

# **Poland: The Land and Its People**

## **A Curriculum Guide for Secondary School Teachers**



*Polish Academy of Sciences building (photo by Gina Peirce)*

Created by the **Center for Russian and East European Studies**  
University Center for International Studies  
University of Pittsburgh  
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# INTRODUCTION

*Poland: The Land and Its People* was created to provide information on the historical and contemporary development of the Polish nation, and to assist teachers in meeting some of the criteria indicated in the Pennsylvania Department of Education's Academic Standard Guidelines ([http://www.portal.state.pa.us/portal/server.pt/community/state\\_board\\_of\\_education/8830/state\\_academic\\_standards/529102](http://www.portal.state.pa.us/portal/server.pt/community/state_board_of_education/8830/state_academic_standards/529102)). To fulfill the fundamental themes for many of the disciplines prescribed by the state guidelines, this curriculum guide provides the following information:

- A description of the unique traits of the Polish culture, and how these traits were developed based upon geographical limitations.
- A description of the effects of political, economic and cultural changes on the European continent, and how these changes shaped the present Polish lands and people.
- Identification and explanation of the contributions of key historical individuals and groups in politics, science, the arts, religion, and business in the Polish lands.
- Exploration of the important roles of Polish dissidents and political leaders.
- Examination of the changing economic and political system of Poland, and how these changes have affected Polish society.

These and other areas of Polish society and culture are explored in an attempt to assist the secondary school teacher in fulfilling the Academic Standard Guidelines. As the unique transitions in Poland provide a laboratory for studying political, economic and cultural change, this guide may be additionally useful as a means for comparison with our own country's development. Whether as a tool for meeting the Academic Standard Guidelines, or as a means to explore issues affecting a society in transition, we expect that this guide will be useful in your classroom preparation.

Each section of this guide is designed to be suitable for classroom use either independently, or as part of a comprehensive study of Poland covering the entire guide. Therefore, you may tailor your use of the guide to fit the amount of time that you have available and the specific topics that are most relevant to your subject area. Each section also contains references to sources of additional information.

This guide was prepared by the Center for Russian and East European Studies at the University of Pittsburgh, with funding from the U.S. Department of Education. It is part of a series of curriculum guides on post-communist countries in East Central Europe that have entered the European Union in 2004.

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## POLAND: THE LAND AND ITS PEOPLE



Map courtesy of CIA World Factbook Country Guides

# Poland in a Nutshell

## Geography and Population

**Size comparison:** slightly smaller than New Mexico

**Countries on its borders:** Belarus, Czech Republic, Germany, Lithuania, Russia, Slovakia, and Ukraine

**Climate:** temperate with cold, cloudy, moderately severe winters with frequent precipitation; mild summers with frequent showers and thundershowers

**Terrain:** mostly flat plain; mountains along southern border

**Natural resources:** coal, sulfur, copper, natural gas, silver, lead, salt, amber, arable land

**Natural hazards:** flooding

**Current environmental issues:** During the communist period, air and water quality presented a serious concern for human health. The situation has improved since 1989 due to a decline in heavy industry and increased environmental concern by post-communist governments. Air pollution nonetheless remains serious because of sulfur dioxide emissions from coal-fired power plants, and the resulting acid rain has caused forest damage; water pollution from industrial and municipal sources is also a problem, as is disposal of hazardous wastes. Pollution levels should continue to decrease as industrial establishments bring their facilities up to European Union code.

**Population:** 38,622,660 (July 2003 est.)

**Age structure:** *0-14 years:* 17.5% (male 3,458,844; female 3,284,995)  
*15-64 years:* 69.8% (male 13,407,012; female 13,547,728)  
*65 years and over:* 12.7% (male 1,879,445; female 3,044,636) (2003 est.)

**Median age:** *total population:* 36 years  
*male:* 34.1 years  
*female:* 38 years (2002 est.)

**Population growth rate:** 0% (2003 est.)

**Life expectancy at birth:** *total population:* 73.9 years  
*male:* 69.8 years  
*female:* 78.3 years (2003 est.)

**Ethnic groups:** Polish 97.6%, German 1.3%, Ukrainian 0.6%, Belarusian 0.5%

**Religions:** Roman Catholic 95% (about 75% practicing); Eastern Orthodox, Protestant, and other 5%

**Languages:** Polish

**Literacy (those age 15 and over who can read and write):** *total population: 99.8%*  
*male: 99.8%*  
*female: 99.7% (2003 est.)*

## Government

**Form of govt.:** Republic

**Capital:** Warsaw

**Independence:** November 11, 1918 (independent republic proclaimed)

**Constitution:** October 16, 1997; adopted by the National Assembly April 2, 1997; passed by national referendum May 23, 1997

**Legal system:** A mixture of Continental (Napoleonic) civil law and holdover communist legal theory; changes being gradually introduced as part of broader democratization process. Limited judicial review of legislative acts, but rulings of the Constitutional Tribunal are final; court decisions can be appealed to the European Court of Justice.

**Voting rights:** 18 years of age; universal

**Executive branch:** *Elections:* president elected by popular vote for a five-year term; election last held October 8, 2000 (next to be held October 2005); prime minister and deputy prime ministers appointed by the president and confirmed by the Sejm (legislature).  
*Cabinet:* Council of Ministers responsible to the prime minister and the Sejm; the prime minister proposes, the president appoints, and the Sejm approves the Council of Ministers.

**Legislative branch:** The Bicameral National Assembly (Zgromadzenie Narodowe) consists of the Sejm (460 seats; members are elected under a complex system of proportional representation to serve four-year terms) and the Senate (Senat) (100 seats; members are elected by a majority vote on a provincial basis to serve four-year terms).

**Judicial branch:** Supreme Court (judges are appointed by the president on the recommendation of the National Council of the Judiciary for an indefinite period); Constitutional Tribunal (judges are chosen by the Sejm for nine-year terms).

**Political parties and movements:** Catholic-National Movement; Citizens Platform; Conservative Peasants Party; Democratic Left Alliance; Freedom Union; German Minority of Lower Silesia; Law and Justice; League of Polish Families; Movement for the Reconstruction of Poland; Peasant-Democratic Party; Polish Accord; Polish Peasant Bloc; Polish Peasant Party; Social Movement; Union of Labor

**Political pressure groups:** All Poland Trade Union Alliance (trade union); Roman Catholic Church; Solidarity Trade Union

## Economy

**Overview:** Poland has steadfastly pursued a policy of economic liberalization throughout the 1990s, and today stands out as a success story among transition economies. Even so, much remains to be done. The privatization of small and medium state-owned companies and a liberal law on establishing new firms allowed for the development of the private business sector, but legal and bureaucratic obstacles alongside persistent corruption are hampering its further development. Poland's large agricultural sector remains handicapped by structural problems, surplus labor, inefficient small farms, and lack of investment. Restructuring and privatization of "sensitive sectors" (e.g., coal, steel, railroads, and energy), while recently initiated, has stalled due to a lack of political will on the part of the government. Structural reforms in health care, education, the pension system, and state administration have resulted in larger than expected fiscal pressures. Further progress in public finance depends mainly on privatization of Poland's remaining state sector, the reduction of state employment, and an overhaul of the tax code to incorporate the growing "gray" economy and farmers, most of whom pay no tax. The government's determination to enter the European Union has shaped most aspects of its economic policy and new legislation. Improving Poland's export competitiveness and containing the internal budget deficit are top priorities. Due to political uncertainty, the zloty has recently depreciated in relation to the euro and the dollar, while currencies of the other euro-zone aspirants have been appreciating.

**GDP:** purchasing power parity - \$368.1 billion (2002 est.)

**GDP - real growth rate:** 3.3% (2003 est.)

**GDP - per capita:** purchasing power parity - \$9,500 (2003 est.)

**GDP - composition by sector:** *agriculture:* 3.8%  
*industry:* 35%  
*services:* 61.2%

**Pop. below poverty line:** 18.4% (2000 est.)

**Inflation rate (consumer prices):** 1.9% (2002)

**Unemployment rate:** 18.1% (2002)

**Industries:** machine building, iron and steel, coal mining, chemicals, shipbuilding, food processing, glass, beverages, textiles

**Agricultural products:** potatoes, fruits, vegetables, wheat, poultry, eggs, pork

**Exports:** \$32.4 billion (2002 est.)

**Exports - commodities:** machinery and transport equipment 30.2%, intermediate manufactured goods 25.5%, miscellaneous manufactured goods 20.9%, food and live animals 8.5% (1999)

**Exports - partners:** Germany 34.3%, Italy 5.4%, France 5.4%, UK 5.0% (1999)

**Imports:** \$43.4 billion (2002)

**Imports - commodities:** machinery and transport equipment 38.2%, intermediate manufactured goods 20.8%, chemicals 14.3%, miscellaneous manufactured goods 9.5% (1999)

**Imports - partners:** Germany 23.9%, Russia 8.8%, Italy 8.2%, France 6.8% (1998)

**Economic aid source:** European Union structural adjustment funds

**Currency:** zloty (PLN)

**Exchange rates:** zloty per US dollar - 3.99 (2002), 4.09 (2001), 4.35 (2000), 3.97 (1999), 3.48 (1998)

## Polish State Symbols



National Flag



State Flag & Civil Ensign



Detail: Arms



Pictures courtesy of [online.cosmos.com](http://online.cosmos.com)

## **I. History: A Brief Summary of Poland and Its People**

The seventh-largest country in Europe, Poland is located in the middle of the North European Plain that extends from the Netherlands to the Ural Mountains of Russia. Most of Poland is relatively flat. Its geographic location and topography has strongly influenced Polish society and the country's relations with surrounding nations.



**Area comparison**

In the years following World War II, Poland, like other East European countries, underwent a rapid, planned transition from an agrarian to a predominantly industrial society. When the country came under communist control in 1945, Polish society was subjected to a set of rigid ideological tenets. Communist dogma failed to change the intellectual or spiritual outlook of most Poles, however, because traditional institutions such as the Roman Catholic Church and the family remained strong support structures for alternative viewpoints. On the other hand, the institutions created by the communist regimes fundamentally influenced the day-to-day functions of Polish society. These influences can be seen in areas such as health and education, where state programs made services accessible to more of the population.

With communism came the disappearance of the landed aristocracy, which had played a large role in governance and in preserving Polish culture and national consciousness, especially during the more than 100 years when Poland was partitioned. The disruption of traditional social hierarchies and barriers also brought substantially more upward mobility as the urban population came into direct contact with the peasants. Within a

decade of the communist takeover, however, the initial benefits of this social engineering had faded, and in 1956 the first of several waves of unrest swept the country. Subsequent social and economic stagnation mobilized intellectuals and workers to stage increasingly widespread and effective protests. These protests eventually contributed to the overthrow of communism and ended its suppression of social diversity. Nevertheless, the 44-year postwar communist period left permanent marks on the Polish way of life, even after the state control structures crumbled in 1989.

World War II resulted in a marked homogenization of the Polish population, which previously had been ethnically and religiously rather diverse. Massive relocations of ethnic populations resulting from boundary changes, as well as the destruction of most of Poland's Jewish population in the Holocaust, meant that a country previously two-thirds ethnically Polish and spiritually Roman Catholic entered the postwar era with a population over 90% Catholic and over 98% ethnically Polish.

From a demographic standpoint, Poland is a young country. More than 65% of the population is under 40 years of age. The country also has one of Europe's highest birth rates. By 1980 nearly half of employed Poles belonged to a socioeconomic group different from that of their parents, showing the mobility of the younger generations across traditional class lines. By 1980 less than a quarter of working Poles remained in agriculture, and about two-thirds were either manual or white-collar workers in urban areas. About a third of the postwar intelligentsia came from worker families, while about a quarter came from peasant families. These numbers represented a drastic change from the predominance of the aristocracy in the intelligentsia before World War II.

Both by cultural tradition and by recent social policy, Poles were relatively well educated. By 1989 the literacy rate was 98%. At that time, more than 17% of Poles had postsecondary education, and 4% had achieved advanced college degrees.

