

## **The Road to Martial Law: Polish Communist Authorities vs. Solidarity**

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When “Solidarity” was born in the second half of 1980, the potential event development scenarios remained unknown to the authorities of the People’s Republic of Poland. It seemed that all solutions were potentially feasible at that time, from the acceptance of the permanent activity of a trade union operating within the framework of a socialist system, to its immediate liquidation. The period of sixteen months during which Solidarity was allowed to operate freely is commonly referred to as a “carnival,” although it had absolutely nothing to do with fun or relaxation. That period of trade union freedom, with freedom understood literally, was a period of daily confrontation between communist authorities and members of Solidarity and other opposition organizations. The forms this struggle took varied, as it was conducted on numerous planes, with its repercussions impacting international politics and finally resulting in the imposition of martial law. Solidarity may have been done away with, but the ideas that the independent trade union stood for were never quashed. Prior to that, however, numerous events took place whose course and origins are worth examining, as the road to martial law was a long and bumpy one.

First of all, it is worth knowing who was responsible on the authorities’ side for shaping policy towards Solidarity, and what entities were involved in its implementation. The broadly

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understood notion of “communist authorities” involved the party apparatus, the government, local administration, military and civilian repression services, and the Polish Army. The activity of these institutions and especially that of the secret police (Służba Bezpieczeństwa – SB), was supervised by the Polish United Workers’ Party (PZPR), more specifically by the First Secretary of the Central Committee, who was in charge of the party’s entire policy. Edward Gierek, who had ruled the country since 1970, was removed from the position of first secretary on September 6, 1980. He was accused of causing an economic depression, and his erroneous economic decisions sparked large-scale workers’ protests, thus contributing to the establishment of Solidarity. Gierek’s successor, Stanisław Kania, managed to remain in power for only slightly over a year. His opponents stressed his weak approach towards independent trade unions. He himself was not in favor of a forceful confrontation with Solidarity, which, in turn, elicited criticism from the party’s hardliners. Kania also lacked the strong support of other Soviet bloc leaders. He was replaced in October 1981 by General Wojciech Jaruzelski, who simultaneously acted as prime minister and minister of national defense. The appointment of a professional soldier to the position of first secretary of the Central Committee of the Polish United Workers’ Party was met with numerous domestic and foreign repercussions. According to the propaganda, such a move was aimed at reinstating the country’s stability and order. Finally, it was Jaruzelski who introduced martial law and cracked down on the opposition.

The camp in power, just like Solidarity, was by no means a monolith at the time. Numerous factions and structures existed within the party representing differing visions of a solution to the Polish crisis. In the first half of 1981, the hardliners became active, seeking the support of the Kremlin and striving for an armed confrontation with Solidarity. These high-ranking PZPR officials included, inter alia, Tadeusz Grabski, Stefan Olszowski, Albin Siwak and

Stanisław Kociołek.<sup>2</sup> They maintained very good relations with the Soviet embassy in Warsaw and clearly presented their disapproval of the party's then-management.<sup>3</sup> These party circles, also referred to as "the party concrete," were also supported by the authorities of the German Democratic Republic. A plot was hatched to remove First Secretary Kania and Prime Minister Wojciech Jaruzelski, to be put in effect by the party's conservative members under the leadership of Tadeusz Grabski. An attempt was made at the 11<sup>th</sup> Plenary Session of the Central Committee in June 1981, but the putsch was compromised.<sup>4</sup> Their motion to remove Kania and Jaruzelski from power was supported by only 24 Central Committee members - 5 abstained and 89 were against it.<sup>5</sup> Despite their painful defeat, the hardliners remained a strong group capable of exerting considerable pressure, first on Kania and then on Jaruzelski, who were well aware of the group's Kremlin connections. A movement trying to introduce a greater degree of democracy within the party, i.e. the so-called lateral structures, was also visible although slightly marginalized.<sup>6</sup> The party's liberal circles were represented, among others by Hieronim Kubiak, Andrzej Werblan, Jerzy Wiatr, and Tadeusz Fiszbach. They enjoyed no support from the communist leaders of the Soviet bloc, with their ideas of necessary PZPR reforms having earned them accusations of presenting revision-oriented and social democratic beliefs.

