Enthusiasm, Strategy and... Fear:

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One may risk saying that there was not a single state in the democratic world that would have assumed a clearly negative attitude towards the Polish trade union movement when Solidarity emerged in August 1980. The situation occurred over an entire 16-month long period called the “Solidarity carnival.” The fact remains, however, that the positive attitude in the West towards the Polish opposition was clearly diversified and far from uniform. Between the extremes of cautious expectation or even indifference on one end of the spectrum and deep trust and clear sympathy on the other, a wide range of less apparent, more complex attitudes could be observed. All of these attitudes shared a fear of destabilization and escalation of the internal conflict within the People’s Republic of Poland, which posed the threat of awakening the Russian Bear. Such a fear was effective in subduing pro-solidarity oriented gestures in official diplomacy. As noted by Andrzej Paczkowski, Western leaders were even “inclined to constrain Solidarity, were it to move too far […]. The West neither planned nor made any attempts to destabilize the situation in Poland.”

On the other hand, after the People’s Republic of Poland had signed the Final Act of the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe in Helsinki in 1975, the Western states were offered a convenient instrument that allowed them to cater to

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the fate of the Polish opposition in the context of respect for human rights without having to worry about the argument raised by the communist authorities of “interference with the internal matters of Poland.”

It so happened that during the “Solidarity carnival,” France and the United States – countries, alongside West Germany and Great Britain, that were the most prominent Western partners of the People’s Republic of Poland – saw some very important political changes. In May 1981, France’s divided de Gaulle camp handed their power over, for the first time since 1956, to the socialists led by the new President François Mitterand. A clear “turn to the left” was taking place, at least as far as France’s domestic policy was concerned. A few months prior to those events, Jimmy Carter was replaced in the White House by Ronald Reagan, who launched a conservative revolution and hardened policy toward the USSR. These weighty political developments, although very different in character, spelled out an interim period of unavoidable tumult and were preceded by lengthy and exhausting election campaigns. Hence, although not immediately and not to such an extent as could be initially expected, they both impacted the attitude that their respective countries displayed towards the events unfolding in Poland.

As was the case elsewhere, the American assessment of the situation in Poland between August 1980 and December 1981 was greatly affected by the Soviet filter, and more specifically, by the threat of Soviet intervention in Poland, similar to the 1968 intervention in Czechoslovakia. Therefore, American diplomacy clung to the slogan, repeated like a mantra, that there was no need to interfere in Poland’s internal problems, which were to be solved by the Polish people themselves. This dogma – which was used in both the Carter and Reagan administrations – was assumed by almost all of the democratic states worldwide. NATO members were among the most consistent of its followers.
Out of respect for the meaningful Polish minority in the U.S., Washington assessed the August Agreements positively, although in very general terms. The fact that the U.S. presidential campaign was poised to enter its most decisive phase was of crucial significance for such reactions. The campaign considerably impacted the rhetoric of the departing administration. Any binding declarations concerning the Polish issue were avoided, although in talks with NATO allies at the end of August of that year, President Carter advocated increased financial support to Poland. With Congress opposing the idea, President Carter did not have many options to choose from for putting his proposition into effect. The American strategy was ambiguous – on the one hand, there were trends to “calm the Poles down” and prevent destabilization of the situation, and on the other, there was a desire to support anti-communist attitudes in Poland in order to weaken the Soviet bloc.

The events that unfolded in northern Poland were assigned a low priority status in American diplomacy, calling for moderate reaction, despite the fact that in mid-July presidential National Security Advisor Zbigniew Brzeziński assured Polish opposition activists of American support; on July 20, the American intelligence services prepared an memorandum which warned that the growing social unrest in Poland could be subdued with the use of force. On August 18, the Department of State (commonly referred to as Foggy Bottom) assured the Polish embassy that the strikes in Poland were considered to be “internal affairs of the People’s Republic of Poland and the Polish government.” It was then that the “non-interference” dogma was clearly

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formulated for the first time. At the time, this declaration could have really reflected the true approach of the United States; no deep thought was given at that time to the role and reaction of the USSR. But on August 21, the Department of State protested against the arrest of a group of Polish dissidents. A day earlier, approximately 100 congressmen signed a resolution drafted by Republican Don Ritter expressing support for the establishment of independent trade unions in Poland and for their right to strike. Prior to that, on August 2, Clement J. Zablocki, a congressman representing the Polish community, submitted to the House of Representatives a draft resolution in which he demanded the release of the arrested strike participants and called for the observance of the provisions of the Final Act of the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe. The resolution was adopted at the beginning of October, with 435 votes in favor and 0 against.

