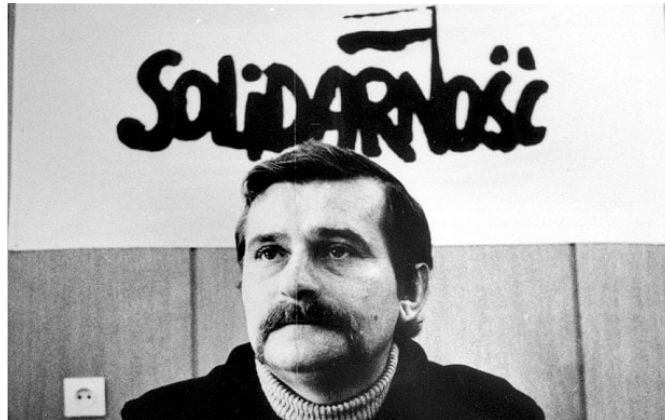


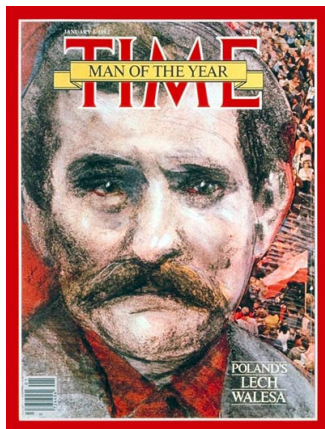
“When I continued saying that we were going to win against communism by peaceful means, they looked at me like a madman.”



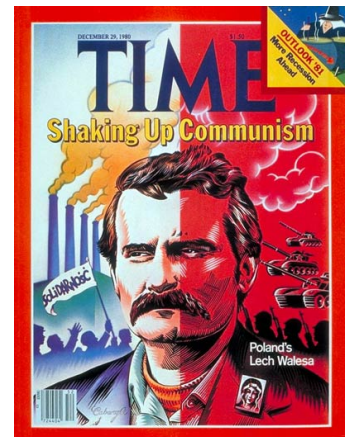
Keystone/Getty Images, URL: <http://sport.tvp.pl/21017512/lechia-juve-1983-lech-walesa-solidarnosc>

## Lech Wałęsa

(Created by Aleksandra Deptuch, HIS 135, October 2017)



Time, Time, URL: <http://content.time.com/time/covers/0,16641,19820104,00.html>



Time, URL: <http://content.time.com/time/covers/0,16641,19801229,00.htm>

### Assignment:

What role did Lech Wałęsa play in the fall of communism in Poland?

### Background:

Lech Wałęsa was born on September 29, 1943 in the village of Popowo in central Poland.

After receiving only basic and technical education, in 1967 he started working as an electrician at the Lenin Shipyard in a coastal city of northern Poland, Gdańsk (now Gdańsk Shipyard).



Riots of 1970s, triggered by increasing food prices, ended with police killing many of the demonstrators. Wałęsa participated in the protests of 1976, from which he emerged as a leader and subsequently was fired from his job. He and his family were under constant Polish secret police surveillance, and Wałęsa himself was arrested several times for participating in activist gatherings.

AFP/wiadomosci.onet.pl

Maciej Sochor (PAP), URL: <http://www.rmfm24.pl/foto/zdjecie,ild,1231858>

The situation repeated itself in August 1980 when the protests emerged from the shipyard in response to yet another price increase. Wałęsa, who was not an employee of the shipyard any more, climbed over the fence and joined the workers who chose him as their leader to negotiate with the authorities. 21 demands, written on a wooden board were presented. The demands not only focused on economic problems, i.e. general economic reform, but also around social issues (free Saturdays, support for people raising children and lowering the pension age), political and basic freedoms (e.g. constitutionally granted right to free speech and stopping repression against people of different opinions than the government's line). The right to strike and to form free trade unions was one of the main objectives. The shipyard workers were not asking for a total change of political system but for it to have more a "humane face".



Jan Morek/PAP, URL: <http://wiadomosci.dziennik.pl/wydarzenia/artykuly/541502.piotr-duda-solidarnosc-lech-walesa-tw-bolek-zobowiazanie-wspolpraca-agent-sb.html>



Censorship limited the spread of the information since all the media were controlled by the government, but despite telephone lines being cut to the region, couriers, railway workers and postmen passed messages around the country. The news of the strike spread and soon most of the biggest factories and work establishments joined in. Previous strikes of 1965 and 1970 were suppressed with force, but the one of 1980 was too extensive for the government to ignore it or to imprison its leaders. Under pressure from the workers, intellectuals and the Roman Catholic Church, the totalitarian government decided to grant the workers' demands.



