



# SOLIDARNOŚĆ

## celebrating 25 years

**Solidarity celebrates its twenty-fifth birthday this year. It was on the 14th day of August 1980, twenty-five years ago, that workers in the "Lenin" Shipyard of Gdansk, Poland, commenced an occupational strike which changed the world.**

The success of Solidarity was the precursor without which the Berlin Wall would not have fallen and the Cold War would not have ended. Without Solidarity, the Iron Curtain would still hang strong and the fear of a nuclear war would still be with us today. Solidarity led to "Perestroika" in the USSR and the collapse of the Soviet Union and its servile Eastern bloc. In a wider sense, it initiated the adjustment of both the political influence and military might of the world's "Super-powers", an expansion of real democracy, and the liberation of trade and exchange in Euro-Asia.

Such an achievement could not have happened without strong conviction, mobilization and the commitment of a large nation. It is difficult to understand the uniqueness and the undercurrents of this strike without understanding the background of the persistent struggle of Poles for independence and self-governance in their homeland.

Since the end of the Second World War, the Polish nation longed for full independence which had been taken away from it by the Yalta Treaty. The longing for freedom was even more keen since Poland had, prior to World War II, only 21 years of freedom after regaining full independence in 1918 as the result of a bloody World War I. Until 1918, Poland had endured 123 years of the iron rule of the old European super-powers, Prussia, Russia and Austria. These three countries had partitioned and annexed Poland in the 18th and 19th centuries.

- Poland suffered horrible casualties in World War II – six million Polish citizens, equating to 1/6th of the population, perished. It fought against the Nazi alliance on both the Eastern and Western fronts as the 4th largest army and lost some 70% of its infrastructure. Despite Poland's enormous input in World War II, Poland was "gifted" to one of her oppressors and attackers, the Soviet Union, through the Yalta Treaty (signed in February, 1945). The Soviets decided to brutally impose their communist totalitarian mono-party system on a nation that not so long ago lived in a free democracy underpinned by a market economy.
- Poland did not endure the Soviet regime lightly. Many times Poles tried to shake off the shackles of totalitarianism, a rigid and inefficient centralized economy, censorship and servitude. But attempts by workers in 1953, 1956, 1970, and 1976 failed and ended in bloody battles and repressions. This led to the polarisation of opinions and feelings, even amongst staunch Communist Party supporters: dissidents arose who later, using their contacts and insider knowledge, enormously helped the workers' cause. It is from these initial attempts that Polish people learned how better to confront the ruthless and self-centered communist government.
- First, they learned that streets are inappropriate place to vent their anger.

## From the president

**Polish people all over the world are now celebrating a very special anniversary.**

The Gdansk Shipyard workers' victory over the communist government in 1980 galvanized the whole Polish population. It led to perestroika, the collapse of the Berlin Wall, the Warsaw Pact disintegration and so on. Solidarity's famous 21 Demands (postulaty) have become part of world heritage under the patronage of UNESCO.

Australians of Polish origin, many of whom are past Solidarity members, wish to celebrate this victory with everybody.

The article written by Dr Włodzimierz Wnuk, a Solidarity past member himself, is based on consultations with Solidarity activists in Australia and Poland. His article should help us to understand why and how Solidarity was successful while many similar attempts in Poland and other countries failed.

*Dr Janusz Rygielski  
President of the PCCA&NZ*

## Australians recognised

Many Australians helped Solidarity and Poland in those turbulent years 1980-1989.

The Polish Government intends to award them with appropriate medals during the 25th anniversary of Solidarity celebrations.

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# SOLIDARNOSĆ

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Above: Lech Walesa and sympathisers at the entrance to the "Lenin" shipyard in Gdansk during the 1980 strike.

**Solidarity was unique. It was a mass movement rather than a typical trade union, because it was not profession specific and it set and sought the goals of wider political and governance changes.**



Below: Shipyard workers at the field mass in 1980.

