



Lech Wałęsa: The Solitary Man Who Inspired

Solidarność (Solidarity)

History of Contemporary World

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➤ Poland Before Lech Walesa

After the crushing defeat of World War II, Poland deeply resented the imposed communist government established by the Stalin regime. What made it worse was the role that the Soviet Union had played in 1939 in the partition of Poland with Hitler's Germany. A hoped for liberalization of the regime failed in 1956 after Nikita Khrushchev's "Secret Speech, and Polish riots were put down.

➤ Lech Walesa

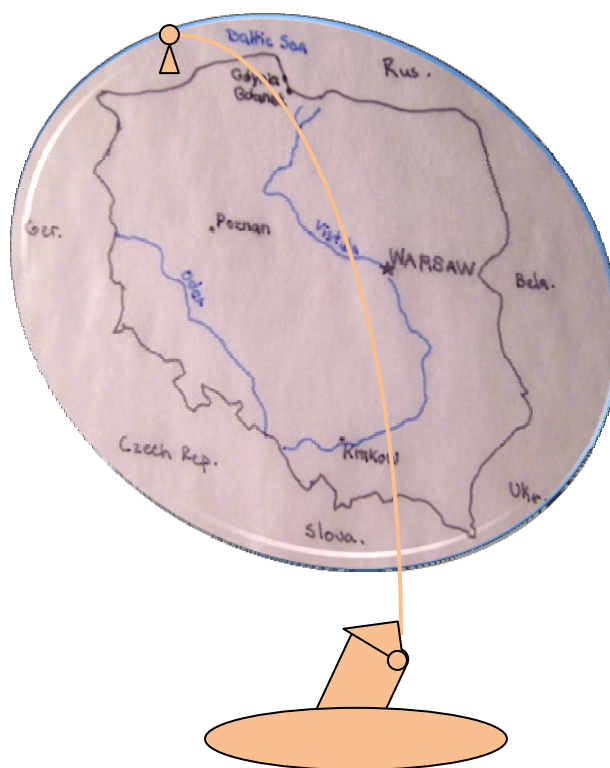
Early Life:

Walesa's family had migrated to Poland from France with his great-great-grandfather, Mateusz, in the seventeenth century. Originally, the family estate had included four hundred acres in the Dobrzyn region of Poland surrounding the then small village of Popowo.

Walesa's family history bears the marks of some revolutionary impact. Walesa's great-grandfather, had fled to France after his two

brothers were exiled to Siberia. There he gambled away 1/3 of the family lands. Finally returning to Poland, settled in the village and raised his family of twenty-four children.

After World War I, Poland achieved its independence with the Treaty of Versailles. At that time, Walesa's father, Bolek married Feliksa Kaminska, but by then the family fortune had dwindled to a pitiful and unsustainable one acre—hardly enough to support a family. Besides farming, Bolek added to the



family budget the money from his carpentry work. But Poland and Lech's family did not long enjoy peace. In 1939, Poland once again lost its independence, and once again the Walesa's joined the resistance. Back at home, Lech's mother both supported her family and the nation's cause.

Lech Walesa was the fourth born of the poor peasant family on September 27, 1943—a child of war. His father, Bolek, passed away hardly a year later after escaping from a Nazi concentration camp imprisoned for his involvement in the partisan resistance. Lech Walesa was to inherit his father's courageous and revolutionary spirit.

Lech Walesa Earns his Living, Love and Life:

Walesa's education at the village church-run school and trade school were uneventful, but he did like sports. As a young boy, he was known for his out-spoken nature and stubbornness as much as his ability at striking a compromise. The poverty of the family eventually required that the young Walesa and his brother Stanislaw leave home at a fairly early age in search of work. The new industrialization program being carried out by the communist regime provided him an opportunity to attend a technology college because of his good math and physics scores. There he received his degree in engineering but a lack of money deprived him of further progress. Walesa was drafted into army where he impressed his officers and swiftly rose to the rank of corporal. However, he decided against a military career.

