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Abstract

The Solidarity trade union formed in the shipyards of Gdansk after a summer of strikes called by factory workers in response to price increases on food. At the end of August 1980, the men who had replaced Edward Gierek’s elite signed an accord with the striking representatives of what came to be called Solidarity to provide increased benefits, and the right to have a free and independent trade union, to strike, and to have media that reported information more freely.

It rapidly became a national movement that forced the Communist government to make many concessions. In the next fifteen months, while the government treated this first independent trade union in a communist country as legal, other citizens’ organizations formed, the media discussed political and economic ideas that had long been censored, and the government gave in on more and more political issues.

Then, on December 13, 1981, in response to increasing pressure from the rest of the Communist Bloc to stop the transformation and a failing economy, the Communist regime declared martial law, “a state of war,” and interned hundreds of Solidarity and intellectual leaders as well as the leaders of the former Communist government.

For the next three years, the government struggled to find a balance between repression and co-optation that would
allow them to reclaim real power. Once they declared the state of war over, they were never in a position to really manage popular demands again.

Building to a Crisis

The workers' strikes that swept Poland in July and August 1980 and, ultimately, crystallized in the formation of Solidarity signaled the sixth major crisis in postwar Polish history. More than that, these events were manifestations of the most profound and pervasive social crisis in Eastern Europe in forty years. It was the culmination of changes in the nature of Polish society and in its expectations, in the failure of the economy, in the structures and processes of governance and control, and in the politics—domestic and foreign, economic and political—of the United States, Western Europe, and the states of the Soviet Bloc. This was the "bridge crisis"—one in which the lessons and legacies of the past were clear, for which there was only a temporary resolution, and from which the compromises and ultimate resignation of the Communists stemmed. Of the Polish crises, as well, it has been the one most examined and reexamined. Individually and collectively, the changes had negative impacts on virtually all of Polish society and, at the same time, they isolated groups in the society from each other.

Beyond the depth and breadth of the domestic problems that brought on the 1980 crisis and made it virtually unsolvable, the decisions of the 1970s made foreign actors more important than they had been at any time since the Yalta Agreements were signed at the end of World War II. The timing of the Polish events raised the stakes for both West and East. Poland became not only a nation in crisis but also a tool for the internal and international battles of the "Great Powers" and Western European states.

Crisis Background

There were clear differences between the prelude to the 1980 Solidarity crisis and to other, earlier crises. At a leadership level, the Gierek leadership's policies and personnel were significantly different from his predecessors'. In 1970, the takeover of Gierek, although he had long been seen as Gomulka's successor, was a takeover by "outsiders." In bringing his supporters from Silesia, Gierek pushed aside the Warsaw circle of Communists that had been governing Poland since 1945. He made major changes in the system by developing
both the size and the prerogatives of the central bureaucracy, significantly reducing the power and authority of regional institutions and leaders,\(^1\) and moving the entire claim for legitimacy from ideology and national interest to material gains and power. In the end, he based his rule on economic promises he could not fulfill. Furthermore, the traditional links between intellectuals and the Polish United Workers Party (PUWP) leadership were weakened because many of the new top leaders and bureaucrats, particularly in the party, came from outside Warsaw and did not have any close personal ties with the main intellectual community.\(^2\) The links were also weakened by the unwillingness of the Gierek leadership to sanction even private criticism of its policies.\(^3\) Ultimately, Gierek’s isolated elite came to live by rules of visible consumption and internal bureaucratic policies, and kept themselves isolated from anyone who might disagree.\(^4\)

The major alternative institution in Polish society, the Catholic Church, increased its power in the post-1976 period. The Church was strong enough (and the pervasiveness of dissent great enough) for it to take the risk of working with the more moderate dissident groups like KOR (the Committee in Defense of Workers).\(^5\) When Karol Wojtyla, the Cracow Bishop, was elected Pope in 1978, Poles had a clear focus for inspiration, their own Pope in Rome. His visit in 1979 triggered an outpouring of support for the papacy and the Church that established the Catholic Church as a partner for Communist leaders. The visit also proved to Poles that they could organize themselves and that they had numbers

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\(^1\) In the summer of 1975, Poland’s nineteen regional provinces (wojewodstwa) were abolished and replaced by forty-nine small regional units. These regional units were coordinated and subordinated to the central government and party apparatus in Warsaw. They were deprived of their press organs and also their power over planning and budgeting. Effectively, this meant that there were few possibilities for regional leaders to build up their own constituencies and to respond to specific local needs.

\(^2\) Prior to the takeover of Edward Gierek, intellectuals in the center had little contact with either the intellectual community or the government and party elite in his Silesian region. Following his takeover, Gierek brought into the top party elite and governing positions in the ministries and media organs men with whom he had worked in Silesia and for whom Warsaw was not “home territory.” This shift was completed after the 1976 upheaval.


\(^4\) After 1989, the literature and revelations on the “sins” of the Gierek elite has become so mammoth that there is no single case or piece of literature that can cover all the material. The isolation and corruption of the Gierek regime was no secret, however, even in the 1970s. Interviews from 1979 and 1983 were filled with information about the regime’s corruption and its refusal to deal with critical information. For the other side of the story, however, see Edward Gierek’s own interview books: Edward Rolicki, *Edward Gierek: Przerwana dekada* (Warsaw: BGW, 1990) and *Replika* (Warsaw: BGW, 1990).

\(^5\) Adam Michnik, *The Church, the Left and Dialogue* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993).
on their side. This was true even though, initially, the Pope’s visit resulted in the withdrawal of the Church from visible, active support of KOR. Ultimately, the Pope’s image—although not necessarily his words—came to symbolize the regime’s vulnerability and its lack of support in the population. Walesa waved a souvenir pen from the papal visit when he signed the accords that ended the strikes in August 1980, and symbols from that visit continued to appear in the early days of Solidarity.

The Polish economy’s failures, on the other hand, were only increased after 1976. From 1976 on, the system could afford to provide less and less to the population. Life grew more and more expensive. The store shelves grew barer and barer. No one was able even to hope that the economy would succeed in achieving any of its promises. At the same time, the Communists’ only other remaining claim to legitimacy—“better us than the Soviets”—was weakened in the 1970s by Poland’s increasing reliance and involvement with the West. This shift was magnified by the fact that the Brezhnev leadership was aging and so weak by the last years of the 1970s that it was difficult to make people see it as permanent.

**Political “Events”**

The acute crisis for both the political authorities and the society began in July 1980. To get Western banks to reschedule Poland’s overwhelming debt, estimated at $20 billion in 1980, the Polish authorities agreed to reduce subsidies and increase the costs of basic commodities. To avoid the unrest that had derailed price-increase programs in earlier years, the regime limited itself to increasing prices on cuts of meat that were virtually unavailable anyway, raising them one region at a time. By doing this, they hoped both to establish a precedent for ending subsidies and to placate Western lenders without triggering a political confrontation. According to underground publications widely circulated in the summer of 1980, Stanislaw Kania and General Wojciech Jaruzelski, then the Politburo members responsible for the security forces and the military, told local leaders that demonstrations had to be met with wage concessions, not force.

Initially, the Gdansk shipyard workers negotiated for salary increases when prices were raised there at the end of the summer, after they had been raised everywhere else. 6 When their demands for compensation were granted, it ap-

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appeared that the final stage of the Gierek plan had been completed and a precedent set for removing government subsidies on foodstuffs. Human factors intervened. Anna Walentynowicz, a nurse in the shipyards, found an open microphone and called on workers not to forget that they had also gotten promises in 1970 only to have them ignored later. Messengers came from the Szczecin shipyards to ask the Gdansk workers not to simply agree to concessions for themselves but to make their demands universal so that smaller, less influential shipyards could benefit too. And the seeds for Solidarity were sown.

None of this appears to have been anticipated by the political leadership. The directors and managers had already left the shipyards to celebrate their victory on August 14, 1980, when Walentynowicz issued her call. Gierek was in the Crimea on a vacation with Soviet leaders. His deputies failed for two days even to notify him about the transformation of the shipyard strikes. This gave the strikers three extra days to organize, formulate their demands, and develop a negotiating base. It made the reins of government control appear particularly loose to both conservatives in the PUWP apparatus and to potentially semiloyal or oppositional groups that were both established (KOR and the Church) and nascent (worker and intellectual groupings). Throughout 1980-81 and in the decade afterwards, this underestimation of the opposition’s popular strength continued.

When Gierek did return from the Soviet Union, a series of mixed signals were sent. The striking coastal cities were completely cut off from the rest of Poland. Major roads were blocked into Gdansk. Telephone and telegraph lines were down. Media coverage only talked about “work stoppages.” At the same time, the government forces’ hold on Gdansk was ineffective. People and information went in and out constantly. During the strikes, Warsaw academics and intellectuals met and sent delegates to caution the strikers. Journalists went to see what was happening and returned with their tales. Dissident representatives carried messages to Western correspondents. Their reports were quickly rebroadcast into Poland. Church representatives went in and out of the shipyard freely. In fact, the people most reluctant to travel to the striking towns were party officials.

Later, in the last two weeks of the strikes, a government-run press center for foreign journalists was established in the striking shipyards. Negotiations were begun even as the strikes were alternately attacked and ignored in the media. The strike agreements were drawn up and agreed to without any mention of party rights or control. Instead, the enactment rested on the passage of laws by the parliament. Government negotiators conceded to the strikers’ demands for recognition of their newly formed union and their right to strike. They also ac-

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knowledged that the Catholic Church and others should be given access to the mass media for religious broadcasts and discussions of different points of view.7

The signing of the Gdansk agreement on August 31, 1980, and parallel agreements by other groups of Baltic shipyard workers and miners in the Silesian coalfields had far more than a local union character. Delegations from other shipyards came to the shipyards to ask for inclusion of them and their demands. During all these negotiations, the presence of a deputy prime minister, other ministers, and top government officials made the negotiations even more national. The universal impact of Poland’s economic crisis and intellectuals’ presence as advisors to workers made this the first clear crisis where workers and prominent intellectuals were actively aligned against the government. Finally, the broadcast of the signing of the Gdansk agreements made them appear to be a new national political accord, even though the party leadership treated the accords as merely a necessary response to the public’s wrath over the failings of the old system.

In the almost three months between the signing of the accords and court approval of the independent union’s charter in November 1980, the situation grew more complicated. Local priorities took over, since Solidarity could not build a national organization until it was officially registered. Instead, individuals simply declared a union into existence in their workplace. Those who wished to sign up and paid the assigned dues became members. Others simply came to Solidarity’s open meetings. By November, nearly nine million people had joined various ostensibly local organizations. Their leaders were self-appointed. Their power depended not on their established positions but on what they could deliver for their clients. Strikes, whether or not they were fully legalized, became the standard vehicle for achieving local goals. The primary national goal was the legal registration of the trade union. To this end, local organizations entered into informal alliances that allowed the Gdansk team (symbolized by Lech Walesa) to speak for the as yet illegal Solidarity in negotiations with the authorities.8

This spontaneous activity continued even after the courts had formally legalized the Solidarity trade union (NSZZ “Solidarnosc”). Individuals and groups of individuals simply declared themselves under the banner of Solidarity and acted as they saw fit. “Journals” were published because individuals had access to printing presses or mimeograph machines, strikes were called in local areas

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over large and small local issues, and open meetings were announced and held by whoever took the initiative. Professional activities and groups were enlivened. New leaders were selected and old, long-submerged demands put forth.