Superimposed over this was the fast rising pride of Polish Roman Catholics, a majority of the population, who had been opposed to communism from the start. For decades, the Church had been discriminated and ridiculed by atheists, communists and Marxists. The election of cardinal Karol Wojtyła to the Holy See of Peter as the world leader of one of the largest religions provided an unexpected and very strong moral boost to the Polish Catholics. This was evident during the inaugural visit of the Pope John Paul II to Poland in 1979.

But probably the fatal threat to the governing party's dominance was the growing conviction of the nation that communism was unable to provide a satisfactory solution to get the country out of economic crisis and institute reforms. Jokes and caricatures from this period clearly illustrate a complete lack of trust and confidence in the pompous and arrogant government of "blockheads". Prohibited underground publishers flourished producing reprints of "illegal" books which dealt with issues of long suppressed historical truth. Overseas radio stations such as "Voice of America", the BBC, and foremost "Radio Free Europe" (run by Jan Nowak-Jezioranski), as well as Jerzy Giedroyc's "Culture – Literary Institute" (Kultura Instytut Literacki w Paryżu) all had a crucial role in breaking the Communist Party's monopoly on information and censorship. Their assiduous and tenacious constructive journalism prepared Poles for change by revealing the inner workings of the Government, highlighting its idiosyncrasies, doctrinal limitations and failures, and by presenting and discussing alternatives. The uncensored version of the Polish history was researched – for example: Poles had been waiting for 35 years to hear the truth about the Ribbentrop-Molotov treaty, the Katyn mass murder of Polish prisoners of war (including army officers, clergy and intelligentsia); and the Warsaw Uprising of 1944.

Since Poland's communist neighbours also had their share of problems, the coincidence of such factors created a powerful feeling that "something" was bound to happen. The political atmosphere, especially in the large industrial cities, was charged and waiting for a spark.

Such a "spark" was the callous sacking of Anna Walentynowicz, a crane operator in the government-owned "Lenin" shipyard in Gdansk, just a few months short of her retirement. She was one of the founding members of the illegal Free Trade Unions of the Coast (Wolne Związki Zawodowe Wyrbrzeża). The founding declaration of the Free Trade Unions states that:

*"the genuine social organisations and associations may save the country, since the only means to consolidate the interests and will of the citizens with the interests and the power of the country is democratisation"*

Buoyed by the recent success of a similar workers' protest in the Lublin region, Anna's colleagues - Bogdan Borusewicz, Piotr Maliszewski, Jerzy Borowczak, Bogdan Felski and Lech Walesa - convinced the shipyard employees to strike in protest. This started a peaceful revolution as the metaphorical "fires" of workers' strikes engulfed the whole nation.

The strikes in the 1980s had the following distinguishing features:

- the participants decided to stage peaceful protests sit-ins at their workplaces;
- the workers elected their own leaders, rather than rely on officials from the pro-government trade unions. One of them was the world's most famous electrical technician, Lech Walesa, a charismatic and able communicator, who was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1983;
- the strikers sought and relied on advice from centre-left intelligentsia, sympathetic intellectuals and Party dissidents;
- the demands of the workers were mainly of a political nature - they wanted trade unions that were independent of the Government; they wanted negotiation about award conditions with the biggest employer - the State. The workers also wanted to initiate a fundamental socio-political breakthrough in Poland.

In the end, the Polish Government reluctantly agreed to most of the demands, but only after its power-play and bluffing backfired. On 31 August 1980, Government representatives signed a formal agreement with the striking workers, and thus a new trade union federation – NSZZ

Solidarnosc (The Independent and Self-Governing Trade Union Solidarity or "Solidarity" for short) – was born.

This day is now celebrated in Poland as a national day of Solidarity and Freedom.

In 2003 a hand-written text of the famous 21 workers' postulates was added by UNESCO to the World Cultural Heritage List (Memory of the World). Such a privilege is only granted to documents which have had a profound influence on the world's history.

