

# The Missing Commemoration: Thoughts on the Meaning of Solidarity

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*On the 30th anniversary of the 1989 "velvet revolutions" that resulted in the downfall of communist regimes in the Soviet bloc countries of Central and Eastern Europe, there was little reflection on the most important social and political movement that helped to bring about this transformation of the region. That movement was the Independent and Self-Governing Trade Union, Solidarity in Poland (Solidarność in Polish). Solidarity's importance as a worker and trade union movement in bringing freedom to Eastern Europe has long been overlooked. Indeed, the official conference marking the 25th anniversary of Solidarity's historic rise in 1980 did not even consider its role as a trade union. The following article was written on that occasion in 2005 to explore the fuller meaning of Solidarity. The lost meaning of Solidarity has had profound consequences for the region. Eric Chenoweth was director of the Committee in Support of Solidarity from 1981 to 1988.*

The August 1980 strikes of Polish workers that led to the signing of the Gdansk Agreements are recognized today as one of the 20<sup>th</sup> century's most consequential events. While not altering Poland's governance, they were revolutionary. By guaranteeing Polish workers the right to freedom of association and the right to strike, the Agreements broke the monopoly control of the communist state over Polish society and shattered the communist party's claims of legitimacy as the sole representative of a "workers' state." Out of the Gdansk Agreements, the free trade union Solidarity emerged with ten million members, nearly the entire industrial and professional workforce. Nine years later, after enduring the imposition of martial law and seven years of repression, Solidarity's re-emergence would lead eventually to the downfall of Soviet communism and the end of the Cold War, transforming both a nation and a continent.

And so, 25 years later, 500 foreigners and Poles gathered in Warsaw, Poland at the conference called "From Solidarity to Freedom" to mark the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the signing of the Gdansk Agreements. Solidarity's legendary leader Lech Walesa was joined by flocks of politicians, advisers, foreign dignitaries, academics, journalists, writers, and, of course, President Aleksander Kwasniewski, head of the ex-communist Party of the Democratic Left (SDL), which has held power eight of the previous twelve years. They all came to discuss the moral, human rights, religious, intellectual, European, foreign, epochal, and other high-minded dimensions of the Solidarity movement. On August 31, the day the Agreements were signed, conference participants all went to Gdansk to the now desolate Gate No. 2 of the Shipyard to give their seal of approval to a European Center of Solidarity and a proposed International Day of Solidarity.

Everyone came. Except, one wondered, "Where was Solidarity? Where was the Polish worker?"

In the end, "From Solidarność to Freedom" was mostly an exclusive commemoration of intellectuals aimed at symbolism not substance. Many of the intellectuals played important roles in the movement; others hung around it. But the event excluded most of those who played

significant roles in Solidarity.<sup>(1)</sup> Worse, it ignored the broadly universal and pluralist nature of Solidarity within Polish society in favor of promoting the political agenda of a small liberal party claiming some heritage in Solidarity but without support to enter parliament.

What was lost in the conference's discussion and analysis was a recognition of the essential quality and meaning of Solidarity as a trade union and workers movement. It is not the first time. In 1989, many of Solidarity's leaders and advisers turned their backs on the union after entering the parliament and politics. The 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration "From Solidarność to Freedom" only continued in that spirit of downplaying Solidarity the trade union, its current and former members, and the idea of solidarity itself. But a true understanding of Solidarity — and a true commemoration — is impossible without taking a broader look at this history.

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The triumph of the Gdansk Agreements on August 31, 1980 was the triumph of Polish workers and their demand for freedom of association. Looking back, the event seems just a seamless part of history, achieved without effort. But this was no easy victory. Starting in the early days of July, workers organized a series of scattered strikes throughout Poland protesting price increases and expressing widespread anger at the regime. Free Trade Union Committees on the Baltic Coast and in the Śląsk region had for several years worked clandestinely to promote the idea of worker rights and observance of International Labor Organization (ILO) Conventions, which the Polish People's Republic was signatory to, and especially of Convention No. 87 guaranteeing freedom of association and of No. 98 ensuring the right to strike and collective bargaining.<sup>(2)</sup> Everyone understood, however, that promoting ILO Conventions as the basis for opposition went beyond the issue of basic working standards and struck at the heart of the "workers' state."