Academics, journalists, and self-styled experts in all fields started to advise the new reformers. When intellectual groups held meetings, they were almost always open, not just to the limited membership of a given group, but to anyone who wanted to come and listen. In addition, through the leadership of Stanislaw Szaniawski, a professor of philosophy at the University of Warsaw, and the new leaders of various intellectual groups, a Coordinating Committee of Polish Intellectual Associations took upon itself the task of negotiating with the government and Solidarity on various legal points that specifically concerned Polish intellectuals and professionals, such as the censorship law and reforms of academic governance, all the while keeping in mind the necessity of protecting Solidarity.

Finally, those who were outside the membership bounds of Solidarity (private farmers and university students) began, after Solidarity had been registered, to press for their own unions. These unions were more politically threatening by their very nature, so they were not readily recognized by the government. After all, student demands were, from the beginning, for a revision not only of authority relations in the university but also for removing ideology from the curriculum. Private farmers sought a union through which their rather tenuous position would be protected. Although this was a less drastic demand than the recognition of a workers’ union in a “workers’ state,” the Communist leaders could not ignore the fact that Polish farmers had forced the regime to give in on collectivization. That made a private farmers’ union a difficult pill to swallow. As a result, strikes to press for the formation of these unions occurred over and over during the first six months after Solidarity’s birth and resulted in more open conflicts and far less rapid concessions than workers had achieved.

All of this “pluralism” meant that union leaders were involved on two fronts from the start. On the one hand, they were attempting to use threats of mass action to force concessions from the government. On the other hand, given the visibly bad economic realities and the demands of the government that they demonstrate leadership and authority by “controlling” their members, Walesa and his Gdansk cadre were forced to press new groups and members not to strike. This left the self-appointed heroes of Solidarity open for challenges by new leaders from newer organizations, all of whom used the Gdansk Accords as a base and sought to wring even more gains out of their local leaders.

As had happened after the workers’ strikes of 1956 and 1970, the initial regime response was to oust the top, publicly visible party leaders. This time, however, there were no clear alternative “answers” waiting in the wings. The process of bureaucratization and unification of the party around the Gierek clique had destroyed the possibilities for anyone in the regime to develop a broad base of support. Nor was a change in the national party leadership ever

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one of the strikers' goals. Kania's leadership—in line with his quiet personality and the general balance of forces within the party—was that of a buffer and mediator, not a leader. The others around him checkmated each other to protect their positions rather than building downward links or cementing permanent ideological groups.  

The party leadership was divided from the outset on how to respond to Solidarity's birth and growth. In initial public statements, the basic line was that there had been excesses in the behavior of the leaders under the Gierek and that these had weakened the party and hurt the economy. Solidarity was treated in many of the public statements of top leaders as an independent force that emerged because the old unions had lost their authority. Local strikes were dealt with as local phenomena requiring local negotiations. The strategy was apparently to oust or transfer leaders who represented unpopular policies, to take strong measures against a few symbols of the worst excesses, to make the required political concessions as slowly as possible, and to minimize workers' hopes of getting what they had been promised by engaging in the "propaganda of disaster" and stressing the economic crisis in which Poland found itself.

This general line was played out in a battle between those who thought there was no need to tolerate Solidarity and those who thought it was a way to give workers a way to feel involved. The result was that actions were seldom consistent with words. Party leaders with different stances toward the liberalization held posts in competing party and government agencies. Their directives reflected their individual positions and power needs, not any coherent policy. The agreements signed with striking workers promised them a union and the right to strike. The mass media and the court decisions required to actualize these agreements initially reneged on or minimized them. Most crucially, in November 1980 the court, in authorizing the legal registration of the union, inserted a provision stating that the union had to recognize the supremacy of the party. This was done without warning and against the will of the union organizers.

Effectively, this all triggered an unhealthy chain of events for the party that left its leaders fractionalized, disgraced, and powerless over their own bureaucracy. The chain began when, almost immediately after the agreements were signed, the new party leaders began attacks on the corruption and abuse of power by leaders around Gierek. These attacks, like the shifts in leaders, served

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10 Perhaps the initial and symbolic indication of this change was the fact that the appointment of Stanislaw Kania, who, after all, had been the party secretary in charge of the police and unpopular Church policies, did not even interest the newly activated population. Nor did they seek to meet with the new leaders as they had in the past. Kania's leadership followed this pattern of disinterest in the party. Poles neither protested the appointment of the man who had supervised two of Poland's most contentious institutions nor rallied around him, as they had Gierek when he criticized the party and called for reform. Essentially, grassroots movements simply went on.

11 Ruane, *The Polish Challenge*, p. 73.
as a substitute for making new policy. But, since corruption and inequality had become the *modus vivendi* for party and state officials at all levels, the attack on corruption turned into a cleansing that swept out ever larger circles of party and state leaders. The public's negative image of its leadership from the 1970s was not ameliorated. It was confirmed and magnified. The revelations served not as excuses for past mistakes but as reasons why workers’ demands should not be restrained by the legacy of economic problems. This, coupled with the fact that many of the “new” leaders were from outside the party and government establishment, made it difficult for the new leaders to control “their” bureaucracy. Reformers in the party began, in early 1981, to consider reforms that involved paring down the party and state administrative and economic bureaucracies that had grown under Gierek. All of this, given the bureaucracy’s sense of its power in the 1970s, resulted in a dramatic split and distrust between many policy makers and administrators.12

Yet, in the Solidarity period, to an even greater degree than in the 1970s, bureaucrats became governors. Party and government leaders were new to the bureaucracies they “ruled” and were internally divided. This meant they were dependent on bureaucrats. Even though a substantial number of state bureaucrats joined Solidarity, particularly from the economic bureaucracy, there was a clear split between their “private” selves and their bureaucratic interests. Thus, unlike the bureaucrats of 1956, many of whom left their positions or pushed for their own bureaucracies to be dissolved, bureaucrats in 1980 supported all the aims and principles of Solidarity except those that would have reduced their bureaucratic powers. One of their prime concerns was to protect their own autonomy against reformist pressures that threatened to abolish their administrative positions or subject their previously unassailable decisions and actions to public examination. In addition, they engaged in conscious and unconscious interpretations of the new regulations to make them consistent with what they had done before and with their needs as bureaucrats.13 All of this made establishing the new order promised by party leaders even more problematic, especially since the bureaucracy was strongest in the areas most challenged by Solidarity: the mass media, the security forces, and the economic administration.

Below the roughly two hundred people holding positions in the top central party and state elite and the rest of the entrenched party apparatus,14 the party membership lived its own life between August 1980 and March 1981. Party members were seldom recruited or encouraged to be ideologically aware in the 1970s, when many joined to get or keep good jobs. They were shaken by the appearance of Solidarity. In the initial months, many moved to join Solidarity

12 Interview data, 1983.
13 Interview data, 1979 and 1983.
while retaining their party membership. At the same time, some, particularly those in large urban industrial areas with a young population, moved to create a new party by fiat. They even held their own, unsanctioned elections for new officers and for delegates to a special party congress. This they did before party leaders had agreed to call any special congress.

It was these “renegades” who emerged as a real force in the lower ranks of the party in the late fall and early winter of 1981. Initially, individuals in the intellectual centers of Torun and Cracow and the site of the 1956 uprising (Poznan) had carried out their own elections for new leaders after local party leaders dragged their heels in the democratization of the party. Defying the old vertical control structures of democratic centralism, they simply bypassed party leaders and talked to their peers elsewhere. Essentially, these contacts served to encourage reformist action within the party’s lower ranks by direct group communication about what they were doing to democratize local party groups. The combination of intellectual guidance and the general frustration of low-level party activists led them to make national demands. Because the party bureaucracy feared that this movement would deplete their power base, these so called horizontalist groups were an ideological lightning rod for the party in early 1981. The movement’s initial instigator was dropped from his party position, only to be returned to it by an unauthorized vote at the local level of the party. Hard-liners made reference to the horizontalists as a threat to national stability. At the same time, other liberal party leaders flirted with the horizontalists and, in doing so, gave their actions even more significance in national politics and to the Soviet Union.15

Foreign Actors

During this time, both Western and Soviet actors were constrained from “doing something about Poland” by their broader world interests. Poland was dependent on Western loans and aid but did not have the funds to make its debt payments. Western bankers were concerned lest Poland default on its debt, as that would have meant an overwhelming loss for some Western European banks in the midst of a worldwide economic recession. They also wanted to avoid sending the message to other heavily indebted nations that default had few if any consequences, lest nations even more indebted than Poland should simply allow themselves to “go under.”16 The Soviets needed Poland to pay its debts on its own and not drain more hard currency from the already fragile Soviet economy. They insisted that Poland pay up; if Poland defaulted it would not only hurt Western banks, but would also hurt Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (CMEA) members’ ability to trade and borrow from the West. The desire to protect the détente on which the Brezhnev regime had concentrated also was

15 Interview data, 1983.
16 Interview data, 1981.
significant enough in 1980 to increase Soviet tolerance of what would have been unthinkable concessions in earlier years and forced the Soviets to keep up costly economic aid to Poland to prevent it from defaulting.\textsuperscript{17}

Politically, to risk an invasion or early repression of the Solidarity movement, which had instantly become the media fascination of the West, seemed to risk an end of that détente, a halt to trade with the technologically more advanced West, and a narrowing of the division between the United States and Western Europe. Naturally, there is no way to weigh the real impact of each of these factors or to know how clearly top Soviet leaders understood the intelligence information they received about events in Poland. But they made it obvious that they would tolerate some change but not let Poland go too far.\textsuperscript{18}

To further complicate the role of foreign powers in Polish developments, the leadership in both the West and the Soviet Union were very unstable and unpredictable. In the initial months of change in Poland, the United States, France, England, and West Germany went through elections that were marked by dramatic shifts to the right everywhere but France. Poland, as a result, became a useful political symbol in domestic political battles.

Public Western reaction was enthusiastic about Solidarity and its successes. As a result, Poles thought aid would come. At the same time, there was little actual commitment of funds for Poland. Lame-duck or campaigning politicians put off any actual commitments from their own economically troubled countries until things got settled after their elections. Once the elections were over, the new leaders were so tied up with getting started and dealing with their own economic problems that they did not have time to concentrate on Poland.

Soviet involvement was under similar constraints. The Brezhnev leadership was aged and facing a leadership transition of its own. For them, the changes in Poland were virtually inconceivable. All they could comprehend was that the troublesome Poles had to be settled down again by concessions that they thought would soon fade. In addition, although they wished to hold back change in Poland and lessen its impact on the rest of the bloc, their willingness to openly intervene was limited both by their commitment to détente and their increasingly costly commitment to holding on to Afghanistan, after their invasion there in December 1979.

**The Economy**

The economic situation in which these events occurred made either calming popular economic demands or simply repressing the movement difficult if not impossible. It put Poland between the West and the Soviet Union. In the first place, Poland’s massive debt to the West, coupled with the Brezhnev-era em-


phasis on détente and cooperation with the West, made the potential of the West an important factor in political and economic decisions. For the Polish leadership, the solution was to borrow even more money from the West to keep the economy afloat and to get enough raw materials to continue production for export and for basic domestic demands. In the second place, the Polish leadership had to get infusions of some hard currency from the Soviet Union to satisfy Western financiers and simply keep the economy functioning. This required acting in terms the Soviets could tolerate.

Domestically, the inevitable collapse of the economy was speeded up by agreements between the workers and the government on pay increases and increased benefits. In July and August 1980, when these had been drawn up, there had been no attempt to account for their actual cost. Instead, separate agreements were made by local managers and negotiators with striking workers. The cost of the agreement was the least of their concerns. These agreements were simply products of individuals’ negotiating skills and the power of an industry and its managers. The agreements were met by printing more money. This only increased the gap between supply and demand. So, as workers earned more without having to produce more, they had more and more money when less and less was available.