Washington clearly became aware of the international implications of the Polish crisis. On August 27, President Carter sent a letter regarding Poland to Margaret Thatcher, Valéry Giscard d’Estaing, and Helmut Schmidt. The letter stated that the events in Poland could impact the future of the entire Eastern bloc. Although Carter supported the striking employees’ desire for reform, he expressed his fear of the Soviet reaction. He suggested that the Western allies work out a common plan to be put into effect if any Soviet army movements were detected, and to adopt the principle of non-interference in Poland’s internal affairs on the basis of their relations with Moscow, thus denying the Kremlin any pretext to intervene. Shortly after the letter was sent, the CIA compiled a report suggesting that the USSR would not approve of free trade

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unions. Everyone was aware that full control over Poland gave Moscow more options to effectively restrain the GDR, Czechoslovakia, and Hungary, not to mention the Baltic Republics and Ukraine. In this context, when summing up Washington’s attitude in August toward the strikes in Poland, journalist Thomas A. Sancton wrote on September 1, 1980, about “a mixture of sympathetic concern and apprehension.”

The fact that these agreements were signed in Gdańsk and in Szczecin did not change their approach. The general statements were dominated by the stay-out-of-Poland’s-business attitude, although Jimmy Carter was convinced that “Americans [were] looking at the Polish workers with pleasure and awe,” and that such workers were displaying “peaceful determination,” “discipline,” “resilience,” and “courage,” and were an “example for those who value freedom and human dignity.” New threats began to surface as well: at the beginning of September, while in talks with the Polish Embassy, the Department of State started suggesting that Solidarity was definitely going to become a topic of interest in the upcoming presidential campaign. The increasing pressure exerted by pro-Solidarity movements was noted as well. All of this was a sign of an important shift in the strategy and attitude of American diplomacy vis-à-vis Poland.

Jimmy Carter’s cautious support for the Solidarity movement was still overshadowed by analyses of moves made by the USSR. According to the then-ambassador to Warsaw, Francis J. Meehan, it was a common belief that Moscow would not hesitate “to do away with the threat

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both for the communist rule in Poland and for its own hegemony.”

This must have been the determining reason that convinced the White House to release to Poland in mid-September the entire loan of $670 million that the Polish government had been seeking for months. Over the weeks that followed, Secretary of State Edmund Muskie assured the Poles of a “sympathetic” attitude toward any further needs. After an agreement had been reached with the workers on strike, the Carter administration started to pay greater attention to the improvement of Poland’s economic standing, which could subdue political pressure and assuage Big Brother’s pride. Therefore, a clear line was officially drawn for the truculent initiatives of the AFL-CIO.

In September, presidential aides established a Special Coordination Committee (SCC) tasked with preparing for the American reaction to the USSR’s potential invasion of Poland. Zbigniew Brzeziński was the Committee’s central figure who tried to convince the president to assume a more assertive stance toward the Polish case. In another memorandum prepared by the American intelligence services on September 19, increased Soviet military activity was reported. Undersecretary of State for Security Assistance Matthew Nimetz admitted in a conversation with Polish diplomats that the USA was “closely following” the military exercise that “differed, in some aspects, from regular maneuvers.” Those enigmatic words were clearly a sign of concern, increased by the overall deterioration of the international situation (an outbreak of war between Iran and Iraq).