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<sup>1</sup> Only two of the eighteen signers of the Gdansk Agreements participated in the conference, Lech Walesa and Bogdan Lis, who is director of his Lech Walesa Institute. For history's sake, the other members of the Interfactory Strike Committee's Presidium who signed the Agreements were: Andrzej Kolodziej, vice chairman, Lech Badkowski, Wojciech Gruszewski, Andrzej Gwiazda, Stefan Izdebski, Jerzy Kwiecik, Zdzisław Kobylinski, Henryka Krzywonos, Stefan Lewandowski, Alina Pienkowska, Jozef Przybylski, Jerzy Sikorski, Lech Sobieszek, Tadeusz Stanny, Anna Walentynowicz, and Florian Wisniewski. Badkowski and Pienkowska are deceased.

<sup>2</sup> The ILO was founded in 1919 as a part of the Versailles Treaty at the instigation of American Federation of Labor's first president Samuel Gompers and it is the only surviving international institution emerging from the League of Nations. In 1947 and 1948, the ILO adopted its most important conventions, No. 87 and No. 98, which have formed the foundation of the ILO's post-war promotion of worker rights. All countries under the Soviet Union's occupation were members of the ILO and signatories to the conventions.

Unlike the earlier worker protests, the strike at the Gdansk Shipyards that began on August 14 was well-prepared. It aimed not only at increased wages to offset price increases but also at forcing the management to take back dismissed free trade union activists Anna Walentynowicz, a recently fired crane operator, and Lech Walesa and Andrzej Gwiazda, two workers fired after the strikes in 1970. Although these demands were effectively met on the 16th, Walesa, Gwiazda, and other leaders of the Free Trade Unions of the Baltic Coast convinced many of their shipyard colleagues to stay when they were joined by a large number of workers representing other enterprises who favored more radical action. During the night, strike leaders prepared 21 Demands and the workers agreed to organize a joint strike committee and to go for an unprecedented agreement demanding independent trade unions, the right to strike, free expression, improved working conditions, a commemoration of shipyard workers killed in 1970, free Saturdays, wage improvements, and the right to influence basic economic decisions.

Nationwide, workers responded with remarkable speed to the strikes in Gdansk and the 21 Demands of what was now being called the Interfactory Strike Committee (MKS). By August 26, more than 2 million workers were taking part in sit-down strikes and 800 to 1,000 worker representatives had been sent to Gdansk to join the MKS at the Lenin Shipyard. Four other MKSes had been formed on the Baltic Coast and in Lower and Upper Silesia.

Each day of the strike brought “news” of an impending attack on the Shipyard. Despite the government’s campaign of intimidation (including manipulation of food supplies, electricity, and water, arrests, and an increasingly threatening propaganda campaign), the workers faced down their fears and remained united behind their demands. As the nationwide strike grew, the workers gained confidence and the central government recognized its own cul de sac and agreed to negotiate with the MKS. The government slowly and grudgingly agreed to the demands, most importantly the right to freedom of association and to strike, and succeeded only in introducing vague implementation language. The one major concession that MKS advisers from Warsaw argued was necessary was the inclusion of the union’s recognition of the leading role of the communist party in its statutes. (It was accepted by the MKS representatives only after a night of heated debate.) The Agreements were signed on the 31<sup>st</sup>. This was followed by similar agreements in Konin, Szczecin, and the mining region of Jastrzebie, meaning that the 21 Points covered all of Poland’s workers. The first free trade union in a communist country was born.

