

# POLAND'S SOLIDARITY WHO IS IN CHARGE?

B Y J O H N F E F F E R

**F**OR MANY Polish intellectuals, a working vacation is just that: work. On Europe's migrant labor circuit, Polish medical students dig ditches in West Germany, Polish philosophers-to-be wash dishes in Sweden—all for minimum wage. Far from being idealistic attempts to understand the working class, these forays to the West have purely materialistic motives. Several weeks of hard currency earnings more than equals a year of Polish wages in zlotys.

While practical economics has forced many an aspiring intellectual to don worker's clothing, practical politics has transformed some Polish workers into intellectuals. The best example is perhaps Lech Walesa who in 1980, as the ex-electrician leader of the Solidarity trade union, exposed the hypocrisy of the Polish government with language that was blunt, often populist, and graced with the occasional solecism. Walesa has since won a Nobel prize, written his autobiography and led Solidarity through the political upheavals of 1989. He may not be an intellectual in the Polish sense of the word—he was not brought up in a family of white-collar professionals, schooled in an intellectual tradition or crowned with an academic degree. But he works primarily with his mind these days, not with his electrician hands. And when he speaks to Parliament or to the Polish public on television, the change in occupation is reflected in his modified language: more diplomatic, more worldly, and more grammatically accurate.

Whether for political or economic reasons, working class and intelligentsia have intermingled in Poland. As two hal-

ves of an opposition movement, they have also spoken a common language of Catholicism, patriotism, and anti-communism. Despite commonalty, however, the two groups were, in the post-World War II era, seemingly doomed to fight solitary and parallel battles against the Communist authorities: intellectuals protested in 1964 and 1968; workers demonstrated in 1956, 1970, and 1976. Shortly after this last burst of worker discontent, opposition intellectuals formed the Workers Defense Committee (KOR) to bring the protests more into sync.

In 1980, political opportunities and economic crisis finally reconciled the Polish opposition's mind-body dichotomy. The result, Solidarity, was a Marxist's dream: a massive movement of workers, across specialties and across regions, joining hands with opposition intellectuals to bring a corrupt and autocratic government to its knees (but not, as Martial Law proved in 1981, to its end). The return of Solidarity in 1989 has offered, in one particularly important and perverse way, an all too frequent Marxist reality: the opposition intellectuals turned politicians are gradually moving away from the working class base of the movement.

For a movement that rejects Marxism-Leninism, the first irony of a class struggle in a "classless" state was delicious: Marx turned on his head. The development of a political vanguard within Solidarity, meanwhile, is an irony about which the opposition is considerably less sanguine.

This emerging (or more accurately, re-emerging) conflict between head and hand goes to the center of Solidarity's present political and economic dilemma. Having skillfully

compromised its way into legality, into Parliament, and finally into government, Solidarity has succeeded in placing opposition intellectuals in policymaking positions. Now these same intellectuals, in a marriage of convenience with Communist reformers, are considering economic reforms which strike at a major component of Solidarity support: unskilled workers, skilled workers in redundant industries, and farmers.

As the majority party in a fragile governmental coalition, faced with a failing economy and lukewarm international support, can Solidarity withstand a division between its intellectual and working class components?