After a while Walesa decided to find his fortune and adventure in the city. In 1967, when he was 24, he took the train and reached Gdansk. He met an old classmate who suggested he sign up for a job at the port's Lenin Shipyard as an electrician. Walesa moved into the labor force which became his home scene for the next ten years.

Walesa was put into the Mosinski Shop, 4th brigade. Here he worked hard to accomplish his labor quota, but also worked at organizing camaraderie amongst his fellow workers. These difficult

early days were lightened for him when he met Danuta at the local flower shop. Only a year later, in 1969, they were happily married—a more perfect couple could not have met.

A devout Catholic, Walesa said he had always found his Catholicism to be his inspiration—*Solidarność* (Solidarity) was born from this source. Walesa became politically involved in many strikes and protests throughout the 1970's becoming well known in this area. One of his first strike attempts at political agitation ended in utter disaster with what is known as "Bloody Thursday" when the government viciously crushed the rebellion with open fire. While his "worst fears were realized" his best dreams were born from the struggle. Walesa's plans were only beginning to take form in 1978 when he sketched his ideas for a free trade union.

The national situation in Poland chaos quieted down when Gierek took control in the 70's and early '80's. But eventually the people saw the government was not cooperating. The 1976 "bulldozer strike" struck up the spark. Walesa finally decided Poland had had enough of empty promises. It was time to take matters and consequences into their own hands. A wave of strikes and violent suppressions followed the Lenin Shipyard unanimous 1980 strike.

In the same year of 1980, the government was forced to sign and recognize this new Solidarity (*Solidarność*) union which had sprung up from the violent succession of strikes. Lech Walesa was perceived and promoted its founder and first freely elected chairman. Solidarity was Walesa's dream, a labor union, independent of government or party, where the people joined unanimously in fellowship arising from common interest and goal to promote free trade and political representation. It was only a few years before Solidarity was recognized by the Polish as the answer to their cries for justice and the union grew to number several million. Their work eventually brought about many reforms and played a major part in the ouster of communism from Poland to be replaced by a multiparty democratic government. This accomplishment inspired many other countries throughout Eastern Europe. But the

government (under the influence of the Soviet Union) opted to repress Solidarity. In 1981, martial law was enacted, and over five thousand Solidarity leaders, including Walesa, were arrested.

Walesa's Solidarity had begun to see a unity of all oppositionists joined together—workers, church, intellectuals Although his whole movement had to go underground and he himself was incarcerated it did not die away. As soon as Lech Walesa was set free, in 1983 he was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize, though Walesa did not feel he had yet earned this recognition as his work was far from done. Solidarity lived and worked until by 1988 its presence could no longer be covered up. Many other world-wide leaders (including Ronald Reagan who enacted sanctions upon the Polish government) were attesting to Solidarity's heroic acts to the degradation of the Soviets.

In 1988 Solidarity came out from the underground. One victory after the other was won by the Union. In 1989, Walesa was the first one ever to be awarded the new Liberty Medal. Solidarity was legalized and a committee known as the Round Table Talks was discussed between the Soviets, Solidarity, and the Church. Open elections followed soon after—the first non communist elections in east Europe in 40 years.

Lech Walesa's Presidency:

Walesa's last great triumph was his election to the presidency in 1990, although his time as president would later become the subject of controversy [See more at below link on "From Solidarity to Division: An Analysis of Lech Walesa's Transition to Constituted Leadership"]. Poland won world renown and gave other communist and socialist oppressed people hope for the future.

1990 brought in a new decade and a new president. Every nation in Eastern Europe, including Poland had undergone dramatic changes. Among the challenges to be faced were the possibility that communism would try to hold on to power, inexperience of new leaders and parties, complications in

transforming an economy rigidly controlled into a free-market system. Could Lech Walesa, who grew up experiencing none of these and knowing nothing else but depression change the situation? A poor person knows he is poor, but may not always know how to remedy his poverty. Poland knew she wanted freedom and prosperity but was not always sure how to attain it.