The Polish strikes were the largest and most successful sit-down strike in history. This was followed by the most remarkable organizing campaign in the history of the international labor movement. Nearly ten million workers and professional employees registered as members of Solidarity, most joining within a month of the Gdansk Agreements. This mass registration was a total repudiation not only of the regime trade unions (the “transmission belts” for the communist party) but also of the communist system itself and its ideological claim to represent the working class as its *raison d’etre*. In fact, the repudiation was universal. Around 2 million farmers joined Rural Solidarity. Hundreds of thousands of students, writers, artists, and members of other intellectual professions created new organizations or transformed old ones.

An entire society was organized through the demand for observance of ILO Convention No. 87.<sup>(3)</sup>

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Today, many observers and analysts now wish to explain the rise of Solidarity by citing the central role of the Church and Karol Wojtyła's election as Pope John Paul II. Lech Wałęsa stated at the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary conference that Solidarity would not have been born without the "miracle of the Polish Pope." Both factors are clearly significant. The Church was the only semi-independent institution to survive the Stalinist period of Soviet occupation. The Pope's election was a matter of enormous national pride and spiritual meaning. His first visit to Poland in 1979 was also a remarkable revelation for people that they were not alone; millions gathered to hear the Polish Pope encourage them to act in dignity and to redeem Poland through their acts.

One cannot prove suppositions, however. What we do know is that the Polish movement for freedom did not find itself in the Church nor was it organized as an outgrowth of the Church. People did not go to their places of worship but to their workplaces to organize their opposition to communism. They demanded free trade unions, not religious freedom. (Only one demand in the 21 Points related to the Church — to allow the national broadcasting of Sunday mass.) Polish workers in Gdansk (and elsewhere) did insist that mass be held on shipyard grounds during the strike, but they did not seek out Church leadership to head, consult on, or even mediate the negotiations. The reason was clear to those knowledgeable of the Church: it was ambivalent about Solidarity from the very beginning, including during the strike, out of fear that a broad crackdown might endanger the Church's independence.

Solidarity is also frequently defined as a national and anti-communist movement. But appeals to Polish national feeling, however significant, were not successful tools for organizing opposition to the regime. There were no "national uprisings" during the communist period (in contrast to the Nazi occupation and previous Russian occupations). The early 1970s petition campaign against amendments to the constitution of the Polish People's Republic that ceded greater sovereignty to the Soviet Union succeeded as a dissident action but not in mobilizing opposition. And the groups explicitly organized on a platform of regaining Poland's national independence and sovereignty from Soviet occupation (Young Poland, Confederation of Independent Poland, or Fighting

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<sup>3</sup> At the "From Solidarność to Freedom" conference, the ILO Conventions were not mentioned. The former ILO General Secretary, Francis Blanchard, who did the most to insist on the full application of the ILO standards in Poland (and communist countries generally), attended but was offered no platform. Instead, a full session was dedicated to the importance of the Helsinki Accords and their active extension of human rights protection to the Soviet bloc. While these were the vehicle of intellectual dissidents, the ILO Conventions were in the first point of the Gdansk Agreements.

Solidarity, for example) gained only small, even if devoted, followings. Indeed, Solidarity's character as an anti-communist and anti-Soviet movement as such cannot even be asserted without identifying Solidarity as a trade union and workers' movement for its existence as such did more to undermine the legitimacy of the Polish People's Republic and all the "people's democracies" and "workers' states." These were of a piece.

During the anniversary celebration, some were insistent to define Solidarity as a moral and social movement in the face of oppression. It was described as a social compact that allowed people to trust one another with their freedom or donate one's time for a noble cause. This, too, can hardly be disputed. But such amorphous piety, while explaining some of its aspects, can hardly explain how Solidarity emerged as a mass movement of workers, farmers, artists, intellectuals, and students, much less its significance in bringing down communism.

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All of these things were well understood in the mid-1970s. Polish oppositionists had realized from previous worker and student uprisings against communism that there had to be a more structured means for Polish society to organize themselves. The Workers Defense Committee (KOR), formed in 1976, was a unique development in the communist bloc aimed at bringing workers and intellectuals together. It supported the demand for free trade unions, defended workers in court and assisted their families, and tried to inspire informal trade union committees like the Free Trade Unions of the Baltic Coast. The publication *Robotnik* (The Worker), replicated by these different committees, published the ILO Conventions and other international instruments guaranteeing worker rights and other essential rights. The importance of free trade unions, the tactics and strategies of strikes and negotiations, the imperative of peaceful and non-violent resistance were all discussed within *Robotnik's* pages.