Solidarity was unique. It was a mass movement rather than a typical trade union, because it was not profession specific and it set and sought the goals of wider political and governance changes. In the 1980s, it garnered a broad anti-communist social movement with supporters ranging from Roman Catholics to members of the anti-communist left. The union was initially backed by a group of intellectual dissidents (Workers' Defence Committee – KOR), and it was based on the rules of nonviolent resistance founded on a refusal to cooperate with the Government. Soon, Solidarity had 10 million members, more than a half of the whole workforce in Poland at that time. It created its own media and culture. Suddenly, Poles could feel a freedom and independence not experienced since the beginning of World War II. There was relative freedom from both Soviet influences and the hypocritical demands of the autocratic communist apparatus dominated by a sclerotic Party largely consisting of Communist "dinosaurs". The loosening of the Soviet shackle was palpable.

The ideology of the Solidarity movement spread like wildfire throughout Poland; more and more new unions were formed and joined the Federation. Solidarity's affiliates now included such diverse unions as: the Independent Self-Governing Trade Union of Independent Farmers; Fighting Solidarity (SW); Freedom and Independence (WiN); Freedom and Peace (WiP); the Confederation of Independent Poland (KPN); the Movement for the Defense of Human and Civic Rights (ROPCiO); and the Independent Student Union (NZS). The agenda of Solidarity, although primarily concerned with trade union matters, was universally regarded as the first step towards dismantling the monopoly the Community Part had over the whole of Poland.



*Marian Jurczyk, Tadeusz Mazowiecki, Lech Walesa and Bogdan Lis presiding over the workers meeting in the shipyard.*

The main ideas of Solidarity – independence and freedom – embraced all geographical regions of Poland and all socio-economical groups, thus the movement became dangerous for other Soviet-aligned communist nations. Emergency meetings of the Warsaw Pact leaders as well as military exercises were held. Communist party general secretaries demanded that the Polish Government crush the Solidarity movement because it was creating problems in their own countries. An invasion (or “brotherly help” in the Communist Party’s parlance) was considered as early as 1 December 1980, but the costs turned out to be exorbitant and prohibitive. Also, the Polish nation had a powerful trump card - this is what Neal Ascherson wrote in “Polish August” (Penguin, 1981):

*“An official from the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, Vadim Zagladin, had arrived at the Vatican for discussions. Their content remains secret, but a few days later two different sources reported that the Pope had told Zagladin that if Poland were invaded he would simply fly home to be with his own people.”*

The Polish Government did try to quash the movement by its usual totalitarian tactics: intimidating the Solidarity leaders; threatening and arresting leading activists of the movement; through “mysterious” killings; and beatings of lower ranked activists. The Party also stalled on implementing the agreement signed on 31 August 1980.

Finally, in December 1981 “martial law” was imposed by a military junta led by General Wojciech Jaruzelski. Polish army tanks and

riot police armoured in personnel carriers seized Poland. Several thousands of activists were interned and many were subsequently severely beaten in prison. Many large factories put up resistance in response. Within a fortnight all of them were pacified by the armed riot police. In the coal mine of “Manifest Lipcowy”, four miners were injured by bullets, in “Wujek”, nine were killed and twenty-one received bullet wounds.

### **The main ideas of Solidarity – independence and freedom – embraced all geographical regions of Poland and all socio-economical groups**

Thereafter, every year on 31 August – the anniversary of the Solidarity beginnings – peaceful street demonstrations were organized. Some participants were killed by security forces (2 in Gdansk, 1 in Wroclaw, 1 in Nowa Huta, 3 in Lubin). Many more were injured and/or arrested.

During the martial law and subsequent resistance, nearly one hundred people were killed or perished. Many more were forced to emigrate, with one-way exit passports, others chose not to return home from overseas. It is estimated that Poland lost approximately one million of its educated, skilled and mostly young citizens. Western democracies opened their borders for them, gaining a young and capable workforce in the process.