The end of communist rule in 1989 presented new challenges to Polish society and to government policy makers. The concept of universal, state-guaranteed protection from unemployment, sickness, and poverty was challenged as Poland turned toward privatization and opened its economy to market forces. Although Polish society had retained a healthy skepticism about the benefits of total socialization, post-communist governments could not devise replacement social programs fast enough to avoid bitter social dissatisfaction when the security of the old system disappeared. As the country moved away from its communist past, it was drawn toward its future with the West and entry into Western culture and institutions.

# The Development of a Nation

## A. The Origins of the Polish Nation

According to Polish myth, the Slavic nations trace their ancestry to three brothers who parted in the forests of Eastern Europe, each moving in a different direction to found a family of distinct but related peoples. This tale accurately describes the westward migration and gradual differentiation of the early West Slavic tribes following the collapse of the Roman Empire. About 20 such tribes formed small states between A.D. 800 and 960. One of these tribes, the Polanie or Poliane (“people of the plain”), settled in the flatlands that eventually formed the heart of Poland, lending their name to the country. Over time the modern Poles emerged as the largest of the West Slavic groupings, establishing themselves to the east of the Germanic regions of Europe with their ethnographic cousins, the Czechs and Slovaks, to the south.

In spite of convincing fragmentary evidence of prior political and social organization, national custom identifies the starting date of Polish history as 966, when Prince Mieszko (who ruled from 963-992) accepted Christianity in the name of the people he ruled. In return, Poland received acknowledgment as a separate principality owing some degree of tribute to the German Empire (later officially known as the [Holy Roman Empire](#) – see Glossary). Under Otto I, the German Empire was an expansionist force to the West in the mid-tenth century. Mieszko accepted baptism directly from Rome, in preference to conversion by the German church and subsequent annexation of Poland by the German Empire. This strategy inaugurated the intimate connection between the Polish national identity and Roman Catholicism that became a prominent theme in the history of the Poles.

Mieszko is considered the first ruler of the Piast Dynasty (named for the legendary peasant founder of the family), which endured for four centuries. Between 967 and 990, Mieszko conquered substantial territory along the Baltic Sea and in the region known as Little Poland to the south. By the time he officially submitted to the authority of the Holy See in Rome in 990, Mieszko had transformed his country into one of the strongest powers in Eastern Europe.

Mieszko’s son and successor Boleslaw I (who ruled from 992-1025), known as the Brave, built on his father’s achievements and became the most successful Polish monarch of the early medieval era. Boleslaw continued the policy of appeasing the Germans while taking advantage of their political situation to gain territory wherever possible. Frustrated in his efforts to form an equal partnership with the Holy Roman Empire, Boleslaw gained some non-Polish territory in a series of wars against his imperial overlord in 1003 and 1004. The Polish conqueror then turned eastward, extending the boundaries of his realm into present-day Ukraine. Shortly before his death in 1025, Boleslaw won international recognition as the first king of a fully sovereign Poland.

## **B. The Medieval Era**

During the eleventh century and the first half of the twelfth century, the building of the Polish state continued under a series of successors to Boleslaw I. By 1150, however, the state had been divided among the sons of Boleslaw III, beginning two centuries of fragmentation that brought Poland to the brink of dissolution.

### **1. Fragmentation and Invasion, 1025-1320**

The most fabled event of the period was the murder in 1079 of Stanislaw, the bishop of Kraków. A participant in uprisings by the aristocracy against King Boleslaw II, Stanislaw was killed by order of the king. This incident, which led to open rebellion and ended the reign of Boleslaw, is a Polish counterpart to the later, more famous assassination of Thomas à Becket on behalf of King Henry II of England. Although historians still debate the circumstances of the death, after his canonization the martyred St. Stanislaw entered national lore as a potent symbol of resistance to illegitimate state authority – an allegorical weapon that proved especially effective against the communist regime.

During the eleventh and twelfth centuries, Poland lost ground in its complex triangular relationship with the German Empire to the west and the kingdom of Bohemia to the south. New foreign enemies appeared by the thirteenth century. The Mongol invasion cut a swath of destruction through the country in 1241; for 50 years after their withdrawal in 1242, Mongol nomads mounted devastating raids into Poland from bases in Ruthenia to the southeast. Meanwhile, an even more dangerous foe arrived in 1226 when a Polish duke invited the [Teutonic Knights](#) (see Glossary), a Germanic crusading order, to help him subdue Baltic pagan tribes. Upon completing their mission with characteristic fierceness and efficiency, the knights built a stronghold on the Baltic seacoast, from which they sought to enlarge their holdings at Polish expense. By that time, the Piasts had been parceling out the realm into ever smaller units for nearly 100 years. This policy of division, initiated by Boleslaw II to appease separatist provinces while maintaining national unity, led to regional governance by various branches of the dynasty and to a near breakdown of cohesiveness in the face of foreign aggression. As the fourteenth century opened, much Polish land lay under foreign occupation (two-thirds of it was ruled by Bohemia in 1300). The continued existence of a united, independent Poland seemed unlikely.

### **2. The Later Piasts**

In the fourteenth century, after a long period of instability and growing menace from other countries, the Polish state experienced a half century of recovery under the last monarchs of the house of Piast. By 1320 Wladyslaw Lokietek (1314-33), called the Short, had manipulated internal and foreign alignments and reunited enough territory to win acceptance abroad as king of an independent Poland. His son Kazimierz III (1333-70) would become the only Polish king to gain the sobriquet “great.” In foreign policy, Kazimierz the Great strengthened his country’s position by combining judicious concessions to Bohemia and the Teutonic Knights with eastward expansion.

While using diplomacy to win Poland a respite from external threat, the king focused on domestic consolidation. He earned his singular reputation through his acumen as a builder and administrator, as well as through foreign relations. Two of the most important events of Kazimierz's rule were the founding of Poland's first university in Kraków in 1364, making that city an important European cultural center, and his mediation between the kings of Bohemia and Hungary at the Congress of Kraków (also in 1364), signaling Poland's return to the status of a European power. Lacking a male heir, Kazimierz was the last ruler in the Piast line. The extinction of the dynasty in 1370 led to several years of renewed political uncertainty. Nevertheless, the accomplishments of the fourteenth century began the ascent of the Polish state toward its historical zenith.

### **3. Integration into European Civilization**

Without question the most significant development of the formative era of Poland's history was the gradual absorption of the country into the culture of medieval Europe. After their relatively late arrival as pagan outsiders on the fringes of the Christian world, the Western Slavs were fully and speedily assimilated into the civilization of the European Middle Ages. Latin Christianity came to determine the identity of that civilization and to permeate its intellect and creativity. Over time the Central Europeans increasingly patterned their thought and institutions on Western models in areas of thought ranging from philosophy, artistic style, literature, and architecture to government, law, and social structure. The Poles borrowed especially heavily from German sources, and successive Polish rulers encouraged a substantial immigration of Germans and Jews to invigorate urban life and commerce. From its beginning, Poland drew its primary inspiration from Western Europe and developed a closer affinity with the French and Italians, for example, than with nearer Slavic neighbors of Eastern Orthodox and [Byzantine](#) (see Glossary) heritage. This westward orientation, which in some ways has made Poland the easternmost outpost of Latinate and Catholic tradition, helps to explain the Poles' tenacious sense of belonging to the "West" and their deeply rooted antagonism toward Russia as the representative of an essentially alien way of life.

#### **C. The Polish-Lithuanian Union**

Poland eventually struck up an unlikely partnership with the adjoining Grand Duchy of Lithuania, Europe's last heathen state, which provided an immediate remedy to the political and military dilemma caused by the end of the Piast Dynasty. At the end of the fourteenth century, Lithuania was a warlike political unit with dominion over enormous stretches of present-day Belarus and Ukraine. Putting aside their previous hostility, Poland and Lithuania saw that they shared common enemies, most notably the Teutonic Knights; this situation was the direct incentive for the Union of Krewo in 1385. The compact hinged on the marriage of the Polish queen, Jadwiga, to Jagiello, who became king of Poland under the name Wladyslaw Jagiello. In return, the new monarch accepted baptism in the name of his people, agreed to confederate Lithuania with Poland, and took the name Wladyslaw II. In 1387 the bishopric of Wilno was established to convert Wladyslaw's subjects to Roman Catholicism. (Eastern Orthodoxy predominated in some parts of Lithuania.) From a military standpoint, Poland received protection from the

Mongols and Tatars, while Lithuania received aid in its long struggle against the Teutonic Knights.

The Polish-Lithuanian alliance exerted a profound influence on the history of Eastern Europe. Poland and Lithuania would maintain joint statehood for more than 400 years, and over the first three centuries of that span the “Commonwealth of Two Nations” ranked as one of the leading powers of the continent.

The association produced prompt benefits in 1410 when the forces of Poland-Lithuania defeated the Teutonic Knights in battle at Grunwald (Tannenberg), at last seizing the upper hand in the long struggle with the renegade crusaders. The new Polish-Lithuanian dynasty, called “Jagiellon” after its founder, continued to augment its holdings during the following decades. By the end of the fifteenth century, representatives of the Jagiellons reigned in Bohemia and Hungary as well as Poland-Lithuania, establishing the government of their clan over virtually all of Eastern Europe and Central Europe. This far-flung federation collapsed in 1526 when armies of the [Ottoman Empire](#) (see Glossary) won a crushing victory at the Battle of Mohács (Hungary), wresting Bohemia and Hungary from the Jagiellons and installing the Turks as a strong presence in the heart of Europe. This presence created a threat to the surrounding countries because of Turkey’s military strength and the cultural tension between the Christian and Muslim countries.

## **1. The Decay of the Commonwealth**

Before another 100 years had elapsed, Poland-Lithuania had virtually ceased to function as a coherent and genuinely independent state. The commonwealth’s last martial triumph occurred in 1683, when King Jan Sobieski drove the Turks from the gates of Vienna with a cavalry charge. Poland’s important role in aiding the European alliance to roll back the Ottoman Empire was rewarded with territory in western Ukraine by the Treaty of Karlowicz (1699). Nonetheless, this isolated success did little to mask the internal weakness and paralysis of the Polish-Lithuanian political system. For the next quarter century, Poland was often a pawn in Russia’s campaigns against other powers. Augustus II of Saxony (1697-1733), who succeeded Jan Sobieski, involved Poland in Peter the Great’s war with Sweden, incurring another round of invasion and devastation by the Swedes between 1704 and 1710.

In the eighteenth century, the powers of the monarchy and the central administration became purely trivial. Kings were denied permission to provide for the elementary requirements of defense and finance, and aristocratic clans made treaties directly with foreign sovereigns. Attempts at reform were stymied by the determination of the ruling elite (*szlachta*) to preserve their “golden freedoms,” as well as the rule of unanimity in the Sejm (the governing body similar to the US Congress), where any deputy could exercise his veto right to disrupt the parliament and nullify its work. Because of the chaos sown by the veto provision, under Augustus III (1733-63) only one of 13 Sejm sessions ran to an orderly adjournment.

Unlike Spain and Sweden, great powers that were allowed to settle peacefully into secondary status at the periphery of Europe at the end of their time of glory, Poland endured its decline at the strategic crossroads of the continent. Lacking central leadership and impotent in foreign relations, Poland-Lithuania became a chattel of the ambitious kingdoms that surrounded it, an immense but feeble buffer state. During the reign of Peter the Great in Russia (1682-1725), the commonwealth fell under the dominance of the Russian tsar, and by the middle of the eighteenth century Poland-Lithuania had been made a virtual protectorate of its eastern neighbor, retaining only the theoretical right to self-rule.

## **2. The Polish Renaissance**

The sixteenth century was perhaps the most illustrious phase of Polish cultural history. During this period, Poland-Lithuania drew great artistic inspiration from the Italians, with whom the Jagiellon court cultivated close relations. Styles and tastes characteristic of the late Renaissance were imported from the Italian states. These influences survived in the renowned period architecture of Kraków, which served as the royal capital until that distinction passed to Warsaw in 1611. The University of Krakow gained international recognition as a cosmopolitan center of learning, and in 1543 its most illustrious student, Nicolaus Copernicus (Mikolaj Kopernik), literally revolutionized the science of astronomy.