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In November Ryszard Kukliński, a CIA agent and member of the General Staff of the Polish Armed Forces, began to notify the CIA of the first plans for military action to be undertaken by the Polish authorities which had the character of martial law.\textsuperscript{20} However, Polish issues were temporarily out of the spotlight after Ronald Reagan captured a surprisingly decisive victory. Speculation concerning the future policy of the president-elect also dominated the message sent by the Polish embassy in Washington.\textsuperscript{21} However, the East-West conflict was quick to return to diplomatic desks at the beginning of December 1980, acute as ever due to the unusually strong fears of the USSR’s reaction to Solidarity. On December 2, the CIA drew up a new memorandum, warning of Soviet armed forces movements that were “very untypical or unprecedented for this time of year.” As a result, President Carter, making use of a hotline to the Kremlin, warned Brezhnev that any military intervention in Poland would “harm” relations between America and the Soviet Union. This statement was all but radical. On December 4, Colonel Ryszard Kukliński sent a “very urgent” note, in which he advised that the invasion would occur within 4 days.\textsuperscript{22} The White House went into high gear, with one meeting following another. Even President-Elect Reagan was invited to participate. The administration wanted to avoid a situation in which it would be caught off-guard, as it had with the invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968 and Afghanistan in 1979.\textsuperscript{23}

\textsuperscript{20} B. Kovrig, \textit{Of Walls and Bridges}..., p. 131.
\textsuperscript{21} See e.g. AMFA, Incoming messages – Washington, in 19/156, Message No. 1672/from Washington, 6 XI 1980, p. 512.
\textsuperscript{23} T. Kemp-Welch, \textit{Solidarity and the Super-Powers}..., p. 10.
On December 7, the American administration quickly created, in cooperation with the European allies through a series of telegrams, a plan of action: an attack which would include severing diplomatic relations with Russia, a trade embargo and a discontinuance of disarmament talks.\(^{24}\) There was no mention of military activity, although methods for warning Solidarity members as well as a blockade of Cuba were considered as sanctions for Soviet actions.\(^{25}\) As tension continued to mount, the media speculated increasingly about the intervention, while the Polish-American community became more active and American intelligence services spied on Polish diplomats.\(^{26}\)

On December 9, an extraordinary meeting of NATO representatives was held, during which the potential scenarios to be put into effect in the case of Soviet intervention were agreed upon.\(^{27}\) One of the documents from the Polish intelligence services listed a detailed catalogue of such actions:

a) Political and diplomatic moves:

– breaking off cooperation under the Conference for Security and Co-operation in Europe and discontinuance of undertakings related to the implementation of the provisions of the Conference’s Final Act;

– suspending talks with the USSR on arms control and speeding up modernization of the nuclear forces;

\(^{24}\) G. J. Church, “Speak Firmly, Carry a Little Stick,” Time, 28 XII 1981; B. Kovrig, Of Walls and Bridges…, p. 132.

\(^{25}\) B. Kovrig, Of Walls and Bridges…, p. 132.


– freezing diplomatic relations with countries directly participating in the intervention, with a simultaneous reduction in the number and rank of diplomats in the remaining Eastern bloc countries;
– freezing some of the cooperation within the UN and in other international organizations.

b) Economic moves:
– demanding that socialist countries pay their debt (under pain of property blockade, e.g. confiscation of ships);
– introduction of a strict trade embargo (e.g. technical and trade licenses);
– blocking communication lines passing through NATO territory and controlling navigation routes;
– limiting telecommunications and mail exchange with aggressor states;
– liquidation of all companies and bank branches of socialist states operating in NATO countries and breaking off cooperation with them in third party territories.

c) Strategic and military undertakings:
– Western parliaments assigning additional resources for military purposes;
– speeding up development of military, sea, and air communication within NATO;
– expanding NATO’s operational area (through the Middle East, Central Asia and Africa) and welcoming new NATO members (Spain and even Australia, New Zealand and Japan);
– stepping up the military and political confrontation in the fight for influence in Africa (exerting greater pressure on pro-Soviet Angola, Mozambique, Libya, etc.).

The problems of Poland and Solidarity became in December 1980 a crucial element of politics not only in Europe, but worldwide. Although no scenario called for a military response,

\[28\text{AINR, 0449/6, vol. 7, Information on the West’s interest in the potential future developments in Poland, 23 II 1981, pp. 323–329.}\]
they were serious enough for Moscow to be interested in solving the problems in Poland through Polish hands only. Hence, the introduction of martial law on December 13 may be considered, to a certain extent, a success for the USSR: it allowed the USSR to successfully (and, as it turned out, temporarily) defeat Solidarity and avoid the most serious of consequences.