Agricultural developments in Poland further complicated the economic equation. Over half the peasant population was over sixty years old. Long-term mismanagement and regime disinterest in agriculture had further reduced farm production. In addition, the summer and fall of 1980 had been marked by bad weather. Finally, shortages of hard currency increased the use of agricultural products as hard-currency export earners while decreasing the supply of grains, fertilizers, and equipment normally imported from the West.¹⁹

All this left Poland on the verge of an economic disaster. There was a ballooning debt when not even the necessities were available and hard-currency earnings were dropping. The polity was fragmented at all levels and the possibility of any internal or external actor acting effectively was virtually nonexistent.

Breakdown

The responses of all the players to the crisis and to each others’ actions led to the first total breakdown in postwar Poland’s history. It was a breakdown so deep that it was impossible even to fully terrorize the population into submission when a “state of war” was finally imposed.

**Political Events**

This period began in March 1981 with the beatings of farmers in Bydgoszcz who demanded the right to establish their own union by occupying local government headquarters. They were attacked and beaten by the police. Only a four-hour national Solidarity warning strike and threats of a national strike, along with Church protests, forced the government to admit that there had been police brutality. Even then, there was no direct admission that any national unit had been involved or that central directions had been given. Instead, all that was clear was that the regime would do no more than make a minimal admission of low-level administrative wrongdoing.\(^{20}\) The breakdown period then continued until the fall of 1982, when martial law was suspended.

The Bydgoszcz incident was the first instance of force being used against strikers in the post-August period. It was also the most dramatic in a series of strikes focused on local economic issues and the improprieties and privileges of local party and government officials. As these local strikes happened, they grew into ever broader and more general attacks on the system, taking on a life of their own. The strike that followed the Bydgoszcz beatings was the first national strike, or the threat of one, used as a weapon to force concessions on local issues.

Even so, Bydgoszcz was only one of the events in March 1981 that marked the breakdown. Not only was Solidarity increasingly restless, but the party membership itself was radicalizing. The congress that party reformers had been promised was delayed. So grassroots horizontalist movements met independently of the party leadership. Under this local pressure, the Ninth Plenum of the PUWP Central Committee met on March 30, 1981 (ten days after the beatings in Bydgoszcz), and began the process of setting up the election machinery for the Extraordinary Congress. This opened the doors for local party bodies to hold secret-ballot elections and negotiations over most of the seats at the congress. At the same time, party leaders ordered party members not to join or remain in Solidarity.\(^{21}\) This marked a clear shift from treating the new union movement as a problem created by the Gierek era to be incorporated or co-opted into the existing party system, to treating it as a threat to the system whose faults were caused by the “anti-system” KOR intellectuals.

Finally, in March 1981, public protest over the Bydgoszcz events and the possibility that the party would give up too much in dealing with this rebellion at its lower levels triggered the Soviet Union to make its first clearly articulated public suggestion, beyond the periodic military exercises on Poland’s borders, that, if Poland could not put its own house in order, others in the Soviet Bloc would have to. Polish events became “bloc events,” as confirmed by the March Soviet letter, the attacks on Poland by East European delegates at the Czech and

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\(^{21}\) For a discussion of these events as breakdown events, see Andrews, *Poland 1980–1981*, pp. 132–35.
later East German Party Congress, and Soviet troop maneuvers. The Soviet intent, though, was not consistent. Bloc members and even the Soviet leaders could not agree on the trustworthiness of the leadership, the immediate necessity of intervention, and the nature of a viable intervention. So, in the midst of major Warsaw Pact maneuvers in Southern Poland, Brezhnev stated at the Czech Congress that Polish leaders should and could be entrusted with regulating their own affairs.22

All these events were the first sketches of what was to become the pattern of breakdown in Poland. There were breakdowns of any sense of cohesive and coherent group direction; of public authority (eventually not only of the party and state but also of the Solidarity leadership itself); of the authorities’ ability to control their subordinates and the broader population’s actions; of the economy; and of the limit on foreign incursions into domestic affairs. For the “loyal or semiloyal opposition” that had originally respected the rules of the system and shared common goals, this period was a time when they fragmented into smaller and increasingly contentious groupings involved in battles both with the regime and with other opposition actors. Finally, it was a time in which events and divisions rendered impossible the creation of any opposition or regime strategy for reform or compromise.

Ironically, this period was also a time for public and formal meetings institutionalizing the new Solidarity unions and reform proposals. It was a period of intensive discussions about economic reform and the preparation of laws to put more democratic structures into place. Too, both the “establishment” and Solidarity took definitive actions to institutionalize or reinstitutionalize themselves: elections and national congresses were held by Solidarity; the PUWP held an Extraordinary Congress; Polish intellectual organizations and the two minor parties held conferences to “cleanse” themselves; the Church became a power that played an institutionalized role between the regime and Solidarity;23 and, finally, a so-called state of war put Poland under formal military and police rule. Yet, none of these actions halted the fragmentation and disintegration of authority at every level and from every political posture. Groups deadlocked each other and fragmentation merely made resolution of any part of the crisis more difficult.

Party and state officials were not in control of their own options. Nor was there an agreed-upon strategy for resolving crises anywhere in the society. The past pattern for Communist reform movements did not occur: elites, this time, did not compete by seeking support from groups in the society. Instead, events in the party and in the society occurred separately. Few links were made between political factions’ leaders and members of dissenting groups. And, as the breakdown progressed, even informal links that had held the intelligentsia to-


23 For a study of the Church in this period, see Piotr Nitecki, *Człowiek droga kosciola* (Warsaw: Osrodek Dokumentacji i Studiow Społecznych, 1987).
gether dissolved. This meant that regime leaders were increasingly isolated from everything but bureaucratic reports on conditions in the society. Their focus was almost exclusively on their own power politics.

Initially, in the breakdown period (from March 1981 until July 1981), the focus was on preparations for the Extraordinary Party Congress. At the membership level, for the intelligentsia in the party, open and secret elections for delegates were a real opportunity to take action. For workers, they were of little interest since Solidarity elections were going on at almost the same time. These party elections, though, were no less contested. Some longtime, high-level Communist officials were even voted out by their primary party organizations.

Public and critical electioneering by the various factions within the leadership made the divisions very clear to the public. There were sharp and sometimes personal attacks on individuals and ideas from other factions. Liberals sought far-reaching decentralization and an opening up of the party and state administration. Conservatives argued that the party bureaucracy should be rebuilt and strengthened so that the party could lead. Both sides (and Kania’s centrists) justified the need for change with the threat of a total social collapse and the suggestion that this collapse would bring a Soviet intervention. This open division and the chaos of the election battles made preparation of a program or enacting real reforms impossible before the Party Congress. Instead, democratic elections were the party leadership’s only proof that change was being made.

In the end, these very election procedures, the party’s evidence of reform, made the party leadership look worse. The Extraordinary Party Congress’ 1,948 delegates were selected from lists of candidates that included far more names than there were seats. Selections were made by voters crossing off those they did not want. This negative balloting made name recognition often the main criterion for selecting from the Central Committee candidates. As a result, little-known delegates were elected to the Central Committee and other committees because their names did not have any connection with the past. Many of the party’s well-known figures, in turn, were removed by this process. In their place, weak unknowns were elected. The shift even affected Politburo membership: it strengthened the four established leaders elected to the Politburo, since the others elected by the congress were such unknowns that they had no real hold on power.24

Aside from this demonstration of “democracy,” however, the PUWP congress did little. Commissions prepared reports on party and state policy but could not agree on substantial proposals. Criticism of the past repeated accusations made earlier. Traditional promises of an even better future were not made. The new line, expressed by Wojciech Jaruzelski as the head of government, was that economic conditions could only get much worse, since the government had

no way to stem the tide. For the public, all of this demonstrated the incompetence and weakness of the party as a leadership force.

The post-congress period was marked by a general collapse within the party. By the party’s own reports, the general desertion of members began in the fall of 1981 and picked up speed after the declaration of martial law.\(^{25}\) Even those who stayed retreated from active involvement. Local meetings focused on local problems and relations with local union groups rather than national issues. The center’s only contact came in its expulsions of the local members it considered too liberal. Then, too, with the resignation of Kania in September 1981, the party ceased to play a real role separate from the state. After all, Gen. Wojciech Jaruzelski took over not as an established party leader but as a man whose status came from his position in the military. The concept of the party’s authority and leadership simply disappeared from party statements and actions.

Between March 1981 and December 1982, when martial law was suspended, fragmentation occurred outside the party as well. Even more critical in the breakdown was the spread of open attitude differences and group conflict throughout the society. As surveys of members of various social groups during this period demonstrated, while there was a general social agreement on the faults of the system, there were increasingly clear class lines between workers and intellectuals that were reinforced by a fragmentation of views as to who should lead and how; who had benefited from the failures of the old system; and what a viable new system would be.\(^{26}\) In addition, the fragmentation of the Solidarity movement and intellectual groups into policy groupings with different views on economic reform and Poland’s political direction was more than a simple search for alternatives. Inherent in it was a commitment to and advocacy of specific individual interests and positions. Solidarity fragmented into various leadership factions. Intellectuals, even those active in Solidarity, saw their interests as different from the workers’ and held to their own professional prerogatives. The siec concept developed when leading factories decided to form policy units of their own to work on economic reform programs when they felt Solidarity had failed to act or had not pressed to solve the needs of the big factories they represented.\(^{27}\) In the post–martial law period, the division grew not only between the population and martial law authorities but also within the intellectual establishment. It fragmented into groups bitterly divided over the moral stance to take toward martial law.

The actual agenda of the Solidarity leadership and other smaller, independent trade unions, after the events in Bydgoszcz, turned more political. The beatings and the subsequent struggle with the government as well as the inabil-

\(^{25}\) See Sulek, “The Polish United Worker’s Party.”


\(^{27}\) Interview data, 1981 and 1983.
ity of the unions to deliver on their economic or social promises, led, in part, to a reorientation of the unions. Internal battles increased as radicals, urging less compromise, rose to the top. Their rise was aided by the failing economic situation and the increasing sense in the union and the population that there was no way to resolve the conflict with the party and state authorities.28

Divisions took on sharper foci as Solidarity’s leadership and policy became more and more national. Lech Walesa and his co-leaders spoke and appeared as national union leaders. A weekly, Tygodnik Solidarnosc, was organized as an official and legal national journal to augment the plethora of local and unauthorized journals. In the course of this nationalization and the preparations for the first national congress of Solidarity, public divisions in views and in the leadership became the order of the day. The election process further crystallized the divisions in Solidarity. There were no previously elected leaders. Few who ran were known even to their local groups or to the other delegates representing the 9,486,000 Poles in Solidarity. So candidates from 5,568 districts (1,500 to 1,900 members, each based on factories, combinations of offices, or workplaces) drew attention to themselves and their views by making dramatic promises in open, mass election meetings. From these locally elected nominees, individuals were selected to be candidates in the forty-two regional-level meetings from which 892 national delegates were elected.

The regional meetings were open forums. All nominees from work units were allowed to give five-minute presentations to Solidarity members, who came to what were often two- to three-day meetings. In the end, whoever was at the meetings when the vote was called was polled to select regional delegates. Individuals thus sought to articulate what made them different, not what made them “representative.” This encouraged extremism. Too few knew the dismal realities of the economic and political situation. Their targets of criticism were most often the self-appointed leaders of Solidarity whom they sought to join or replace and whom they criticized for not bringing Poles an instantly better life.