The period also bore the fruit of a mature Polish literature, once again modeled after the fashion of the West European Renaissance. The talented dilettante Mikolaj Rej was the first major Polish writer to employ the vernacular, but the elegant classicist Jan Kochanowski (1530-84) is acknowledged as the genius of the age. Accomplished in several genres and equally adept in Polish and Latin, Kochanowski is widely regarded as the finest Slavic poet before the nineteenth century.

## **D. The Three Partitions, 1764-95**

During the reign of Empress Catherine the Great (1762-96) in Russia, that country intensified its manipulation in Polish affairs. Prussia and Austria, the other powers surrounding the republic of Poland-Lithuania, also took advantage of internal religious and political bickering to divide up the country in three partition stages. The third partition in 1795 wiped Poland-Lithuania from the map of Europe.

### **1. The First Partition**

In 1764, Catherine the Great dictated the election of Stanislaw August Poniatowski as king of Poland-Lithuania. Confounding expectations that he would be an obedient servant of his mistress, Stanislaw August encouraged the modernization of his realm's ramshackle political system and achieved a temporary moratorium on use of the individual veto in the Sejm (1764-66). This turnabout threatened to renew the strength of the monarchy and brought displeasure in the foreign capitals that preferred an inert, pliable Poland. Catherine, among the most displeased by Poniatowski's independence,

encouraged religious dissension in Poland-Lithuania's substantial Eastern Orthodox population, which earlier in the eighteenth century had lost the rights enjoyed during the Jagiellon Dynasty. Under heavy Russian pressure, the Sejm restored Orthodox equality in 1767. This action provoked a Catholic uprising by the Confederation of Bar, a league of Polish nobles that fought until 1772 to revoke Catherine's mandate.

The defeat of the Confederation of Bar again left Poland exposed to the ambitions of its neighbors. Although Catherine initially opposed partition, Frederick the Great of Prussia profited from Austria's threatening military position to the southwest by pressing a long-standing proposal to carve territory from the Polish-Lithuanian commonwealth. Catherine, persuaded that Russia did not have the resources to continue unilateral domination of Poland, agreed. In 1772 Russia, Prussia, and Austria forced terms of partition upon the helpless commonwealth under the pretext of restoring order in the anarchic Polish situation.

## 2. National Revival

The first partition in 1772 did not directly threaten the viability of Poland-Lithuania. Poland retained extensive territory that included the Polish heartland. In fact, the shock of the annexations made clear the dangers of decay in government institutions, creating a body of opinion favorable to reform along the lines of the European [Enlightenment](#) (see Glossary). King Stanislaw August supported the progressive elements in the government and promoted the ideas of foreign political figures such as Edmund Burke and George Washington. At the same time, Polish intellectuals discussed Enlightenment philosophers such as Montesquieu and Rousseau. During this period, the concept of democratic institutions for all classes was accepted in Polish society. Educational reform included the establishment of the first ministry of education in Europe. Taxation and the army underwent thorough reform, and government again was centralized in the Permanent Council. Landholders emancipated large numbers of peasants, although there was no official government decree on this subject. Polish cities, in decline for many decades, were revived by the influence of the Industrial Revolution, especially in mining and textiles.

Stanislaw August's process of renovation reached its climax on May 3, 1791, when after three years of intense debate, the "Four Years' Sejm" produced Europe's first written constitution. Conceived in the liberal spirit of the contemporaneous document in the United States, the constitution recast Poland-Lithuania as a hereditary monarchy and abolished many of the eccentricities and antiquated features of the old system. The new constitution abolished the individual veto in parliament; provided a separation of powers among the legislative, executive, and judicial branches of government; and established "people's sovereignty" (for the noble and bourgeois classes). Although never fully implemented, the Constitution of May 3 gained an honored position in the Polish political heritage; tradition marks the anniversary of its passage as the country's most important civic holiday.

### **3. Destruction of Poland-Lithuania**

Passage of the constitution alarmed nobles, who would lose considerable stature under the new order. In autocratic states such as Russia, the democratic ideals of the constitution also threatened the existing order, and the prospect of Polish recovery threatened to end domination of Polish affairs by its neighbors. In 1792 domestic and foreign reactionaries combined to end the democratization process. Polish conservative factions formed the Confederation of Targowica and appealed for Russian assistance in restoring the status quo. Catherine the Great gladly used this opportunity; enlisting Prussian support, she invaded Poland under the pretext of defending Poland's ancient liberties. The irresolute Stanislaw August capitulated, defecting to the Targowica faction. Arguing that Poland had fallen prey to the radical [Jacobinism](#) (see Glossary) then at high tide in France, Russia and Prussia, he did away with the Constitution of May 3, carried out a second partition of Poland in 1793, and placed the remainder of the country under occupation by Russian troops.

The second partition was far more injurious than the first. Russia received a vast area of eastern Poland, extending southward from its gains in the first partition nearly to the Black Sea. To the west, Prussia received an area known as South Prussia, nearly twice the size of its first partition gains along the Baltic, as well as the port of Gdansk (then renamed Danzig). Thus, Poland's neighbors reduced the commonwealth to a rump state, and plainly signaled their designs to abolish it altogether at their convenience.

In a gesture of defiance, a general Polish revolt broke out in 1794 under the leadership of Tadeusz Kosciuszko, a military officer who had rendered notable service in the American Revolution. Kosciuszko's ragtag insurgent armies won some initial successes, but they eventually fell before the superior forces of Russian General Alexander Suvorov. In the wake of the insurrection of 1794, Russia, Prussia and Austria carried out the third and final partition of Poland-Lithuania in 1795, erasing the Commonwealth of Two Nations from the map and pledging never to let it return.

Much of Europe condemned the dismemberment as an international crime without historical parallel. Amid the distractions of the French Revolution and its attendant wars, however, no state actively opposed the annexations. In the long term, the dissolution of Poland-Lithuania upset the traditional European balance of power, dramatically magnifying the influence of Russia and paving the way for the Germany that would emerge in the nineteenth century with Prussia at its core. For the Poles, the third partition began a period of continuous foreign rule that would endure for well over a century.

### **E. The Napoleonic Period**

At the turn of the nineteenth century, Europe had begun to feel the impact of momentous political and intellectual movements that, among their other effects, would keep the "Polish Question" on the agenda of international issues needing resolution. Most immediately, Napoleon Bonaparte had established a new empire in France in 1804 following that country's revolution. Napoleon's attempts to build and expand his empire

kept Europe at war for the next decade, and brought him into conflict with the same East European powers that had beleaguered Poland in the last decades of the previous century. An alliance of convenience was the natural result of this situation. Volunteer Polish legions attached themselves to Bonaparte's armies, hoping that in return the emperor would allow an independent Poland to reappear out of his conquests. Although Napoleon promised more than he ever intended to deliver to the Polish cause, in 1807 he created a Duchy of Warsaw from Prussian territory that had been part of old Poland and was still inhabited by Poles. Basically a French puppet, the duchy did enjoy some degree of self-government, and many Poles believed that further Napoleonic victories would bring restoration of the entire commonwealth.

In 1809, under Józef Poniatowski, nephew of Stanislaw Augustus II, the duchy reclaimed the land taken by Austria in the second partition. The Russian army occupied the duchy as it chased Napoleon out of Russia in 1813, however, and Polish expectations ended with the final defeat of Napoleon at Waterloo in 1815. In the subsequent peace settlement of the Congress of Vienna, the victorious Austrians and Prussians swept away the Duchy of Warsaw and reconfirmed most of the terms of the final partition of Poland.

Although brief, the Napoleonic period occupies an important place in Polish annals. Much of the legend and symbolism of modern Polish patriotism derives from this period, including the conviction that Polish independence is a necessary element of a just and legitimate European order. This conviction was simply expressed in a fighting slogan of the time, "for your freedom and ours." Moreover, the appearance of the Duchy of Warsaw so soon after the partitions proved that the seemingly final historical death sentence delivered in 1795 was not necessarily the end of the Polish nation. Instead, many observers came to believe that favorable circumstances would free Poland from foreign domination.

## **F. The Impact of Nationalism and Romanticism**

The intellectual and artistic climate of the early nineteenth century stimulated the growth of Polish demands for self-government. During these decades, modern nationalism took shape and rapidly developed a massive following throughout the continent, becoming the most dynamic and appealing political doctrine of its time. By stressing the value and dignity of native cultures and languages, nationalism offered a rationale for ethnic loyalty and resistance to assimilation. The associated principle of the nation-state, or national homeland, provided a rallying cry for the stateless peoples of Europe.

Romanticism was the artistic element of nineteenth century European culture that exerted the strongest influence on the Polish national consciousness. The Romantic movement was a natural partner of political nationalism, for it echoed the nationalist sympathy for folk cultures and manifested a general air of disdain for the conservative political order of post-Napoleonic Europe. Under this influence, Polish literature flourished anew in the works of a school of nineteenth century Romantic poets, led by Adam Mickiewicz (1798-1855). Mickiewicz concentrated on patriotic themes and the glorious national past.

Frédéric Chopin (1810-49), a leading composer of the century, also used the tragic history of his nation as a major inspiration.

Nurtured by these influences, nationalism awoke first among the intelligentsia and certain segments of the nobility, then more gradually in the peasantry. At the end of the process, a broader definition of nationhood had replaced the old class-based “gentry patriotism” of Poland.

## **G. The Era of National Insurrections**

For several decades, the Polish national movement gave priority to the immediate restoration of independence, a drive that found expression in a series of armed rebellions. The insurgencies arose mainly in the Russian zone of partition to the east, about three-quarters of which was formerly Polish territory. After the Congress of Vienna, the Russian government in St. Petersburg had organized its Polish lands as the Congress Kingdom of Poland, granting it a quite liberal constitution, its own army, and limited autonomy within the tsarist empire. In the 1820s, however, Russian rule grew more arbitrary, and secret societies were formed by intellectuals in several cities to plot an overthrow. In November 1830, Polish troops in Warsaw rose in revolt. When the government of Congress Poland proclaimed solidarity with the insurrectionists shortly thereafter, a new Polish-Russian war began. The rebels’ requests for aid from France were ignored, and their reluctance to abolish serfdom cost them the support of the peasantry. By September 1831, the Russians had subdued Polish resistance and forced 6,000 resistance fighters into exile in France, beginning a time of harsh repression of intellectual and religious activity throughout Poland. At the same time, Congress Poland lost its constitution and its army.

After the failure of the November Revolt, clandestine conspiratorial activity continued on Polish territory. An exiled Polish political and intellectual elite established a base of operations in Paris. A conservative group headed by Adam Czartoryski (leader of the November Revolt) relied on foreign diplomatic support to restore Poland’s status as established by the Congress of Vienna, which Russia had routinely violated beginning in 1819. Otherwise, this group was satisfied with a return to monarchy and traditional social structures.

The radical factions never formed a united front on any issue besides the general goal of independence. Their programs insisted that the Poles liberate themselves by their own efforts and linked independence with republicanism and the emancipation of the peasants. Handicapped by internal division, limited resources, heavy surveillance, and persecution of revolutionary cells in Poland, the Polish national movement suffered numerous losses. The movement sustained a major setback in a 1846 revolt organized in Austrian Poland by the Polish Democratic Society, the leading radical nationalist group. The uprising ended in a bloody fiasco when the peasantry took up arms against the gentry’s rebel leadership, which was regarded as potentially a worse oppressor than the Austrians. By incurring harsh military repression from Austria, the failed revolt left the Polish nationalists in a poor position to participate in the wave of national revolutions that

crossed Europe in 1848 and 1849. The stubborn idealism of this uprising's leaders emphasized individual liberty and separate national identity rather than establishment of a unified republic, a significant change of political philosophy from earlier movements.