Thus, Solidarity was organized as a trade union not only because this was the most natural form for it to take — given the communist economy's reliance on heavy industry and large-scale workplaces — but also because there was a conscious effort to organize free trade unions. These were, it was believed, the most effective means both of opposing the communist dictatorship and also for forging freedom. Without this intelligent strategy, there could not have arisen a national sit-in strike movement on a scale never before seen in the history of industrial unionism. Such deliberate efforts at union organization and spreading of information gave specific form to the Pope's calls for courage during his 1979 visit to Poland. Workers who emerged as strike leaders were already familiar with ILO Conventions No. 87 and No. 98 as well as with Article 71 of the PRL Constitution supposedly guaranteeing the rights of freedom of association within Poland.

Solidarity took the form of a trade union not just for strategic reasons but also for necessary democratic ones. A representative institution was essential for organizing a mass movement that maintained the workers' support. By definition, free trade unions are democratic structures that begin at the workplace level. (Undemocratic structures, like communist trade unions, are not free

trade unions.) During its sixteen months of open existence in 1980-81, Solidarity was an extraordinarily democratic institution even by trade union standards. At every place of employment, elected union leaders represented members and negotiated conditions of work. Democratic procedures — debate and discussion, voting, respect for minority opinions — were accepted and adopted in internal meetings and publications. Notwithstanding the sense of emergency and tension that pervaded the period of 1980-81 as a result of the authorities' constant provocations, any effort within Solidarity to restrict the union's democratic structure was decisively rebuffed by its members. While Solidarity might have been an anti-communist movement or another type of political or national movement without being a trade union, it certainly could not have been an organized mass democratic movement in another form.

After the imposition of martial law, a nationwide strike of enormous strength by the regime, it would have been natural for Solidarity to dissolve or lose its democratic character in the face of the brutality of the regime. And yet the workers reconstituted Solidarity as an underground movement at every level — workplace, city, regional, and national commissions of Solidarity were reestablished based on the previously elected leadership that escaped arrest. Meetings were held regularly with votes on key issues determined democratically. Not only did Solidarity the movement live, the Independent and Self-Governing Trade Union Solidarity lived.

Solidarity structures adopted new tactics to demonstrate their vitality and continuing importance, disseminating information, aiding families of imprisoned and unemployed workers, organizing a boycott of state television news, and holding open protests and demonstrations. Added to these activities were cultural events, educational programs, and other aspects of any trade union's existence. All of this was done with the constant threat of arrest and repression. Each week brought news of a new arrest of an underground leader or of someone caught with copies of the underground union's free press. In some cases, the prison sentences were quite harsh and every Solidarity activist knew the risks. Yet, Solidarity underground, with many hundreds of thousands of activists and collaborators, never compromised in its determination to regain legal status. In May and August 1988, when sit-down strikes were organized throughout the country, the first demand, again, was observance of freedom of association and the re-legalization of Solidarity.

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It is often said that Solidarity was reborn during the underground, meaning that it remade itself from a union into an "alternative" or "parallel society," something akin to a national underground or resistance movement rather than a trade union. This is partially true. Publishing houses, an independent press, education and science, student self-government, and scouting were all re-established underground, usually under the banner of Solidarity the movement, but not strictly under its structure. While this underground movement broadened Solidarity beyond its "strict" trade union character, it should be noted that this broad quality existed during Solidarity's 16 months of legal existence. There was one important difference, however. While Solidarity was an openly functioning trade union, it was impossible to downplay its trade union membership,

structure, or character. The “parallel society,” however, representing more the intellectual class, easily gained greater prominence in the underground press and publishing houses after martial law, contributing to a de-emphasis on worker or union issues.