The establishment of an independent trade union shook the Polish United Workers' Party. Many of its members left the organization and joined Solidarity. Others retained their party membership while joining the ranks of the independent trade union. The PZPR was falling

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<sup>2</sup> Andrzej Paczkowski, *Wojna polsko-jaruzelska. Stan wojenny w Polsce 13 XII 1981-22 VII 1983*, Warsaw 2006, p. 250.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Witalij Pawłow, *General Pawłow: byłem rezydentem KGB w Polsce*, Warsaw 1994, pp. 139-163

<sup>4</sup> *Tajne dokumenty Biura Politycznego. PZPR a „Solidarność” 1980-1981*, edited by Z. Włodek, London 1992, pp. 401-405.

<sup>5</sup> Andrzej Paczkowski, *Świat i blok sowiecki wobec „kryzysu polskiego” oraz stanu wojennego [in:] Wokół „mniejszego zła”. Stan wojenny w Polsce. Materiały pokonferencyjne*, Wrocław 2010, p. 21.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Roman Becker, *Struktury poziome w Toruniu (1980-1981)*, Warszawa 1990; Cegła M., *Struktury poziome w Polskiej Zjednoczonej Partii Robotniczej [in:] Polska lewica w XX wieku. Historia – ludzie – idee*, edited by T. Ślęzak, M. Śliwa, Cracow 2004, pp. 270–280.

apart. The party, which was previously intended to be the Polish nation's avant-garde, was in reality divided and full of conflicts over the mistakes committed by its previous leaders. As far as the nature of PZPR is concerned, one must note that the party was neither fully Polish, nor united, nor did it belong to the working class. Moreover, it was not a party proper, but an administrative structure that managed the state from the top of the pyramid all the way down to the smallest factories and local administrative units.<sup>7</sup> Its importance, however, cannot be underestimated, as it still exercised control over the security forces and offered its members measurable benefits, in the form of a better and more comfortable life.

### **A Tactical Concession – The Legalization of “Solidarity”**

During the strike in the Gdańsk Shipyard in August 1980, the authorities had not yet decided how to react to the protesters' demands. In the first place, the Polish communists were irritated by the workers' drive to establish an independent trade union. Authorizing a structure that would remain beyond the control of the party's apparatus and secret police could only bring about unimaginable consequences. Hence, in August, the National Defense Committee (Komitet Obrony Kraju) ordered Chief of Staff of the Polish Armed Forces General Florian Siwicki to undertake studies on the introduction of martial law. The idea of a forcible solution to the problem of mass strikes was first presented on August 26, 1980 by Deputy Minister of the Interior General Bogusław Stachura. The plan was part of the “Summer-80” operation and was drawn up by a special task force coordinating protest-related actions. It consisted of, inter alia, the military unblocking the ports, blocking the Gdańsk shipyard and the military arresting members of the strike committee along with Lech Wałęsa.<sup>8</sup> The scenario was discussed three

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<sup>7</sup> *Przewodnia siła narodu. O Polskiej Zjednoczonej Partii Robotniczej z Łukaszem Kamińskim* [in:] B. Polak, *Rozmowy*, Warsaw 2007, pp. 172–173.

<sup>8</sup> Andrzej Paczkowski, *Droga do „mniejszego zła”*. *Strategia i taktyka obozu władzy lipiec 1980-styczeń 1982*, Cracow 2002, pp. 39-41.

days later at a session of the Central Committee's Political Bureau, but the party management decided to avoid confrontation.<sup>9</sup> The security forces and the party members themselves were not ready for such a solution yet. It was also feared that the events would spark more protests in other regions of the country, especially when considering the fact that the strikes had approximately 700,000 participants.<sup>10</sup> That is why the authorities decided to conclude agreements with the protesters.

The party's management, however, had no illusions as to the lasting character of the August Agreements. They were considered a necessary concession, a tactical gambit allowing the party to regroup and win some time required to come up with a plan to do away with Solidarity completely. In the meantime, the authorities were willing to accept a compromise, hoping that the future trade union would be subjected to party supervision.