Arturo Mari / AFP, URL: <https://www.nbcnews.com/http://www.nbcnews.com/slideshow/polish-hero-lech-walesa-electrician-president-49860248>

On August 31, 1980 the official document called “the August agreements” was signed by the authorities



and Lech Wałęsa, officially the leader of the Interfactory Strike Committee. Granting the right to form free trade unions, agreed upon by the communist government out of fear of national unrest, resulted, in a short period of time, in over 10 million people (a quarter of Poland's population) spontaneously joining the only one, legalized, on which the eyes of the world were focused - “Solidarność” (ang. Solidarity) Free Trade Union. Wałęsa became the chairman and spokesman for the federation and gained international recognition. It was an unusual victory over the government and one with no bloodshed.

© Chris Niedenthal, URL: <http://fototapeta.art.pl/2010/cnd.php>

It wasn't long until the Soviet Union put pressure on its satellite, and General Wojciech Jaruzelski was named the Chairman of the Council of Ministers (Prime Minister) in February 1981. Soon after, he also became the First Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist party in Poland. At midnight on December 13, 1981 he announced in a widely broadcast speech, introduction of martial law, justifying the decision by preventing a coup being prepared by Solidarity, which would be followed by a Soviet invasion.



Janusz Bałanda Rydzewski / European Solidarity Centre; URL: <https://newtimes.pl/teresa-toranska-wywiad-z-wojciechem-jaruzelskim-czesc-ii/>

The free unions were delegatized and Solidarity was banned, the right to strike withdrawn and Wałęsa, together with many other Solidarity leaders, was arrested. He was imprisoned for 11 months until November 1983 and in the meantime the only legal form of protest were religious celebrations.

In December 1983 Lech Wałęsa was awarded Nobel Peace Prize. Solidarity leader's wife, Danuta, accepted it on his behalf in person in Oslo. The award was a recognition of Wałęsa's fight against communism. Although he was released from internment before the award gala, he feared that if he left the country, the authorities wouldn't let him back in since he was regarded as a symbol of revolt.



With change in Moscow, pressure on the Polish government lessened, and in 1986 amnesty for Solidarity activists was announced. 1987-1990 Lech Wałęsa led the semi-legal Provisional Executive Committee of the Solidarity Trade Union. In 1989 the ruling Polish Communist Party finally agreed to re-enter into negotiations.

Wojtek Laski, Getty Images, URL: <http://www.gettyimages.com/detail/news-photo/former-president-of-the-soviet-union-mikhail-gorbachev-and-news-photo/702077411#former-president-of-the-soviet-union-mikhail-gorbachev-and-president-picture-id702077411>



The Round Table negotiations took place from February to April of 1989 with Wałęsa being the leader of the non-governmental side. As a result, the Solidarity Trade Union was re-established and semi-free general elections to the parliament took place (securing the Communist Party with 65% of the seats in lower chamber). Solidarity took all the seats subjected to free elections in June 1989 with Wałęsa being the most active and recognizable figure. He also persuaded leaders of other parties previously forming coalition with the communists, form a non-communist government. In August 1989 the Parliament named Tadeusz Mazowiecki the Prime Minister, first non-communist since after World War II.



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PAP/arch/Jan Bogacz, URL: <https://wpolityce.pl/polityka/185201-duch-okraglego-stolu-wpedzil-polakow-w-nedze-nie-samo-wydarzenie-a-jego-interpretacja-lansowana-od-zarania-iii-rp>



Damazy Kwiatkowski / PAP, URL: <http://www.newsweek.pl/wiedza/historia/andrzej-celinski-w-magdalence-byl-tez-lech-kaczynski,artykuly,383250,1.html>



In 1990, Lech Wałęsa won general presidential elections, became the first non-communist president in 63 years. He stayed in office until the end of his term in 1995.

Janek Skarzynski / AFP, URL: <https://www.nbcnews.com/http://www.nbcnews.com/slideshow/polish-hero-lech-walesa-electrician-president-49860248>

## Timeline:

1943	<b>September 29</b> – Lech Wałęsa is born in Popowo, Poland
1967	Wałęsa begins working at the Gdańsk's shipyard as an electrician
1970	Future President witnesses food riots in Gdańsk where police killed some demonstrators
1976	<b>April</b> Antigovernment activism causes Wałęsa losing his job
1980	<b>August 14</b> protests in the shipyard caused by food prices increase, Wałęsa climbs over the shipyard's fence to join the workers; he becomes the head of the strike to negotiate.
1980	<b>August</b> Inter-Factory Strike Committee, uniting enterprises, 21 demands presented to the authorities.
1980	<b>August 31</b> Wałęsa signs the agreement with the government on behalf of the Inter-Factory Strike Committee – The August Agreements.
1980	<b>October</b> "Solidarity" was legalized in court and therefore recognized by the government as free trade union
1981	<b>January</b> delegation of Solidarity leaders with Wałęsa meets with Pope John Paul II in Rome.
1981	<b>February</b> General Wojciech Jaruzelski is named the Prime Minister
1981	<b>December 13</b> Martial Law is imposed in Poland, Wałęsa is arrested and kept in seclusion
1982	<b>November</b> Brezhnev dies.
1982	<b>November</b> Wałęsa returns to Gdańsk
1983	<b>July</b> the end of Martial Law
1983	<b>October</b> The Nobel Prize Committee announces Wałęsa the awardee of the Peace Prize
1983	<b>December</b> Nobel Peace Prize is received in person in Oslo by Wałęsa's wife, Danuta and his oldest son, Bogdan.
1985	<b>March</b> Mikhail Gorbachev takes over leading the Soviet Communist Party.
1986	Release of political prisoners of Solidarity; start of building structures of the Free Trade Union federation, also on regional level.
1989	Received the Presidential Medal of Freedom (from G. H.W. Bush)
1989	<b>August</b> Wałęsa one of the main architects of electing Tadeusz Mazowiecki the Prime Minister, first non-communist since after World War II
1990	<b>December</b> elected President of the Republic of Poland in general elections