As a result, the delegates reflected both generational splits and radicalization. Of the 701 delegates surveyed by the congress’s research group, 50.5 percent were under 35; 30.6 percent from 36 to 45; and 16.8 percent from 46 to 55. And 74.2 percent of the delegates were from towns of over 50,000 (43.2 percent from industrial and mining establishments), even though most Poles lived in smaller towns. At the same time, the delegates had the backgrounds to make them potentially independent actors: 30.3 percent were in supervisory positions and 16.5 percent were present or former party members (the forum in the 1970s for those who wanted to be heard).29

The distance between Solidarity leaders and its rank and file increased significantly during this period. Union leaders like Walesa became international celebrities and heard what the economic realities facing Poland were from gov-

ernment and Western officials. While the union leadership turned to threats of national strikes to get access to television, force concessions, and have a greater voice in economic decisions, they found their negotiating powers weakened by spontaneous local strikes over increasingly radical, unspecific, and local political issues. To insure that independent strikes did not make it impossible to achieve national goals, Solidarity leaders continually intervened in these local battles. This, and the spreading sense that every group had the right to use strikes to resolve issues, brought with it a shift to strikes that were basically political in their goals. Demands for the release of specific political prisoners or for the shift of specific facilities from government ministries to public use were symbols of broader political pressures to reduce the independence and power of the bureaucracy and political establishment. Others joined local strikes that were verging on success to raise specific demands even though Solidarity leaders begged them to hold back for the good of the whole. Finally, Solidarity politicians' focus on political gains was increasingly hollow as most Poles felt increasingly trapped by the economic problems Poland faced and the failure of the union and the government either to deal with or resolve these problems.

The Solidarity Congress in September 1981\textsuperscript{30} and the meetings that occurred before each of the two sessions were clear demonstrations of the union's popular strength and determination. They were also forums for division, demonstrating that cooperation with the party and state could no longer be a primary goal, given the other priorities of the membership and young leadership.

These congressional sessions were, in all dimensions, purely Solidarity's. Government and party officials did not give the kind of symbolic speeches they had given at official gatherings of supposedly "independent" organizations in the pre-Solidarity era. The only appearance of a government representative was, in fact, the result of the demand of the delegates for an explanation of the sudden increase in cigarette prices during the Congress. State radio and television were even barred by Solidarity because they were accused of not reporting Solidarity's activities fully and fairly in the past.

At the same time, although there was a fairly universal lack of support for the government and party among the delegates, there were dramatic differences in the diagnoses of what the causes and resolutions of Poland's difficulties would be, what the limits on feasible actions were, and what the union's role should be. These differences were articulated in public sessions and also in meetings of various working groups set up to develop platforms on issues ranging from economic reform to media policy. These began before the congress and continued throughout its two sessions. In many critical areas, the splits on these specific issues were so deep that single policy proposals were not made. In the open sessions themselves, these splits and the chaos that resulted led to unplanned issues—like a call for workers elsewhere in Eastern Europe to join

\textsuperscript{30}This section on the Solidarity Congress is based on Western and Polish press coverage, interviews done in 1981 and 1983 with participants; and Sanford, \textit{The Solidarity Congress}, pp. 4–5.
Solidarity—being raised from the floor and voted on without either the knowledge or support of the leadership.

The process of selecting delegates brought forth clear signs of dissension and opposition to any strong leadership. The initial focus of the congress was on the election of the chairman of the union. Three more radical leaders competed with Walesa for election. Their speeches and presentations stressed the failures of the existing Solidarity leadership to push for concessions and change. In the end, Walesa won with 55.2 percent of the vote and Marian Jurczak, the most trade union–oriented of the candidates, who had stressed the need for pay increases as a first political and economic step, got the next largest percentage (24.0 percent). The election of the National Coordinating Commission members to serve alongside the regional chairmen then took six rounds to complete. Candidates representing individual districts were voted on by the entire convention membership. Those who got a majority were seated. The remaining seats were filled after election battles had been completed between the candidates who remained. In this complex and lengthy process, a number of Solidarity’s original advisors and leaders lost.31

In the end, the Solidarity Congress increased government and party opposition to Solidarity. It also revealed that Solidarity was not a solid organization with programs and structures for resolving Poland’s problems. Very few concrete proposals were supported by enough delegates to be passed. The ones dealing with critical national problems (economic reform, restructuring of the budget, social priorities, and the nature of Solidarity’s political position in the future) were matters of obvious and unresolvable division. Even Solidarity’s position on the parliament’s self-management bill, which passed in the parliament, was approved by the leadership of Solidarity between the August and September sessions of the Solidarity Congress but then not ratified by the delegates at the second session. While the National Coordinating Commission dealt with economic reform, other alternative worker-based organizations split off because they perceived Solidarity as unable to deal with such policy questions.

The newly elected and legitimized National Coordinating Commission was further hamstrung by the union structure established at the Congress. Instead of being empowered to lead and represent the union as a national unit, the coordinating commission was limited to coordinating but not directing or legislating for independent local unions.32 This perpetuated and encouraged regional and even work-unit divisions in Solidarity. When government, Church, and Solidarity negotiations began, this meant Walesa had to negotiate without the support of his coordinating board because it maintained that the entire board should be included and one voice could not speak for Solidarity.

The resulting drop in public trust33 and the fragmentation of Solidarity into political, generational, and regional groupings was further exacerbated by the

31 Ibid.
32 Ibid.
economic situation. Solidarity was drawn into trying to resolve the nation’s economic problems because the government appeared to be doing nothing. When it did, it appeared to be working against workers’ short-term interests and supporting price increases and austerity measures. Hope for real change diminished daily. A complete and public debunking of Gierek-era promises of rapid industrialization and dramatic quantitative and qualitative increases in living standards was done on both sides. There were not enough raw materials to keep factories running and virtually nothing to be sold in the stores. Overall, the gross national product dropped, by some estimates, over 15 percent in 1981. For the society, long before martial law was declared, this meant empty hours in factories and stores with workers and clerks but nothing to make or sell. Poles at all levels found themselves increasingly dependent on a rapidly expanding rationing system to get scarce goods. And, even with rationing, by the late summer and fall of 1981, finding basic rationed foods had become as critical a problem as finding soap, clothes, and other consumer essentials. During this period, the government admitted supplies were so short that there had to be cutbacks in rations of basic goods themselves. Those who could bartered what they had. This, plus the constant discussions and revelations on the special privileges of party and government officials, triggered many strikes. But, given the state of the economy, the government could make no promises that life would improve. It could only make symbolic admissions that its predecessors of the 1970s had wrongly benefited from the economy and had done irreparable damage. As time went on, the collapse of the economy came to be more and more symbolic of the complete incompetence of the party and state leaders and those who had worked under them or, worse, of a deliberate policy of the government.

The failures in the industrial sector were followed (and matched) by failures in the agricultural sector. Since there was nothing to buy on the normal market and since government purchase prices did not match production costs for goods, peasants worked in a basically barter economy—trading livestock with factory units that offered them goods they wanted or with individuals who paid in Western currency or scarce goods or services (including medical care or aid within bureaucracies). This discouraged the kind of grain and livestock cultivation and sales the state needed to feed the population and meet its export needs. It also took away the distribution role of public institutions like stores. Finally, it created bitterness between urban and rural dwellers as urban dwellers bartered for food with peasants.

Commerce was broken down and individualized. So, too, was production—small friendship groups were organized to hire builders and build apartments. Corruption and bribery became a part of even the smallest transactions. Private industries proliferated. Some professionals began to learn handicrafts to supplement their incomes. This process was facilitated by government policy

35 Interview data, 1983.
permitting small private crafts stores and the opening of production enterprises established by foreign entrepreneurs of Polish descent.

The visible and politically explosive collapse in the domestic economy was not the only concrete sign of social breakdown and atomization before the declaration of martial law. The crime rate rose dramatically from late spring 1981 on, as did the number of people who sought to emigrate from Poland to the West. Ironically, at the same time, family units became even stronger. The birth and marriage rate increased and the divorce rate fell even as the conditions in which families had to function worsened and health conditions deteriorated. Both Solidarity and the government and party acknowledged these problems and sought to solve them. But even the publicly acclaimed military inspections and arrests of profiteers in October–November 1981 did little to encourage legal observance or to create the impression that the government could govern. Instead, government offers of early retirement and long maternity leaves resulted in an exodus of virtually anyone who could survive with income cuts. Survival required people working together to barter, make, and trade for virtually all the necessities of life.

By December 13, 1981, when martial law was imposed, domestic fragmentation had reached a peak. Public opinion research done in the month prior to December 13 showed a dramatic increase in popular support for government control over demonstrations and strikes and also showed a drop in the authority of Solidarity. And yet, in the meetings of December 11 and 12, the National Coordinating Commission took its most explicitly oppositional steps, declaring that there had to be a national referendum on the party leadership and a move to end the dominance of the PUWP. Even more significantly, the distance between classes, within social groups, and between the government and the population led to a total misperception by the population of the weakness of the government to act and by the regime leaders of the potential response of the population.

Martial Law Imposed

In the period between October 1981 and midnight of December 13, there were continual discussions in the press about the possibility of a government declaration of a state of emergency through the constitutional channel of the parliament. Yet no preparations were made by the union organizations for an organized response to any declaration of martial law. Virtually none of the participants meeting in the two conferences of Poland’s leading semiloyal opposition groups (the Solidarity National Coordinating Commission and the Congress

37 Ibid., p. 50.
38 Ibid., pp. 44–45.
39 See Adamski et al., Polacy, 1981.
of Polish Culture) in session when martial law was declared sensed any danger. Neither took steps to avoid detention or prepare their members or the public. In fact, participants in the Solidarity National Coordinating Commission meeting in Gdansk and the Congress of Polish Culture left their relatively secure meeting places and returned to their homes or hotels on the night of December 12 even when some of them knew troop movements had begun and telephone lines had been cut. Eyewitness reports universally affirm that the customary unofficial gossip lines out of the party leadership had so broken down that, even after the detention of major figures and the takeover of Solidarity headquarters, few people in Warsaw or elsewhere knew what had happened until they started their normal lives on Sunday, December 13, and heard the declaration of “a state of war” on their radios or televisions, tried to use their phones, or found that friends and co-workers were gone. Both retrospectives and the continuation, until the last days before the state of war was declared, of negotiations and rebuffs from Solidarity suggest that martial law was perceived by the decision makers as a final and unavoidable alternative to be taken when all else failed. Meeting notes of rulers from this period reveal both a real fear of the masses, if the economic situation deteriorated as they feared it would given the real shortage of supplies, and, at the same time, a general secrecy at top levels about the martial law plan drawn up the preceding spring. Yet, the extent of the detention and placement of military and police units and the direct involvement of Jaruzelski in directing its imposition (and his later insistence that this was ordered by the Soviet Union) as well as the presence of Soviet officials, suggest that the regime saw no other option except a Soviet intervention and that it expected a far more extensive and organized opposition than it saw in the hours, days, and weeks after martial law was declared.

The nature of martial law reinforced the divisions that preceded its declaration. Massive numbers of police and military units were visibly stationed in urban and rural areas without permission to have personal contacts with the citizens. The initial provisions of the state of war declaration, beyond providing for the suspension of all organizations and the right to strike, were targeted primarily at breaking down all communication channels. Travel was blocked. A strict curfew was imposed. All media but the military and party journals and radio and television broadcasts of the military were closed down. Telephone lines were cut and mail to the outside strictly censored. The right to hold any public gatherings except church services was suspended. Furthermore, after an initial period of chaos, there was differential treatment of workers and intellectuals in the internment camps. This encouraged a division between the two groups.

