



Global Nonviolent Action Database

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Solidarno?? (Solidarity) brings down the communist government of Poland, 1988-89

- Soviet Bloc Independence Campaigns (1989-1991)

Time period notes: *Although Solidarnosc was engaged in struggle since the 1980 general strike, this case beginning with the April 1988 strikes is considered a separate campaign focused on broad economic and democratic reforms.*

21 April

1988

to: 4 June

1989

Country: Poland

Location City/State/Province: *Warsaw, Gdansk, Katowice, Poznan, Wroclaw, Tarnobrzeg, and Walbrzych*

Goals:

Due to the complexity and size of Solidarity and the amount of labor organizing occurring during the campaign it's difficult to define a definite list of goals. However, throughout the campaign, the following demands were made on some scale: wage justice, the re-legalization of Solidarity and its invitation to work on economic reforms with the government, release of political prisoners, collective bargaining rights, safety and health regulations, rights to organize, and free elections.

Methods

Methods in 1st segment:

- 003. Declarations by organizations and institutions
- 007. Slogans, caricatures, and symbols
- 038. Marches
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support
- 105. Establishment strike
- 107. Sympathy strike
- 116. Generalised strike
- 179. Alternative social institutions
- 182. Stay-in strike

Methods in 2nd segment:

- 047. Assemblies of protest or support
- 105. Establishment strike

- 116. Generalised strike
- 179. Alternative social institutions

Methods in 3rd segment:

- 008. Banners, posters, and displayed communications
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support
- 179. Alternative social institutions

Methods in 4th segment:

- 179. Alternative social institutions

Methods in 5th segment:

- 179. Alternative social institutions

Methods in 6th segment:

- 010. Newspapers and journals
- 039. Parades
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support
- 105. Establishment strike
- 179. Alternative social institutions
- 182. Stay-in strike

Notes on Methods:

Limited information could be found regarding the details of different direct actions. More research is needed to report the full extent and depth of action taken. Also, the source 'The Encyclopedia of Solidarity' is only available in Polish. A loose translation was used for this report, but further study should be undertaken.

Classifications

Classification:

Change

Cluster:

Democracy

Economic Justice

Group characterization:

- iron and steel workers
- many others
- members of the independent trade union Solidarity
- mineworkers
- shipyard workers
- transport workers

Leaders, partners, allies, elites

Leaders:

Lech Walesa, Tadeusz Mazowiecki

Partners:

Students of the Independent Students' Association (NZZ), bus drivers in Szczecin (it is not clear if this group was part of Solidarity)

External allies:

Solidarity received funds, equipment, and support from varied members of the international community including international solidarity organizations, U.S. President Ronald Reagan, the C.I.A., the Catholic Church, and Western trade unions such as the AFL-CIO. While these actions were reported before the time period of this campaign, it seems the support affected the dynamics of this campaign, if not continued during it. More research needs to be done to determine what sort of economic and political sanctions were in place during the course of this campaign.

Involvement of social elites:

Not known

Joining/exiting order of social groups

Groups in 1st Segment:

- bus drivers in Szczecin
- the Independent Students' Association (NZZ)

Groups in 2nd Segment:**Groups in 3rd Segment:****Groups in 4th Segment:****Groups in 5th Segment:****Groups in 6th Segment:**

Segment Length: *Approximately 9 weeks*

Opponent, Opponent Responses, and Violence

Opponents:

Communist-party government and officials, the Polish United Workers' Party (PZPR)

Nonviolent responses of opponent:

Not known

Campaigner violence:

Not known

Repressive Violence:

Beatings, arrests

Success Outcome

Success in achieving specific demands/goals:

4 points out of 6 points

Survival:

1 point out of 1 points

Growth:

3 points out of 3 points

Notes on outcomes:

Solidarity was extremely successful as an alternative social institution, ultimately displacing the communist party faction through popular elections and forming a Solidarity-led coalition government. However, it is less known from this research to what extent the economic demands regarding wage justice, collective bargaining, and right to organize were affected directly by the turnover in government. The 4 out of 6 is largely to indicate the gap in research needed to determine the extent these other goals were addressed.

In the late 1980's, Poland was nearing the end of almost 40 years of postwar communism as part of the Soviet Eastern Bloc. Out of labor organizing earlier in the decade emerged Solidarno?? (Solidarity), the first non-communist party-controlled trade union federation in a Warsaw Pact country (see Polish workers general strike for economic rights, 1980). Shortly after the rise of Solidarity, the organization expanded into a larger social movement, appealing for economic reforms, free elections, and increased political participation of trade unions.

By early 1981, Solidarity had a membership of over 10 million people that included almost 80% of the total workforce. That year Solidarity held its first national congress; Lech Walesa, a pivotal figure in the emergence of the union, was elected president.