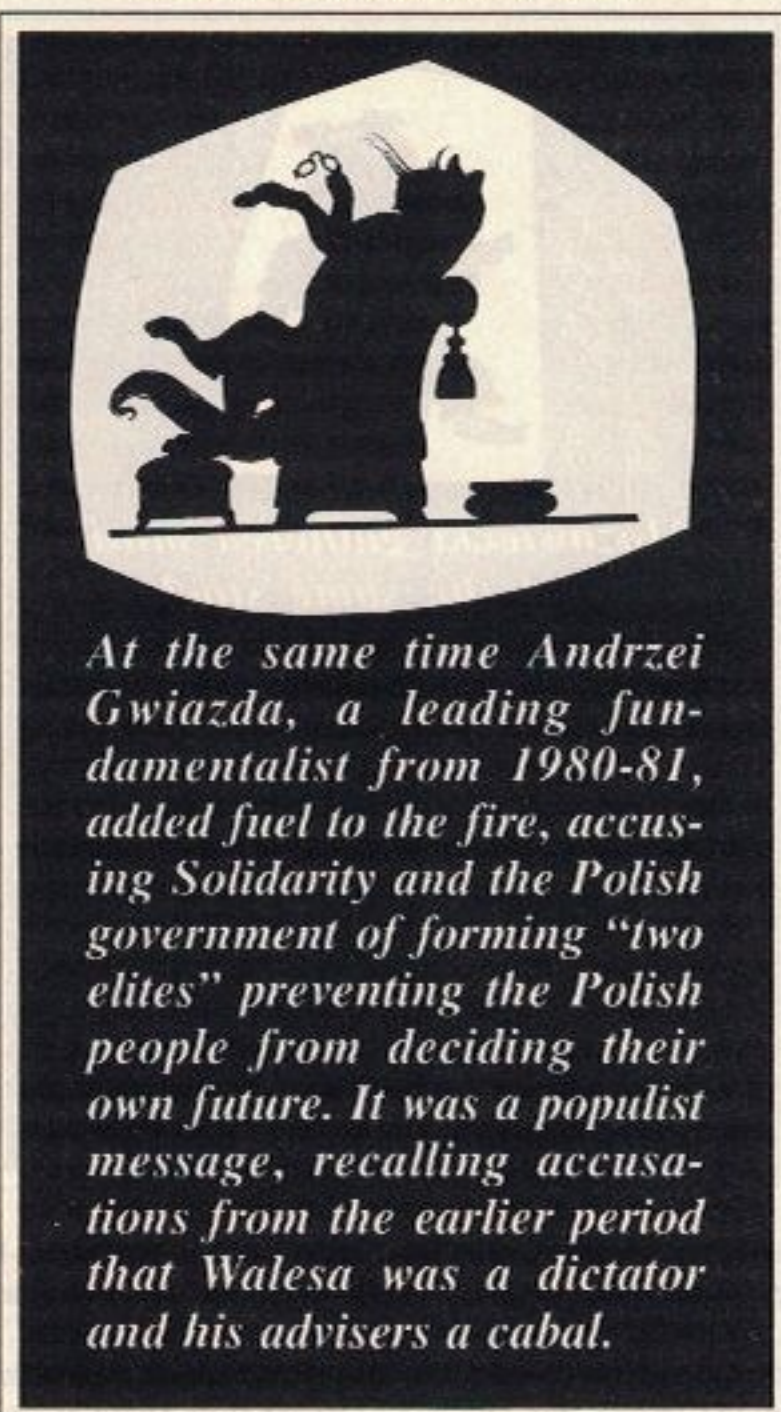
Does it really have a choice?

### A Growing Split

IN MAY 1988, a new generation of industrial workers—young, angry, militant—occupied key factories, bypassing a cynical and pessimistic Solidarity leadership. By August after a second round of strikes, seasoned members of the opposition including Walesa were back in the forefront, calling for negotiations with the Polish Communist party (PZPR). The agenda: re-legalization of Solidarity, political pluralism, economic reform.

With Solidarity still illegal and dialogue slated to begin with the government, Walesa created the Citizens' Committee in December 1988. The Committee reunited many of the chief advisers and activists of 1980-81: the medieval historian Bronislaw Geremek, Catholic intellectual Tadeusz Mazowiecki, KOR alumni Adam Michnik and Jacek Kuron. Not only did this experienced and learned team become the Solidarity negotiators in the ensuing Round Table talks (February 6-April 5), but subsequently they controlled the selection of Solidarity candidates for the June elections as well.

The Committee emphasized one wing of Solidarity—the pragmatists who, in 1980-81, cautioned the need for a "self-limited revolution" grudgingly recognizing the Polish Communist party's strategic concerns and the Soviet Union's geopolitical interests. The fundamentalists, meanwhile, placed greater emphasis on certain values that could not be compromised: national independence, democracy, workers' rights. While the pragmatists—particularly Walesa, Geremek and Mazowiecki—embraced these same values, they preferred different tactics, less uncompromising means to similar ends.