We have no way of knowing, beyond the justifications given by the martial law authorities, what the precise preparations for martial law had been. It appears, given the Communist leaders’ memoirs, the internment lists released to the Red Cross, and the revelations by Colonel Kuklinski, that the lists were

41 See Rakowski, Jak to sie stalo?, chapter 1. Wojciech Jaruzelski in his justification points to this social disorder and the readiness of the Soviets to invade.
made up in the spring of 1981. At the same time, the number of individuals involved in martial law planning was small enough to prevent any leakage.

The final decision to impose martial law is said to have been a civilian one, not a military decision, except in the sense that Jaruzelski "wore both hats." It was also not intended to strengthen either the position or power of the Communist Party. The party was not included as a signatory in any of the initial declarations. Only in later propaganda were party units said to have called for martial law. The reaction to martial law was a massive defection from the party at all levels that began as soon as workplaces reopened.

Social Actors

In the initial months after martial law was declared, power was in the hands of the military and the police. Instead of giving an ideological reason for the martial law decision or promising improved conditions, the leaders made it clear that this had been a last resort to protect the nation's sovereignty and to avoid collapse and Soviet intervention. Those who might oppose martial law or who were seen as potential sparks for discontent (even former delegates to the Extraordinary Party Congress) were interned or threatened with detention. Whatever the ultimate level of repression, the presence of martial law rule was very visible, with police, ZOMO (special armed riot police), and military troops on the streets.

The imposition of martial law broke down the Solidarity organization. The top leadership was interned and isolated. A second-level self-appointed leadership had to take over. With no telephone lines open and travel restricted, and with the continuing threat of internments and the sealing of buildings, most of Solidarity's communication equipment and records were gone and the organizational bases for any resistance with publicly articulated goals were blocked. The economic conditions, the lack of preparation on how to handle such an exigency, and the destruction of both formal and informal channels of communication broke Solidarity down further, making it look far less effective. Whatever the individual opposition to government actions, Solidarity, as an organization, temporarily lost its resources, its momentum, and its leadership.

True, on anniversaries symbolic in Solidarity's or Poland's history, increasingly younger demonstrators took to the streets in what became violent

42 Colonel Kuklinski was a former head of the Strategic Planning Department of the Polish General Staff who defected in early 1981. The Polish leaders knew of his defection and assumed this meant American leaders were apprised of the martial law plan. His revelations reported in *Kultura* (Paris), no. 4/475 (April 1987), pp. 3–57 were that martial law was prepared in the spring of 1981 as a final measure. Jaruzelski and others have since testified to this and to the Soviet pressure as the final push.

43 See Sulek, "The Polish United Worker's Party."

clashes with police and ZOMO. These conflicts were all violent, and the “victory” of Solidarity was limited to its symbolic ability to call out demonstrators in the face of all odds.\footnote{Marek Perna, Jan Skorzynski, \textit{Kalendarium Solidarnosci 1980-89} (Warsaw: Omni-press, 1990); and Jerzy Holzer, \textit{Solidarnosc Poddziemnie} (Lodz: Wydawnicwo Lodzkie, 1990).} They kept alive the image of struggle between “the people” and the regime. But they did not build or rebuild the union organization; Solidarity’s network survived in the reemergence of an underground press, in the resources of life in hiding, and in the conditions of the detention camps. Post-martial law demonstrations were a return to methods prevalent in earlier years, when workers took to the streets in uncontrolled protest with no organized leadership. This shift from what had been a successful strategy to what had never proved successful, and from adult participants with established grievances to ever-younger groups, was due to the practical problems the movement faced. Workers in economically perilous positions could not risk having a role in a strike and being arrested or fired when they had little hope that the demonstrations could succeed. The shift from workers to young people was a result of this hope, that something \textit{would} change. Adults, then, opted out. For high school and college students, though, there were simply fewer risks and less of a sense of the permanency of the state.

The one institution that gained from the breakdown was the Catholic Church. Parish-level priests were active in supporting popular demands. The Church, on this level, became a symbol for popular political action, while the Church hierarchy made itself less of a visible presence in opposition to the state. The Church hierarchy pressed for calm and compromise rather than competition and conflict. Its initial power to do even this was further diminished by the illness and death in June 1981 of the postwar head of the Church, Cardinal Stefan Wyszynski.

In this whole breakdown period, Church officials were mediators and conegotiators with representatives of the party-state and Solidarity. After the declaration of martial law, the Church was involved, on the one hand, in aiding internees and arguing against martial law and, on the other, in pressing for domestic calm and bargaining for increasing rights for itself.\footnote{See Piotr Nitecki, \textit{Czlowiek droga kosciola} (Warsaw: Osrodek Dokumentacji i Studiow Spolecznych, 1987).}

In this setting, intellectuals shifted their foci. Before martial law, many leading intellectuals and intellectual groupings were focused on advocating their own specific interests: passing the censorship law, drawing up new professional codes and protections, pressing for increased benefits for their groups, establishing a new law on higher education, and organizing the Congress of Polish Culture to review the needs of Polish intellectual life. Many were concerned with broader political advocacy as well: there was an increase in the percentage of university professors and journalists in government positions. Many more made active commitments to Solidarity. Large numbers of discussion groups sprang
up to deal not only with Poland's problems but also with how to resolve them. Some, such as the former dissident leaders from KOR and the Confederation for an Independent Poland (KPN), pushed for radical change. Others put themselves forward as negotiators. Still others sought to propose programs of limited reform. This involved many leading intellectuals in at least coffeehouse searches for solutions and in public protests over government failures and abuses. It took many away from focusing on purely professional work.

The declaration of martial law split the intellectuals. For many leading intellectuals in the party, martial law was evidence of its total bankruptcy. Many previously prominent party members resigned or simply became inactive. This, while not made a public issue, was widely known and contributed to an image of an isolated leadership. On the other hand, some few moved up in the government. The bulk either left all their public positions in protest or turned to "private politics" and the underground.

The Economy

Ultimately, the imposition of martial law furthered the collapse of the economy. The old "coping mechanisms" no longer worked. Initial restrictions on travel within Poland made the barter trade that had kept life survivable more complicated. The economic ramifications of Western sanctions reduced Poland's ability to import goods. The end to Western government-to-government aid triggered a shift to churches as material providers. This further scrambled the roles of traditional institutions and allowed the Church to attract people, not as a spiritual or political guide but as a source of basic material goods.

The potential for economic reform was diminished by the size of the debt and the political ramifications which were likely to accompany decentralization and increased individual initiative and accountability. The various reform proposals also struck out against the power and interests of the bureaucracy and managerial class and were bound to lead to a dramatic reduction in their size. So government and party bureaucrats and members of the managerial class were a strong counterforce to reforms. They stressed, before and after martial law, that the errors of the Gierek regime and the subsequent sanctions were the cause of Poland's economic disaster.

Foreign Actors

During 1981, action on the Polish debt was limited by the worldwide recession, and by (1) Westerners' perception that the Soviet economy would not allow Poland to default, and (2) their fear that, if Poland were excused, other debtor nations would be encouraged not to make their loan payments. So Western actions focused, first, on making it clear to Poles that their failure to meet

47 Interview data, 1983.
the debt service would cut them off from future aid and loans and, second, on
drawing up a detailed series of required economic reforms (including the drastic
food price increases) the Poles had to agree to put into effect to avoid default—
although they were not permitted to refer to the agreement as the cause for their
decisions.48

In essence, by 1981, Western actors were involved with their own prob-
lems. They no longer worked with Polish leaders or considered Polish condi-
tions. Instead, they dictated internal Polish decisions based on their international
financial considerations. Furthermore, since, in this period, the changes in Brit-
ish, French, West German, and American leaderships had left these regimes in a
state of internal restructuring, the foreign policy apparatus essentially did not
focus on Polish political developments to the extent that economic institutions
focused on the debt situation. The conservative victories in Britain, West Ger-
many, and the United States marked a swing away from détente and toward con-
frontation with the Soviet Union. So the message conveyed to many sections of
the Polish foreign policy apparatus was that financial interests were the West’s
chief concern, even as the foreign policy of Western states seemed to shift to
confrontation with the Soviet Union. The possibility for further loans, clearly,
was negligible.

By fall of 1981, the Polish government had tried all avenues. It made ap-
plication to the International Monetary Fund, and counted on this aid politically
as well as economically. Poland’s admission would have given Western special-
ists enormous control over the redirecting of the Polish economy. In spite of
these ramifications, the Soviets had agreed to this “out” for Poland. Final
American agreement and the final acceptance of the Polish burden, though, were
too slow to put IMF aid in place by the end of 1981. The declaration of martial
law made it politically untenable for the West to allow IMF involvement to
continue.

The breakdown of the Polish regime’s ability to block foreign intervention
and, in fact, its need for external force were even greater in the case of the So-
viet Union. The continuing maneuvers of Warsaw Pact troops on Poland’s bor-
ders drew in Poland’s own troops, testing their battle readiness and political
attitudes. Ultimately, most significantly, the Soviets used economic pressures to
direct events in Poland. They were silent partners in negotiations about further
loans and the debt question by Western bankers. They and the East Europeans
cut back on their financial aid to Poland as liberalization swept Poland. And,
according to some, the Soviets advised the Poles that if, by January 1, 1982, the
government did not have its domestic affairs under control, a large percentage
of goods and energy shipments to Poland from the Soviet Union would be
ended.49

48 Interview data, 1980 and 1981, with bankers and government officials involved.
49 Interview data, 1983.
Foreign Response to Martial Law

The declaration of martial law was a response, then, not only to the party and government's loss of control over the domestic situation but also to foreign economic incursions. At the same time, its timing—two days before December 15 when Western debt service payments were due, and two weeks before the rumored Soviet deadline to cut off oil and natural gas if there was no restoration of order—was clearly a response to the West and not just to the Soviet orders. The presence of Soviet General Kulikov the week before martial law was declared was certainly not incidental. His role was, at the least, that of telling the Poles that they had to act and of supervising their actions. The absence of Soviet and East European troop movements at this point and his lack of expertise in domestic battles suggest that a direction from the Soviets for martial law itself or an actual Soviet troop commitment was not considered to be necessary to calm the Polish crisis. Finally, although martial law was not politically or economically anti-Western—in fact, there was no mention of any foreign powers in the martial law declaration—cutting off Poles' contacts with outside support was a key element in establishing control of the country.