In spring 1981, after some Solidarity members were beaten up by security forces as part of the Bydgoszcz events, Solidarity organized a four-hour warning strike in late March, involving over 12 million people and regarded as the largest strike in the history of the Soviet Bloc.

That summer, in response to a worsening economy and food shortages, thousands of Poles participated in hunger demonstrations throughout the country. By late 1981, Solidarity announced plans for a strike in anticipation of government repression. Indeed, soon after the announcement, the government declared martial law and initiated a major crackdown. Mass arrests of Solidarity leaders followed; security forces arrested thousands of Solidarity members in the middle of the night. Censorship and military presence increased. Even still, hundreds of isolated strikes and occupations occurred throughout the country. In the midst of these actions, government forces opened fire on demonstrators, killing some and injuring many. By the end of December 1981, strikes had ended.

On October 8, 1982, the government formally banned Solidarity, rendering the organization illegal. Solidarity was forced underground. Anti-government protest demonstrations and strikes resumed throughout 1982, along with more killings of demonstrators. During its time underground, Solidarity received funds, equipment, and support from varied members of the international community including international solidarity organizations, U.S. President Ronald Reagan, the C.I.A., the Catholic Church, and Western trade unions such as the AFL-CIO.

In December 1982, Security Forces carried out a large crackdown, arresting over 10,000 members and seizing the organization's assets. By this time, the underground Solidarity had over 70,000 members and was publishing underground newspapers.

During July 1983, martial law was lifted, and amnesty was granted to many imprisoned Solidarity members. However, heightened controls on civil and political life remained in place for years to come. It's estimated that between 1981 and 1985, around 78 people were killed by police and security force action; thousands more were imprisoned, beaten, and harassed.

On March 11, 1985, Mikhail Gorbachev assumed power in the Soviet Union, bringing a new generation of Soviet party members and political and economic reforms, affecting all Soviet satellites.

In late 1986, another group of Polish political prisoners were released, freeing most all Solidarity members arrested during the previous years. Shortly after, Lech Walesa helped create the Temporary Council of NSZZ Solidarno??, the first legal Solidarity entity since martial law was declared. Many local Solidarity groups emerged from underground and a national committee was formed late 1987. Solidarity members and activists were still threatened with repression, but it marked a new era for the organization. Also around this time, a more radically anti-communist faction, Fighting Solidarity splintered from the leadership of Walesa.

By 1988, Poland's economy was in dire conditions. International sanctions and government unwillingness to introduce reforms compounded previous problems. In February, the government increased food prices by 40%.

On April 21, a wave of strikes occurred throughout the country. They began in Stalowa Wola, with workers demanding higher wages and the end to the persecution of Solidarity. Strikes spread to the city transport department in Bydgoszcz, and later to iron and steel works in Nowa Huta; security forces and police responded with beatings and arrests.

Also on the 21st, several hundred students demonstrated at Wrocław University in support of the trade unions and on behalf of the Independent Students' Association (NZZ), the student sub-organization of Solidarity formed in 1980, and also banned in 1981.

At the end of April, Lech Wałęsa released a statement appealing to ruling authorities to negotiate, to the international trade union movement to offer support, and to governments of democratic countries to politically and economically oppose the injustices carried out by the Polish government.

On the first day in May, demonstrations took place in several cities, leading to several dozen arrests. The next day, workers at the Gdańsk Shipyard began a sit-in strike. In addition to economic demands (wage increase) were added political demands concerning Solidarity, including the legal recognition of the organization and the release of political prisoners. Government forces broke the strike on May 10, after which Wałęsa and Solidarity leader, Tadeusz Mazowiecki, led a march to the Church of Saint Brygida.

During the Gdańsk strike, on May 4, NZZ supporters demonstrated at the Catholic University of Lublin. Action soon spread to other academic institutions and sectors of society. For example, on June 22, bus drivers in Szczecin went on strike in support of labor leaders.

On August 15, a mass strike was organized at the July Manifesto mine in Jastrzębie Zdrój, involving thousands; the strike lasted until September 3. By August 20, the strike had spread to many other mines and cities. Strikers chanted, 'There's no liberty without Solidarity!' On the 17th, the Inter-Enterprise Strike Committee (Solidarity) released a list of demands including: the legalization of Solidarity, economic reforms, wage justice, collective bargaining rights, safety and health standards, and the right to organize.

On August 22, the largest strike of the month began in Huta Stalowa Wola. Out of the strike grew a large demonstration of more than 20,000 people. The Gdańsk Shipyard joined the strike as well; soon strikes and protests were being held in the provinces of Warsaw, Gdansk, Katowice, Poznan, Wrocław, Tarnobrzeg, and Walbrzych.