In the tense atmosphere at the start of 1981, the new Reagan administration took over on January 20. Earlier, on November 6, 1980, during the first press conference that Reagan held as President-Elect, no specific declarations were made concerning the approach he intended to adopt in the future. Reagan avoided answering a question about his attitude toward the situation in Poland. According to the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, he presented himself as “a skillful and well-prepared politician.”29 After taking office, the new head of the White House immediately expressed his intention of having permanent access to information on the situation in Poland. From then on, the CIA included with the set of daily reports submitted to the president a separate document devoted to Poland and Solidarity. Robert Gates noted that the Polish crisis “had dominated the foreign policy agenda from the day of inauguration (January 20) to Christmas.”30 According to Peter Schweizer and John O’Sullivan, this is how the new administration provoked the CIA’s greater interest in Solidarity, as previously the intelligence services had been supporting the opposition on a very limited scale, mainly by supporting its publications.31

On January 28, the first press conference devoted to Polish affairs was held by Secretary of State Alexander Haig, and a day later, by President Reagan himself. The new team had hardened the political discourse, making its critique of the USSR much more apparent. One has

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29 AINR, 1585/2876, Message No. 1771/IV from Washington, 7 XI 1980, pp. 15–16.
30 R. M. Gates, From the Shadows..., p. 227–.
to bear in mind, however, that it was the rhetoric, and not the actions, that were more radical. Coral Bell notes that even though Carter and Reagan differed in the area of “declarative politics,” they shared, rather surprisingly, quite a lot on the level of “applied politics.”32 Such a statement may seem a bit rudimentary perhaps, but it prevents us from making any extreme assessments. Moreover, as noted by the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Haig was even more cautious than the previous administration about making statements on issues related to Poland.33 His stance was more conciliatory and took into consideration, inter alia, financial support for Poland, contrary to the opinions of some NSC members who viewed Poland’s economic downfall as a method for attacking the USSR.34

According to Robert D. Blackwill, the new White House host, weaving between those two trends, did not intend to “fundamentally” affect the status quo in Eastern Europe.35 Haig confirmed this in his memoirs as well. He notes that the new administration was formulating statements that were much stronger than those issued by their predecessors, but it also intended to avoid radicalization of the Polish social resistance.36

At the same time, American intelligence was suggesting that Soviet invasion remained a feasible scenario, especially if the activity of Solidarity became more radical in character, and if

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34 A. Haig, Caveat. Realism, Reagan and Foreign Policy, London 1984, p. 239; B. Kovrig, Of Walls and Bridges…, p. 134.
35 R. D. Blackwill, “European Influences and Constraints on U.S. Policy toward the Soviet Union, [in:] U.S. – Soviet Relations: The Next Phase,” red. Arnold L. Horelick, Ithaca 1986, p. 144. The first gossip about the secret “Sonnefeld doctrine” appeared behind the political scenes as early as in 1975 (Helmut Sonnenfeldt was an aide to president Nixon and Ford). In line with the doctrine, the USA was to fully accept the fact that Eastern Europe would remain under complete influence of the USSR, see T. Kemp-Welch, Solidarity and the Super-Powers…, p. 8. The news surfaced after Sonnenfeld’s meeting with American ambassadors in December 1975, when he was to define the “organic union” of the USSR and its satellite states as favorable for the USA, as it prevented the outbreak of a new war. Under pressure exerted by immigrants form the countries in question, Sonnenfeldt denied making the statement of the “organic link”, see K. Tarka, Emigracyjna dyplomacja. Polityka zagraniczna Rządu RP na Uchodźstwie 1945–1990, Warsaw 2003, p. 249; A. Mania, Détente i polityka Stanów Zjednoczonych wobec Europy Wschodniej, styczeń 1969–styczeń 1981, Cracow 2003, pp. 117–122; P. Machcewicz, Emigracja w polityce międzynarodowej, Warsaw 1999, p. 226.
36 A. Haig, Caveat…, p. 240.
the economic and political disturbances continued. No quick solution to the rudimentary difficulties and problems was expected. In February, the Department of State drew up a contingency plan to be employed if Warsaw Pact forces decided to strike. The plan was, according to Richard Pipes, ineffective.\textsuperscript{37}

