

Statement on the Fifth Anniversary of the Solidarity Movement in Poland

August 31, 1985

In the history of Eastern Europe since World War II, there have been few events whose anniversaries can be celebrated with any sense of pride or satisfaction. The lot of these countries has been one of repression, of sacrifice, of waiting for a better day that never comes. Five years ago, however, in a unique, spontaneous, and overwhelming expression of the public will, the working people of Poland exacted from their government the right to form their own free trade unions. The myth of the "worker state," as Communist governments so misleadingly characterize themselves, was thereby shattered for all time.

During the ensuing 15 months, some 10 million Polish citizens banded together under the banner of the Solidarity movement, to be joined by 4 million farmers who created their own union along similar lines. Their goals were no different from those of the working class throughout the world -- decent working conditions, a fair wage, an economic system that works, and a genuine voice in shaping the society of which they form the foundation. They pursued those goals then, as they do today, not with force, for they had no weapons other than indomitable courage, steadfast will, and a readiness to accept high risks in pursuit of their cause. Not one drop of blood was shed when Polish workers gained their victory, and Solidarity has consistently eschewed violence in any form ever since.

These brave aspirations were brought to a temporary standstill in December 1981, when, pressured by Moscow, Gen. Wojciech Jaruzelski used the Polish Armed Forces to impose martial law on his own people, to arrest most of Solidarity's leaders and many of the rank and file, to force others into hiding, and to withdraw from the union its legal right to exist. Since that day, the alienation of the Polish Government from the people it professes to represent has become all too evident.

But Solidarity has not died, nor have the principles for which it came into existence become any less urgent in the minds of the Polish people. Despite all oppressive measures, provocations, imprisonment, police brutality, and even killings, this, the only free trade union in the entire Communist world, has continued its struggle by peaceful means to persuade its government to provide all elements of the society a role in shaping Poland's destiny. Although Solidarity's voice has been muted by being forced underground, its message -- whether via underground radio, clandestine publications, public demonstrations, or by simple word of mouth -- continues to be heard clearly throughout Poland and throughout the world, wherever there are people who value freedom.

We here in the United States have also heard Solidarity's message and respond to it with all our hearts. We call upon the Polish Government to do likewise. This is not a subversive organization. It asks only that basic human rights be observed and that Poland be governed by responsible and responsive leaders. It asks those leaders to seek participation of workers, managers, and technocrats, academicians and intelligentsia, and the cohesive strength of the church in grappling with the massive economic and societal problems which must be solved if Poland is to assume its rightful place within the brotherhood of nations. Should such a reconciliation take place, the traditional hand of American friendship will be ready and unreservedly extended to Poland, just as it has been throughout the last 200 years. Meanwhile, we shall continue to support the legitimate hopes of our Polish brothers and sisters who are defending our common values.

<http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1985/83185b.htm>