Nevertheless, the trade union remained the core of the Solidarity movement and, as noted, it was worker strikes in 1988, not the publication of an independent book, that finally pushed the authorities to the negotiating table. The problem, however, was which trade union. After a broad amnesty in 1986, Solidarity the trade union divided, taking two forms. One was the active trade union still forced to organize clandestinely and the second Solidarity was an “aboveground” symbolic union appointed by Lech Walesa and made up of Solidarity leaders and advisers who were released from internment and imprisonment. This first overruling of trade union democracy by Walesa would be consequential. The intellectuals advising Lech Walesa at this time tended to believe in some form of accommodation: that Solidarity should compromise its stance and not insist on absolutes, like re-legalization or freedom of association, but to accept step-by-step improvements. When the 1988 strikes, sparked by the underground worker leaders of Solidarity, forced the authorities into negotiations, Lech Walesa thus agreed to the proposal that they be in the form of a “roundtable,” not face-to-face with the union but with “citizens’ representatives” appointed (by Walesa). Some would be trade unionists, some would be cultural figures, some educators, and none could argue that their role was actually representative.

The result was a breakthrough of great proportions: the agreement constituted a negotiated end to communism. Its design was to ensure a “soft landing” for the communists through negotiated, step-by-step reforms, which then became accelerated by the communists’ own miscalculations. At the time, though, the miscalculations were as yet unclear and many of Solidarity’s members saw the agreement as a compromise of the position they had struggled so hard to maintain.

Granting the Roundtable’s historical significance, the agreement had far-reaching and perilous consequences for Solidarity. For one, it prevented Solidarity from taking part in the elections directly, thereby diluting its organizational significance as a trade union and as a free institution. *The agreement thus allowed the communist authorities to determine the form and scope of the relegalized union’s activities.* Instead of Solidarity’s union structures nominating candidates through internal elections or primaries, a new appointed and non-elected structure called the “Citizens’ Committees of Lech Walesa,” tied only to Walesa’s name, was created as an electoral device to run candidates in the elections. This meant that there would be no organizational or institutional accountability either for the nominators or the nominated candidates after their election to parliament. Just as importantly, this process meant there was no agreed-upon platform of economic, political, and social reforms on which to govern.

Thus, after more than seven years’ de-legalization, Solidarity’s re-legalization was secondary to the agreement for a semi-democratic, semi-authoritarian hybrid election. No thought was given to rebuilding or even maintaining the union’s strength; the elections held highest priority. Most of the union’s leaders were recruited as candidates for the Sejm and Senate, which now propelled one

into the elite ranks. The union's most talented activists were tapped as campaign managers and workers. Everyone was convinced that the election was more important than the structure that had kept up resistance to communism all these years. When municipal elections offered more political opportunities, secondary and tertiary leadership left the union as well. The drive to power — however compromised — overrode any considerations of what would be left behind as a social foundation for ruling.

A third consequence, however, was that the union immediately became compromised by the political bloc it had not nominated but had nevertheless elected. The landslide victory that the voters gave to the Solidarity list was a devastating blow to the communists, who were planning for a prolonged and controlled transition. The loss went beyond even their worst nightmares. Yet, instead of seizing an opportunity for more clear-cut gains, Solidarity's leaders accepted unconstitutional run-off elections to fill empty communist and satellite party seats and the maintenance of its agreed-upon minority status. Worse, Solidarity leaders ensured Jaruzelski's election for president by the Sejm, pressing its own MPs to spoil their ballots.<sup>(4)</sup>

