

ligious, Catholic people where, out of a population of 36 million, some 14 million were members of Solidarity, Rural Solidarity, and the associated independent unions. The Church has sustained Polish workers when they were without trade unions, and the leaders of Solidarity never ignored this fact. At the same time, when Walesa and his principal adviser, Bronislaw Geremek, met with CLC representatives during the 1981 International Labour Conference, they made the point emphatically that Solidarity was a union, and its meetings would be union meetings, not religious masses.

In the too few months between the signing of the Gdansk Agreement and the imposition of martial law, Solidarity did hold a number of meetings, and did much more besides. That it was able to do anything at all in the harrowing circumstances facing it must remain a tribute to the Polish workers, and must stand as a portent of their determination.

When Solidarity began its work in September and October, 1980, its logistical problems were enormous. The new headquarters of the Masowsze Region of Solidarity in Warsaw had to be kept open twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. In the early days, literally thousands of visitors filed into the former school building. Many were well-wishers, others volunteers, but many were those Polish citizens finally believing that they had at their disposal an institution which would care about their problems and would try to redress old injustices.

There was never a time when the union could concentrate only on the specific interests of its members stemming from their employment in one enterprise rather than another. Solidarity had to play the roles of a massive social work agency, a civil liberties watchdog, and the architect of economic reconstruction, in the face of scheming opposition from a ruling party signally deficient in each of these areas. In the last of these is to be found the kernel of why Solidarity will never be stilled in spirit, irrespective of the damage done to the form. The Gdansk Agreement was not limited to the setting up of a free trade union with the right to strike. It said, among other things, that "the new trade unions should have a real opportunity to publicly express an opinion on key decisions that determine the living conditions of working people . . . long-term economic plans, and investment policy and price changes." The government guaranteed that these provisions would be carried out, and agreed to enter into formal negotiations with Solidarity on the future of the Polish economy.

Solidarity and the government

Much of the energy of delegates to the Congress of Solidarity was expended in preparing the major policies of the union to enable it to negotiate on the basis of articulating precisely what the workers wanted. In this way, major debates took place on the question of workers' participation and investment planning, for example. Serving as a backcloth to the debates was the growing feeling of many delegates that the authorities were dealing with Solidarity in the most extreme bad faith, thus giving rise to strong criticism of Walesa for not being firm enough. The basic argument of the critics was that when the union leadership did not react massively and determinedly following the Bydgoszcz incident. The authorities read this correctly as a

sign of weakness, a weakness so enervating as to reduce Solidarity in time to impotence, whereupon it could collapse through a failure to meet its members' expectations.

The incident in Bydgoszcz took place on March 19, 1981, when the Militia attacked unionists peacefully discussing the registration of Rural Solidarity. One of those most severely beaten, Jan Rulewski, challenged Walesa for the leadership in the union elections later that year. After the attack, Solidarity held a warning strike on March 28, but called off a threatened general strike. It is believed in some quarters that, heartened by the moderate stand of the Solidarity leadership, the authorities decided that a military crackdown might just succeed. Certainly, there is evidence to show that military planning did get underway in April of 1981, at a time when Solidarity was clearly trying to honor its side of the Gdansk Agreement.

Even throughout the heated debates at its Congress, the Solidarity leadership kept clearly in mind its responsibility to the workers and also to the community as a whole. In his election address Walesa, challenged as he was by Rulewski and others, told the delegates that "We have three independent self-governing structures which we should safeguard for the good of democracy." He listed the worker-participation mechanism then being elaborated, the union, and the party-and-state administration, before emphasizing that "The replacement or removal of any of these elements weakens, it really does weaken, democracy." Two weeks later, the Central Committee of the Party met and replaced Kania with General Jaruzelski as First Secretary. Solidarity was severely criticized at the party meeting. The next day, October 19, Solidarity issued a statement recognizing the need to prevent unjustified strikes. Disputes should be settled through removal of their objective causes, not by actions running counter to Polish social agreements or international conventions ratified by Poland.

The unions' National Commission met thereafter every few days, commenting on the situation and expressing a willingness to participate in serious negotiations with Jaruzelski. Nowhere, strangely, does the National Commission seem to have taken heed of the warning from its own Press Service in early October, before Kania's ousting, that Albin Sliwak, a Politbureau hardliner, had told "official" trade unionists in the city of Krosno on September 3 that a Committee for National Salvation, now reviled as the infamous KROW of martial law, had been set up with Jaruzelski at its head, and that it would act in another two months. Perhaps to this signal should have been added another. On October 16 the Polish Council of Ministers announced its decision to "extend national service for two months in the land forces for servicemen who are about to complete the second and final year of their service."

Early in November, 1981, Walesa met with Primate Archbishop Glemp and General Jaruzelski for the first time. The meeting appeared to create an atmosphere for further talks and negotiation. The Archbishop acted more as a moderator than a partner in the talks, and the Secretary of the Polish Bishops' Conference hailed the meeting as a major event in Poland's post-war history. The presidium of Solidarity issued a statement that in any negotiations with the state authorities, it was ready to make concessions and would seek a compromise for the good of