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In 1989 through the Citizens' Committee, the pragmatists returned more wary but just as committed to compromise. Their ranks were not filled exclusively with intellectuals but the nature of the Round Table negotiations encouraged experienced and diplomatic proto-politicians. The new wave of fundamentalists—militant workers of the 1988 strikes, younger members of the Confederation for an Independent Poland (KPN) and the Polish Socialist Party-Revolutionary Democrats (PPS-RD)—decried the conciliatory strategy. These mostly younger activists came together during the Round Table talks at a Congress of those opposed to negotiations with the Communist government. According to an interview with one of the organizers in the unofficial press, "the Congress expresses the sentiment of that section of society which does not see the possibility of reforming the existing system."

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their own future. It was a populist message, recalling accusations from the earlier period that Walesa was a dictator and his advisers a cabal. If the Round Table had failed to produce a satisfactory compromise, Gwiazda and the young militants were ready to capitalize on discontent.

But the Round Table did produce an agreement and though it was vague in certain spots (such as the economy), it nonetheless guaranteed a legal Solidarity and mandated semi-free elections. The compromise intellectuals had won an important victory and moved quickly to consolidate their gains. With only two months before the June elections, the Citizens' Committee handpicked the opposition candidates—bowing to key constituencies, accepting input from the regions—but nonetheless circumventing democratic procedures in the interests of unity and speed. Solidarity wanted to enter the elections with a common front—not as a loose confederation of interests. That there was such a brief period to launch the campaigns of over 300 candidates made unity all the more important.

It wasn't the first time Solidarity had to balance democracy and short-term priorities. In achieving the March 1981 Warsaw Agreement postponing a general strike in exchange for government promises, Walesa and his chief advisers had made executive decisions and had not consulted other Solidarity leaders, much less the rank-and-file.

Later, at the first National Congress the following September, Walesa infuriated the fundamentalists by supporting a union structure that would have put more power in an executive committee. In both cases, intellectuals such as Geremek framed the arguments for restricting "ultra" democracy in the interests of unity and survival.

Seven years after the declaration of Martial Law, Geremek had another chance to try out the strategy. As the chief negotiator for Solidarity in the Round Table on political questions, he laid the groundwork for limited pluralism: competitive elections for the newly re-created chamber of Parliament (Senate) and 35 percent of the seats in the other chamber (Sejm). It was, as the Poles remarked, "kielbasa democracy": a couple slices but not the whole thing.

Yet the Citizens' Committee's strategy of limited democratic procedures producing candidates for limited democratic elections worked. Solidarity swept the June elections, filling its 35 percent share of the Sejm and taking all but one seat in the Senate. The opposition had created a parallel government with sizable public support but dubious state powers. Solidarity intellectuals were now on the inside but could still distance themselves from government policies and, most importantly, the government's proposed program of economic austerity. After all, Solidarity was in the Parliament, but not part of government. That shadow status would not last long.

### A New Government

IT TOOK AN act of folly by the Polish Communists to push Solidarity into government. In August, the Party proposed General Czeslaw Kiszczak for Prime Minister. Kiszczak was, next to longtime Party chief and newly-elected President Wojciech Jaruzelski, the man most linked in the public's mind to the Martial Law period. To have these two in the top government positions would be intolerable—all sides of Solidarity could agree on that. But what was the alternative? The surprise solution came from the United Peasant and Democratic parties, longtime members of the Communist's ruling coalition. Emboldened by the political transformations of the spring, the two parties had become increasingly independent and in August decided to work with Solidarity in forming a government.

Their collective choice for Prime Minister was, significantly, an intellectual—Tadeusz Mazowiecki. Active in every key intellectual movement in Poland since 1956, Mazowiecki was an important link between the intel-



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ligentsia and the striking workers in 1980, and went on to become one of Walesa's most important ministers of compromise. He was active in mediating the 1988 strikes and in drawing up the Round Table agreement. After the legalization of Solidarity, he returned to editing the reinstated Solidarity weekly, a job cut short by Martial Law. For his cabinet, Mazowiecki gathered ministers of the same stock—a professor, a lawyer, a computer specialist, a theater director, a rector of Warsaw University, a journalist, an economist. No steelworkers, no coalminers, no electricians. Even the Ministry of Labor post went to an intellectual—Jacek Kuron.

The era of "Walesa and his advisers" was clearly over. The advisers had come into their own and Walesa was left without a public office. Although he receives high marks for his political instincts—and his odyssey from slightly uncouth firebrand in 1980, to articulate and groomed Solidarity repre-

sentative in 1989—he is not generally held to be a politician, in the parliamentary sense of the word. A parting of ways had begun. The Citizens' Committee had transformed intellectuals into politicians; Solidarity was left to channel its energies into trade unionism.