The last and most tenacious of the Polish uprisings of the mid-nineteenth century erupted in the Russian-occupied sector in January 1863. Following Russia's disastrous defeat in the Crimean War, the government of Tsar Alexander II enacted a series of liberal reforms, including liberation of the serfs throughout the Russian empire. High-handed imposition of land reforms in Poland aroused hostility among the landed nobles and a group of young radical intellectuals influenced by Karl Marx and the Russian liberal Alexander Herzen. Repeating the pattern of 1830-31, the open revolt of the January Insurrection by Congress Poland failed to win foreign backing. Although its socially progressive program could not mobilize the peasants, the rebellion persisted stubbornly for well over a year. After finally crushing the insurgency in August 1864, Russia abolished the Congress Kingdom of Poland altogether and revoked the separate status of the Polish lands, incorporating them directly as the Western Region of the Russian Empire. The region was placed under the dictatorial rule of Mikhail Muravev, who became known as the Hangman of Wilno. All Polish citizens were assimilated into the empire. When Russia officially emancipated the Polish serfs in early 1864, it removed a major rallying point from the agenda of potential Polish revolutionaries.

## **H. Social and Political Transformation**

Throughout the later nineteenth century, profound social and economic forces operated on the Polish lands, giving them a more modern aspect and altering traditional patterns of life. Especially in Russian Poland and the Silesian regions under German control, mining and manufacturing commenced on a large scale. This development sped the process of urbanization, and the emergence of capitalism began to reduce the relative importance of the landed aristocracy in Polish society. A considerable segment of the peasantry abandoned the overburdened land. Millions of Poles emigrated to North America and other destinations, and millions more migrated to cities to form the new industrial labor force. These shifts stimulated fresh social tensions. Urban workers bore the full range of hardships associated with early capitalism, and the intensely nationalistic atmosphere of the day bred frictions between Poles and the other peoples remaining from the old heterogeneous Commonwealth of Two Nations. The movement of the former noble class into cities created a new urban professional class. Mirroring a trend visible throughout Central Europe, anti-Semitic sentiment mounted visibly, fed by Poles competing for the urban livelihoods long regarded as Jewish specialties.

These transformations changed the face of politics as well, giving rise to new parties and movements that would dominate the Polish landscape for the next century. The grievances of the lower classes led to the formation of peasant and socialist parties. Communism gained only a marginal following, but a more moderate socialist faction led by Józef Pilsudski (1867-1935) won broader support through its emphatic advocacy of Polish independence. By 1905 Pilsudski's party, the Polish Socialist Party, was the largest socialist party in the entire Russian Empire. The National Democracy of Roman

Dmowski (1864-1939) became the leading vehicle of the right by espousing a doctrine that combined nationalism with mistrust of Jews and other minorities. By the turn of the century, Polish political life had emerged from the relative quiescence of quiet daily work and entered a stage of renewed assertiveness. In particular, Pilsudski and Dmowski had initiated what would be long careers as the paramount figures in the civic affairs of Poland. After 1900 political activity was suppressed only in the Prussian sector.

## **I. War and the Polish Lands**

World War I split the ranks of the three partitioning empires, pitting Russia as defender of Serbia and ally of Britain and France against the leading members of the Central Powers, Germany and Austria-Hungary. This circumstance afforded the Poles political leverage, as both sides offered pledges of concessions and future autonomy in exchange for Polish loyalty and recruits. The Austrians wanted to incorporate Congress Poland into their territory of Galicia, so they allowed nationalist organizations to form there. The Russians recognized the Polish right to autonomy and allowed formation of the Polish National Committee, which supported the Russian side. In 1916, attempting to increase Polish support for the Central Powers, the German and Austrian emperors declared a new kingdom of Poland. The new kingdom included only a small part of the old commonwealth, however.

As the war settled into a long stalemate, the issue of Polish self-rule gained greater urgency. Roman Dmowski spent the war years in Western Europe, hoping to persuade the Allies to unify the Polish lands under Russian rule as an initial step toward liberation. In the meantime, Pilsudski had correctly predicted that the war would ruin all three of the partitioners, a conclusion most people thought highly unlikely before 1918. Pilsudski therefore formed Polish legions to assist the Central Powers in defeating Russia as the first step toward full independence for Poland.

Much of the heavy fighting on the war's Eastern Front took place on the territory of the former Polish state. In 1914 Russian forces advanced very close to Kraków before being beaten back. The next spring, heavy fighting occurred around Gorlice and Przemyśl, to the east of Kraków in Galicia. By the end of 1915, the Germans had occupied the entire Russian sector, including Warsaw. In 1916 another Russian offensive in Galicia exacerbated the already desperate situation of civilians in the war zone; about 1 million Polish refugees fled eastward behind Russian lines during the war. Although the Russian offensive of 1916 caught the Germans and Austrians by surprise, poor communications and logistics prevented the Russians from taking full advantage of their situation.

A total of 2 million Polish troops fought with the armies of the three occupying powers, and 450,000 died. Several hundred thousand Polish civilians were moved to labor camps in Germany. The scorched-earth retreat strategies of both sides left much of the war zone uninhabitable.

## **1. Recovery of Statehood**

In 1917 two separate events decisively changed the character of the war and set it on a course toward the rebirth of Poland. The United States entered the conflict on the Allied side, while a process of revolutionary upheaval in Russia weakened and then removed the Russians from the Eastern Front, finally bringing the [Bolsheviks](#) (see Glossary) to power in that country. After the last Russian advance into Galicia failed in mid-1917, the Germans went on the offensive again, the army of revolutionary Russia ceased to be a factor, and the Russian presence on Polish territory ended for the next 22 years. The defection of Russia from the Allied coalition gave free rein to the calls of Woodrow Wilson, the American president, to transform the war into a crusade to spread democracy and liberate the Poles and other peoples from the suzerainty of the Central Powers. Polish opinion crystallized in support of the Allied cause. Pilsudski became a popular hero when Berlin jailed him for insubordination. The Allies broke the resistance of the Central Powers by autumn 1918, as the Habsburg monarchy disintegrated and the German imperial government collapsed. In November 1918, Pilsudski was released from internment in Germany, returned to Warsaw, and took control as provisional president of an independent Poland that had been absent from the map of Europe for 123 years.

## **2. Interwar Poland**

Pilsudski's first task was to reunite the Polish regions that had assumed various economic and political identities since the partition in the late eighteenth century, and especially since the advent of political parties. Using an authoritarian style of governance, Pilsudski took immediate steps to consolidate the Polish regions under a single government with its own currency and army, but the borders of the Second Polish Republic were not established until 1921. Between 1921 and 1939, Poland achieved significant economic growth despite world economic crisis. The Polish political scene remained chaotic and shifting, however, especially after Pilsudski's death in 1935.

## **3. The Outbreak of War**

The crisis that led directly to renewed European conflict in 1939 commenced with German demands against Poland, backed by threats of war, for territorial readjustments in the region of Danzig and the Baltic coast to connect East Prussia with the rest of Germany. When Warsaw refused, correctly reading Hitler's proposal as a mere prelude to further exactions, it received only hesitant promises of British and French backing. Hitler overcame the deterrent effect of this alliance on August 23, when Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union signed a nonaggression treaty (the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact) that ended their interwar hostility. A secret provision of the treaty essentially divided all of Eastern Europe into Soviet and German spheres of domination. This provision signified the blessing of Soviet dictator Joseph V. Stalin for Berlin to attack Poland without fear of Soviet interference.

The Hitler-Stalin pact sealed Poland's fate and put the country in an indefensible position. On September 1, 1939, Germany hurled the bulk of its armed forces at its

eastern neighbor, touching off World War II. Based on existing guarantees of security, Britain and France declared war on Germany two days later, but they gave no effective assistance to their ally. By mid-September, Warsaw was surrounded, in spite of stout resistance by outnumbered Polish forces. As Poland reeled under the assault from the west, the Soviet Union administered the coup de grace by invading from the east on September 17. By the end of the month, the “September campaign” was over. Hitler and Stalin had reached terms defining their respective gains, and the Polish lands had been subjected once more to occupation.

The following photos are courtesy of <http://www.scrapbookpages.com/poland>.



**Tomb of Unknown Soldier in Warsaw after bomb damage**



**Tomb of Unknown Soldier after it was restored**



**Current view of statue of King Zygmunt Waza at entrance to Old Town Warsaw**



**Area behind statue after Warsaw was destroyed by bombs**



**Reconstructed town houses of rich merchants in Old Town Warsaw**



**Town square in Old Town Warsaw after bomb damage**

#### **4. German and Soviet Rule**

For the next five years, Poland endured the most severe wartime occupation conditions in modern European history. Initially, Germany annexed western Poland directly, establishing a brutal colonial government whose expressed goal was to erase completely the concept of Polish nationhood and make the Poles slaves of a new German empire. About one million Poles were removed from German-occupied areas and replaced with German settlers. An additional 2.5 million Poles were sent into forced labor camps in Germany.

Until mid-1941, Germany and the Soviet Union maintained good relations in the joint dominion they had established over Poland. Moscow had absorbed the eastern regions largely inhabited by Ukrainians and Byelorussians. By 1941 the Soviets had moved 1.5 million Poles into labor camps all over the Soviet Union, and Stalin's secret police had murdered thousands of Polish prisoners of war, especially figures in politics and public administration. The most notorious incident was the 1940 murder of thousands of Polish military officers; the bodies of 4,000 of them were discovered in a mass grave in the Katyn forests near Smolensk in 1943. Because Soviet authorities refused to admit responsibility until near the time of the Soviet Union's collapse in 1991, Polish opinion regarded the Katyn Massacre as the ultimate symbol of Soviet cruelty and mendacity.

After Germany broke the Hitler-Stalin pact and invaded the Soviet Union in June 1941, all of the Polish lands came under control of the Third Reich, whose occupation policies became even more bloodthirsty as the war continued. Hitler considered Poland to be an integral part of German Lebensraum (living space), his concept of German domination of the European continent. Eastern Europe would be purged of its population of racial inferiors and prepared as the hinterland of a grandiose Germanic empire. This vision fueled the genocidal fanaticism of the conquerors. Reduced to slave status, the Poles lived under severe restrictions enforced with savage punishment. As the principal center of European Jewry, Poland became the main killing ground of the Nazi Holocaust; several of the most lethal death camps, including Auschwitz, Majdanek, and Treblinka, operated on Polish soil. The Germans annihilated nearly all of Poland's three million Jews. Roughly as many Polish gentiles also perished under the occupation.

#### **5. Soviet Liberation of Poland**

Later in the war, the fate of Poland came to depend on the Soviet Union, which was initially the agent of deliverance from Nazi tyranny but became the bearer of a new form of oppression. Stalin responded to Polish indignation over the Katyn Massacre by establishing an alternative Polish government of communists. The underground Polish Workers' Party (Polska Partia Robotnicza) had already been active in German-occupied Poland for over a year. In 1943 it established a small military arm, the People's or Home Army (Armia Ludowa). This Army and the Polish Workers' Party acted separately throughout the war.

As the tide of war turned in favor of the Allies, the Soviet shadow over Poland and Central Europe loomed larger. When Soviet forces neared Warsaw in the summer of 1944, the Home Army, anticipating imminent Red Army assistance, launched a rebellion against the German garrisons in the capital. However, the Soviets halted their advance just short of Warsaw, isolating the uprising and enabling the Germans to crush it after two months of intense fighting. In retaliation against the Poles, the Germans demolished Warsaw before retreating westward, leaving 90% of the city in ruins. The city was later rebuilt (see pictures on pages 22-24).

Just before the Home Army uprising, the communist factions had formed the Polish Committee of National Liberation, later known as the Lublin Committee, as the official legal authority in liberated territory. In January 1945, the Lublin Committee became a provisional government, and was recognized by the Soviet Union and installed in Warsaw. From that time, the Polish communists exerted primary influence on decisions about the restoration of Poland. Given this outcome, there is a strong suspicion that the Soviet failure to move on Warsaw in 1944 was an intentional strategy used by Stalin to eliminate the noncommunist resistance forces. The Red Army expelled the last German troops from Poland in March 1945, several weeks before the final Allied victory in Europe.

## **6. Consolidation of Communist Power**

The shattered Poland that emerged from the rubble of World War II was reconstituted as a communist state and incorporated within the newly formed Soviet sphere of influence in Eastern Europe, despite the evident wishes of the overwhelming majority of the Polish nation. The deciding factor in this outcome was the dominant position gained by the victorious Red Army at the end of the war. At the conferences of Yalta and Potsdam in 1945, US President Franklin Roosevelt and British prime minister Winston Churchill met with Stalin to determine postwar political conditions, including the disposition of Polish territory occupied by the Red Army. At Yalta in February, Stalin pledged to permit free elections in Poland and the other Soviet-occupied countries of Eastern Europe. At Potsdam in July-August, the Allies awarded Poland over 100,000 square kilometers of German territory, west to the Oder and Neisse rivers, commonly called the Oder-Neisse Line. In turn, about three million Poles were removed from former Polish territory awarded to the Soviet Union and resettled in the former German lands; similarly, about two million Germans had to move west of the new border.