Many people accused Walesa of having misused his authority and failing to address certain problems. He refused to hear people whom he felt did not deserve his attention instead of giving them a chance to speak their mind. Lech Walesa was not an experienced politician

Presidency Timeline:

- 📅 1990
 - Presidential elections
 - Signing of German-Polish Border Treaty
 - Lech Walesa becomes president
- 📅 1991
 - Mława pogrom
 - Dissolution of Warsaw Pact
 - Parliamentary election
- 📅 1992
 - Adoption of small Constitution
 - Signing of central European Free trade Agreement
- 📅 1993
 - Lufthansa Flight
 - Parliamentary election
- 📅 1994
 - Poland bus disaster
 - Local elections
- 📅 Aleksander Kwasniewski becomes president

➤ After Lech Walesa

By the early 1990s, Poland had inspired national and world admiration. Solidarity not only united the Polish but the men of every culture and race who believed in freedom and democracy, in free trade and freedom of speech, in religious freedom and personal prosperity, in life lived to the fullest.

“A man is judged not by his words but by the fruit of his works”

--Lech Walesa

➤ What Others Have Said of Lech Walesa

“Lech Walesa grew up in People’s Poland. He has experienced his country’s most dramatic moments. He did not flinch, but participated in them.”

--Andrzej Drzycimski, journalist

“He liked to show off his courage—well he has gone far in his life as well, very far.”

--a classmate of Lech

“He was an extremely well organized boy. If one suggested to him that he should try to lead a group, he would be irreplaceable.”

--Jerzy Rybacki, director of trade school which Lech attended

“If today we fail to make our opposition felt, there will be no one to control the increase in working hours, the violation of security rules . . . the best way of defending our own interests is to defend one another.”

--founding committee of the Free Trade Union

“He liked discipline, was exacting but understanding. He achieved more by a joke and a sense of humor than others did by shouting.”

--Lenin Shipyard worker

“Walesa emerged from the crowd as an authentic man, free, angry, decisive, behaving directly and speaking plainly.”

--Maria Janion, first impression

“He behaves as someone charged, electrified by the collective body.”

--Maria Janion

“His strength comes from understanding people, in the most elementary situations, but also in the entire span of experience.”

--Maria Janion

"I see Walesa as a man of instinct, not intellect. He is in my opinion, a man of considerable innate intelligence that he has never tried to develop or refine."

--Lech Badkowski, newspaper columnist

"He wanted to be merely a trade unionist, but the situation in Poland forced him to act in a way which his adversaries always defined as political."

--Andrzej Drzycimski, journalist

"Your young and inexperienced and you'll make mistakes. Don't let them elect you alone . . . On your own you'll only mess things up."

--director of strike committee to Walesa on his election

"He never used incentive or insults. It had to be put down to his refinement, not forgetting his close ties with the Christian ethic."

--Boleslaw Fac, Polish writer

"Mr. Walesa, I look upon you as the liberator of the Polish workers and farmers. I look upon you as a Great National Hero, Mr. Walesa."

--a letter to Walesa

"All humanity's desire for peace argues for an end to the state of martial law in Poland."

--Pope John Paul II

"Mr. Walesa, you'll never be a good politician. You know why? Because you are afraid of bloodshed."

--Solidarity leaders to Walesa

See Ronald Ragan's Speech in praise and support of Walesa:

http://www.liveleak.com/view?i=52b_1338702365&comments=1

Good sources on Lech Walesa:

<http://www.libraries.iub.edu/index.php?pageId=8908>

Controversial discussion on Lech Walesa's competence as a government leader:

<http://ideas.repec.org/p/cdl/bpsps/qt8jw8f696.html>

Online bibliography and biography of Lech Walesa:

http://www.nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/peace/laureates/1983/walesa-bio.html

<http://www.libraries.iub.edu/index.php?pageId=8908>

<http://www.thefamouspeople.com/profiles/lech-walesa-54.php>

A Website on Polish Solidarity:

<http://www.soviethistory.org/index.php?page=subject&SubjectID=1980solidarity&Year=1980&navi=byYear>