Despite this maneuvering, the Solidarity bloc could not escape the inevitability of forming the first non-communist government since the Soviet occupation and thus taking responsibility for Poland's sick economy. The first Solidarity-led government under Prime Minister Tadeusz Mazowiecki decided to adopt "shock therapy" — a drastic all-at-once reform of the economy once undertaken by Bolivia at the advice of Harvard economist Jeffrey Sachs — without any national consensus or debate. In thinking reminiscent of the communist period, "shock therapy" was determined to be the only solution for overcoming Poland's economic woes and so it had to be adopted. Part of this policy — a fourth consequence of the Roundtable Agreement — was treating the trade union Solidarity, the agent of Poland's historical revolutionary change, as an impediment to economic and even political reform. No democratic discussion was held with the union whereby workers could agree to accept necessary harsh measures or negotiate over compromise approaches to ameliorate economic reforms. Indeed, weakening Solidarity's position further, government ministers gave equal standing in negotiations to the O.P.Z.Z., the "transmission belt" unions of Jaruzelski's martial law regime that had been built on the stolen property of Solidarity. Certainly, this was the ultimate betrayal of Solidarity the union.

How did this happen? While many of Solidarity's economists had worked to develop a phased transition plan that did not target workers for the highest level of economic pain, all the other

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<sup>4</sup>New diplomatic documents uncovered by the National Security Archives indicate that Solidarity's leaders worked closely with U.S. Ambassador John Davis on the plan to ensure Jaruzelski's election and that the idea of spoiled ballots was his suggestion. U.S. diplomatic cables indicate that the U.S. government was convinced that if Solidarity did not do this, there would be a serious crackdown, despite all indications to the contrary.



intellectual advisers were convinced and had convinced Solidarity's new political leaders of the need for a free market approach based on the Reagan and Thatcher model. It was an approach, they thought, necessary not only to save the economy and the Polish nation from collapse but also to convince the communists of the benefits of change. The freer the market and the faster privatization, the more benefits accrued to the class with existing capital, namely the communists. Thus, economic reform, far from being a radical break with the past, was part of the same approach taken for political reform: ensure a "safe landing" for the communists. In this case, all valuable assets were either stolen or privatized into their hands Workers, who faced both high prices and imminent redundancy, were given all of the "shock" and a ripped safety net on which to land. "Former" communists were offered not only therapy but revivication.

These intertwined policies proved fateful for Solidarity as a union and for the movement as a whole. It is hard enough to replace a union's entire national, regional, and local leadership; it is impossible to restore unity after such a betrayal of the members' trust; it is worse still if economic policies are adopted whose negative effects are targeted at unions and their members. Solidarity's political elite negotiated a "soft landing" for communists, but a crash landing for the union and workers generally.<sup>(5)</sup> In doing so, they destroyed Poland's social fabric.

One of the indications of Solidarity's lost political base is the constant switch of governments as a result of Poland's post-1989 elections. In 1991, no political party associated with Solidarity won a majority or significant political plurality, while in 1993, after two years of patchwork coalitions, the re-organized post-communists won. A reconstituted Solidarity Electoral Bloc (AWS) won 1997 parliamentary elections (although the union continued to have little influence on overall government policies), but again the postcommunist Alliance of the Democratic Left (SLD) won the next elections. In the wake of corruption scandals the SDL lost in 2005 to two right-wing parties, one prominently led by former leading advisers to Lech Walesa.

After resuming its legal existence, the trade union Solidarity counted no more than 2.5 million members in 1990, down from its height of 10 million, although still significant in conditions of Eastern Europe. Fifteen years later, it has fewer than 1 million members in a country of more than 40 million population. The repressive impact of martial law and the changed circumstances of Solidarity's relegalization account for a large element of the union's collapse. But the concerted effort to minimize the role and importance of the trade union in the changes and reforms after 1989

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<sup>5</sup> Betray, of course, is a strong word, but not inappropriate for what in fact happened. At another 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration in New York, Lech Walesa told a stunned audience, "You wonder where is Solidarity today. After 1989, *we had to destroy Solidarity*. If we hadn't, we would have been like Maoists supporting the monopoly of the proletariat" (my emphasis). Equally troubling is that there is no idea of solidarity for leaders and activists, aboveground or underground, who sacrificed their jobs, lives, or liberty who are now left behind. While a few got rich, most have little assistance to get by.

testify to the strong anti-institutional and anti-Solidarity bias of many of Poland's new elite. To place Solidarity's downfall in perspective, in 1980-81, it was second only to the AFL-CIO in number of members among the world's international free trade unions. Today, nearly all trade union federations in Western Europe maintain much larger memberships and represent a larger percentage of the workforce. And every historical European working class movement continues to have a major influence on the left political parties in their countries.