The Yalta accords sanctioned the formation of a provisional Polish coalition government, composed of communists and proponents of Western democracy. From its outset the Yalta formula favored the communists, who enjoyed the advantages of Soviet support, superior morale, control over crucial ministries, and Moscow's determination to bring Eastern Europe securely under its thumb as a strategic asset in the emerging Cold War. The new regime in Warsaw subdued guerrilla resistance in the countryside and gained political advantage by gradually whittling away the rights of their democratic foes. By 1946 the coalition regime held a carefully controlled national referendum that approved nationalization of the economy, land reform, and a unicameral rather than bicameral

Sejm. Rightist parties had been outlawed by that time, and a pro-government Democratic Bloc that was formed in 1947 included the forerunner of the communist Polish United Workers' Party (Polska Zjednoczona Partia Robotnicza, PZPR) and its leftist allies.

The first parliamentary election, held in 1947, allowed opposition candidates only from the now-insignificant Polish Peasant Party, which was harassed into ineffectiveness. Under these conditions, the regime's candidates gained 417 of 434 seats in parliament, effectively ending the role of genuine opposition parties. Within the next two years, the communists ensured their ascendancy by restyling the PZPR as holders of a monopoly of power in the Polish People's Republic.

## **7. From Stalinism to the Polish October**

Communist social engineering transformed Poland nearly as much as did the war. In the early years of the new regime, Poland became more urban and industrial as a modern working class came into existence. The Polish People's Republic attained its principal accomplishments in this initial, relatively dynamic phase of its existence. The greatest gains were made in postwar reconstruction and in integration of the territories annexed from Germany. Imposition of the Soviet model on the political, economic, and social aspects of Polish life was generally slower and less traumatic than in the other East European countries following World War II. The PZPR took great care, for example, to limit the pace of agricultural collectivization lest Soviet-style reform antagonize Polish farmers.

Nevertheless, in the late 1940s and early 1950s, PZPR rule grew steadily more totalitarian and developed the full range of Stalinist features then obligatory within the Soviet European empire: ideological regimentation, the police state, strict subordination to the Soviet Union, a rigid command economy, persecution of the Roman Catholic Church, and blatant distortion of history, especially concerning the more sensitive aspects of Poland's relations with the Soviet Union. Stringent censorship stifled artistic and intellectual creativity or drove its exponents into exile. At the same time, popular restiveness increased as initial postwar gains gave way to the economic malaise that would become chronic in the party-state.

Soviet-style centralized state planning was introduced in the First Six-Year Plan, which began in 1950. The plan called for accelerated development of heavy industry and forced collectivization of agriculture, abandoning the previous go-slow policy in that area. As the earlier policy had cautioned, however, collectivization met stubborn peasant resistance, and the process moved much more slowly than anticipated. The state also took control of nearly all commercial and industrial enterprises. Leaving only family-run shops in the private sector, the government harassed such independent shopkeepers with bureaucratic requirements.

In its relations with the Roman Catholic Church, the communist government carefully avoided open intervention, seeking rather to foment anticlerical sentiment in society. Polish Catholic clergy denounced the atheism and materialism in the regime; in 1949 the

Vatican's excommunication of Catholics belonging to the PZPR brought open hostility from both sides, including state control of church institutions and propaganda against them and church officials. By 1954 nine high Polish churchmen including the head of the Polish Catholic Church, Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński, had been imprisoned.

A brief liberalizing "thaw" in Eastern Europe followed the death of Stalin in early 1953. In Poland this event stirred ferment, calls for systemic reform, and conflict in the ranks of the PZPR. The de-Stalinization of official Soviet dogma left Poland's Stalinist regime in a difficult position, especially following new Soviet leader Nikita S. Khrushchev's 1956 speech attacking Stalin's cult of personality. In the same month as Khrushchev's speech, the death of hard-liner Bolesław Bierut exacerbated an existing split in the PZPR. In 1951 Bierut had won a struggle with Władysław Gomułka for the top position in the party. In June 1956, scores of demonstrators died when army troops quelled street riots in Poznań, inaugurating a recurrent phenomenon of Polish worker protest against the self-proclaimed workers' state.

Realizing the need for new leadership, the PZPR chose Gomułka as first secretary in October 1956. This decision was made despite Moscow's threats to invade Poland if the PZPR picked Gomułka, a moderate who had been purged after losing his battle with Bierut. When Khrushchev was reassured that Gomułka would not alter the basic foundations of Polish communism, he withdrew the invasion threat. On the other hand, Gomułka's pledge to follow a "Polish road to socialism" that would be more in harmony with national traditions and preferences caused many Poles to interpret the dramatic "Polish October" confrontation of 1956 as a sign that the end of the dictatorship was in sight.

## **8. The Gomułka Years**

The elevation of Gomułka to first secretary marked a milestone in the history of communist Poland. Most importantly, it was the first time that popular opinion had influenced a change at the top of any communist government. Gomułka's regime began auspiciously by curbing the secret police, returning most collective farmland to private ownership, loosening censorship, freeing political prisoners, improving relations with the Catholic Church, and pledging democratization of communist party management. In general, Gomułka's Poland gained a deserved reputation as one of the more open societies in Eastern Europe. The new party chief disappointed many Poles, however, by failing to dismantle the fundamentals of the Stalinist system. Regarding himself as a loyal communist and striving to overcome the traditional Polish-Russian enmity, Gomułka came to favor only those reforms necessary to secure public toleration of the party's dominion. The PZPR was to be both the defender of Polish nationalism and the keeper of communist ideology. By the late 1960s, Gomułka's leadership had grown more orthodox and stagnant as the memory of the Poznań uprising faded. In 1968 Gomułka encouraged the [Warsaw Pact](#) (see Glossary) military suppression of the democratic reforms occurring in Czechoslovakia.

Gomulka's hold on power weakened that year when Polish students, inspired by the idealism of the [Prague Spring](#) (see Glossary), demonstrated to protest suppression of intellectual freedom. Popular disenchantment mounted as police attacked student demonstrators in Warsaw. The PZPR hardliners, who had been alarmed by Gomulka's modest reforms, seized the opportunity to force the first secretary into purging Jews from party and professional positions, exacerbating discontent among the most vocal elements of Polish society.

The downfall of the Gomulka regime in December 1970 was triggered by a renewed outbreak of labor violence in protest of drastic price rises on basic goods. When strikes spread from the Lenin Shipyard in Gdansk to other industrial centers on the Baltic coast, Gomulka interpreted the peaceful stoppages and walkouts as counterrevolution and ordered them met with deadly force. The bloodshed claimed hundreds of victims and inflamed the entire coastline before the PZPR annulled the price increases and pushed Gomulka into retirement, replacing him as first secretary with Edward Gierek. The Baltic slayings permanently embittered millions of workers, while the events of the later Gomulka period convinced Polish progressives that enlightened communist rule was a futile hope. Many of the future leaders of Solidarity and other opposition movements gained their formative political experiences in 1968 and 1970.

## **J. The Road to Freedom**

### **1. The Birth of Solidarity**

When the government enacted new food price increases in the summer of 1980, another wave of labor unrest swept the country. Partly moved by local grievances, the workers of the Lenin Shipyard in Gdansk went on strike in mid-August. Led by electrician and veteran strike leader Lech Walesa, the strikers occupied the shipyard and issued far-reaching demands for labor reform and greater civil rights. The workers' top priority was establishment of a trade union independent of communist party control and possessing the legal right to strike. Buoyed by a wave of popular support and formally acknowledged by other striking enterprises as their leader, the Gdansk workers held out until the government capitulated. The victorious strikers hailed the [Gdansk Agreement](#) (see Glossary) of August 31, 1980 as a veritable social contract, authorizing citizens to introduce democratic change to the extent possible within the confines of the communist system.

Solidarity, the free national trade union that arose from the nucleus of the Lenin Shipyard strike, was unlike anything in the previous experience of communist states. Although primarily a labor movement led and supported by workers and represented by its charismatic chairman Walesa, Solidarity attracted a diverse membership that quickly swelled to 10 million people, or more than one of every four Poles. Because of its size and massive support, the organization assumed the stature of a national reform lobby. Although it disavowed overtly political ambitions, the movement became a de facto vehicle of opposition to the communists, who were demoralized but still in power. With the encouragement of Pope John Paul II (who was of Polish descent), the church gave

Solidarity vital material and moral support that further legitimized it in the eyes of the Polish population.

In the 16 months following its initial strike, Solidarity waged a difficult campaign to realize the letter and spirit of the Gdansk Agreement. This struggle fostered a level of openness unprecedented in a communist East European society. Although the PZPR ousted Gierek as first secretary and proclaimed its willingness to cooperate with the fledgling union, the ruling party still sought to frustrate its rival and curtail its autonomy in every possible way. In 1980-81, repeated showdowns between Solidarity and the party-state usually were decided by Solidarity's effective strikes. The movement spread from industrial to agricultural enterprises with the founding of Rural Solidarity, which pressured the regime to recognize private farmers as the economic foundation of the country's agricultural sector.

Meanwhile, the persistence of Solidarity prompted furious objections from Moscow and other East European governments, putting Poland under a constant threat of invasion by its Warsaw Pact allies. This was the first time that a ruling communist regime had accepted organizations completely beyond the regime's control. It was also the first time an overwhelming majority of the workers under such a regime were openly loyal to an organization that was fundamentally opposed to everything for which the party stood. In 1981 an estimated 30% of PZPR members also belonged to an independent union.

In late 1981, the tide began to turn against the union movement. In the midst of the virtual economic collapse of the country, many Poles lost the enthusiasm that had given Solidarity its initial impetus. The extremely heterogeneous movement developed internal splits over personality and policy. Walesa's moderate wing emphasized nonpolitical goals, assuming that Moscow would never permit Poland to be governed by a group not endorsed by the Warsaw Pact. Walesa sought cooperation with the PZPR to prod the regime into reforms and avoid open confrontation with the Soviet Union. By contrast, the militant wing of Solidarity sought to destabilize the regime and force drastic change through wildcat strikes (unexpected strikes often incorporating entire work groups) and demonstrations.

In 1981 the government adopted a harder line against the union, and General Wojciech Jaruzelski, commander in chief of the Polish armed forces, replaced Stanislaw Kania as party leader in October. Jaruzelski's very profession symbolized a tougher approach to the increasingly turbulent political situation. At the end of 1981, the government broke off all negotiations with Solidarity, and tension between the antagonists rose sharply.

## **2. Martial Law**

In December 1981, Jaruzelski suddenly declared martial law, ordering the army and special police units to seize control of the country, apprehend Solidarity's leaders, and prevent all further union activity. In effect, Jaruzelski executed a carefully planned and efficient military coup on behalf of the beleaguered and paralyzed PZPR. The motives of this act remain unclear. The general later claimed that he acted to head off the greater evil of an imminent Soviet invasion; detractors dismissed this explanation as a pretext for an

ironfisted attempt to salvage party rule. In any case, the junta suppressed resistance with a determination that cost the lives of several protesters, and by the new year the stunned nation was again under the firm grip of a conventional communist regime.

Under martial law, Jaruzelski's regime applied draconian restrictions on civil liberties, closed the universities, and imprisoned thousands of Solidarity activists, including Walesa. During the succeeding months, the government undid much of Solidarity's work and finally dissolved the union itself. Official pressure overcame repeated attempts by Solidarity sympathizers to force the nullification of the December coup. By the end of 1982, the junta felt sufficiently secure to free Walesa, whom it now characterized as the "former leader of a former union." After gradually easing the most onerous features of the state of emergency, Warsaw lifted martial law in July 1983, but Jaruzelski and his generals continued to control the most critical party and government posts.