Communist decision makers never expected that a trade union independent of their control would gain a permanent place within the then-existing political system. Instead, they slowly but systematically prepared for the ultimate crackdown on the opposition. In October 1980, prior to Solidarity's official legalization by a court, work commenced in the Ministry of the Interior and in the General Staff of the Polish Armed Forces on operation "W" – i.e. war. The "set of legal acts necessary for the introduction of martial law" was ready in November. Over the following months, plans that the Ministry of Interior and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs had created were fine-tuned. A military exercise was held in 1981, during which operational plans were put to the test. The territorial range of martial law was one of the principle questions that remained to be answered. Although it was initially considered that martial law's range would be

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<sup>9</sup> *Tajne dokumenty...*, pp. 84-90.

<sup>10</sup> Antoni Dudek, *Dzieje dziesięcioletniej „Solidarności” (1980-1981)* [in:] *Droga do niepodległości. Solidarność 1980-2005*, collective work, Warsaw 2005, p. 25.

limited and that it would be imposed only in one or several provinces of the country, these plans were later abandoned for fear of Solidarity - inspired strikes.<sup>11</sup>

The authorities' consent for Solidarity's continued operation did not change the negative stance of the former towards the latter. The communist state was continuing with its repression policy, although the establishment of Solidarity constituted a considerable limitation thereof. Despite the official guarantee of free operation, the PZPR management did everything in its power to make the life of the independent trade union as difficult as possible. Periodic tensions could be observed between the party and Solidarity, which initially gained in strength, giving rise to serious concerns, but were then settled peacefully by means of mediation. A general strike that could paralyze the entire country was the argument that the union took advantage of most frequently. The character of the actions taken against Solidarity served as proof that no way existed to successfully implement the trade union into the then-existing political system.

### **Official Anti-Union Propaganda**

In their conflict with Solidarity, the authorities had a trump card - the mass media - which was fully subordinate to the party and played the role of a conveyor belt, only presenting information accepted by the censors, i.e. the Main Office for Press, Publications and Show Control.<sup>12</sup> Propaganda efforts were led by the Education, Ideology, Press and Television Department of the Central Committee of the PZPR. Department Secretary Stefan Olszowski was considered a supporter of the party's conservative faction. Thanks to mass media remaining at their disposal, the communist authorities were able to shape the image of Solidarity to their liking. The independent trade union was authorized to publish one nationwide weekly paper,

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<sup>11</sup> *Stan wojenny w dokumentach władz PRL (1980-1983)*, oprac. Bogusław Kopka, Grzegorz Majchrzak, Warsaw 2001, pp. 13-14.

<sup>12</sup> The name changed for the Main Office for Publication and Performance Control in July 1981.

*Tygodnik Solidarność*, published between April and December 1981 with a circulation of 500,000 copies.

The party's most prominent daily, *Trybuna Ludu*, criticized the actions of Solidarity leaders in almost every issue. The hardline faction of the PZPR, however, was not satisfied with the existing anti-Solidarity propaganda and created a new weekly in May 1981 at the initiative of Stefan Olszowski. It was entitled *Rzeczywistość*. The paper was a propaganda vessel for national communists who were reluctant to start a dialogue with Solidarity. The journalists of this magazine disclosed the alleged numerous connections between trade union leaders and forces of American imperialism, German revisionism, and Jewish Zionism.<sup>13</sup> Materials and documents that the secret police obtained illegally were published as well in their struggle against Solidarity.<sup>14</sup> They were moving ever further in their anti-union propaganda. Numerous press articles in which Solidarity activists were presented as traitors of the Polish nation, NATO servants, and counter revolutionaries no longer sufficed. The communist mass media was oblivious to the peaceful character of Solidarity, and was not open to its arguments. According to the regime media, members of the independent trade union were even aiming at a forcible confrontation that would unquestionably lead to a civil war. Despite strongly biased radio and television shows, in which the hosts did everything in their power to disparage Solidarity, the union enjoyed considerable support within Polish society. Communist decision makers even decided to employ anti-Semitic propaganda by supporting the nationalistic and xenophobic Grunwald Patriotic Union (Zjednoczenie Patriotyczne "Grunwald"). The party management attempted to use the hatred of Jews in Polish society to belittle some Solidarity's aides of Jewish

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<sup>13</sup> Tomasz Mielczarek, *Od Nowej Kultury do Polityki. Tygodniki społeczno-kulturalne i społeczno-polityczne PRL*, Kielce 2003, pp. 102-103.