The declaration of a state of war did not reduce foreign pressure on Poland. It brought sanctions from the West and minimal rewards from Soviet Bloc allies. The immediate impact of the sanctions was diminished by the fact that Poland had been too strapped to import most of the goods barred from shipment after martial law was imposed.\textsuperscript{50} Divisions between Western Europe and the United States over the broader issue of their treatment of the Soviet Union, as well as the massive private charity missions that were initiated in the winter of 1981, further diminished the real impact of the sanctions. The Polish leadership used Western sanctions as a justification for the economic crisis while many Poles saw the sanctions and private charity missions as signs of Western opposition to martial law. Ironically, the sanctions served to aid the Polish economy by giving Poland an excuse not to pay its debt to Western governments. This, then, allowed Poland to meet its minimal obligations to private banks and have some limited hard currency available.\textsuperscript{51}

Similarly, Soviet and East European aid was of minimal help. It could neither fill the needs of individuals nor substitute for the Western parts and raw materials on which Polish industry was dependent. And, like the propaganda created about Western sanctions, propaganda about Soviet fraternal aid was heard very differently. Most Poles assumed the aid was insufficient and a sign of Soviet control over purportedly "Polish" decisions. No real shift from a Western to an Eastern orientation in the economy occurred. As a result, Polish industry


Reequilibration

A pattern of equilibrium emerged in Poland by the fall of 1982, nearly one year after the imposition of the state of war. It was based neither on “honeymoon” support of the new leadership nor on its promises of a better life and more respect for the population but on social divisions and economic failures and the fact that the population simply had no hope that its lot would improve. Three events signaled the end of the breakdown in power and social control by the governing institutions and the return of at least an uneasy equilibrium: the comparatively peaceful disbanding of Solidarity and the imposition of a new, limited trade union organization; the failure of the “one-day strike” called by the underground leadership of Solidarity for November 12; and the release of Solidarity leader Lech Walesa from internment as a “private citizen.” These events demonstrated that, with or without support, government authorities were able to exert their power.

The critical structural move in this period was the initial suspension of martial law as an indication of “normalization.” This was followed by the lifting of some of the more visible controls and a continuation or increase in more legal restrictions imposed under martial law. The focus of the regime was on demonstrating two things: (1) whether or not it was popular, permanent control had been achieved, and (2) its claim that, even with martial law, it was on the “Solidarity road.” This was reinforced symbolically by the government’s attention to the return of the Pope to Poland in the summer of 1983, the observation of the founding date of Solidarity as a public event, and the lifting of martial law in July 1983, with the accompanying changes in legal provisions for control over various areas, as well as amnesty for underground Solidarity activists.

In symbol and reality, the regime used nationalism. It did this to the point of resurrecting previously forbidden anti-Russian and anti-regime symbols. Poland’s foreign relations furthered this nationalist focus. Even though Poland had fulfilled the letter, if not the spirit, of the requirements for the lifting of Western sanctions, they were not lifted. Nor were Western states as prepared as they had been in earlier crises to accept refugees. Therefore, many former internees who had been told by the Polish authorities that they could leave Poland had their exits delayed by difficulties in getting visas from Western states. At the same time, charitable aid shipments fell as Poland disappeared from the news. To further the sense of isolation and separation between Western states and Poles, the Polish government made formerly easy contact between Western officials and Poles difficult by stationing police troops around key embassies and engaging in bitter media statements against the West. Soviet and Soviet Bloc contacts with Poland also did not increase visibly during this period. It was not until the
winter of 1984 that the travel restrictions between Poland and her neighbors, established first by East Germany and Czechoslovakia in the initial days of Solidarity, were relaxed.

Public expressions of political or military concerns about the situation in Poland by either the West or East ceased to be either frequent or severe. For the official Western side, Poland was a status quo situation. For the Soviet side, the death of Brezhnev and his replacement by Andropov led to a focusing of Soviet concerns on domestic regulation. World attention refocused on the potential of a direct superpower conflict. In this context, the changes that did occur in Poland were not of real concern to either Poland’s allies or her self-appointed adversaries.

**The Economy**

In this reequilibration period, price adjustments were the chief economic mechanism used to improve the domestic economy. Individual factories were allowed to set their own prices. Purchase prices for farmers were increased and compensated for by decreased subsidies on the food sold on the market. In the process of economic reequilibration, prices went up but goods began to appear on the market in large enough quantities to allow rationing to be dropped month by month. This too was used as an indication of the normalization of the economic situation and the ability of the government to bring some benefits to the population. All of this served as a substitute for real economic reform.

In this period, economic reform discussion took on a tone of reality. Under martial law, nearly 30 percent of Polish industries had been militarized, so no reform measures (such as self-management) could be implemented. With the suspension of martial law, not only did the discussion of reform packages go on actively in the press and in various commissions of specialists set up to aid the government; but, the reforms that had been passed prior to the imposition of martial law and those that were before the Sejm when it was imposed were put into effect. So, while all of them were watered-down versions of the initial proposals, anyone involved in the economy had to come to grips with what they could lose and gain from each aspect of a decentralizing reform.

**Political Groups**

Politically, the banning of Solidarity in October 1982 was a final shakeout of party membership. With the ending of any hope that “normalization” would mean a return to the 1980–81 status quo, there was a final large defection from the party. In addition, the leadership of the Jaruzelski government and party

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53 Interview data, 1983.
underwent its last ideological "cleansing."

Subsequent changes in leaders during the period of reequilibration were merely cosmetic. Neither the liberal nor the conservative groupings gained within the party elite. At best, the suspension of martial law brought with it an increase in the number of military officials charged with civilian responsibilities. But, as had been the case since the declaration of martial law, the party leadership remained relatively silent.

The period between the outlawing of Solidarity and the lifting of martial law was marked by a legislation of legitimacy and control. New laws were passed authorizing greater police powers and rights than had been ever been admitted before. Greater labor regulation than had been the case in the 1960s and 1970s went along with this. Furthermore, the penal code was modified to give far greater rights to military courts over civilian cases and to allow for the arrests of individuals acting as the original founders of Solidarity had acted. Finally, laws were passed against alcoholism and social parasitism, as well as for stronger military authority. These were all intended to give the government direct and indirect ways not only to handle existing social problems but also to control individuals who defied the authorities. Balancing these laws, there was a plethora of legislation giving limited social welfare benefits, such as lengthened maternity leaves; enacting parts of the economic reform legislation sought by various groups; and giving amnesty to Solidarity activists willing to come forward and admit fault by accepting it. In addition, laws were passed giving legal status to an enlarged sphere of private enterprise. Governmental actions also allowed for a greater role for the Church in the mass media, the education of children, and the making of social policy than had ever existed legally in the postwar period.

The statements of party and government officials in this period of reequilibration emphasized both the authorities' commitment to social betterment and their ability to rule and control without any support. The postsuspension period also was filled with retrospective books and articles explaining that martial law had been the best of the unsatisfactory options available to the government and stressing that the alternative had been a bloody and unwelcome Soviet invasion. As their ideological heritage, party and government leaders claimed the Extraordinary Party Congress and the "partnership" they had supported throughout 1980 and 1981. To keep up this image, the government continued to pay those who had been on the Solidarity payroll until its disbanding and offered elaborate financial settlements to many in the intelligentsia fired for being ideologically unacceptable.

Ironically, as a part of their attempt to give themselves legitimacy, the top Jaruzelski leaders recruited, as ministers and aides, prominent liberal academics

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54 Sulek, "The Polish United Worker's Party"; and Lewis, Political Authority and Party Secretaries.
55 The prime vehicle for this was to facilitate investments by Poles living abroad, as joint ventures with foreigners were allowed by the new law only with foreigners of Polish background.
and journalists who had had legitimacy in the 1970s because of their critical perspectives. This legitimation did not carry over into their positions in the martial law regime. Old social ties were severed. But the criticism from their colleagues who refused to join the regime created, among those who joined the Jaruzelski group, a bitter sense of betrayal and misrepresentation. Hence, Solidarity, the previously suppressed historical events, and martial law could never be put to rest by the ruling elite, much less Solidarity’s old leaders.

The legislative and ideological posture of the Jaruzelski leadership, however much it was rejected by the population, demanded a new set of responses from the underground Solidarity leadership. Their initial program of keeping up popular pressure for the reinstatement of Solidarity with regular demonstrations on various Solidarity anniversaries had to end when the government disbanded Solidarity and released Lech Walesa. His release as a private citizen and his at least oblique suggestions that compromise was possible put the more radical leaders, imprisoned or in the underground, in a quandary. It divided Solidarity’s image.

In initially reacting to the disbanding of Solidarity (prior to Lech Walesa’s release), the underground leadership had not supported a spontaneous three-day strike by Gdansk shipyard workers. Instead, they had tried to organize an unannounced national strike one month later. This strike failed to draw support because the union had to make its plans public, thus giving the authorities enough warning to frighten people away. Its failure was then used as a signal by the regime that Solidarity was “no longer a threat.”

In this new context, Solidarity underground leaders, its former leaders who lived “above ground,” and intellectual critics and dissidents had to rethink their long-run perspectives and tactics. This rethinking led to diverse expressions of opinion reflecting the need of the organization both (1) to appear concerned with members’ “union” interests (some suggested that Solidarity members join existing workers’ self-management groups to push for benefits) and (2) to force recognition and change in the political establishment. To do this, some put out a call for a boycott of the new unions, for strikes and street demonstrations, and for continued active opposition.

This period was marked by a diminution of the authority of the Catholic Church. From the beginning of this reequilibration period, the Church hierarchy, especially its new Primate, Josef Glemp, called for restraint on the part of Solidarity and, in exchange, sought concessions from the government on the construction of churches, provision of religious education, Church access to the mass media, and a summer visit by the Pope. The coincidence of these first calls for restraint with the announcement of Solidarity’s disbanding, the release of an apparently circumspect Lech Walesa, and the announcement that the Pope would visit Poland in the summer raised questions at the time as to how much the Church was willing to fight for national political democracy or freedom.

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56 Interview data, 1983.
The Church’s leadership was further divided. Josef Glemp was relatively young, unestablished, and noncharismatic in comparison to Wyszynski, who had headed the Church since the war. Furthermore, he faced competition from Pope John Paul II (who made himself a visible observer and actor in Polish affairs and was regarded by the nation as “their leader”) and other bishops whose public lives in the Church had been far longer and more militant than Glemp’s. Therefore, even as head of the Church, Glemp had limited authority. Beyond this, the hierarchy faced the disaffection of the lower rungs of the clergy. Parish priests were heavily involved in distributing charitable aid to their parishioners. Many also were involved with aiding and hiding the remnants of Solidarity in their own communities. This went on even as the leaders of the Church sided closer to the governing elite.

Finally, the Catholic intelligentsia, from the pre-Solidarity and post-Solidarity eras, remained, as individuals, closely involved with Solidarity. In this period of equilibrium, their clubs and publications were often the only haven for intellectuals fired from their jobs. They wanted to push for liberalization but were cautious enough to insure the safety of their last remaining islands of employment and discussion.\(^5\)

For each of these groups and for the believers and nonbelievers alike in Poland, the visit of the Pope was a critical and unpredictable political juncture. Expectations were high that he would defy the authorities and force them to make major concessions. In fact, his appearance in Poland was a victory for the Church and the government. With the exception of limited conflicts that broke out in Warsaw and Cracow, his stay was peaceful. Government estimates are that nearly one-third of the population attended one of his appearances and heard his nationalistic, family-oriented sermons. The government treated him as an honored guest and publicized the high-level meetings that took place between him and Jaruzelski. The Pope left Poland having gotten no visible concessions and with the announcement of potential Church agricultural aid delayed until well after his departure, only to be bogged down in the complexities of legal requirements and financial complications. In the lifting of martial law, the Pope’s visit seemed to give an aura of legitimacy to the regime. From the Church’s perspective, however, the gains were fundamental to its own goals of getting more access to the population, making abortion more difficult, and increasing the number of churches. Public opinion continued to perceive disunity in the Church hierarchy below the Pope. After the Pope’s visit, Church protests about laws were largely ignored rather than responded to. And, Church leaders increasingly pressed to rein in critical clergy. All of this reduced the Church’s image as a firm base for limiting the regime. What saved the Church was the dearth of other options to oppose the system, even symbolically.

The reequilibration period was thus based on the final failure of all alternative institutions and the remaining presence of the government and the party. It began with an established base of opposition in Solidarity and ended with the

\(^{5}\	ext{Interview data, 1983.}\)
legitimation of some of Solidarity’s principles (both by law and in public opinion) by the regime and the growth of an explicitly tolerated culture of “internal immigration.”