The military maneuvers of the Warsaw Pact held in March 1981 only stiffened the American position. In addition, the so-called Bydgoszcz provocation, in which several union activists were beat up by the militia, only strengthened the negative perceptions. The discrepancy between the maneuvers and the “provocation” was noted. In a statement issued on March 26 and formulated after a meeting of the National Security Council, the President expressed his “growing concern” about developments in Poland. Several days later Reagan sent a clear warning to Brezhnev (from the hospital, were he was recovering after an assassination attempt) not to transform the maneuvers into an invasion.\textsuperscript{38} The statement did not say so outright, but the president’s intention was clear.\textsuperscript{39} On April 3, the CIA presented another alert in the form of a memorandum. After the mood had subsided due to the Solidarity management calling off a general strike, the American position lost much of its resolve. A resolution on suspending strikes for two months, passed by the Sejm on April 10, was welcomed as a positive sign in Washington, and was perceived to be a step toward strengthening dialogue between the Polish authorities and Solidarity. Wałęsa’s moderate attitude was supported.\textsuperscript{40}

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Throughout the entire “Solidarity carnival,” some American politicians initiated charity campaigns that the Polish authorities considered suspicious. In the first months of 1981, for instance, a Chicago democrat by the name of Herbert started to organize, in cooperation with Congressman John Fary and Bishop Alfred Abramowicz, a food drive for Poland. The initiative had a political second bottom, as fears of Soviet invasion remained strong among the Polish community in America. The collection was “widely commented on in the American mass media.”

On June 5, the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union sent the famous letter to its Polish comrades in which they requested that their comrades refrain from caving in to the “counter revolution.” Having learned of this initiative, Alexander Haig, who was set to leave for Beijing, held a press conference in which he condemned Moscow’s interference in the affairs of Poland. Several days later, the USA announced they would begin selling weapons to China. Although the President officially denied this had anything to do with the situation in Poland, it is hard to believe that it was just a coincidence. Earlier, in May, in a meeting with graduates of the Catholic Notre Dame University, President Reagan stated that communism was a “sad, bizarre chapter in human history whose last pages are even now being written.” When one of the journalists asked, at a press conference on June 16, whether “the developments observed over the past ten months in Poland were the beginning of the end of

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41 AINR, 1585/2887, Message No. 249/II from Chicago, 8 IV 1981, p. 87.
42 “Why Weapons for Either China?” The New York Times, 13 VI 1981; B. Kovrig, Of Walls and Bridges..., p. 137; Ronald Reagan Library, The Public Papers of the President Ronald Reagan 1981–1989, Ronald Reagan’s press conference, 16 VI 1981, no page number. One of the journalists who asked Reagan the question about the relation between Poland and the contract with China suggested that weapon deliveries to Beijing were to be started in the event of the Soviet intervention in Poland. In his opinion it was the main method of exerting pressure on Moscow to indicate that the intervention in Poland would result in an increase of USA’s military support for China, Ronald Reagan Library, The Public Papers of the President Ronald Reagan 1981–1989, Ronald Reagan’s press conference, 16 VI 1981, no page number.
Soviet domination in Eastern Europe,” the President replied: “I just think that it is impossible - and history reveals this - for any form of government to completely deny freedom to people and have that go on interminably […]. And I think the things we're seeing, not only in Poland […], is an indication that communism is an aberration. It's not a normal way of living for human beings, and I think we are seeing the first, beginning cracks, the beginning of the end.”

Solidarity had definitely played a pivotal role in the shaping of similar moves and declarations, whose propaganda dimension is clearly visible as well.

At the same time, the Bureau of Intelligence and Research presented an analysis in which it suggested that Poles would widely resist a potential Soviet invasion. What is extremely interesting, is that the Bureau forecast that even the Polish army and the Polish authorities would rebel against such a decision by Big Brother. Therefore, the “martial law or some kind of a state of war” contemplated by Jaruzelski was aimed not only at quieting the opposition, but at depriving the Soviets of a pretext to intervene as well. Wasn’t the intelligence overestimating the scale of the potential resistance and the patriotism of the Polish authorities?

