



Solidarity: The Great Workers Strike of 1980 (The Harvard Cold War Studies Book Series)

By Michael M., Ph.D Szporer

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In the summer of 1980, the eyes of the world turned to the Gdansk shipyard in Poland which suddenly became the nexus of a strike wave that paralyzed the entire country. The Gdansk strike was orchestrated by the members of an underground free trade union that came to be known as Solidarnosc [Solidarity]. Despite fears of a violent response from the communist authorities, the strikes spread to more than 800 sites around the country and involved over a million workers, mobilizing its working population. Faced with crippling strikes and with the eyes of the world on them, the communist regime signed landmark accords formally recognizing Solidarity as the first free trade union in a communist country. The union registered nearly ten million members, making it the world's largest union to date. In a widespread and inspiring demonstration of nonviolent protest, Solidarity managed to bring about real and powerful changes that contributed to the end of the Cold War.

Solidarity: The Great Workers Strike of 1980 tells the story of this pivotal period in Poland's history from the perspective of those who lived it. Through unique personal interviews with the individuals who helped breathe life into the Solidarity movement, Michael Szporer brings home the momentous impact these events had on the people involved and subsequent history that changed the face of Europe. This movement, which began as a strike, had major consequences that no one could have foreseen at the start. In this book, the individuals who shaped history speak with their own voices about the strike that changed the course of history.

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Editorial Review

Review

Szporer (communications, arts, and humanities, Univ. of Maryland Univ. College) has put together a collection of 25 eyewitness accounts of intellectuals and workers who were involved with the creation of the Solidarity trade union and the advent of the workers strike at the Gdansk Shipyard in summer 1980. In effect, the book consists of the author asking questions and recording the answers of leading participants who organized the first non-Communist workers union and strike behind the Iron Curtain. The book is a fascinating and valuable documentary of how a group of workers and intellectuals formed a workers union in defiance of the Polish Communist and Soviet-backed government, and then leveraged the union into a political challenge to the Soviet Bloc. Surprisingly, the Solidarity leaders did not have the support of the Polish Roman Catholic Church at first; all they had was their unity of purpose and their courage. The book has an appendix that includes a chronology of events and some documents from the Russian archives related to Solidarity. Summing Up: Recommended. (*CHOICE*)

Michael Szporer's *Solidarity the Great Workers Strike of 1980* is a fascinating story, told in many voices, of the world's largest strike to date which signaled the fall of the Soviet empire. Solidarity's peaceful revolution is the beginning of the 21st century, a correction of the lie perpetrated by the October Revolution. It is a story of people mobilizing a nation and taking down a totalitarian ideology with minimum loss of life. While at the time I closely followed the ups and downs of the events in Poland, I found the inside story of the movement that changed our world very revealing and remarkably human. I highly recommend this brilliant work to anyone interested in the real history of a major event that contributed to ending the Cold War. (Lt. General Edward Rowny, former Chief U.S. Strategic Arms Negotiator)

Michael Szporer's *Solidarity: The Great Worker's Strike of 1980* is a very valuable contribution to the history of the first successful anti-Communist movement in the Soviet camp. It consists mainly of interviews with leading figures in this movement elucidating their thinking and their moods. (Richard Pipes, Harvard University)

A marvelous historical record of the great workers' protest that led to the downfall of 'workers' state,' first in Poland, then in the Soviet Union. Through documents, photographs, and interviews with leading participants, including Lech Walesa, Michael Szporer sheds important new light on the Gdansk shipyard strike of August 1980 and the role it played in the collapse of communism. Solidarity advisor Bronislaw Geremek is correct to conclude that the Berlin wall 'started falling in the Gdansk shipyard.' (Michael Dobbs, Washington Post correspondent in Poland and the Soviet Union, 1980-1991, and author of "Down with Big Brother: The Fall of the Soviet Empire.")

Most Americans don't understand how or why the Cold War ended. But Michael Szporer's definitive book on the brave Polish 'Solidarity' underground will both inform and inspire them. Pope John Paul II told the Poles, 'Be not afraid!' and they proceeded to free not only Poland but all of Eastern Europe. (Georgie Anne Geyer, syndicated columnist and author of "Predicting the Unthinkable, Anticipating the Impossible.")

The book is and will be a very important, if not the main source document on the process of the formation of free trade unions (WZZ) in Poland in 1980, and the opinion of their leaders on the effects of creeping, the Polish revolution of 1980-89. (*Polish News*)

About the Author

Michael Szporer is professor of communications, arts and humanities at the University of Maryland University College.

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