The attempted integration took place on all levels. The rulers’ attempts to forge new links with intellectuals, however, were largely stymied by the unwillingness of many to be co-opted. Consultive councils and invitations to talk with party and state officials publicly or privately were most often rejected out of hand. Workers were more easily reinvolved during this period. Their channels of involvement were the new factory union and self-management organizations begun with the suspension of martial law. Internal party reports show that, in small and medium-sized units, even when the first initiatives came from the regional party, Solidarity members often took the lead and dominated party members in the councils. Although only an average of 40 percent of the employees in a given enterprise enrolled as members, this was presented by the government as evidence of support and by Solidarity as evidence of continued opposition.

What Doomed Communism in Poland

Poland’s reequilibration in 1983 was not permanent; nor did anyone on either side see it as such. The breakdown was simply too deep; the past had manacled the system’s ability to respond and caused virtually total fragmentation in the economy and the society. At the same time, a massive and externally imposed crushing of rebellions, such as ended the 1956 revolt in Hungary and the Prague Spring in 1968 in Czechoslovakia, was not an option for Poland in 1981. It was unthinkable because of the increased complexity of the international situation and Poland’s position in it, as well as the thoroughness of the economy’s collapse and the population’s alienation.

Ironically, the apparent stability of the reequilibration period depended on the loss of authority by all institutions in the society. No institution (including the Church, Solidarity, the military, and the state apparatus) came through unscathed. Western sanctions and the countervailing interest of the Soviet Union and the other bloc members had isolated Poland from real external economic or political influence at the moment when an equilibrium seemed to have been achieved. In the end, the system was simply poised for another crisis—any change from outside or inside could destabilize it.

External Forces

As with Poland’s other postwar crises, the institutions and processes around which a loyal and disloyal opposition organized in 1980 were institutions and processes forced on Poland after the Communist takeover and maintained by Soviet requirements. The requirements (the so-called Brezhnev Doc-
trine) were taken into account, at least subconsciously, by all but the most radical opposition elements in their formulation of demands and responses during 1980–81. At the same time, the extent of domestic Polish democratization and discussion tolerated by the Soviets in the 1980s proved to be far greater than had ever even been assumed before. The level of this tolerance emboldened the movement and left the state and party leadership exposed. Even the declaration of martial law and the regime’s justification of it violated basic maxims of the Brezhnev Doctrine: it suggested, if it did not admit, that the Soviet Union was not a friend but a controller and that control, not Marxist-Leninist purity, was the goal. In part, this was a result of the special treatment accorded Poles by the Soviet Union in the past, but it also reflected the growing crisis in the Soviet Union. In the end, then, even before Gorbachev, the Soviet threat had diminished for Poles.

The development of the events in Poland was, however, not just a product of the Soviet Union. It was far more a product of the increased complexity of intrabloc relations. Poland was not simply beholden to or dependent on the Soviet Union. Rather, it was as economically dependent on the West as it was on the East. In turn, its connection with the West enabled other bloc nations to receive the trade and technological infusions they needed to improve their economies. Therefore, none of the major forces in the bloc could afford the cost of Poland’s breaking her trade ties with the West, nor could they provide the parts and materials that Poland’s heavily Westernized economy needed to continue production. All of this contributed to at least partial support by other bloc states for Poland’s ties with the West, even though they were threatened by her internal liberalization and chaos.

Western economic commitment to Poland and the linkage between economic ties and human rights observance diminished as private creditors sought to protect their investments and Western governments to deal with their own domestic problems. This encouraged other leaders in the Soviet Bloc to openly pressure the Poles. Potential Western responses, however, remained important enough in the economic and political considerations of the Brezhnev elite to keep them from publicly suppressing Solidarity. In addition, the extent of Poland’s indebtedness and the cost of replacing Western input in the Polish economy (to say nothing of the threat of lending limits being applied to the entire bloc) increased the propensity of the Soviets and their allies to be tolerant and avoid military commitments that would jeopardize Soviet détente with Western Europe and require Soviet troops to fight on two fronts, Afghanistan and Poland.

In an ironic sense, the economic involvement of Poland with the West (as well as its historic identity with things Western) increased the number of decisions based on external actors’ interests. Poland’s strategic position in the Soviet bloc also reduced the potential options for averting crisis and breakdown. The

outcome of the reequilibration was not a further integration of Poland with any bloc (as occurred in Hungary and Czechoslovakia when their revolutions were put down by the Soviets) but an isolation of the economy and polity from the outside. So, within the constraints of minimum Soviet and Western tolerance, Poland was left, in the end, to find its own solutions. In that situation, the old Communist elite could not hold on by itself.

**Economic Pressures**

The extent of Poland’s economic involvement and indebtedness to the West buoyed the economy enough, until the last years of the 1970s, to allow it to avoid any structural change and hampered future attempts at change with the overwhelming weight of debt repayment. Workers were encouraged by promises of material reward. Economic misinvestment, inefficiency, and failure were managed by borrowing to substitute for increased production. Furthermore, as Polish agricultural products became the only viable currency for paying Poland’s debts, the reward of more and better food was removed just as popular expectations were raised by Gierek’s promises of a better future and higher income.

At the same time, the dependence of the economy on agricultural products and the low legitimacy that the state historically had with the peasant class made agricultural reform impossible. The delay in reforming agriculture and the dependence of the system on outside trade simply encouraged the aging of the agricultural population while it stiffened the peasants’ historic resistance to reform.

Poland’s economic involvement with the West and the West’s long-standing tolerance of Poland’s failing economic institutions and practices, permitting them to survive and to be entrenched, made it almost impossible for Poland to avoid economic collapse without getting massive aid from the outside. As it happened, recession in the West and tensions between the Soviet Union and the United States ruled out such a result. Economic failure thus made crisis and breakdown of authority in Poland virtually inevitable. Moreover, the disastrous state of Poland’s internal economy and the overwhelming burden of repaying its debt made the peaceful and apolitical institutionalization of Solidarity impossible as well. There were simply no material demands that could be met, given the economic crisis in 1980. Instead, initially, political demands were the only and “cheapest” concessions there were to grant. These concessions did not substitute for economic gains. They merely increased the population’s sense that no political gain had any meaning and that there was no possible peaceful solution.

The economic crisis and collapse in the late summer and fall of 1981 were so deep that the short-term sacrifices required to reform the socialist economy and ward off future collapse and failure could not be made. In a reversal of traditional political patterns, the failure of the economy contributed first to the
bitter gulf between the elite and the population; then, to a widening of that gulf; and, finally, to a false calming of the bitterness. In effect, the impoverishment of the entire system and the extent to which survival became a preoccupation depoliticized the issue temporarily by making political action too risky, costly, and time-consuming. An economy in which nothing was available made underground Solidarity less able to call for public action. No one could risk what had been gained. Finally, the depths of the economic failure meant that any improvement, be it charity shipments or increased domestic production, contributed to the appearance of a survivable equilibrium. But it also made it nearly impossible for Poland to enact a reform package that would allow for change without a total transformation in the system and a temporary and intolerable impoverishment of the population.

Establishing Elite Options

The possibility of bringing in a new elite unconnected with the discredited Gierek regime and tolerable to the population and the Soviet Union did not exist by 1980. The fact that the Communist system had lasted for more than a generation and involved party control over appointments even to apolitical managerial posts left Poland with a very limited (and compromised) base for selecting new leaders. The “reforms” undertaken by the Gierek leadership shrank this base even further. On the one hand, all alternatives within the Communist party had been pushed out or denied media access by 1980. Regional reform in the 1970s had reduced the autonomy of regional leaders, a traditional source for new leadership. Furthermore, bureaucratization in the party had increased dramatically in the 1970s and left party politicians and personalities with very little visibility. On the other hand, the tight control Gierek kept over the media caused many of the alternative leaders outside the party, who were critical of the regime and its policies, to disappear from the public mind.

The Party

Workers made it clear in their initial strikes that the party was no longer a negotiating partner they would recognize, as they had in past confrontations. The appointment of Stanislaw Kania to replace Edward Gierek was treated as basically irrelevant. The party ranked below even the police on public surveys of respected institutions. All of this left the party elite with an ever-declining membership and no constituency but the bureaucracy, a group whose interest was in blocking political concessions.

The remnants of the Gierek elite tried a minimalist approach to survival after the original strikes. It merely shifted power from Gierek to Kania, a little-known party bureaucrat who had supervised the police and religious affairs for the PUWP. Gradually, however, the party leadership sought to create public
support by bringing in leaders whose identities and credibility were based on their connections with institutions that still had authority in the society (the military, academics, and journalism). The problem with this shift was that these outsiders (often former “establishment” critics of the regime) were unable to control either the party or the state bureaucracy that was supposed to serve them. Nor, in fact, did their prestige and authority follow them to their new positions. The only effect of this shift was to reduce popular perceptions of the party as a focus of power and to discourage individuals from seeing party membership as a route up.

Given that it was not possible to find individuals to lead the party who could control the bureaucracy and increase its authority, the party and its leaders were faced with a series of problematic program options. They tried first to follow popular pressure, allow authority to shift to state organs, and have the party take a secondary position. All this alarmed the party apparatus and made them less trusting of the “outsiders” who had been promoted over them into leadership positions. As a result, the public saw the party not as accepting a new role but as collapsing into internal warfare.59 The second option, tried sporadically during the Solidarity period, was for the party leadership to allow party structures to liberalize. This both alarmed Poland’s allies and led to grassroots challenges from both ends of the ideological spectrum. Finally, party leaders increasingly cloaked themselves in state and military garb and presented themselves to a distrusting population as an anti-Soviet force that had saved the country from its allies. This forced the party to focus on symbols that had long been used by the opposition.

None of these tactics worked to either transform the elite or bring it real support. The individuals who made and presented policy were not “new” or untainted; they got no “honeymoon.” In addition, the appearance of Solidarity did not lead to a “cleansing of the leadership.” Instead, it led to a fragmentation of the party leadership. This was so visible that it further decreased the credibility of any single individual and left the party as a whole with no ability to make and carry out policies. What one group said, others often ignored. The population either saw this as an internal division or perceived the elite as deliberately going back on its word.

The party leadership refused to make a dramatic break with the past, disband the party and open a new one, or enact dramatic reform, even though many of their own advisors counseled that this would be the only hope for a peaceful resolution of the crisis and the only way to rebuild the party’s authority. The first element they recommended was to enact new and immediate steps toward economic reform and political decentralization, but this would have required resources that the economy did not possess, and it threatened the party bureaucracy. The second stage would have been to dissolve the party along with all the other social organizations and begin a new party. This would have required that there be enough support for the ideals the party represented or enough possible

advantages to membership for people to be willing to join the new party. Given how many people had withdrawn from party membership, this option clearly carried the risk of a memberless Communist Party replacing the demoralized but immutable numbers of the old party. It was a risk that Jaruzelski and other top party leaders were unwilling to take. Ultimately, the party political, as opposed to bureaucratic, leadership shifted power away from itself without either rebuilding or permitting other institutions to garner true authority. This meant there was no real break with the past in the public mind while every institution lost power and legitimacy.

**The State Institutions**

State institutions were constrained as well. The ministries, economic bureaucracy, and parliament were all peopled by Gierek’s men. Their choices, as Solidarity became more powerful, were to visibly renounce their pasts or continue in the old ways and try to protect their power base. Effectively, large numbers of parliamentary delegates, before the imposition of martial law and to a lesser degree afterwards, took the option of renouncing their previous connections. Political and economic reform threatened their power. Even if they wanted change, they did not want to be “reformed” out of their jobs.