Colonel Kukliński’s reports became more alarming in August 1981. After the “false start” in December, his revelations concerning the potential introduction of martial law were not considered very reliable, due to disinformation by the Polish authorities and the real fear of Colonel Kukliński’s cover being blown. Nevertheless, the Reagan administration was determined to assist Solidarity in surviving for as long as possible, in order to further weaken the USSR and the Eastern bloc. At the end of July, the House of Representatives adopted resolution No. 124, which stated as follows: “The United States could not remain indifferent to any outside

\[44\] Ibidem.
aggression or internal repressions in Poland.” A day later the Senate called upon the governments and societies of “Western and Eastern Europe” to intensify financial support for the Poles.46

The First National Conference of Solidarity Delegates held in September 1981 was widely publicized in the American and Western press, just as it was among politicians. The more radical character of the union, the difficult position of Wałęsa and the risky initiative of issuing an “appeal to the brother countries” were noted.47 Gradually, news from the conference was replaced by information on the movements of Soviet armed forces, unseen since the 1940s. The American government filed a complaint in which Moscow was accused of violating the Helsinki agreement, as the objectives and scale of the exercise had not been communicated in advance. At the same time, Polish and American diplomatic skirmishes focused on the opening of Solidarity’s Information Bureau in New York. The Polish embassy filed protests with the Department of State, which, in turn, played down the issue. At the same time, preparations for a visit by a Solidarity delegation headed by Lech Wałęsa to Canada and the US were gaining in momentum. At the end of October, Wałęsa’s office informed the US and Canada that the visit had been cancelled due to the “domestic situation.”48

Shortly thereafter, on November 3, the Senate’s Foreign Affairs Committee published a report entitled “Poland: Its Renewal and a US Strategy.” This report was concerned with the period between August 1980 and the 4th Plenary Meeting of the PZPR held in October 1981. As

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46 Institute for Research on Contemporary Capitalism Problems, Kongres USA wobec spraw Polski (sierpień 1980–listopad 1983), Warsaw 1984, pp. 37, 42–43; D. MacEachin, U.S. intelligence and the confrontation in Poland…, pp. 225–234; P. Schweizer, Victory czyli zwycięstwo…, pp. 72–76. Kukliński, being aware of the suspicions of his fellow members of the General Stadd, decided to defect to America at the beginning of November. That is how the CIA has lost its most valuable source of information.


reported by the Polish embassy in Washington, the report was “sympathetic” in evaluating the developments in Poland, although it criticized the country’s economic policy. It contained a statement on Solidarity stating that certain resolutions by Conference delegates were of a “provocative” nature. The threat of Soviet intervention was not considered a high priority event. The author of the report, Diana Smith, who visited Poland in August 1981, confirmed that several different factions existed within the Reagan Administration as far as the stance towards Poland was concerned. Two points of view prevailed, according to Smith, which coincided with reports by the Polish intelligence services: the first was that the Polish experiment was perceived as favorable for the USA and that greater economic support for Poland was required. The second was more pessimistic and assumed that Solidarity would vanish as a result of Soviet intervention or economic collapse. Hence, economic support was considered pointless.49

Reagan was sitting on the fence between those two extremes. He offered Poland a number of humanitarian initiatives: on November 25, he offered in celebration of Thanksgiving a gift in the form of foodstuffs with a total value of $30 million under the “Food for Peace” program. He took the occasion to highlight “friendship between the American and Polish nations” and actions aimed at “finding a peaceful solution to the current situation in Poland.”50 That is how one camp became satisfied, by his granting of support, while the other camp remained in contempt of the US, by highlighting the exclusively humanitarian character of the initiative.

The “Solidarity carnival” evoked great interest not only among American politicians, but also among ordinary citizens and union activists. Here, support for the Polish opposition was

much less ambiguous and not as conditional, which also influenced the stance assumed by politicians. The Polish-American community, several million strong, was not to be underestimated, as it constituted a large group of voters in the presidential election. In mid-August, American East Coast dock workers started to boycott Polish ships in an effort to express their solidarity with Polish shipyard workers. The phenomenon of an independent, mass-scale social movement in a country behind the iron curtain was both fascinating and inspiring. As suggested above, the largest American trade union, the AFL-CIO, probably showed the deepest and most serious involvement in supporting Solidarity compared to trade unions from other Western countries and its involvement was definitely greater than that of the Carter administration. On August 21, Chairman of the AFL-CIO Lane Kirkland, announced full support for his Polish colleagues. Several days later in a TV interview, he said that if negotiations between the authorities and Polish trade union activists from the Gdańsk region were to fail, the AFL-CIO would attempt an international blockade of goods from the People’s Republic of Poland.