<sup>14</sup> AINR, 01285/571, Letter by Director of the 1<sup>st</sup> Department of the Ministry of Defense gen. Jan Słowikowski to the Minister of Interior gen. Czesław Kiszczak, Warsaw, 29 IX 1981, p. 30.

origin, especially those related to the Workers' Defense Committee (KOR).<sup>15</sup> The instrumental use of anti-Semitic attitudes as attempted by the authorities was met, however, with loud protests at home and abroad, forcing the communists to abandon such disreputable rhetoric.<sup>16</sup>

In addition to the propaganda coordinated by the relevant department of the party's Central Committee, the military pursued its own policy aimed at presenting Solidarity in a negative light. The daily *Żołnierz Wolności* and the veterans' weekly *Za Wolność i Lud* led the way in the deceitful presentation of the political situation. The Main Political Board of the Polish Armed Forces coordinated military propaganda. Officers working for this institution influenced the political attitudes of professional army employees and shaped a proper, ideological line of information that was presented to regular conscripts. Military print houses turned out thousands of anti-trade union leaflets, posters, and books. In preparation for martial law, officers of the Main Political Board printed 500,000 copies of 40 posters and 660,000 copies of 300 propaganda leaflets. Conscripts were indoctrinated so that their minds would be full of negative attitudes or even hatred towards Solidarity.<sup>17</sup>

### **Pressure by Soviet Bloc Countries**

The legal character of Solidarity was a problem that had to be faced not only by the Polish authorities. It was a challenge for all communist governments under Moscow's influence. The leaders of those countries were afraid that the ideas promoted by the independent trade unions would spill over into their countries, leading to a "domino effect", i.e. the spreading of trade union freedom and social unrest among other countries of the Soviet bloc. Hence, from the

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<sup>15</sup> P. Gasztold-Seń, *Zjednoczenie Patriotyczne „Grunwald” – charakterystyka stowarzyszenia* [in:] *Letnia Szkoła Historii Najnowszej 2008*, edited by Monika Bielak, Łukasz Kamiński, Warsaw 2009, pp. 112-124.

<sup>16</sup> A. Paczkowski, *The Spring Will Be Ours. Poland and the Poles from Occupation to Freedom*, University Park PA, 2005, pp. 431.

<sup>17</sup> Paweł Piotrowski, *Propaganda wojskowa w okresie kryzysu politycznego 1980-1981 i stanu wojennego* „Biuletyn Instytutu Pamięci Narodowej” 2001, issue 11, pp. 31-37.

moment Solidarity was established, Polish party authorities were subjected to great pressure from Soviet bloc leaders who insisted that the independent trade union be dealt with. Moreover, both Polish society and party circles feared that the Soviet invasion of Poland could be a real option. The Brezhnev doctrine, under which a military intervention by Warsaw Pact armed forces was allowed to protect the socialist state system, was still in effect. Poles remembered the Prague Spring of 1968, violently subdued by Soviet tanks. A year before Solidarity was established, the Soviet army entered Afghanistan, so the Polish scenario remained unclear.<sup>18</sup> It is worth adding that discussions concerning the probability of this “brotherly” intervention in Poland will continue as long as Russian archives remain closed.

At the beginning of December 1980, a meeting of communist state leaders was held in order to discuss the Polish crisis. At the same time, authorities in Warsaw were informed that Warsaw Pact maneuvers known as “Soyuz 80” would take place in Poland. The exercise was to include troops from Poland, the USSR, Czechoslovakia, and the GDR. In addition, military forces were to be deployed around big industrial centers, with the maneuvers aimed at supporting the introduction of martial law. In the end, no such plans were put into effect. According to First Secretary of the Central Committee Stanisław Kania, Leonid Brezhnev informed him that no intervention would take place yet, but that there would be no hesitation should the need arise. The form of pressure exerted on the Polish party management changed at that time. It was the Soviet bloc countries that demanded their Polish comrades solve the Solidarity problem by themselves.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Cf. Andrew Bennett, *Condemned to Repetition? The Rise, Fall, and Reprise of Soviet-Russian Military Interventionism, 1973-1996*, Cambridge MA 1999.