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This reference brings up another aspect missing from the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebrations, namely the role of international trade union solidarity. Most everyone agrees that the AFL-CIO's moral, financial, and material assistance was essential for keeping Solidarity alive in the underground period. From the outset, with the creation of the Polish Workers Aid Fund on September 1, 1980, AFL-CIO Lane Kirkland made clear that trade union solidarity trumped all other considerations and he flatly rejected pressure from the Carter Administration to stop raising funds for Solidarity on spurious grounds of national security. Kirkland and the AFL-CIO remained Solidarity's main champions and defenders in the West throughout both its legal and underground existence. In an address delivered by videotape to Solidarity's First Congress, Lane Kirkland said that Solidarity had made clear that the most important issue facing the world was not nuclear weapons, nor the ownership of the means of production, but freedom of association, the right of workers to organize in unions of their choosing and to freely express and represent their interests. His argument then is more compelling than that Solidarity's "ethos" overthrew communism.

Lane Kirkland and the AFL-CIO endured their own "intellectuals" in the United States who argued that unions were historical niceties belonging to the rise of industrialization but were no longer important. Kirkland responded that these intellectuals, on both right and left, lacked an understanding both of freedom and of free institutions. In addressing U.S. intellectuals and also the new elite guiding the Polish state and economy, Kirkland made a profound argument that democracy cannot last long if it lacks the institutions that can sustain it by representing society's interests. And, trade unions are the most essential of these institutions in any democracy. Of course, this is not just a U.S. or a Polish lesson, but one that is being felt throughout the globalized economy. The "de-institutionalization" of Solidarity is emblematic of many "democratic" victories that lack any foundation in organized social or political movements.

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When symbols acquire universal significance, as Solidarity has on its 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary, it is difficult to argue with the claims of their meaning. Is it possible to disagree with the argument that Solidarity was a moral and ethical movement? That the August 1980 strikes and the Gdansk Agreements mark the beginning of the end of Soviet communism and the Cold War? That Solidarity represents a new model for political change breaking a 200-year-long tradition of revolutionary violence? That the fall of the Berlin Wall and the revolutions in Czechoslovakia, the

Baltic States, Romania, Bulgaria, Serbia, and now Ukraine and Georgia all have their origin in Solidarity? All of this is true and more.

And yet. . . . It is difficult to accept the commemoration of Solidarity without acknowledging its character and meaning as a trade union and workers' movement. Only in doing so can some measure of the true meaning of Solidarity's significance be celebrated. The intellectuals who gathered for what constituted Poland's official commemoration of the Gdansk Agreements, were so intent on defining the movement's meaning in hifalutin ideas that they failed to identify Solidarity's significance in relation to people and social institutions. Indeed, they failed even to recognize their own signal contribution to freedom — the bringing together of workers, students, and intellectuals together in a united social movement against a monolithic state to achieve democracy — a model followed by nearly every democratic revolution since. To do so, perhaps, would mean reflecting on their fatalistic (and wrong) belief that communism's collapse required a soft landing for communists and a hard landing for workers, a belief that resulted in the utter abandonment of Solidarność as a democratic institution and of solidarity as a moral principle.

The message of the "official" 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary celebrations is that Solidarity achieved the end of communism and brought unity to Europe as an amorphous movement of basically moral, human rights, and possibly religious but no other dimensions. This should not be the lesson of Solidarity, however. The lesson of Solidarity is one rooted in social movements and trade unionism: that workers and other segments of society, banding together peacefully to represent themselves in independent institutions, can achieve both revolutionary and democratic ends. The strikes of August 1980 and the rise of Solidarity — which brought together an entire nation — represent one of the great worker and democratic movements of history. The determination of Polish workers and the trade union Solidarity did bring about the successful end of communism.

This is the meaning of the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Solidarity.

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