"Soviet Archives" includes a Communist Polish Timeline:

<http://www.soviethistory.org/index.php?page=subject&SubjectID=1980solidarity&Year=1980&navi=byYear>

Congress confers on Lech Walesa honorary citizenship:

<http://thomas.loc.gov/cgi-bin/bdquery/z?d102:H.J.RES.202>:

An online history of Solidarity:

<http://www.gdansk-life.com/poland/solidarity>

Detailed account of John Paul II's support and influence on Solidarity:

http://carlberstein.com/magazine_holy_alliance.php

President Bush supports Solidarity:

<http://chnm.gmu.edu/1989/items/show/36>

A Program in soviet and Past Soviet Studies entitled "From Solidarity to Division: An Analysis of Lech Walesa's Transition to Constituted Leadership":

<http://www.escholarship.org/uc/item/8jw8f696>

➤ From Lech Walesa

“A wall cannot be demolished by butting it with your head. We must move slowly, one step at a time. If we rush at it, the wall will still be in place, but we shall have our heads smashed in.”

--Lech Walesa

“We’re not strong enough yet. The time will come that we shall be stronger than they, then we shall act. Not everything is ready—yet.”

--Lech Walesa, proposing a strike in 1978

“Popularity is a tricky thing . . . one must not talk but act and work. Talk will not achieve anything.”

--Lech Walesa

“We shall not yield, we want free unions. We shall conquer with unity.”

--Lech Walesa, Gdansk 1980 strike

“Man has got to believe in something. If he doesn’t, he becomes an animal. A dangerous animal.”

--Lech Walesa

“I hadn’t the slightest notion of how to manage a strike; I was out of my depth.”

--Lech Walesa, of the 1970 strike

“It is said that experience come with age. Of course, but it also comes with action.”

--Lech Walesa

“Solidarity was born at that precise moment when the shipyard strike evolved from local success in the shipyard to a strike in support of other factories . . . large and small, in need of our protection.”

--Lech Walesa, on the advent of Solidarity

“If this stage has to end (as it did), I want to learn as much as possible, right up to the last minute—learn about democracy, the art of negotiation, and all those areas which, for thirty-five years, had been closed to us, or with which we ourselves had failed to grapple.

--Lech Walesa, when Solidarity was in conflict with the gov.

“Poland . . . will never perish”

--Lech Walesa

“Here is the proof that . . . terror and blackmail [are] an integral part of the methods of political repression practiced against the citizens of Poland.”

--Lech Walesa, at Fr. Popieluszko’s funeral

“Don’t let’s look backwards, but forwards. This past is in all of us, the real work is before us.”

--Lech Walesa

“We are one big family—a world family—and we share a common fate.”

--Lech Walesa

Read Lech Walesa’s Acceptance Speech at:

http://www.nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/peace/laureates/1983/walesa-acceptance.html

Lech Walesa’s Tribute to Ronald Reagan for his help and support:

<http://www.tommyduggan.com/VP070204lech.html>

Lech Walesa thanks Reagan and the US:

http://www.violenceworker.com/my_weblog/2009/06/lech-walesa-thanks-ronald-reagan.html

Lech Walesa's Life

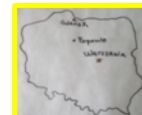


- **1943** (Sep 29)- Born in Popowo
- **1945**- Polish Comies take over Warsaw
- **1967**- Begins work at Lenin Shipyard
- **1968**- Marries Danuta
- **1971**- Meets with Edward Gierek
- **1976**- Fired for criticizing Gierek
 - hired as a mechanic for ZREMB
- **1979**- fired from engineering co. for speaking at memorial service.
- **1980**- arrested **Timeline:**
 - Declares and heads strike at shipyard
 - Signs agreement guaranteeing independant trade union
 - Solidarity establishes headquarters in Gdansk w/ Walesa as chairman of Temporary National Committiee.
 - Gov. sends Walesa to Warsaw to help control strikes there
 - **1981**- Walesa meets w/ John Paul II.
 - Negotiates w/ gov. over a new farmers' union.
 - Arrested by Jaruzelski
 - **1983**- Awarded Nobel Peace Prize.
 - **1989**- Awarded Liberty Medal
 - **1990**- Elected President at the first free election.