<http://www.gettyimages.com/detail/news-photo/polish-solidarnosc-trade-unionist-lech-walesa-addresses-a-news-photo/696374096#polish-solidarnosc-tradeunionist-lech-walesa-addresses-a-joint-of-picture-id696374096>

## Websites:

### On Lech Wałęsa:

[CNN Archive](#) Rather short bio note, gives all the necessary background also mentioning time after 1989.

[Encyclopedia Britannica](#) More detailed biography with pictures and links to video resources and bios of people related to L. Wałęsa.

[President of the Republic of Poland - Official Website](#) Bio note with a little more information on the early life.

[Nobel Prize - Official Website](#) Basic bio from Nobel Prize database of Awardees.

[The American Academy of Achievement](#) presents Lech Wałęsa as its Golden Plate Awardee, many facts from his public life after leaving the office in 1995.

[New York Times](#) Survey of articles related to Lech Wałęsa on the Magazine's Official Website from 1980s until now.

### On Solidarity/"Solidarność":

[Global Encyclopedia Britannica](#) Background information on "Solidarność"/Solidarity movement.

[European Solidarity Centre](#) Official Website with many related materials to beginnings of the movement, also presenting the history of the Centre itself.

[Lech Wałęsa Institute](#) Official Website presenting goals and achievements of the Institute started to preserve Wałęsa's legacy, national and solidarity traditions as well as supporting youth in pursuing higher education.

## Videos:

- Short [video](#) published by the Lech Wałęsa Institute summarizing the events and former President's achievements with emphasis of the current role.
- [Video](#) covering factors leading to historical events in Poland as well as background information prior, depicting the setting for later events.
- Useful [background information](#) explaining events leading to dissolution of communism in Poland, covering also influences of the Pope, Gorbachev, Reagan and other external factors. Good pictures from the time of when events happened.
- Short [recapitulation](#) of Solidarity in 1970s and 1980s.
- Lech Wałęsa's [speech](#) in Congress in 1989.
- [Longer video](#) including interviews with Lech Wałęsa and Zbigniew Brzeziński, among others, as well as pictures of the time covering the situation in 70s and 80s when Solidarity was being formed.



## Recommended Books:

*The Book of Lech Wałęsa*, trans. from Polish (1982), is a collection of essays.

MARY CRAIG, *The Crystal Spirit: Lech Wałęsa and His Poland*, 1986 (also published as *Lech Wałęsa and His Poland*, 1987), places Wałęsa in the context of his generation's history.

DANUTA WAŁĘSA, *Dreams and Secrets* (2012), a book, not yet translated into English, recounts the historical events from Wałęsa's wife perspective with a good dose of private life insight.

Lech Wałęsa, *The Struggle and the Triumph: An Autobiography* (Arcade Publishing New York 1991) gives a lot of personal insight from the Solidarity leader, also on how his faith helped throughout the years of struggle with communism.

Rebecca Stefoff *Lech Walesa: The Road to Democracy - Great Lives Biography Series* (Fawcett Columbine 1992) provides another view on the events in Poland culminating in 1989 also mentioning details how Polish mentality of that time was shaped when the survival skill was to know how to break the communist law or go around it without facing the consequences.

Lech Wałęsa, *A way of hope* (Henry Holt and Company New York, 1987) is a personal, mostly detailed perspective on the events of 1980 and 1981.

Lawrence Goodwyn, *Breaking the Barrier: The Rise of Solidarity in Poland* (Oxford University Press, 1991) shows leadership, personal charisma as well as historical events and Roman Catholic Church's influence on the outcome of Solidarity movement.

Timothy Garton Ash in *The Polish Revolution: Solidarity* (Yale University Press, 2002) focuses on historical, economic and social factors why Solidarity succeeded and helped break the iron curtain.



Leszek Biernacki, URL: [http://www.wszechnica.solidarnosc.org.pl/?page\\_id=162](http://www.wszechnica.solidarnosc.org.pl/?page_id=162)