After the August Agreements were concluded, Kirkland, apart from expressing his contempt, also promised financial support that resulted in the almost immediate establishment of a special Polish Workers Aid Fund. Such clear support for Solidarity by the AFL-CIO was observed throughout the entire sixteen-month period of the “carnival.” In March 1981,  

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Kirkland’s assistant Tom Kahn, bluntly noted during a public debate concerning support for the Polish opposition that “it is our task to strengthen Solidarity.”

It was not surprising to see the Polish American community active on this issue as early as August 1980. The Polish American Congress undertook its first efforts to support the workers on strike as early as August 23. In the following days, sympathies were expressed, inter alia, by members of the Polish House in Seattle and by the Polish Canadian community. It is beyond doubt that Alojzy Mazewski, chairman of the Congress, tried to use “Solidarity” for his own gain as well, however this did not detract from the Polish community’s sincere intentions in pro-Solidarity actions. The Congress organized numerous collections for Poland and sent food and medicine. It is estimated that between 1980 and 1990, the Polish American community shipped to Poland over one thousand aid containers, whose total value equaled approximately $200 million.

It is worth noting that Solidarity became an inspiration for other opposition movements in Eastern and Central Europe. The “message to the working class of Eastern Europe” adopted by the Conference of Solidarity delegates was bearing fruit. Such a trend was very much in line with American interests, namely trying to weaken the Bloc’s cohesion. Opposition-oriented feelings manifested themselves in peace movements, gaining in strength especially in the GDR, where a large peace demonstration was held at the beginning of 1982. At the same time, bombings were reported in Bulgaria – something very unusual for the Eastern bloc: unlike communist hit squads, the anti-communist opposition had failed to develop any terrorist tactics. Intellectuals and artists became active in the USSR: Andrey Tarkovsky, Valentin Rasputin, Ilya Glazunov, Alla

55 M. Frybes, Społeczne reakcje Zachodu na fenomen „Solidarności”..., p. 514.
Pugacheva and sociologist Tatiana Zaslavska, to name a few. In Latvia, an initiative was created in October 1981 to issue a statement on the establishment of a nuclear-free zone around the Baltic Sea. At this time, vehicles with the Solidarity logo on them were visible in the streets.”

These movements, however, cannot be compared to the mass social phenomenon that was the Polish independent trade union movement. Despite this, Solidarity may be considered the motivating force that stirred the pot and led to the dismantling of the Communist system throughout the entire Eastern bloc at the end of the 1980s.

Despite being aware of the imminent collapse of the “Polish experiment,” the introduction of martial law on the night of December 12-13, 1981 took the Americans somewhat by surprise. No precise information was available in the early hours of this event, and bad weather made it difficult for spy satellites to operate. It could only be determined that no Soviet invasion took place. In reaction to this news, many politicians felt relieved.

It was only in the following days that Ronald Reagan’s reaction to martial law started to fully reflect the president’s hard, anti-communist stance, so deeply rooted in the public’s mentality. It is true that Washington decided to react in a strict manner, blaming Moscow for the events in Poland and imposing economic sanctions on Poland and the USSR. To a certain extent, however, American policy was isolated: NATO and EEC allies did not follow the American example and decided not to impose any sanctions. All parties, however, agreed that there was a need for a political boycott of Poland, a suspension of loans and a discontinuance of talks on the repayment of the Polish debt. A catalog of three proposals for General Jaruzelski’s team was prepared by the international players: abolition of martial law (later: democratization), release of the detained (later: release of prisoners of conscience) and return to dialogue with the opposition.

Those demands, despite numerous variations or shifts in value, were to survive in their basic form until the end of the 1980s. It seems that they played – along with the pressure exerted by Western public opinion which was infuriated with the demise of Solidarity and undertook numerous pro-Solidarity initiatives – an undisputable role in the evolution of the political reality of the People’s Republic of Poland, and consequently, in its dissolution.