• Australia, in particular, accepted a proportionally large number of the immigrants from the “Solidarity Wave”. Many of the Polish immigrants organised support and help from Australian workers and trade unions for the victims of persecution in Poland. Actions like “Solidarity with Solidarity”, “Help Poland Live”, and various public rallies, were hugely popular and spread the Solidarity name.

• Throughout the early and mid-1980s, Solidarity survived solely as an underground organisation, supported by the general populace, the Church and supporters from overseas. For example, in 1984, the International Labour Organisation in Geneva started proceedings against the Polish Government for violations of Convention 87 and 98 of the ILO charter, which Poland had ratified.

• The Communist Party via its security forces unleashed its frustration on Solidarity supporters not stopping at murder. Students (Grzegorz Przemyski, Marcin Antonowicz), members of the clergy (Fathers Jerzy Popieluszko, Stefan Niedzielak, Stanislaw Suchowolec, Sylwester Zych), and movement activists (Piotr Bartoszcze – NSZZ RI “S”) were cold-bloodedly murdered. Father Kazimierz Jancarz and others managed to escape from ambushes.

• The survival of Solidarity was an unprecedented event not only in Poland, a satellite of the USSR ruled by a dominant-party Communist regime, but also in the whole Eastern bloc. Thankfully, despite the cruel suppression of Solidarity, the embers of hope for a better way of life were still glowing in Poland.

• Facing mounting economical problems and continual social unrest after six turbulent years, the Polish Government decided to negotiate at the Round Table (Okragly Stol) with a new wave of Solidarity leaders of whom only four per cent were the leaders of the original Solidarity. As a result of these talks, in April 1989, a new Solidarity (with a modified constitution) was legalised and allowed to participate in the upcoming elections. In these limited elections, union candidates won a striking victory, thus abolishing the communist system in Poland in June 1989. By the end of August in the same year, a Solidarity-led coalition government was formed and in December, Lech Walesa was



*Top: Police confront Solidarity demonstrators during John Paul's 1987 visit to Poland.*

*Above: Pope John Paul II visits Poland in 1979.*

*Inset: The crowds in Wroclaw in 1983 – John Paul II's visit to Poland during the martial law.*

*Below: At the MKS meeting in the shipyard, 1980. From the left: Zbigniew Kobylinski, Bogdan Borusewicz, Andrzej Gwiazda, Joanna Duda-Gwiazda i Alina Pienkowska.*



*Above: “Faces of Solidarity” – Lech Walesa, Anna Walentynowicz, Andrzej Gwiazda, Bogdan Lis, Zbigniew Bujak, Jerzy Popieluszko.*



Above: Sz. Wesoly, John Paul II, Lech Walesa – audience in Rome.

elected as Poland's first "free" president after the end of the Second World War.

This sparked off a succession of peaceful anti-communist "counter-revolutions" in Central Eastern Europe which had a domino effect. By August 1989 the communist system had been abolished in Hungary and by November the Berlin Wall had fallen. A year later the Soviet Union disintegrated and the Cold War ended. Four hundred million people started a new chapter in their lives; for many of them this transformation was difficult and painful.

So it was that in 1989 a political turning point occurred when a remarkable turn-around in the relationship between the government and the opposition was formed. It was then that the today's most significant results of the decade-long mass movement of the 80's were prime-started and pushed through. But this development and transformation in Middle Europe was overseen by a new Solidarity – a successor to the Solidarity of the 80's, which was banned in 1982 by the Communist Party during the martial law in Poland.