Solidarity

- **1980** (Aug 31)-Comunist gov. signs approves the Solidarity Trade Union's existence w/ a signature
- unveiling of Monument to Fallen Shipyard Workers 1970. 1st monument for victims of comi oppression in a comi country.
- National strike.
- Solidarity delegates meet w/ John Paul II
- 27 Solidarity members beaten. Response: largest strike in history of Eastern Bloch. 1/2 million Poles froze country. got their way.
- **1981**- Martial law imposed at midnight after 5,000 members arested + Solidarity goes underground.
 - Hunger Demonstration
- **1982**- banned and strikes temporarily cease.
- **1984**- supported by Pope John Paul
- **1986**- Protest in favor of gov. amnesty for remaining political prisoners.
- **1988**- out in the open again
- **1989**- Solidarity comes out again + is legalized
 - Round Table Talks
 - Open elections: 1st non-comi in E. Europe in 40 years.
 - Citizenship Committee of the chairman of Solidarity organized.



Polish Events

- **1943**- Polish Jews further persecuted by Nazis.
- **1944**- Polish resistance controlling Warsaw are defeated + the city burned down.
- **1945**- Soviets capture Warsaw. Germans are expelled. Postdam conference rearanges Polish borders.
- **1947**- Comunist People's Republic of Poland under Boleslaw Bierut.
- **1956**- After constant strikes + revolts, Gomulka takes over.
- **1970**- Prices sky rocket, riots, protests, violence, + killing breaks out suppressed by Gierek. There is temporary economic stability based on foreign trade.
- **1980**- Solidarity Union approved.
- **1981**- Martial Law inposed + many Solidarity leaders including Walesa are imprisoned.
- **1983**- Martial Law lifted because of foreign intervention.
- **1988**- food prices purposefully increased 40%
- **1989**- Solidarity, Comis + Catholic Church discuss future aims after severe economic crisis of '88.
 - Partial free elections turn out in favor of Solidarity + a coalition gov. is formed.
- **1990**- Walesa freely elected President. Market reforms + large-scale privatization launched.

 *Glossary*

Bolek—Walesa’s father who married Feliksa Kaminska inheriting only a few acres of the family land. The land not being enough to support a family, Bolek practiced carpentry on the side. When Poland lost its independence in 1939, Bolek joined the Home Army Partisans in 1941 using gorilla war tactics against the Germans. In 1945 Bolek escaped from the concentration camp he had been put into in 1943 only to survive long enough to have Stanislaw promise to look after his family including one-year-old Lech. Lech probably inherited this spirit of leadership, endurance and freedom from his father.

Dobrzyn—the area surrounding the village of Popowo where the Walesa family had their ancestral land.

Free Trade Unions (FTU)—an opposition group in Gdansk.

Gdansk—Port city in northern Poland.

Gierek, Edward (1913-2001)—Communist politician. Born in Poland, raised in France. Took over the government in Poland from Wladtslaw Gomulka 1957-1970. Failure to keep economic stability and please Polish protesters he was in turn overthrown by Stanislaw Kania.

Golos (Walesa), Danuta—the flower shop cashier in Gdansk who became Lech’s faithful wife in 1969.

Gomulka, Wladyslaw—WWII veteran fighting against the Nazis. Initiated economic reforms after the 1968 student rebellion. He headed the Natolinians PZPR faction after its divide. He was expelled in 1949 in favor of Bierut only to come back in 1956 as leader of the ruling Natolinians settling the strikes which had come up. His ambitious liberal reforms came to nothing and so he changed his stratagem in 1968 revamping the economy with a new “selective investment” program introducing modern technology to the ultimate dissatisfaction of the overworked and unimpressed people.

Jan—Walesa’s great-grandfather who became a gambler and lost more than half the family lands. The remaining 50 acres was divided between his 24 children.

