

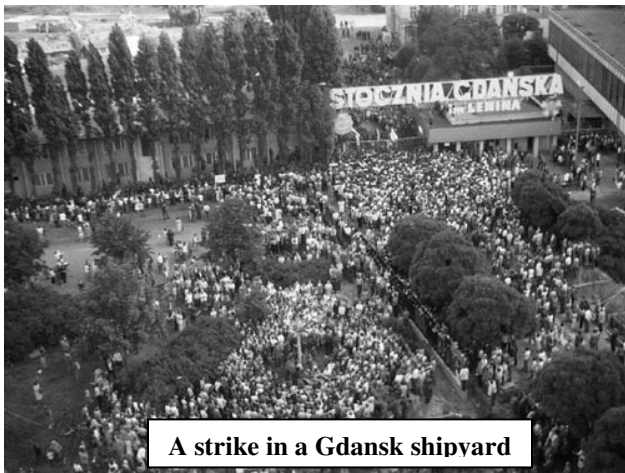
Solidarity

Background:

Poland was extremely in debt during the 1970s. Her Communist leader, Gierek, attempted to increase government income by raising food prices and lowering wages so that he could pay off the debts.

However, this reacted badly with the Poles because they felt that the government's incompetence caused the debt and they knew that the government leaders and police officials had many privileges that they did not. They felt that if they had to pay off the country's debt, they should have a say in how it was run.

The origin of Solidarity



A strike in a Gdansk shipyard

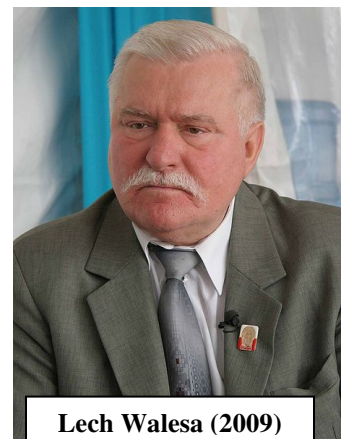
Solidarity originated in the Polish shipyard city of Gdansk in 1980. The protestors there set up a committee to demand a say in how the economy was run. In September, this committee joined together with others like it across the country, forming a trade union called Solidarity.

Solidarity became very popular because of its well-liked leader, Lech Walesa and its power. It had the complete support of the Catholic Church and became the most powerful organisation in Poland besides the Communist Party.

The power of Solidarity

By 1981, it had 9.4 million members and powerful say in things. Solidarity demanded that Gierek resign and he did. Kania, his replacement, recognized Solidarity as a legal organisation, just as it demanded.

Solidarity became internationally known and liked. Anti-Communist countries adored it, especially Americans with Polish heritage. Money poured in from countries worldwide and Walesa was interviewed on TV as if he was a major political figure.



Lech Walesa (2009)

The fall of Solidarity

In October 1981, Poland got a new leader, General Jaruzelski, the head of the army. Leonid Brezhnev, the leader of the USSR, ordered General Jaruzelski to clamp down on Solidarity or he would send Soviet troops into Poland.

Jaruzelski arrested Lech Walesa and about 10 000 other Solidarity members in December 1981. In January 1982, Solidarity was declared illegal. Its members did not resist because they feared the Soviets and their troops.

The importance of Solidarity

Solidarity's demise was important because it gave the Communist governments of Eastern Europe a clear message: the majority of ordinary working people were sick of living under Communist rule and Communist control over Eastern Europe was completely dependant on Soviet military power – if the USSR stopped backing the countries, Communism would fall.

The great return

From June to August 1989, there were massive protests in Poland. Communist party leaders eventually agreed to hold free elections. Solidarity won 99 out of 100 seats in Poland's Senate and Lech Walesa became Eastern Europe's first non-Communist leader since the Second World War. Communism fell that same year.

Questions:

1. How did Gierek try to increase government income in Poland? [1]
2. There are two sentences in the second paragraph which justify the Poles' wish to have a say in the running of their country. Quote them here. [1]
3. Where did Solidarity originate from? [1]
4. Who was Lech Walesa? [1]
5. Why do you think the Catholic Church supported Solidarity? [2]
6. How many members did Solidarity have by 1981? [1]
7. True or false: Solidarity was never popular. Back up your choice with information that you have learnt. [3]
8. What consequence did Leonid Brezhnev use to get General Jaruzelski to clamp down on Solidarity? [1]
9. What important message did Solidarity's demise send out to all the Communist governments? [2]
10. 'Solidarity never had any real power.' Do you agree with this statement? Write an essay backing up your view. [7]

Total points: [20]