Since 1989, the New Solidarity underwent another transformation. Initially, by participating in a number of Polish governments (through the Solidarity Electoral Action – Akcja Wyborcza Solidarnosc), and thus resembling a political party rather than a traditional trade union, it was instrumental in changing the economic, legal and political system in Poland. It participated in the privatisations of government enterprises and adjusted industrial awards to meet with modern reality. New Solidarity steered Poland towards

- a new constitution, the NATO pact and the European Union.
- The implementation of such monumental changes was only possible because Poland had a government it could trust and whom the nation gave a "carte blanche" permission to. The previous communist and neo-communist governments could not have even dreamt about making such changes. However, such drastic change, even with overwhelming popular support was not without social pain and many tribulations. As a result of such grand transitions, the New Solidarity lost the election in 2001 to a government with the roots in the Polish communist past.
- It was time for Solidarity to re-evaluate its actions and goals. Not many leaders of the New Solidarity survived this assessment. Many of them, especially the ones with political experience, ambition and zest, left Solidarity and joined various political parties in the now pluralist Poland. To this day, they still contribute to governance and law in the Sejm and Senat – the Polish Parliament.
- The Solidarity of the third millenium is different from both its predecessors. It has returned to its grass-root trade unionism and is lead by a new generation of activists. Its membership consists of mainly employees from privatised and/or corporate enterprises. It is no longer a mass movement. Solidarity's leadership now concentrates on issues different to the ones that the previous Solidarity generations had to face and solve.
- The history of Solidarity is a vital element of the history of Europe and the modern world. However, not enough is done to preserve the knowledge of this era and movement. Many active participants have died without

- being able to tell their story.
- Quite a number of details and undercurrents are still misrepresented, misclassified and misunderstood. Some of the events from Solidarity's heroic past were skewed in the media to serve a particular pragmatic aim at the time, and remain so even now.
- Unfortunately, the Polish Institute of National Remembrance (Instytut Pamięci Narodowej) does not have sufficient means or resources to collate, research and publish the history of Solidarity of the 80s, the period of martial law or the political struggles up until 1989.

- The history of Solidarity is a testament to the power of employees who want to have a strong, independent trade union. As in the 19th century, this determination changed the political map of the world. It also affected Australia - our current home country - through the immigration of a large group of skilled migrants many of whom settled in large capital cities. It has also affected Australian foreign policy. Poland is no longer a member of an enemy bloc but is Australia's ally, as it was in World War II. Poland is now a member of the Coalition of the Willing and cooperates with Australia in counter-fighting international terrorism.

- Today most of the "Solidarity Wave" of immigrants have extended families who "call Australia home". The "new" immigrants have rejuvenated the Polish organisations formed by the first wave of post-war Polish immigrants, mainly soldiers and displaced persons who were refused entry to the Homeland (for whose independence they were fighting on the world fronts) by the senseless and dogmatic Soviet installed Communist government. The new Polish arrivals provided a needed continuation of the Polish heritage in Australia.

- It is not coincidental that the names of two of the most recognisable Poles in the world, Pope John Paul II and Lech Walesa, are linked forever with the noble and peaceful mass movement known as Solidarity.

- On the 25th anniversary of Solidarity, we all should remember the lessons of this free trade union's history.

## About Polish Community Council of Australia and New Zealand

The Polish Community Council of Australia and New Zealand Inc. is non-profit, non politically aligned community-based voluntary umbrella body for Polish community organisations in Australia and New Zealand. The Council was established as an Australian organisation in 1950 to represent the Australian Polish community within Australia and abroad and to coordinate the activities of Polish community organisations in Australia. Several Polish community organisations in New Zealand joined the Council in 2002.

Membership of the Council is open to all Polish and Polish-Australian organisations from all States and Territories and from New Zealand. Currently, the Council comprises 26 member organisations (which in turn, have a number of member sub-organisations) with over 10,000 volunteers involved in a range of community programs and activities.

The Council's objectives are set out in its constitution. Its activities and operational framework support the principles of Australian multicultural policy based on the notion of upholding the values and principles of democracy, freedom, justice and respect for human rights.

The Council's headquarters are currently located in Brisbane, Queensland, having been so determined by the Congress of Delegates in 1999.

## Contact details

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