Jaruzelski, Wojciech (1923-)—Poland’s last Communist leader and ruler until Lech Walesa’s free election in 1990.

John Paul II, Pope (1920-2005)—Roman Catholic Pontiff celebrated as one of the most prominent leaders of the 20th century. He is personally accredited by Lech Walesa as being the spiritual backbone of the Solidarity movement, inspiring his native people to be courageous in demanding necessary change and freedom. He made nine pilgrimages to Poland throughout his pontificate.

Kania, Stanslaw (1927-)—Communist political leader pretended friendliness towards the Polish only to have them work with him. But after repressing the Catholic Church and the Solidarity movement and criticizing the Soviets he was replaced by Wojciech Jaruzelski.

Lenin Shipyard—Walesas first job in Gdansk. Site of his first strike.

Mateusz—Walesa’s great-great-grandfather who immigrated from France and bought 400 acres in Dobrzyn where he settled down. He was a good farmer and well respected in the town. His sons were exiled to Siberia after the 1863 uprising.

Mosinski Brigade—Walesa’s assigned group in the Lenin Shipyard at the electrical shop #4.

Pilsudski, Jozef—a socialist marshal who ruled Poland as a nationalist dictator after his service in WWI. He wanted to build up Poland to match the surrounding powers. 1920 declared war on Bolshevik Soviet Union.

Polish Committee of National Liberation—the Soviet recognized imposed government established in 1945 after the defeat of the Nazis who had left Poland devastated. In 1948, it was dominated by the communist Polish Worker’s Party (PPR).

Polish Worker’s Party (PPR)—Marxist committee founded in Moscow in 1942. Renamed Polish United Workers (PZPR) in 1948 when they established their rule in the new Polish People’s Republic in the same year. They controlled the country by reliable party members (*menklatura*) appointed in key local positions throughout the country including, police force, universities, media, and industries. They had a plan to redistribute land and peoples and harass the Church in an attempt to exploit, subjugate and rebuild the war sick country according to their primarily economic aims. After WWII, they divided into the Natolinians who wanted to follow the Soviet communist model of government; the Pulawians wanted to a more free and democratic socialist government allied to the Soviet Union.

Popowo— Lech Walesa’s birth place.

Red Army—The Soviet Union’s peasants and workers revolutionary army eventually becoming one of the world’s largest. They pushed the Nazis west out of Poland 1944-45 in order to conquer Poland themselves.

Round Table Talks—When Poland’s economy became so bad due to foreign sanctions and lack of reforms, the government finally announced it was ready to negotiate with the Solidarity movement and met with Walesa and his followers. This official negotiation conference of 1989 was composed of a hundred member committee with many sections of Solidarity each presenting specific demands to the government.

Solidarność—Free Trade Union founded by Lech Walesa in 1980 later publicly supported by many world leaders.

Stanislaw—Walesa’s step father who was a strict choleric though he meant well. He nevertheless, did all he could to support his brother’s poor family in a poor country.

State Agricultural Department (POM)—the school where Lech earned his certified electrician degree which enabled him to find a job later on in the ship yard.

Strike—Uprising of the people because unsatisfied with authorities, in this case refusal to work.

Student Rebellion (1968) / The Forefather’s Eve—a production by Adam Mickiewicz banned from the theatres by the authorities in 1968 labeled “anti-Russian” because of its inspiration to Polish independence. Walesa got his first taste of active political opposition when he supported the students and intellectuals who protested this act and tried to lead others to do likewise.

Walentynowicz, Anna—aka “Mrs. Anya; 30 worker in the Lenin Shipyard whose expulsion for opposition to unfair treatment sparked the 1980 strike inspired and lead by Walesa.

Walesa, Lech -Founder of Solidarity Trade Union, father of eight, loving husband, loyal Polish citizen, winner of 1983 Nobel Peace Prize, awarded 1989 Liberty Medal, freedom fighter, elected president in 1990.

➤ Bibliography—both critics and proponents

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*These are the ones I personally selected and skimmed or used as sources finding them particularly informative.