By late August, Poland's communist government expressed a willingness to negotiate, as long as the strikes were stopped. On August 31, the eight anniversary of the original Gdansk Agreement, the Interior Minister formally received Lech Wałęsa for negotiations. Afterward, Wałęsa called an end to the strikes, claiming it an important step to the re-legalization of Solidarity. The strikes ended, although reluctantly by many strikers, over the next few days.

Further action was stalemated over the next months as both government bodies and Solidarity representatives prepared for long-term negotiations. In fact in mid-September negotiations collapsed because Solidarity would not yield its demands for legalization and it rejected the authorities' right to veto its selection of delegates to take part in roundtable talks.

Some sympathetic actions did take place. In early October, signs were hung at Warsaw University supporting the legalization of Solidarity and recognition of NZZ. Throughout the month, student organizing spread to other campuses, and included anti-military action.

Early November, government authorities closed the Gdańsk Shipyard, which was seen as an insult to Solidarity and an attempt to crush morale. Thousands demonstrated against the decision. Later that month, Lech Wałęsa scored a 'public relations victory' during a televised debate between him and a leader of the All-Poland Alliance of Trade Unions (OPZZ), a pro-government trade

union.

In mid December, a hundred-member Citizens' Committee was formed within Solidarity. It was made up of several sections, each related to a specific demand being made of the government. A majority of the Committee members advocated negotiation, whereas a minority wanted an anticommunist revolution and were open to the use of violence.

On February 6, 1989, the Polish Round Table talks began, bringing members of Solidarity, OPZZ, priests, and communists party members together for negotiation. Throughout the talks, a number of opposition groups including NZS, the Confederation for an Independent Poland, and the Federation of Fighting Youth began a series of demonstrations in Krakow, which lasted a week before being broken up.

In April 1989, the results of the negotiations were announced. The government agreed to legalize Solidarity and allow it to participate in free elections for Polish parliament. The government announced an economic plan, promised more freedom for the media, and ensured freedom of association. Elections were set for June 4. Even though they had minimal resources Solidarity quickly organized an electoral campaign.

In May, a series of Solidarity parades took place. The largest in Warsaw had nearly 100,000 participants. Rallies and marches were also held by Fighting Solidarity in several cities, advocating a boycott of the elections.

On May 8, a new pro-Solidarity newspaper was started called the *Gazeta Wyborcza* (The Election Gazette) to support the Solidarity campaign. Strike actions also continued. In Lubinski, 35,000 copper miners organized a sit-in strike, demanding wage justice and a meeting with the minister of industry.

In the elections that June, Solidarity candidates won 99 of the 100 seats in the newly formed Senate and all seats they were eligible to run for in the Sejm (lower house) (161 seats out of 460 total). The results came as a total surprise in comparison to pre-election polls. The total victory of Solidarity candidates in these elections would inspire a wave of nonviolent anti-communist revolutions in Central and Eastern Europe.

Later in June, the newly formed Solidarity Citizens' Parliamentary Club (Obywatelski Klub Parlamentarny "Solidarno??") formed a coalition with parties formerly affiliated with the communist majority. For the first time, communist party members were outnumbered. On August 24, Tadeusz Mazowiecki, a Solidarity representative, was elected Prime Minister of Poland, who became the first non-communist prime minister in Eastern Europe for almost four decades. By the end of the month, a Solidarity-led coalition government was formed.

In December 1990, Walesa was elected president. It was the end of the communist governmental system in Poland. Into the 1990s, Solidarity gradually lost its influence as a political party, but did become one of the largest trade unions in Poland. Solidarity's example in 1989 influenced the spread of anti-communist ideas and organizing throughout the Eastern Bloc, weakening communist governments and ultimately causing them to fall.

Research Notes

Influences:

During the late 1980s and early 1990s, Communist governments throughout Europe began to topple. Solidarity's success in 1989 in setting up the first non-Communist government in the Soviet Eastern Bloc inspired surrounding states to take similar action (see Soviet Bloc Independence Campaigns (1989-)).

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Additional Notes:

As was mentioned in the methods notes, limited information was found regarding the details of each direct action. More research is needed to report the full extent and depth of action taken. The source 'The Encyclopedia of Solidarity' is only available in Polish. A loose translation was used for this report, but closer study should be undertaken. It is expected that upon further study, more methods will be reported than represented here. Also, from this research it is unclear the dynamic between Solidarity and other organizations, including the All-Poland Alliance of Trade Unions (OPZZ), the Independent Students' Association (NZS), and others. Further study should evaluate how actions taken by different groups affected the goals and developments of Solidarity's efforts.

Name of researcher, and date dd/mm/yyyy:

Zein Nakhoda, 10/9/2011

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