<sup>19</sup> *Przed i po 13 grudnia. Państwa bloku wschodniego wobec kryzysu w PRL 1980-1982, tom 1 (sierpień 1980-marzec 1981)*, edited by Łukasz Kamiński, Warsaw 2006; *Przed i po 13 grudnia. Państwa bloku wschodniego wobec kryzysu w PRL 1980-1982, tom 2, (kwiecień 1981-grudzień 1982)*, edited by Ł. Kamiński, Warsaw 2007.

Moscow's pressure on Polish communists to crack down on the opposition with the use of their own forces lasted until martial law was imposed. Moscow made use of various methods, with economic pressure being one of them. The Soviets threatened the Polish authorities with reducing gas, crude oil, and other raw materials. A letter sent by the Central Committee of the CPSU to the Central Committee of the Polish United Workers' Party on June 5, 1981 offered some psychological support to the team of Kania and Jaruzelski, as the phrases it contained, e.g. "socialist Poland, our brotherly Poland will not be left alone in need and we shall not allow it to be harmed" were a clear threat of the potential intervention by the Eastern protector.<sup>20</sup>

The Polish party decision-makers decided to use the psychosis of the Polish society, frightened by the potential Soviet invasion, for their own propaganda purposes. During one of the meetings held at the Ministry of the Interior on November 25, 1981, General Czesław Kiszczak stressed that he wanted to "use the threat of intervention and the gathering of military forces across the border as a deterrent, to keep saying that not only Soviet, but also Czech and German forces may enter." Moreover, at the beginning of December 1981, General Jaruzelski requested through the Soviets that the Committee of Ministers of the Warsaw Pact holding talks in Moscow issue a strict message, unequivocally threatening the use of force. Much to his disappointment, after Romania and Hungary opposed the idea, no such message was adopted. Several days later, Polish communists once more requested the Soviet Union provide military assistance, most likely in the form of a protective operation. The presence of foreign military forces would have definitely had considerable psychological effect, but the Kremlin's decision makers refused to go along, arguing that Poles had to deal with the situation on their own.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Wojciech Polak, *Związek Sowiecki jako inspirator wprowadzenia stanu wojennego w Polsce* [in:] *Stan wojenny. Fakty, hipotezy, interpretacje*, edited by Arkadiusz Cwołek, Wojciech Polak, Toruń 2008, pp. 58-59.

<sup>21</sup> Łukasz Kamiński, *1981: koniec doktryny Breżniewa* [in:] *Od Piłsudskiego do Wałęsy. Studia z dziejów Polski w XX wieku*, collective work, Warsaw 2008, pp. 488-489.

## Anti-Solidarity Campaigns by the Secret Police

The party and the government aside, the independent trade union had to face another formidable enemy – the communist secret police. In November 1980, the secret police commenced operation “Clan,” aimed at covering Solidarity’s leadership with close surveillance. The secret operation consisted of, inter alia, installing bugs and controlling correspondence, as well as following selected Solidarity activists. The entire elite of the union was under close surveillance. Secret police officers collected various types of information concerning resumes, addictions, habits, family relations, strong and weak personality features, domicile and neighbors’ opinions concerning individual Solidarity activists. In other words, they were interested in anything that could come in handy in combating the independent trade union.<sup>22</sup>

Secret collaborators were recruited from those under surveillance, who agreed to cooperate with the authorities, having been threatened by blackmail or lured by material gains. Such actions gave the communist authorities access to the unions’ documents and provided them with knowledge on the moods prevailing in individual Solidarity structures. The secret collaborators acted under Secret Police orders, supporting, for instance, the more moderate activists, or quite the contrary, striving for confrontation with the authorities, which was suitably used for propaganda purposes in the regime’s press. Secret police officers also used disinformation by presenting forged documents or declarations meant to disrupt the stable operation of the union and augment a mood of suspicion amongst its activists. At the beginning of 1981, there were over 1,800 secret collaborators within Solidarity’s members.<sup>23</sup> On December 3, 1981 two of these collaborators recorded a meeting between the National Committee Board

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<sup>22</sup> Grzegorz Majchrzak, *Działania SB wobec NSZZ „Solidarność” w latach 1980-1982* [in:] *Czas przełomu. Solidarność 1980-1981*, edited by Wojciech Polak, Przemysław Ruchlewski, Violetta Kmieciak, Jakub Kufel, Gdańsk 2011, p. 678.

