

SOLIDARNOŚĆ, POLAND, AUGUST 1980



ANATOMY OF PROTEST



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GDANSK, WHERE IT ALL BEGINS

In the summer of 1980, Poland is living under a **repressive communist regime**, with no trade-union freedom. Unions are under the Party's control, strikes are banned, and demonstrations are broken up. The announcement of yet **another price rise turns anger into open rupture**.

At the **Lenin Shipyard in Gdansk**, **workers' frustration boils over**. What begins as a local strike quickly becomes the **first serious crack in the European communist bloc**.



A DISMISSAL THAT SPARKS THE UPRISING



The trigger is specific. **Anna Walentynowicz, a shipyard worker and trade-union activist**, is dismissed. Seen as arbitrary and unjust, the decision acts like a spark. **Workers down tools.**

Quickly, the strike spreads beyond a single workplace: the shipyards, the ports, then **entire sectors of the country grind to a halt**. The strikers create a decisive instrument: an **Interfactory Strike Committee (MKS)**, tasked with coordinating demands and organising a national movement.

“**SOLIDARNOŚĆ**”: SOLIDARITY IN ACTION

The movement relies on a **non-violent, methodical strategy** (peaceful occupations, strict discipline, and collective bargaining). Around the shipyards, broad support takes hold, **turning a workers' dispute into a national cause.**

On 31 August 1980, the **Gdansk Agreements** authorise the creation of a trade-union independent of the Party: **Solidarnosc**, meaning “solidarity”. Within months, the movement **brings together ten million Poles.**



REPRESSION AND THE SUPPORT OF JOHN PAUL II



Faced with this surge, General Jaruzelski imposes **martial law in December 1981 and bans Solidarnosc**. Its leaders are arrested, but **the movement does not disappear**.

It endures thanks to the **decisive backing of the Catholic Church, embodied by Pope John Paul II**, himself Polish, and whose moral authority protects and legitimises the resistance. In the end, repression fails, and **Solidarnosc becomes firmly embedded in society**.



HISTORIC VICTORY, CONTRADICTIONARY LEGACY

In 1989, Solidarnosc takes part in the **Round Table Talks**, paving the way for the first partially free elections in the Eastern Bloc. **Poland's democratic transition begins.**

But the movement's legacy is complex. Once in power, its political heirs splinter. Solidarnosc thus remains both the founding **symbol of regained freedom and the starting point of a Poland that has remained deeply polarised.**



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