### **3. Poland at an Impasse**

From the viewpoint of the regime, implementing martial law efficiently extinguished the immediate challenge posed by Solidarity. It did nothing, however, to resolve the long-standing crisis of "People's Poland," which in many ways originated in the very foundation of communist rule and the shadow of illegitimacy and ineptitude from which it never escaped. Jaruzelski presented himself as a realistic moderate, a proponent of reform who nevertheless insisted on the leading role of the party. Polish society remained sullenly unresponsive to his appeals, however. At the same time, he encountered resistance from the PZPR conservatives. These so-called hardheads, held in contempt by the public, regarded the party chief as too conciliatory and resented the interference of Jaruzelski's fellow generals in the affairs of the civilian party apparatus.

Time proved that Jaruzelski's coup had staggered Solidarity but not killed it. Adherents of the union operated underground or from jail cells, advocating a waiting game to preserve the principles of the Gdansk Agreement. Walesa in particular refused to fade into obscurity; he gained added luster by his receipt of the Nobel Prize for Peace in 1983. In the next year, the Jaruzelski government suffered embarrassment when secret policemen were discovered to have abducted and murdered Father Jerzy Popieluszko, a priest who had gained recognition as the spiritual adviser of the repressed Solidarity. At that juncture, Poland seemed mired in frustrating deadlock, with no reasonable prospect of resuscitating the stricken economy or achieving political harmony.

### **4. Collapse of the Communist Regime**

The deadlock was broken chiefly by events elsewhere in the Soviet alliance. The birth of Solidarity proved to be a precursor of forces of change across all of Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union. Once again Poland was in the midst of cataclysmic European events, but in this case Poland had a decisive influence on events in neighboring countries. Beginning with the liberalization programs of Soviet leader Mikhail S. Gorbachev, and continuing with the unforeseen and sudden demise of Poland's communist regime, decades of tension were released throughout the region by the end of 1989.

## **K. The 1989 Elections and Their Aftermath**

With the end of communism, the country needed new leadership that represented the interests of the people. Leading dissident groups and existing government officials met often to discuss the future of Poland. After months of haggling in round table discussions, the talks yielded a historic compromise in early 1989: Solidarity would regain legal status and the right to post candidates in parliamentary elections (with the outcome guaranteed to leave the communists a majority of seats). Although the guarantee seemed a foolish concession by Solidarity to many observers at the time, the election of June 1989 swept communists from nearly all the contested seats, demonstrating that the PZPR's presumed advantages in organization and funding could not overcome society's disapproval of its ineptitude and oppression.

Solidarity used its newly superior position to broker a coalition with various small parties that until then had been silent satellites of the PZPR. The coalition produced a noncommunist majority that formed a cabinet dominated by Solidarity. Totally demoralized and advised by Gorbachev to accept defeat, the PZPR held its final congress in January 1990. In August 1989, the Catholic intellectual Tadeusz Mazowiecki became prime minister of a government committed to dismantling the communist system and replacing it with a Western-style democracy and a free-market economy. By the end of 1989, the Soviet alliance had been swept away by a stunning succession of Central and East European revolutions, partly inspired by the Polish example. Suddenly the history of Poland, and of its entire region, had entered the post-communist era.



*Piotrkowski Street in the main commercial district of Lodz, Poland's second largest city  
(photo by Gina Peirce)*

## II. Society

### **A. Languages**

Beginning with the early post-World War I years, Polish has been the language of all but a very few citizens. Grouped with Czech and Slovak in the West Slavic subgroup of the Slavonic linguistic family, Polish uses a Latin alphabet because the Roman Catholic Church has been dominant in Poland since the tenth century. Documents written in Polish survive from the fourteenth century; however, the literary language largely developed during the sixteenth century in response to Western religious and humanistic ideas and the availability of printed materials. In the eighteenth century, the Enlightenment stimulated a second period of advances in the literary language. When the Polish state fell at the end of the eighteenth century, the language played an important role in maintaining the Polish national identity.

Although modern Polish was homogenized by widespread education, distribution of literature, and the flourishing of the mass media, several dialects that originated in tribal settlement patterns have survived this process. Among the most significant are Greater Polish and Lesser Polish (from a combination of which the literary language was formed), Silesian, Mazovian, and Kashubian, which is sometimes classified as a separate language.

### **B. Local Cuisine**

“Smaczego” (“delicious”) is the signal to start your hearty Polish meal. The cuisine draws from a number of other nations, Slavic and otherwise, but still retains some unique features, and home cooking will usually beat out that found in the growing number of restaurants. Before 1989, eating out was uncommon. Since then, the idea is catching on.



### *Soup*

“Zupy” (soup) remains a Polish standard and is almost always made from scratch. Soup is eaten year round. In the summer, try the cold, creamy beet and vegetable soup “chlodnik,” or the hot, spicy version “barszcz” in the colder months. Another soup worth tasting is the creamy, sausage and potato “zurek.”

### *Entrees*

For an entrée, Poles offer up beef, pork, sausage, ham, chicken, or wild game. Most “kotlets” are fried or grilled, topped with a creamy sauce of some sort and accompanied by (usually) potatoes in some form or another. A salad might come along, but it will be a simple affair of lettuce, sliced cucumber, carrots, or tomatoes. More complex salads pop up here and there, so look for them under a separate section of the menu (“salatka” or “surowka”).

Other Polish favorites with international appeal are “bigos” and “pierogi.” Bigos is a stew of cabbage, sausage, meat, and sometimes mushrooms. Pierogi are dumplings stuffed with meat (“mieso”), cabbage and mushrooms (“kapusta i grzybami”), fruit, or cheese and potatoes (“ruskie”). They are served cold, hot, fried, with or without sour cream.

Like most cuisines that draw from a peasant culture, simple ingredients pop up again and again; for Poles, one staple was cabbage. You’ll find it as a soup “kapusniak,” sliced up for salads, pickled for sauerkraut, the foundation of bigos, or stuffed with rice, meat, or mushrooms as “golabki.” Potatoes are another staple and show up in the pierogi, as a side to a meat dish, or fried and served with sour milk as “placki.”

### *Desserts*

If you want to round out your meal with something sweet, pay for your dinner and take a walk to the nearest ice cream stand (“lody”). If you crave something warmer, try “packi” (pastry stuffed with sweet jellies) or “makowiec” (poppy-seed cake). Other desserts or “ciasta” on offer in the sweet shops (“cukiernia”) will tempt any tooth, but remember that in general, European pastries are not inundated with the fat and sugar more common in the United States.

*Fast food or takeout* has reached Poland. You can find a McDonald’s, Pizza Hut or KFC on every other street corner in Warsaw. But for something local, try the “bar wietnamski” stands (which offer the standard generic Asian dishes) or the burger/hot dog/“sandwicz” stands that cover the other hemisphere. Some Polish quick bites not yet pushed off the market are “zapienkanki” (half a baguette topped with melted cheese and ketchup) or “bulka z pieczarkami” (a whole baguette stuffed with mushrooms).

### *Traditional Polish drinks*

Poles enjoy alcohol, and usually they like to drink chilled vodka. Vodka comes in a number of varieties, from clear (“Zytunia”, “Krakus”, “Chopin”, “Wyobrowa”) to flavored (“Zubrowka”, “Pieprzowka”, “Krupnik”). Most drink it straight, but mixing it with orange or apple juice is also quite popular. Beer is also readily available.

For a non-alcoholic drink, ask for bottled mineral water (“woda mineralna”), a fruit juice (“sok”), tea (“herbata”) or coffee (“kawa”), but beware before you sip the latter two. Both are usually prepared by freely mixing the dry with the wet; if you don't wait for your tea to steep or your coffee to cool, you're ensured a first gritty mouthful. Poles don't add milk to their tea or coffee generally, so you'll have to ask for it (“z mlekiem”). Soft drinks, Coke and Pepsi (non-diet versions, usually) are standard, as are some Polish generics.

## **C. Ethnic Groups**

During most of its history, Poland was a multiethnic society that included substantial numbers of Belarusians (prior to 1992 known as Byelorussians), Germans, Jews, and Ukrainians. This ethnic diversity was reduced sharply by World War II and the migrations that followed it. The Jewish population, which in the interwar period was over 10% of Poland's total and over 30 % of Warsaw's, was reduced by about three million in the Holocaust. Postwar resettlement and adjustment of borders sent about two million Germans from Polish territory westward, and awarded the Polish territory inhabited by 500,000 Ukrainians, Belarusians, and Lithuanians to the Soviet Union. These multiethnic émigrés were replaced by an estimated three million ethnic Poles repatriated from the Soviet Union, and by thousands of others who returned from emigration or combat in the West. (Poland's communist governments, which consistently emphasized ethnic homogeneity, had not differentiated ethnic groups in official census statistics.) As a result of this process, in 2002 an estimated 97% of Poland's population was ethnically Polish.

### **1. Jews**

Although an estimated 200,000 Polish Jews survived the Holocaust, only about 10,000 remained in Poland in 1991, and that population was mostly elderly. As the post-communist era began, relations with the now very small Jewish community retained an ambiguous but prominent place in the consciousness of Polish society. Beginning in the late 1970s, public interest in past Polish-Jewish relations increased significantly despite the dwindling of the Jewish population. Social observers attributed this partly to nostalgia for prewar times, when the Jews had made a dynamic contribution to Poland's diverse urban cultural environment. Another source of renewed interest was the need to finally understand the long and tangled historical connection of the Poles and the Jews. That connection was formed most prominently by the Holocaust, which had wrought havoc upon both Poles and Jews, and by the role of anti-Semitic elements in Polish society both before and after World War II. In the early 1990s, these issues still provoked deep emotional responses, as well as intellectual contemplation.

When communist rule ended, the phenomenon of “anti-Semitism without Jews” came under renewed scrutiny. In the first national elections of post-communist Poland, candidates frequently exchanged charges of anti-Semitism and, conversely, of undue Jewish influence in policy-making. In 1991 Solidarity leader Lech Walesa apologized personally before the Israeli parliament, the Knesset, for anti-Semitic statements by some of his supporters during the presidential campaign. According to a 1992 survey, 40% of

Poles estimated the current Jewish population in Poland at above 750,000; 16% believed the Jews were a threat to Poland's political development in the 1990s; and 26% said the Jews exerted too much influence on Polish society. On the other hand, 81% said that the memory of the Holocaust should be preserved indefinitely to prevent a recurrence.

## **2. Roma**

The Roma (sometimes derogatorily referred to as "Gypsies") represent a major sociopolitical issue in most other East European countries, but are much less numerous and less controversial in Poland. The estimates of the Roma population in Poland range from 15,000 to 50,000 residents. Czechoslovakia's Roma population, by contrast, numbered 500,000 in the 1980s when Poland became a transit point on the illegal migration route from Romania to Germany. Emigration of Polish Roma to Germany in the late 1980s reduced Poland's Roma population by as much as 75%. Nevertheless, negative stereotypes remain strong in Polish society, and acts of violence and discrimination against this most visible minority are common in Poland. In 1991 a mob destroyed a wealthy Roma neighborhood in central Poland. The Polish government has to date adopted no comprehensive policy on Roma, but instead has treated violent acts against them as isolated incidents.

## **D. Social Structure**

### **1. The Intelligentsia**

The Polish intelligentsia (intellectual elite or wealthy class) played a unique and vital role in several phases of Polish history. During the partition period of the nineteenth century, the intelligentsia maintained through their writings the history and culture of the once united Poland. Containing the last vestiges of the landed gentry that had led the country during its heyday as an independent commonwealth, the intelligentsia was the chief means by which new and progressive ideas entered the fabric of partitioned Poland's society. As such, the class became the chief repository of a romanticized, idealistic concept of Polish nationhood. Well into the twentieth century, the roughly 50% of the intelligentsia that had roots in the landowning class maintained the aristocratic values of their ancestors. Although those values conferred a distinctly higher social status on the intelligentsia in everyday life, they also included the cultural heritage that all Poles recognized.

In the first part of the twentieth century, the intelligentsia was diversified and enriched as more middle- and lower-class Poles attained education and upward mobility. At this point, the intelligentsia divided philosophically into conservative viewpoints of the past (whose landholdings gave them a vested interest in maintaining the status quo) and liberal reformers advocating the development of capitalism. In the interwar period, Poland's social structure was further complicated by the rise of a vigorous, practical upper middle class. After the war, however, socialism drastically reduced the influence of this entrepreneurial class.

