

IMUN Research Report 2024

Historical Security Council Issue #1: The question of the political situation in Poland.

30 March 1981

The People's Republic of Poland was one of the numerous nations within the Soviet Sphere of Influence throughout the duration of the Cold War: a period of time which arose after World War II and included an open yet restricted rivalry between the Soviet Union and the United States¹. Similarly, to other countries under the communist rule, the citizens of Poland were not particularly favourable towards their hardline communist government, closely controlled by the USSR. Throughout the entirety of the occupation, although not always successful, Poles attempted to resist the communist governance in countless ways, which climaxed in 1980 with the creation of an independent trade union and social movement called Solidarity ("August")

It must be noted that throughout the 1970s the resentment towards the communist leaders was at an all-time high. The mismanagement of the economy by the government, led to dozens of consequences for the people. They included a great inflation in regards to prices of basic goods (such as meats), abysmal working conditions (including longer and more gruelling hours for workers and an increased need for manual labour), general economic hardships for individuals and families and decreased pay for the workforce. On account of this, resistance groups, consisting mostly of workers, emerged. As a part of their actions, the groups in the northern part of Poland² – specifically in Gdańsk, Gdynia and Szczecin – organised non-violent demonstrations with the purpose of receiving higher wages and economic reforms throughout December of 1970. However, these were not explicitly successful for the workers. They were met with brutality from the officials, resulting in 45 deaths and many more wounded ("A Short").

¹ "Cold War", Encyclopaedia Britannica

² [Map showing Poland](#)

The civil noncompliance did not stop there. In June of 1976, more workers' strikes took place, this time in Płock, Radom and Warsaw (Ursus). Upon the government's suppression of these revolts, the worker's movements gained support from numerous notable intellectuals. They joined together in the workers' defence after the workers had been attacked and jailed, resulting in the strike not being a complete failure for the workers. Additionally, soon after, this type of reinforcement turned into an official establishment called the Workers Defence Committee (KOR)³, established on September 23, 1976, their main function being to help organize aid for victimised workers and their families.

Meanwhile, also occurring in the second half of the 1970s, a key figure to modern culture was also being elected. Polish Karol Wojtyła became the first non-Italian Pope since 1523 and took the name John Paul II. This monumental moment helped unite Poles from all over the country and simply field their desire for change. However, this was key for the political situation in Poland as throughout his time as Pope, he supported the Polish resistance and raised its awareness towards the West ("Poland").

Following the formation of the Workers Defence Committee, more and more workers strikes began to take place throughout Poland. One very notable non-violent strike was one that took place in Gdańsk, in the Lenin Shipyard, which was ultimately initiated by the firing of a popular crane worker, Anna Walentynowicz, in 1980 (Nelsson). The demonstration began on August 14, with at its head was Lech Wałęsa, a former electrician from the same shipyard who was fired a couple of months before, and approximately 17,000 workers who demanded the rehiring of Walentynowicz and 21 key demands⁴ (for example: the legalisation of trade unions or improved working conditions). The strikers were not met with violence from the authorities,

³ In polish, KOR stands for 'Komitet Obrony Robotników'

⁴ Read more about the 21 Demands in this [article](#).

instead the government attempted to censor the revolt to other resistance groups, which ended up being a disaster for the officials (“History”). The news of the strike quickly spread to other parts of the nation – like Szczecin, who also began to strike – and to the rest of the world, through popular radio channel Radio Free Europe. Over the next couple of days, over 200 factories and enterprises joined the demonstration. With the support of most workers in Poland, and international support, on August 31, 1980, the workers were granted their demands. This understanding between the government and the workers became known as the August or Gdańsk agreement (“General”).

Subsequent to this successful strike, on September 22, 1980, the first ever independent labour union in a soviet controlled nation was created. It came to be when representatives from 36 regional trade unions met in the port city of Gdańsk and united under the name Solidarity⁵ (Bartkowski).

With the development of the trade union, the Workers Defence Committee was disbanded. This was a result of the fact that most of its members joined Solidarity instead. By the beginning of 1981, just a couple of months after the labour union was established, it had about 10 million members, over one-third of Poland’s working population (Bartkowski). Additionally, on January 15 of the same year, key Solidarity representatives, such as Wałęsa, met with Pope John Paul II, who publicly declared his support for the movement (“Solidarity”). However, the independent trade union did not stop there, they began to protest for free elections and even greater economic reforms. They did this not only through strikes, but also through public and international radio broadcasts, leaflets, catholic masses and much more.

As of March 30, 1981, the starting date for debate, the Solidarity movement and the Polish government with the assistance from Soviet officials have yet to reach concrete solutions to resolve

⁵ In polish it is known as ‘Solidarność’.

the economic challenges and social unrest, whilst maintaining stability in the nation and rest of the region (“The Editors”).

Focus of debate:

Debate should centre around creating the resolution of the conflict, resulting in a more economically and politically stable Poland, and subsequently a more stable Europe. Additionally, it is important to note that there has been some use of violence from the government towards citizens, and it would be important to address this in the duration of debate. Measures that will call for interference from Western troops, must also take into account the presence of the USSR veto, and how they may not be passed by the council. Finally, attitudes and information available to the delegates must mirror that publicly accessible as of March 30, 1981.

Relevant resolutions and documents:

[The Gdańsk Agreement](#)

- The agreement that officially ended the strikes at the Lenin Shipyard in Gdańsk and led to the formation of Solidarity.

[The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights](#)

- Ratified by Poland in 1977, this covenant provides legally binding obligations to protect civil and political rights.

[UN General Assembly Resolution 34/169](#)

- Adopted to protect the rights of individuals against arbitrary detention and ensuring fair treatment.

[UN General Assembly Resolution 35/178](#)

- Focuses on the protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms.

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