Solidarity could theoretically remain unified with intellectuals in government and labor leaders in the trade union working together. In practice, however, certain programmatic differences make the division more than simply institutional. The wedge dividing the new Solidarity politicians from the workers is the perplexing Polish conundrum, economic reform.

### The Economy

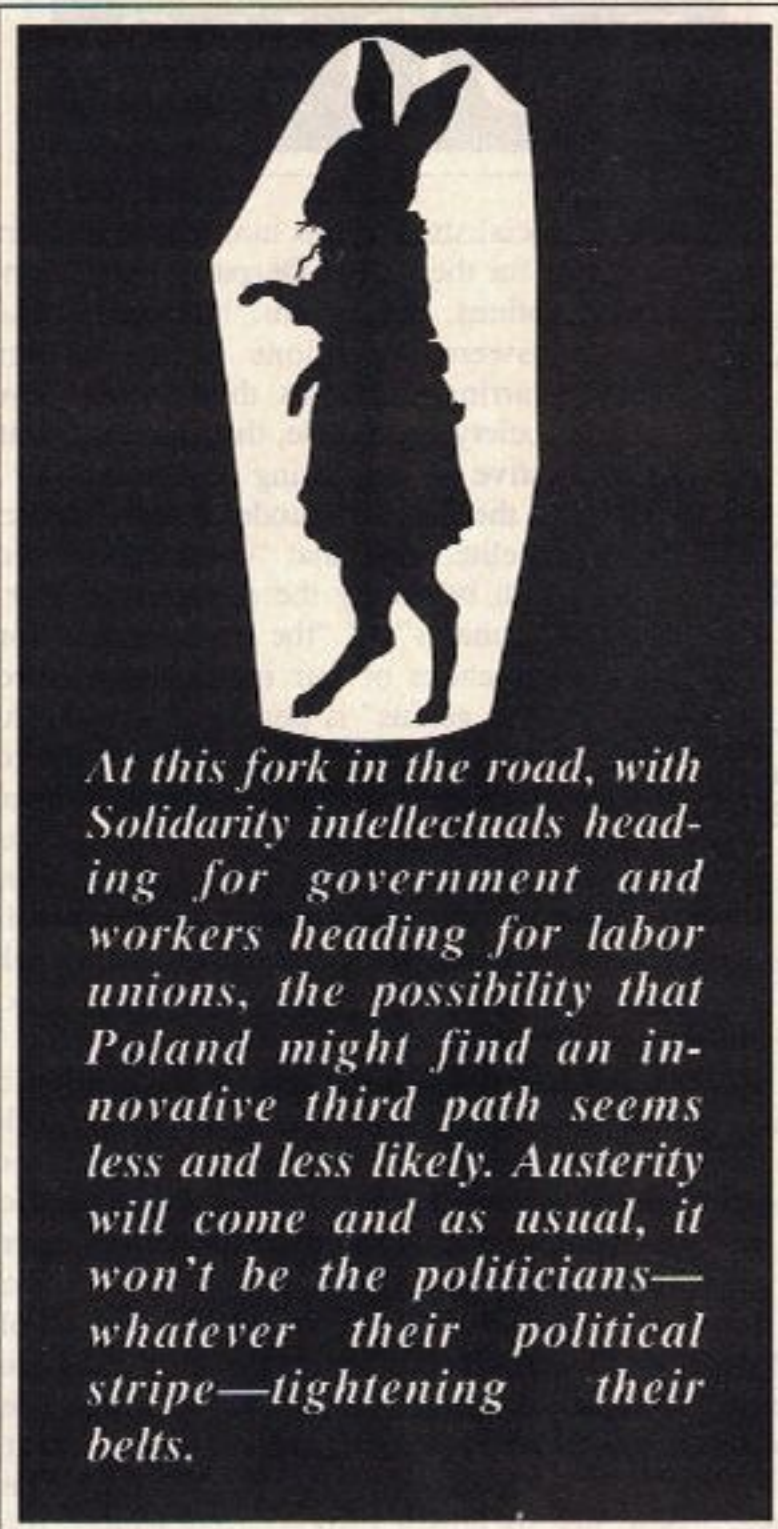
INEFFICIENT, OUTDATED and leveraged to the West, the Polish economy has over the last decade not so much collapsed as suffered prolonged trauma. Artificially sustained by Western credits during the 1970s, the economy began its long slide into sickness in 1979. The reasons for decline were manifold, not the least of which were external (rising oil prices, rising interest rates in the United States, economic slump in the West). Domestically, heavy industry such as shipbuilding and steelmaking, long the mainstay of the economy, could not compete internationally. Instead of being used to modernize the machinery of these industries, investments were often poured into large new projects of questionable economic worth. Or, worse, to gild the lifestyles of Party officials, primarily the technocrats of the Gierk administration.