Facing a severe shortage of educated citizens, in 1945 the communists expanded opportunities for political loyalists to advance through education into the professions and the bureaucracy. Of the 300,000 college graduates produced by the educational system between 1945 and 1962, over 50% were from worker or peasant families. The introduction of these groups sharply diversified the class basis of the postwar intelligentsia. In the late 1960s, however, the policy of preferential treatment in education ended. The percentage of working-class university admissions dropped to below 25%. Because the chief means of entry into the professional classes remained educational achievement, the drop in university admissions drastically slowed mobility from the working classes into the intelligentsia. In the postwar years, the intelligentsia diversified into several categories of employment: highly educated professionals, government and party officials, senior civil servants, writers and academics, and top-level economic managers.

Especially in the 1970s, many members of the intelligentsia established careers in the ruling party or its bureaucracy, joining the cause of the socialist state with varying degrees of commitment. By 1987 all but one of the 49 provincial PZPR first secretaries had at least a bachelor's degree. The strong presence of the intelligentsia in the party influenced the policy of the ruling elite away from standard Soviet practice, flavoring it instead with pragmatic nationalism. As that force exerted subtle influence within the establishment, other elements of the intelligentsia joined with worker and student groups to express open dissent from the system. They objected to the system as a whole, and decried the increasingly stressful conditions that it imposed on Polish society in the 1970s and 1980s. The most important result of this class alliance was the Solidarity movement, nominally a workers' movement that achieved broad support in the intelligentsia and finally toppled the communist regime.

In the 1980s, the activist elements of the intelligentsia resumed their traditional role as protectors of national ideals from outside political interference. In this role, the Polish intelligentsia retained and gradually spread the values that it had inherited from its nineteenth century predecessors: admiration for Western society, disdain for contact with and reliance on Russia and the Soviet Union, and reverence for the pre-partition commonwealth of the nobility and the romantic patriotism of the partition era. As it had after Poland regained its independence in 1918, however, the intelligentsia reverted to its naturally fragmented state once the common enemy fell. In the early 1990s, the official communist leadership elite had disappeared (although in reality that group continued to control powerful economic positions), and no comparably identifiable and organized group had taken its place. In this atmosphere, a wide variety of social and political agendas competed for attention in the government, reflecting the diverse ideas proposed by the intelligentsia, the source of most of Poland's reformist concepts in the early 1990s.

## **2. The Working Classes and Peasants**

In the years following World War II, the composition of the Polish working classes changed significantly. Agriculture, which underwent several major changes in

government policy during this period, consistently lost stature as an occupation and as a lifestyle in competition with expanded urban industrial opportunities. The post-war rural exodus left an aging farm population split apart the traditional multigenerational families upon which rural society had been based, and fragmented landholdings into inefficient plots. In the same period, the augmented Polish industrial work force struggled to achieve the social gains promised in Marxist-Leninist ideology. In the early days, the central planning system yielded impressive gains in the education level and living standards of many industrial workers. Later in the communist era, this group made less tangible gains in social status and began actively opposing the regressive government policies that prevented its further progress. By the early 1980s, the working population reached a stable proportion of 40% in industry, 30% in agriculture, and 30% in the service sector (which, like industry, had tripled in size in the postwar era). In the early post-communist era, industrial workers faced high unemployment as privatization and the drive for efficiency restructured their enterprises.

### **3. Social Relationships**

In the 45 years of their rule, the communists built a monocentric society, the social and political fabric of which was dominated by a new elite of loyal government functionaries. In the 1950s, social institutions such as political groups, voluntary organizations, youth and professional organizations, and community associations lost their autonomy and were forced into a hierarchical state-controlled network. Only the Polish Catholic Church retained some degree of independence during this period. At the same time, however, smaller groups that were initially isolated and fragmented began developing informal, pragmatic networks for economic supply, mediation of interests, and expression of anti-establishment views. Such groups functioned both within state-sanctioned institutions and among families, groups of friends, and small communities. In this context, *dojście* (informal access to useful connections) was the means by which ordinary citizens remained above subsistence level.

The family, the traditional center of Polish social life, assumed a vital role in this informal system. In this respect, everyday urban life assumed some characteristics of traditional rural life. For both professional and working classes, extended families and circles of friends helped when a family or individual was not self-sufficient. Private exchange arrangements eased the chronic scarcities of the official supply system. Especially important within the family structure were parental support of grown children until they became self-sufficient, and care by the children for their aging parents and grandparents. In the economic slump of the 1980s, urban food shortages often were alleviated by exchanges with rural relatives.

The inventive and independent networking process formed a distinct tier within Polish society. Seen by its participants as the repository of Polish nationhood and tradition, the world of *dojście* (the first tier) increasingly contrasted with the inefficient, rigid, invasive, and corrupt state system. The emergence of Solidarity was a first step toward restoring the variety of social structures and independent cultural activities present in interwar Poland. In 1980 the phenomenon of public figures rising to tell the truth about Poland's

problems began to break the wall between private and public morality, although the subsequent declaration of martial law temporarily dampened its effect.

The second tier involved illegal and quasi-legal actions, as well as the pragmatic rearrangement of social relationships. Especially in the 1980s, the relationships between work performed and official wages and between job qualification and salary level (which for “ideological” reasons was higher for many classes of unskilled workers) were objects of general ridicule in Polish society. Under these circumstances, Poles increasingly saw the second tier, rather than the official economy, as the more rewarding investment of their initiative and responsibility. By the 1980s, this allocation of energy led some sociologists to argue that the second tier was necessary in order for communist societies such as Poland’s to function.

The end of communism brought no rapid change in social attitudes. In the early post-communist period, many Poles retained a deep-seated cynicism toward a state long perceived as an untrustworthy privileged elite. Direct and indirect stealing from such a state was, at worst, an amoral act that could never match the hypocrisy and corruption of high authorities who claimed to govern in the name of all the Polish people. However, society’s habit of separating “us” from “them” became a major obstacle to enlisting widespread public cooperation and sacrifice for large-scale economic and political reform.

#### **4. The Role of Women**

By the mid-1970s, nearly half of the Polish work force was made up of women. On a purely statistical basis, Poland, like the rest of the Soviet alliance in Eastern Europe, offered women more opportunities for higher education and employment than did most West European countries. Between 1975 and 1983, the total number of women with a higher education doubled, to 681,000 graduates. Many professions, such as architecture, engineering, and university teaching, employed a considerably higher percentage of women in Poland than in the West, and over 60% of medical students in 1980 were women. In many households in the 1980s, women earned more than their husbands. Yet the socialist system that yielded those statistics also uniformly excluded women from the highest positions of economic and political power. In the mid-1980s, only 15% of graduates in technical subjects were women, while more than 70% of jobs in health, social security, finance, education, and retail sales were filled by women. During the 1980s, very few women occupied top positions in the PZPR (whose 1986 membership was 27% women). Similar statistics reflected the power relationships in Solidarity, the diplomatic corps, and the government. By definition, women were excluded completely from the other great center of power, the Catholic Church. In mid-1992, Poland elected its first woman prime minister, Hanna Suchocka. Her coalition government included no other women. Also in 1992 the head of the National Bank of Poland, a very powerful position, was a woman, and Ewa Letowska, former commissioner of citizens’ rights, was prominently mentioned as a presidential candidate. The wife of current Polish president Alexander Kwasniewski has been mentioned as a presidential candidate, as well.

Some experts have asserted that the male power structure protected its dominance by limiting opportunities for the advancement of Polish women to those that filled an existing need in the male-dominated society. Another factor in the role of women, however, was the high priority that Polish society continued to give to their role within the family and in raising children. In the 1980s, one in ten Polish mothers was single, and many single mothers had never been married. In 1991 over 6% of Polish families consisted of a single mother caring for one or more children. The extended family provided support for such unconventional arrangements. During the 1980s, both the state (by adjusting school schedules and providing nurseries and substantial paid maternity leave) and the church (by its influential emphasis on the sanctity of the family) successfully promoted the traditional role of women in raising the next generation. In the early 1980s, a very small women's liberation movement began at Warsaw University, but in the following years it failed to expand its membership significantly. In 1990 women in Warsaw set a precedent by demonstrating against church-inspired legislation to make abortion illegal.

Even with the support of state institutions, however, during the communist era working women with families often had the equivalent of two full-time jobs, because their husbands did not make major contributions to household work. According to one study, working women averaged 6.5 hours per day at their jobs and 4.3 hours per day on household duties. In the times of scarcity in the 1980s, standing in line to make purchases occupied a large part of the latter category. Women without jobs, by contrast, spent an average of 8.1 hours per day on household duties. The increased unemployment of the early 1990s generally affected more women than men.

The end of communist government brought a new debate about women's role in Polish society. After 1989 many Poles began to associate women's rights with the enforced equality of the discredited communist past. A significant part of society saw the political transformation as an appropriate time for women to return full-time to the home, after communism had forced them into the workplace and weakened the Polish family.

The rights of women were central to the controversy over state abortion law that escalated sharply in 1991 and 1992, although few women had policy-making roles and no major women's groups took advocacy positions. Some of the social policies of the post-communist governments complicated the situation of working mothers. A 1992 national study revealed discrimination against women in hiring practices and payment of unemployment benefits, and no law prohibited such sex discrimination. In the communist system, daycare for the children of working mothers had been cheap and widely available, but by 1992 more than half of the Polish daycare centers had closed. Striving to become self-supporting, the remaining centers raised their prices sharply in the reform period.

## **E. Communist Housing Policy**

As in most other economic and social areas, postwar Polish housing policy followed the Soviet model. The principle behind that model was that housing should be public

property and a direct tool of the state's social policy. Accordingly, the Soviet model eliminated private ownership or construction of multifamily residential buildings. Except for single-family units, the government had the legal power to take over private houses and land required for building. Private construction firms were turned into state enterprises that did contract building for central state organizations. State housing policy disregarded supply and demand in favor of administrative space allocation norms, standardized design and construction practices, and central rent control. Maintaining rents at a very low level was supposed to ensure that housing was available to even the poorest citizens. However, housing policy was subordinate to the requirements of central economic planning, so resources for housing construction were directed to industrial areas critical to fulfilling plans and advancing state policy. Materials distribution for housing also was subject to delays or disruption caused by the urgency of other types of construction projects. Although rural and small-town housing nominally escaped direct control, materials rationing and deliberate state hindrance of private construction limited the availability of new housing in such areas.

## **1. Polish Housing in Practice**

In practice the housing policy of Polish communist regimes was more pragmatic than the Soviet model. In some regions, high housing demand inspired locally controlled cooperatives that pooled state and private resources. State housing construction actually was halted in the 1960s to create demand for cooperative housing, for which rents were much higher. Thereafter, however, the cooperatives gradually became centralized national monopolies, and construction in the 1970s was dominated again by large state enterprises. The monopoly status of the builders and the cooperatives insulated those groups from market competition and enabled them to pass along the costs of inefficient operations to the tenant or to the state.

Under these conditions, housing construction was extremely wasteful and inefficient. The economic crisis of 1980 combined with existing weaknesses in industrial policy to begin a housing shortage that lasted for most of the decade. Between 1978 and 1988, annual housing completions dropped by nearly 45%, and investment in housing dropped by nearly 20%. At the same time, the Polish birth rate added pressure to the housing situation. By the late 1980s, the average waiting time to buy a house was projected at between 15 and 20 years if construction continued at the same rate. The housing shortage was a primary cause of social unrest, yet the structural flaws of Polish building continued unchanged. Construction remained of low quality, builders maintained the monopoly control granted by centralized planning, labor productivity dropped, and distribution and transport remained centralized and inefficient.

Housing also remained subordinate to industrial goals. In the 1980s, this meant that new workplaces were the center of housing construction activity, which produced dormitories for workers. By 1988 Poland ranked last in Europe in housing, with only 284 dwellings per 1,000 persons; 30% of Polish families did not have their own housing accommodations; and the average number of persons per dwelling was 20% above the European average. In addition, the average usable area per dwelling in Poland was

10-15% below the average for other socialist countries and 30% below the average for Western Europe.

