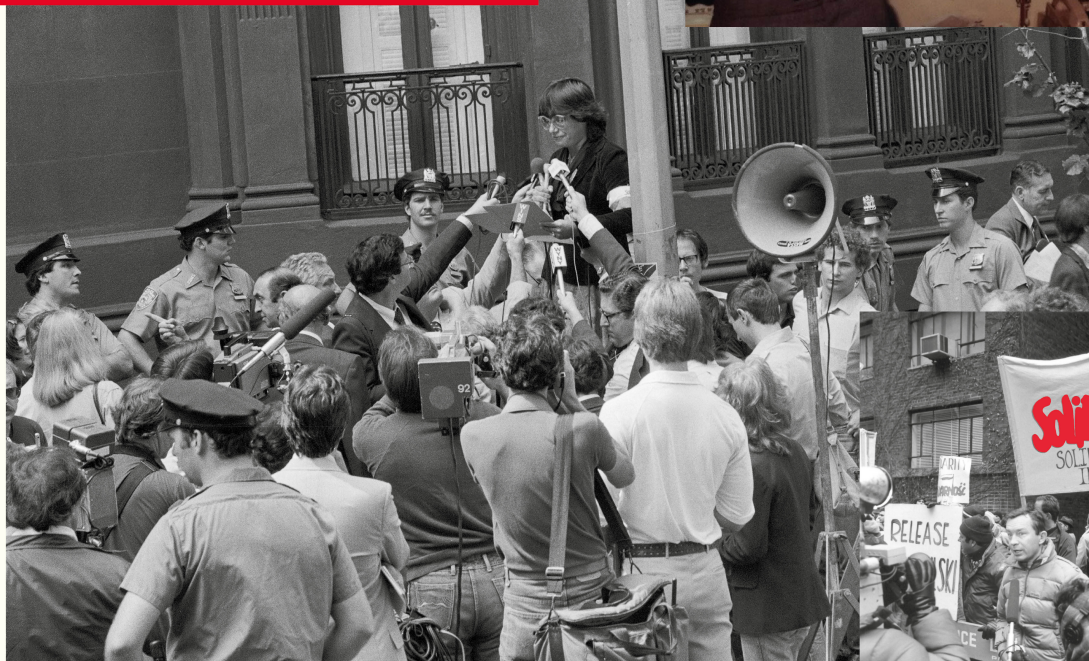


Lane Kirkland, January 13, 1982. (IDEE)

Lane Kirkland (1922–1999), the president of the American federation of unions, the AFL-CIO. Kirkland helped organize international support for an American-led boycott of Polish shipping in order to pressure the Polish government to negotiate the Gdańsk Agreements on August 31, 1980. Under Kirkland, the AFL-CIO supplied money, fax machines, radios and computers to Solidarity and other free unions in communist countries. He relied on a small cadre of dedicated assistants who shared his passion for the cause; Tom Kahn coordinated the undertaking.

Irena Lasota and Eric Chenoweth at the office of the Committee in Support of Solidarity in NYC. (IDEE)

For reliable information from inside martial-law Poland, Kirkland worked with the Committee in Support of Solidarity, whose principal figures – Irena Lasota, a Polish émigré who came to the United States after facing persecution for her anti-regime involvement as a student, and Eric Chenoweth, a young political activist – had developed a wide range of contacts within the Solidarity structure.



© Zygmunt Malinowski
Irena Lasota, a co-founder of the Committee in Support of Solidarity at a rally in NYC, 1982.



© Zygmunt Malinowski
Jakub Karpiński, a co-founder of the Committee in Support of Solidarity at a rally in NYC, December 19, 1981.



Albert Shanker

Albert Shanker (1928–1997), an early activist in the civil rights movement, lifelong social democrat, a staunch anti-communist, and president of the American Federation of Teachers (AFT). Shanker was engaged in the central struggles of his time for human and civil rights, workers' rights, and freedom. He was Ronald Reagan's opponent on domestic issues, but supported his opposition to communism. Under Shanker's leadership, the AFT supported a range of projects and actions aimed at strengthening trade unions and democracy movements, including Solidarność. In 1988, Shanker was the first American trade union leader after the imposition of martial law to meet with underground Solidarity leaders in Poland.



Tom Kahn. (IDEE)

Tom Kahn (1938–1992), an assistant to Lane Kirkland and former aide to civil rights leader Bayard Rustin. In 1980, Lane Kirkland appointed Kahn to organize the AFL-CIO's support for Solidarity. Kahn focused on winning financial and political support for the Polish workers through information dissemination, demonstrations and activities in the United States, purchasing and smuggling in materials needed by Solidarity – printing presses, typewriters, computers – and making sure that the u.s. administration (first Carter's, then Reagan's) did not undermine the workers by lifting sanctions against Poland. Kahn was so successful in organizing aid for Solidarity that by 1984, both Democrats and Republicans agreed that the movement deserved to be supported openly. The AFL-CIO's public support was deemed exemplary and appropriate for a democracy – much more suitable than the clandestine CIA funding that had previously been funneled to Solidarity.



© Zygmunt Malinowski
Bayard Rustin, a civil rights leader and an advisor to Martin Luther King Jr., at a pro-Solidarity demonstration, NYC, August 1982.