By 1980, austerity and marketization were the preferred solutions of international monetary agencies, Western governments and, surprisingly, the Polish Communist party. Austerity meant drastically raising prices, calling on consumers to tighten already tightened belts and cutting back on social expenditures. Market reform meant encouraging private investment and the flow of external capital into the country. The Party also considered limited privatization that would have primarily benefited the so-called red capitalists—party members who would own or have controlling shares in enterprises. In other words, the Giersek technocrats (and subsequently, the Jaruzelski technocrats) would continue to control the economy, though the economy went by a different name.

In the early 1980s, these were not popular measures, especially when proposed by the Party. Polish consumers had always protested proposed price hikes; Polish workers traditionally viewed the Party's idea of a market with a great deal of skepticism. Moreover, in 1980, egalitarianism remained a dominant social value. According to research done at the Polish Academy of Science, economic egalitarianism peaked in that year: 89.7 percent of subjects interviewed supported restricting income inequalities. In 1980, Solidarity appealed to this egalitarian sentiment by offering an alternative to austerity and markets. Workers would gain more control of the industries and the party officials would lose their privileges. The economy would be democratized, rendered more equal.

Over the next nine years, however, egalitarian values declined precipitously: by 1989, 91.3 percent of subjects interviewed by Polish sociologists in the study supported major wage differentials. Market solutions were clearly more popular and both the Party and Solidarity reflected this in their programs. For the Party, the fall of egalitarianism merely meant that austerity measures could be inset in a larger, now more popular market-oriented reform. For Solidarity, however, the change was problematic. After all, key elements of its constituency still feared marketization and austerity: unskilled workers, the poorly educated, senior citizens, workers in failing enterprises. Solidarity could not simultaneously push through reform and please this section of its constituency.

But maybe with some finagling...



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## The Packaging of Reform

WE ARE AT the bottom, we can fall no farther," is a common sentiment heard in Poland and informs the perspectives of both Party and opposition politicians. Jan Maria Rokita, opposition member of Parliament, says "you don't have to have a painful reform. A reform is done to ease the pain." A startling similar opinion comes from Party economist Marcin Swiecicki: "The situation is already painful. What is ahead of us has to be less painful. There will be costs, but it will be less than the pain we already have."

Both camps are preparing for austerity and sugarcoating it for their respective constituencies. Intellectuals perhaps imagine that they cannot fall any further—washing dishes in Sweden for minimum wage may be the worst economic condition a Polish intellectual can imagine. Party members can speak glibly about painful situations, supported by perks and position.

But the victims of austerity and rapidly escalating income differentials may discover that pain can indeed increase. Not only must they contend with Solidarity politicians and Party reformers, this group of threatened workers—the chief opponents of drastic market reform—

have to face the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and Western governments. Ordinarily, a powerful trade union would be expected to protect these interests. But a strong union is not a strong favorite with either the IMF or foreign industries. Such a union supposedly distorts market conditions and potentially threatens foreign investments.

Despite acknowledging these external pressures, many Poles foresee a Swedish solution: union, government and business all working together. In this scenario, the Poles say that compromise would be raised to its highest level; practical politics and practical economics would successfully fuse. Yet given the persistence of class tensions in Poland (tensions which will only increase under market reform), the Swedish model seems little more than a political vision divorced from an economic reality. At this fork in the road, with Solidarity intellectuals heading for government and workers heading for labor unions, the possibility that Poland might find an innovative third path seems less and less likely. Austerity will come and as usual, it won't be the politicians—whatever their political stripe—tightening their belts.

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