From the perspective of the parliament, the issue of effectiveness was even more complicated. To be taken seriously, the parliament had to make it clear that bills were openly debated and all sides heard. To debate delayed desperately needed legislation. Ironically, this lack of efficiency lessened the credibility of this parliament, named and elected by the old discredited Gierek regime. Ultimately, the imposition of martial law made clear that, whatever the parliament had done in Solidarity’s fifteen months, institutions in Poland were only as strong as the party leaders allowed them to be. Even the minimal opposition that was voiced by parliamentary delegates to the state of war had little positive resonance: it demonstrated that parliamentary opposition could change nothing.

From the perspective of those whose careers were within the state bureaucracy, it appeared that the population was allowed to act and put pressure on them and against them without any external restraints. It did not, however, cause them to desert their positions, as their predecessors had, in times of crisis and breakdown. Instead, they lived with a split between their public and private selves: bureaucrats increasingly involved themselves in Solidarity protests about everything but their own work. Their loyalty to the bureaucracy was almost solely out of individual economic necessity and their belief that they worked well.\(^6\)

In this sense, the imposition of martial law was a kind of “colonel’s coup,” not necessarily to protect the old order—that had largely been broken down—

but to preserve what bureaucrats and military men saw as the order required for
the system to continue to function. However unpopular and ineffective the state
was in delivering the kind of material goods the population expected, martial
law protected the bureaucracy by slowing down the process of reform and tem­
porarily silencing the critics in Solidarity. Because martial law was not followed
by effective policy in the direction either of change or of the system’s reestab­
ishment, all this resulted, ultimately, in destabilizing the system.

The Catholic Church

The options for the Church in this period were complex. On the one hand,
the Church was able to become a strong political power that negotiated as an
equal, if not a superior, with government leaders. It served as a political symbol
and root for the Solidarity movement and was a prime link between the events
in Poland and the outside. In these roles, the Church was intimately connected
with the establishment of Solidarity, the balancing of forces in the breakdown
period, and the establishment of an equilibrium in the system through the visit
of the Pope and the legitimacy it granted state and party leaders. On the other
hand, this power was a mixed blessing for the Church. In seeking its support, the
state and party authorities were forced to grant the Church advantages and
rights. But, in the trade-off, the Church had to encourage quiescence and dimin­
ish its role as an institutional haven for opposition.

The Church was also divided internally. Instead of a unified body directed
by an established Primate whose leadership had spanned the entire postwar pe­
riod, the Church of the 1980s was divided between a young generation of priests
who were well educated and no longer subservient to the Primate and a new,
less charismatic and less established Primate attempting to fill expectations es­
tablished by his predecessor. Thus individual churches responded rapidly to the
events in their parishes and were far more radical than the Catholic hierarchy.
Such actions strengthened individual churches but strained church-state relations
at the local level. This weakened the power and credibility of the institution as a
whole.

The second visit of Pope John Paul II to Poland was, in this context, the
pinnacle of religious power in a secular state. Popular expectations were that his
presence and negotiating skills would force change. Regime hopes, on the other
hand, were pinned on his using his presence to legitimize tolerance of the re­
gime. For the Catholic hierarchy, it was a chance to enliven the national com­
mitment to the Church. Symbolically, the Pope was victorious: his demand to
meet with Walesa was conceded to in his final meeting with Jaruzelski. It was
presented as the result of the Pope summoning Jaruzelski to meet him in the
national cathedral. More people came to his masses and meetings than had at­
tended in his first visit. But, ultimately, the second visit of the Pope helped sta­
bilize the situation in favor of the government. The clear lesson was that con­
cessions and respect were required. Furthermore, in the weeks and months after
the Pope’s visit, the Church took a much more restrained stance because state leaders did not respond to its demands and because there was little that was or could be done concretely to equal the visibility and impact of the Pope’s visit. This, coupled with the Church hierarchy’s own commitment to its long-range goal of expanding religious life in Poland, added to the Church’s image as an increasingly loyal “critic” of the regime.61

**Solidarity**

The Solidarity movement began as a loyal opposition that accepted the limits of the Brezhnev Doctrine and fitted its demands to the system. By the end of 1981, it had become an opposition force, partly because the most important elements of the party and government came to define it as such and partly because of the dynamics of establishing a trade union movement and forcing recognition from the system. The Solidarity movement was by design and by necessity not a unified movement. Its image, however, assumed this national “solidarity.” Finally, the movement had to balance its actions between the needs of the population for the betterment of their living conditions, the realities of Poland’s economic situation, and the explosion of demands from the bottom.

The problem of what to demand was a difficult one throughout this period. Initially, Solidarity was a trade union seeking recognition and protection of its gains from within the system. Ultimately, however, the economic situation made the fulfillment of its trade union goals impossible and leaders had to shift to achievable political goals. But, when these political gains did not lead to material gains, the political system lost its worth for the population. This led to an escalation of demands well beyond the very outer limits of the Brezhnev Doctrine or the normal concerns of even a highly politicized trade union movement. It also made making cooperation with the established political leadership of the party and state difficult at best.

The political options of Solidarity were significantly circumscribed by the internal and external imperatives it faced. It was a new organization doing things that had never before been perceived as possible in Poland or elsewhere in the communist world. Its very organization was a product of the wisdom gained after years of upheavals that had brought promises but no real gains: workers involved this time did not seek only material gains. They wrote into their demands the right to have a legally recognized independent trade union to give political protection for economic promises.

The organizational model that the social movement took on was not “solid.” In fact, the model was a negation of the centralized internal and external control of the Polish United Workers Party. The union moved to the other extreme: rather than creating all-encompassing and hierarchical bureaucracies as

61 Confidential polls done by CBOS in this period showed that the Pope remained the leader for Poles, but the Church did not gain in popularity from his second visit.
earlier European movements for suffrage or inclusion into the system had done, Solidarity deliberately set up a regionally fragmented structure at its first national congress. This meant that there was an unending battle, exacerbated by the economic crisis and the inability of the union to protect the very material gains it had been created to ensure.

This structure was also a natural outgrowth of the social movement's development through a series of spontaneous gatherings with self-appointed leaders who were given position and visibility by the recognition they received from the political and economic establishment. Ironically, although it allowed for and even encouraged regional control, it did not give play to the divisions that were paramount in Polish society, the divisions between classes and occupational groupings. Instead, it attempted to bring all these separate groups together by focusing on a jointly held enemy, the political establishment. When economic conditions worsened to the point that there was clear competition between groups and even individuals for survival, this led to a further fragmentation. It also reinforced the tendency, increasingly counterproductive as time went on, to focus the organization's pressure on political rather than on unachievable economic goals.

In a system in which all the other negotiating agents were highly centralized and institutionalized bureaucracies, this form of organization (useful in the context of developing societies) ultimately put Solidarity, and the plethora of smaller union and professional associations that grew up with it, at a disadvantage. Those who did negotiate for the union were largely self-selected and "approved" by the government and party establishment. By negotiating, they were performing a necessary service for the union, but they were also allowing themselves to be co-opted by the "enemy" establishment. This dilemma worsened as the economic situation left the negotiators with few gains to report. It also worsened as the self-selected leadership found itself in competitive elections with newly emerging leaders from other regions and from a variety of social and class groups. This was further complicated by the fact that, under the aegis of Solidarity, there were a variety of unions and associations trying to match each others' gains: the workers' groups; offshoot organizations representing specific professional groups or dissident workers; peasants' associations; and student associations. Finally, the decentralization and the deliberate attempt at equality of power between individuals in the union led to the emergence of factions within the Solidarity leadership at all levels (intellectual dissident group members whose opposition had begun in the mid-1970s, young worker activists, and seasoned worker opposition from past conflicts). This encouraged these groups to focus not on common goals but on personalities and specifics.

As a movement that flowed into organizations, as opposed to an organized movement, Solidarity and the other groups surrounding it were unable to block action by organized bureaucracies like the Polish military. At the same time, the military rulers were trapped by this "movement style." Because of the informality and fragmentation of Solidarity's structure, the visible leadership could be removed and the means of communication the union had amassed confiscated,
but the ideas, the authority, and the movement persisted through "internal migration" or through the sense that, while one might have to resign oneself, one did not need to support any regime. For this reason, under martial law the rulers had to continually acknowledge the ideals and power of Solidarity even as they destroyed its formal organizational base. In this way, the tactical options of the post-Solidarity elite were significantly different from the tactical options of the pre-Solidarity elite in Poland or the normalization leaders of Hungary or Czechoslovakia.

From Solidarity to the Exit of Communism

Polish society and the possibilities for change were significantly different in the post-Solidarity period from those that characterized the reequilibration and crisis periods of earlier years in Poland. This was the first time that a localized organization had become nationalized and institutionalized. As a result, it was also the first time that an organizational leadership had emerged separate from the traditional establishment and its intellectual opposition. In addition, this was a period in which worker action preceded both comprehensive intellectual platforms and internal fragmentation and movement within the party and state bureaucracy and elite. Finally, this was the first time that internal decisions were circumscribed not only by Soviet tolerance but also by Western involvement, both economic and political. This involvement and the economic collapse led to the inability of either the new or old elite to provide established and divisible rewards for support or pacification.

The result of this complex of new factors, growing out of earlier experiences and policies, was a new form of reequilibrium or "crisis resolution." There was no notion of a "honeymoon period" or of a "pacification or normalization," either in the reality of Polish events or in their presentation by actors in them. Instead of elites being respected, there was a recognition that there were no ideal leaders or institutions. Every institution was lowered in its public prestige and in what the public expected of it. The public's perception of the potential for change was also reduced by the experience of the Solidarity period and the crisis that preceded it.

The Solidarity movement had a longer period of development and dominance than had any of its predecessors. It was also a more universal movement. At the same time, its development and denouement were accompanied by a changed elite posture: previously, the promise was for improvements; in the 1980s, the warning was that things could only get worse, not better, no matter what. Finally, given the sense of power that had accompanied Solidarity's gains and the stress that had been placed on institution building, the speed with which the major structures of the movement were delegalized and debilitated left the population with a sense of hopelessness that would take years to break through.
Accompanying this was an exacerbation of social and class conflict. This underlay the tensions in the Solidarity period and was played upon by the martial-law leadership to ensure its power. It further created the necessity of public and private posturing, which allowed the population to both oppose and survive the system. With the imposition of martial law, this tension further fragmented social groups.

The result was hardly a stable situation. On the other hand, it was a situation that managed to last until 1989, when the gradual collapse of the rulers’ power had reached the point that they could do nothing but seek compromise. An uneasy interaction between the political controllers and the population developed, based on what seemed to be an unspoken agreement of the population to retreat into its own world and the leadership to accept that retreat. Economic failure and the failure of the leadership to accomplish anything were the primary tools of pacification. People’s faith and hope were simply depressed. All of this occurred in a situation where party and state politics lost much of their relevance to the population and where even party and state leaders recognized they had to co-opt popular ideology rather than insist on Marxist-Leninist images. Ultimately, their only hope was to co-opt their opponents. Poland, after the Solidarity crisis, remained calm, not because of credible leadership or new institutions but because the loyal and disloyal opposition had been discredited and an unspoken pluralism of political and social worlds had been established. Social differences and unresolvable conflict were recognized. So, too, was the impossibility of movement or change. In the end, this meant no one could deny that “the emperor had no clothes” by the end of the 1980s.