Bayard Rustin (1912–1987), a legend of the civil rights movement in the United States, one of Martin Luther King's closest collaborators, and the organizer of the 1963 March on Washington. Rustin worked to strengthen the labor movement, which he saw as the champion of empowerment for the African-American community. He was the Director of the A. Philip Randolph Institute, which coordinated the AFL-CIO's work on civil rights and economic justice. Rustin was instrumental in organizing early support for Solidarity, particularly in New York. He traveled to Poland several times, including as a member of the u.s. Holocaust Commission, most notably in April 1981, where he met with leaders of a number of regional branches of Solidarity and with Lech Wałęsa, the leader of Solidarity.



The First National Congress of Solidarity in the fall of 1981 was a huge success for union democracy worldwide.

Trade unions in the free world supported Solidarity through a variety of means; equally as important, Solidarity inspired the creation of dissident free trade unions in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe as well as beyond, including Chile, South Africa and China. Today, four decades since the inception of Solidarity, we are yet to appreciate fully the impact and transformative role it played in Poland and around the world.

Lane Kirkland holding a *Solidarność* banner with Monsignor George Higgins (known as "American labor's priest"). Higgins was sent to the First National Congress of Solidarity to give Kirkland's speech in his stead, after Kirkland was denied a visa (pictured center is Thomas R. Donahue, Secretary-Treasurer of the AFL-CIO). (IDEE)



Jan Sawka, a Polish graphic artist, designed this poster, subsequently sold in the millions to provide immediate support to *Solidarność*. The button with the Solidarity logo as a sun above a landscape of crowd-like trees became an iconic image, immediately recognizable to supporters of the movement around the world.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We are particularly grateful to Ms. Irena Lasota and Mr. Eric Chenoweth, formerly the Committee in Support of Solidarity, now the Institute for Democracy in Eastern Europe (IDEE), for their indispensable guidance and support in the process of preparing this exhibition, and for allowing us to peruse the organizations' photographic archives.

We also wish to thank Mr. Zygmunt Malinowski and the Polish Institute of Arts and Sciences of America (PIASA) for their permission to use the photos and images included in this publication, and the *Solidarność* trade union for granting permission to use their logo. The image of Jan Sawka's poster was used with the permission of the PIASA.



Poland reborn at the end of wwI.

1918

The Polish-Bolshevik War; Poland stops the attempted invasion of its territory by the Soviet Army.

1919–1921

The Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact between Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union is signed; in September 1939, both attack and invade Poland. The country remains under Nazi German occupation until the end of wwII.

1939

The creation of the Polish Committee in the USSR, under Soviet tutelage, to act as the new government of Poland.

1944

Workers' uprising in Poznań, Poland; many participants killed and wounded.

1956

Student protests at major Polish universities are suppressed, participants arrested; as a result of an anti-Semitic campaign launched by the communist government, many leave the country.

1968

Workers peacefully protesting against price increases in major industrial centers, including Gdańsk, Szczecin, Gdynia, are met by army units; many are killed, arrested and fired.

1970

Workers protesting against price increases in Ursus, Radom and Płock are attacked by the police. Students and intellectuals organize to provide aid for the victims.

1976

Pope John Paul II visits Poland.

1979

Strikes begin all over Poland; over 200 factories join in. On August 31, an agreement between the Inter-factory Strike Committee and the communist government is signed, allowing for the creation of free and independent trade unions – *Solidarność* is born.

1980

General Wojciech Jaruzelski becomes the Prime Minister of Poland in October and is elected the First Secretary of the Polish United Workers' Party (PZPR). ►

1981

Arrested Solidarity members are handed sentences of up to 8 years; over 3,000 people are sentenced to prison, over 10,000 are detained; over 100,000 fired from work. Hundreds are arrested and wounded in attacks by the police. Solidarity supporters demonstrate in defiance of the government; Solidarity delegatized.

1982

Martial law lifted.

1983

A wave of strikes begins: workers, members of free professions and students join forces.

1988

Negotiations between Solidarity and the communist government begin, culminating in the first partially-free elections in over half of a century on June 4, 1989; an overwhelming victory for Solidarity.

1989

► The Soviet newspaper "Pravda" publishes a message from Jaruzelski to Brezhnev, affirming the principles of Marxism-Leninism as a foundation for repelling "counterrevolutionary forces" in Poland. Joint Polish-Soviet maneuvers conducted in Poland.

September 1981, the First National Congress of Solidarity opens in Gdańsk.

November 1981, student strikes spread throughout Poland, involving over 55,000 students who demand greater academic freedom.

At 6:00 AM on December 13, Polish television and radio broadcast Jaruzelski's speech declaring the imposition of a state of war (martial law). Security forces round up Solidarity leaders.

Strikes break out throughout Poland, demanding the end of martial law. Armed with tanks, machine guns, water cannons and gas canisters, army and special militarized police forces break up the strikes.

December 16 – while suppressing the strike in the *Wujek* coal mine in Katowice, nine miners are shot dead, many others wounded and detained.

1945

The Yalta Conference
The u.s., the u.k. and the USSR, agree that Poland will fall under the Soviet sphere of influence.

1956

The Hungarian Revolution is brutally suppressed by the USSR.

1968

The Prague Spring – Soviet-led Warsaw Pact troops invade Czechoslovakia. 2,000 tanks and 200,000 troops strong, they crush the Czechoslovakian attempt at democratization, tightening the Soviet grip on the country.

1978

Polish Cardinal Karol Wojtyła is elected Pope John Paul II.

1979

The beginning of the Soviet-Afghan War.

1981

Ronald Reagan becomes the 40th President of the United States.

1983

Lech Wałęsa, the leader of Solidarity, is awarded the Nobel Peace Prize.

1985

The Perestroika ("restructuring") era begins in the USSR.

The Berlin Wall falls on November 9, 1989.