<sup>23</sup> Sławomir Cenckiewicz, *Powstrzymać powódź kontrrewolucji. Służba Bezpieczeństwa wobec „Solidarności” w latach 1980-1981*, [in:] *Droga do niepodległości...*, pp. 85-103.

and chairmen of Solidarity's regional boards, held in Radom. The recording, minus some minor fragments, was broadcast a few days later on Polish Radio and presented a manipulated picture of the union striving for confrontation with the communist authorities.<sup>24</sup>

### **Introduction of Martial Law**

The communists in the PZPR had been planning to introduce martial law for quite some time. The moment at which they planned to strike was selected very meticulously. In the second half of 1981, support for Solidarity fell from 74 to 58 percent, and although the union's authority remained unquestioned, it could no longer count on the backing it had previously enjoyed.<sup>25</sup> Regime propaganda made good use of all of the methods it had at its disposal to compromise the union. It distributed, inter alia, manipulated tapes from the Radom meeting of Solidarity's management and used the mass media to criticize the union's disruptive policy.<sup>27</sup>

The authorities had been getting ready to impose martial law since the fall of 1980. By mid-March 1981, the Polish army and forces subordinate to the Ministry of Interior were ready to hit Solidarity structures, but the final decision was withheld for another six months. During that time, special emphasis was placed on propaganda-related preparations for martial law, and a campaign of numerous "local confrontations" with the union was conducted. Special protection measures were taken with regard to families of officers in the armed forces, and weapons were distributed amongst the most trusted party members.<sup>29</sup>

During a Political Bureau meeting on December 5, 1981, the party leadership agreed to the introduction of martial law.<sup>30</sup> General Wojciech Jaruzelski chose the date of December 13 – a

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<sup>24</sup> Grzegorz Majchrzak, *Działania Ministerstwa Spraw Wewnętrznych w okresie stanu wojennego* [in:] *Wokół „mniejszego zła”*..., p. 71.

<sup>25</sup> A. Paczkowski, *Droga do „mniejszego zła”*..., pp. 235-236.

<sup>27</sup> *Stan wojenny w dokumentach*..., p. 15.

<sup>29</sup> Sebastian Ligarski, *Walka o umysły. Propagandowe przygotowania do wprowadzenia w Polsce stanu wojennego* [in:] *Czas przełomu*..., pp. 661-672.

<sup>30</sup> *Tajne dokumenty*..., pp. 549-569.

Sunday – as a good tactical move which would prevent Solidarity members from conducting any effective protests at their workplaces. During the State Council meeting of December 13, 1981, the relevant legal regulations were passed, but the entire martial law introduction operation had begun several hours prior.<sup>31</sup> The lists of those who were to be detained had been continuously updated throughout 1981. Finally, by December 22, 1981, 5,179 persons were detained. During the period of martial law 10,132 detainment decisions were issued. This form of repression was used mainly towards Solidarity members, but it is worth noting that members of the former party leadership, with Edward Gierek among them, were detained as well.<sup>32</sup>

Initially the communist authorities tried to re-organize the trade union and to subordinate it fully to the regime by establishing neo-Solidarity. The aim of the operation was to install obedient union leaders who would shape the organization's policy along with the secret police collaborators. The idea never materialized, however, mainly due to the unwavering attitude of Lech Wałęsa, who refused to participate in such a "licensed" initiative.<sup>33</sup> Although the authorities succeeded in pacifying a social movement with millions of members, the ideas of freedom and self-governance were not forgotten. The union became an underground organization and continued to operate. The involvement and willingness for sacrifice displayed by members of the banned Solidarity produced results in 1989, when, plagued by economic problems, the authorities were finally forced to commence talks with the opposition.

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<sup>31</sup> G. Majchrzak, *Obóz władzy w stanie wojennym* [in:] *Droga do niepodległości...*, pp. 107-108.

<sup>32</sup> T. Kozłowski, J. Olaszek, *Internowani w stanie wojennym. Dane statystyczne*, „Pamięć i Sprawiedliwość” 2010, issue 2, pp. 507-510.

<sup>33</sup> S. Cenckiewicz, *Oczami bezpieki. Szkice i materiały z dziejów aparatu bezpieczeństwa PRL*, Kraków 2006, pp. 451-454.