Private housing revived somewhat in the 1980s, although independent cooperatives still faced critical materials shortages in the construction stage. An easing of tax regulations and other economic changes raised the profitability of private property in that period. In 1988 the percentage of housing construction projects in which individuals invested had risen to nearly 34% from its 1978 level of 26%. Although state investment also rose slightly in that period, both increases were at the expense of cooperative investment, which dropped by 10%. Nevertheless, privately owned properties in towns remained insignificant until 1989, mainly because high inflation in the 1980s devalued the long-term, low-interest loans offered on state property. In 1989 the new government's anti-inflation measures realigned such loans with present currency values and raised interest rates, stimulating conversion of two-thirds of cooperative flats into private property by early 1990. At the same time, the monopolistic Central Cooperatives Association was split into numerous genuine cooperatives, the state housing administration was abolished, and new incentives were introduced to stimulate private building and rentals.

## **2. Housing after 1989**

In 1990, Poland's traditionally low rents rose drastically when government subsidies of fuel, electricity, and housing maintenance ended. The long-term goal of housing reform was to let rents rise to market levels. A housing benefits program was to help the poorest groups in society, and new rules were put in place for financing housing purchases. In the transitional period that followed the end of the communist government, however, the gap between demand and supply grew. Rising rental and purchase prices, the new obstacles created for housing construction firms by competitive conditions, and the economic downturn that began in 1990 also contributed to this gap. To function efficiently, the housing industry also required more substantial investment in modern technology, particularly in chronically wasteful areas such as cement production and building assembly.

In 1989 and 1991, new housing legislation concentrated on privatizing the ownership of housing units. Of the 2.7 million cooperative apartments in Poland, 57% were still tenant-occupied rather than owner-occupied in 1991. An additional 1.5 million apartments were owned by enterprises, which continued the uneconomical communist system of subsidizing as much as 80% of the property upkeep for their tenant workers. Beginning in 1989, private owners of multifamily houses could receive subsidies for maintenance, for which they had paid in full under the old system. The 1991 legislation set financial and legal conditions under which renters of cooperative-owned and enterprise-owned housing could assume ownership, creating individual property units from the larger units formerly administered by a central agency.

## F. Religion

World War II essentially transformed Poland into a state dominated by a single religion. According to a recent government survey, Roman Catholicism was professed by 96% of the population. The practice of Judaism declined more dramatically than any other religion after the war, but the numbers of adherents of Greek Orthodoxy, Protestantism, and other religions also fell significantly. Although the claim of religious affiliation signified different levels of participation for different segments of society (80.6% of professed Catholics described themselves as attending mass regularly), the history of Roman Catholicism in Poland formed a uniquely solid link between nationality and religious belief. As a result of that identity, Poland was the only country where the advent of communism had very little effect on the individual citizen's practice of organized religion. During the communist era, the Catholic Church enjoyed varying levels of autonomy, but the church remained the primary source of moral values, as well as an important political force. Of the 4% of Poles who were not Roman Catholic, half belonged to one of 42 other denominations in 1991, and the rest professed no religion. The largest of the non-Catholic faiths was the Polish Autocephalous Orthodox Church. Although Poland returned to its tradition of religious tolerance after the communist era, jurisdictional issues complicated relations between the Orthodox and Roman Catholic churches.



*Chestochawa Monastery*

Photo courtesy of <http://www.gopoland.com>

### 1. The Polish Catholic Church and the State

Throughout the 1800s and 1900s, the Catholic Church was not only a spiritual institution but also a social and political force. The dynamics of church-state relations in Poland after the communist era were shaped by the multifaceted identity that the church had

assumed during many decades when conventional social and political institutions were suppressed. That identity, called by one scholar a “civil religion,” combined religious and political symbols in Poles’ conception of their national history and destiny. Important aspects of this social and political role remained intact after 1989, fueling a controversial new drive for church activism.

## **2. Church and State Before 1945**

The first impetus for an expanded church role was the social repression that Poles experienced during the era of the third partition, from 1795 to 1918. In this period, the partitioning nations severely limited freedom of organization, education, and publication in Polish territory. With the exception of the post-1867 Austrian-occupied sector, public use of the Polish language was also forbidden. These restrictions left religious practice as the only means for national self-expression and for the preservation of social bonds among lay Catholics. From that situation came a strong new sense of national consciousness that combined nineteenth century literary, philosophical, and religious trends within the formal structure of the church. In 1925 the newly independent Polish state signed a concordat that prescribed separate roles for church and state and guaranteed the church free exercise of religious, moral, educational, and economic activities. Although Poland enjoyed 14 years of independence between the signing of the concordat and the Nazi invasion, the special role of the church continued and intensified when postwar communist rule again regimented other forms of self-expression.

## **3. The Communist Decades**

The Polish Catholic Church suffered enormous losses during the Nazi occupation of Poland in World War II. Its leadership was scattered or exterminated, its schools were closed, and its property was destroyed. Ironically, this destruction during the war years fostered the church’s conversion from an aloof hierarchy with feudal overtones to a flexible, socially active institution capable of dealing with the adversity of the postwar years. In the first two postwar years, the church enjoyed considerable autonomy. In 1947, however, consolidation of the East European nations under the hegemony of the Stalinist Soviet Union led to the closing of Polish seminaries and confiscation of church property in the name of the state. The state abolished the 1925 concordat and assumed legal supremacy over all religious organizations in 1948.

In the decades that followed, the church adapted to the new constraints, pragmatically reaching compromise agreements with the state and avoiding open confrontation over most issues. Between 1948 and 1981, the church was led by Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński, an expert on Catholic social doctrine whose commanding personality augmented the power of the church hierarchy as a direct conduit from the Vatican to the people of Poland. As a general policy in the early communist decades, Wyszyński avoided fruitless direct campaigning against communist oppression. Instead, he stressed the church’s role as an advocate of Christian morality. Nevertheless, the cardinal’s criticism of PZPR leader Bolesław Bierut earned Wyszyński three years under house arrest (1953-56), as well as international stature as a spokesman against communism. During this period, a

total of 1,000 priests and eight bishops were imprisoned, and convents were raided by the police in the communist drive to completely destroy the authority of the church in Polish society.

Wyszynski was released in 1956 as a result of severe social unrest that forced a change in party leadership. The release was followed by a church-state agreement significantly relaxing restrictions in such areas as religious teaching and jurisdiction over church property. This agreement marked a general softening of state religious policy at the end of the period of hard-line Stalinism. Ten years later, the church's lavish celebration of the millennium of Polish Christianity strengthened the identification of Polish national consciousness with the church and, in the process, the state's respect for the church as a representative of national opinion.

Throughout the communist era, the church provided a necessary alternative to an unpopular state authority, even for the least religious Poles. Between 1945 and 1989, relations between the Polish Catholic Church and the communist regime followed a regular pattern: when the state felt strong and self-sufficient, it imposed harsh restrictions on church activities; in times of political crisis, however, the state offered conciliatory measures to the church in order to gain popular support.

#### **4. Church and State after 1989**

The approach of the Polish Catholic Church to the Polish state changed drastically after 1989. The church's influential role in promoting opposition views, its close relationship with Solidarity, and its mediation between factions in the tumultuous 1980s brought it enhanced political power in the post-communist system. In 1989 virtually every significant public organization in Poland saw the church as a partner in its activities and decisions.

One result of this identification was that when the Sejm began deliberations on a new constitution in 1990, the Episcopate requested that the document virtually abolish the separation of church and state. Such a change of constitutional philosophy would put the authority of the state behind such religious guarantees as the right to religious education and the right to life beginning at conception (hence a ban on abortion). Throughout the communist era, the separation of church and state had been the basis of the church's refusal to acknowledge the authority of atheistic political regimes over ecclesiastical activities. In justifying its new approach to the separation doctrine, the Episcopate explained that the communist regimes had discredited the doctrine as a constitutional foundation for post-communist governance by using the separation of church and state to defend their totalitarian control of society against church interference.

As a political matter, however, the unleashing of stronger church influence in public life began to alienate parts of the population within two years of the passage of the bill that restored freedom of religion. Catholic intellectuals, who had shared opposition sympathies with the church in the communist era, also had opposed the autocratic rule of

Cardinal Wyszyński. Many people had feared that compromise between the church and the communist state might yield an alliance that in effect would establish an official state church. Once the common opponent, the communist system, disappeared in 1989, these fears revived and spread to other parts of Polish society.

In the period that followed, critical issues were the reintroduction of religious instruction in public schools – which occurred nationwide at church insistence, without parliamentary discussion, in 1990 – and legal prohibition of abortion. Almost immediately after the last communist regime fell, the church began to exert pressure for repeal of the liberal communist-era abortion law in effect since 1956. Between 1990 and 1992, church pressure brought three progressively tighter restrictions on birth control and abortion, although surveys showed that about 60% of Poles backed freedom of individual choice on those issues. By 1991, the proper boundary of church intervention in social policy making was a divisive issue. At that point, only 58% of citizens polled rated the church as the most respected institution in Polish public life, second behind the army. By contrast, one year before, 90% of citizens polled had rated the church as the most respected.

The church responded to the conditions of the reform era in other ways as well. It campaigned vigorously (but unsuccessfully) to prevent dissemination of pornographic materials, which became quite abundant in all East European nations after 1989 and were viewed as a moral threat. The church strongly defended aid for the poor, some aspects of which were suspended in the period of austerity that accompanied Poland's drive toward capitalism, as some policy makers saw welfare programs as remnants of the communist state.

## **5. The Polish Catholic Church and the People**

Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, more than 90% of Polish children were baptized in the Catholic Church, showing that the younger generation shared loyalty to traditional religion. Surveys of young people in the 1980s showed an increase in professed religious belief over the decade, from 74% to 96%. Also, the number of men preparing for the priesthood rose from 6,285 to 8,835 between 1980 and 1986. The church's influence extended far beyond the limits of a traditional predominant religion, however. Especially in rural areas and among the less-educated urban population, religion permeated everyday life, and church attendance was higher in the communist era than it had been before World War II. As other forms of social affiliation were repressed or reorganized, churches continued as the de facto arbiters of a wide range of moral and ethical problems in their communities, a role they had initially assumed during the war. Although church affiliation was less prevalent among the educated elite, over 60% of that group (which included most of the nominally atheistic communist ruling class) professed belief in Catholicism in 1978.

Experts point to certain characteristics of Polish Catholicism to explain its unique resilience in a population bombarded for decades with state-sponsored atheistic propaganda. Polish Catholic religiosity focuses more strongly on the Virgin Mary and the

saints than on the direct relationship of the individual to God or on abstract religious doctrine. The most important pilgrimage destination for Polish Roman Catholics is the image of the Virgin (called the Black Madonna) at Jasna Góra Monastery in Czestochowa. This image is believed to have rescued Poland miraculously from invasions by the Tatars and the Swedes, and some Solidarity leaders wore replicas of the icon.

Especially for less-educated Poles, Mary represents a tangible yet mystical connection with God, much preferable to contemplation of abstract theological doctrine. During the communist era, this more immediate and anthropocentric religiosity seemed uniquely resistant to replacement by the intellectual doctrine of atheism. On the other hand, in the early 1990s, once the specter of state-sponsored atheism had disappeared, this immediacy promoted individual expression of beliefs in ways that questioned the church's authority over secular social ethics. Thus, the official church that had protected the spiritual interests of all Poles under communism risked separation from the everyday religious practice that retained great meaning for the average Polish Catholic.

## **G. The Educational System**

The education of Polish society was a goal of rulers as early as the twelfth century, when monks were brought from France and Silesia to teach agricultural methods to Polish peasants. Kraków University, founded in 1364 by Kazimierz the Great, became one of Europe's great early universities and a center of intellectual tolerance. Throughout the eighteenth century, Poland was a refuge for academic figures persecuted elsewhere in Europe for unorthodox ideas. The dissident schools founded by these refugees became centers of avant-garde thought, especially in the natural sciences. The Renaissance and Enlightenment periods in Western Europe brought advanced educational theories to Poland. In 1773 King Stanislaw August established his Commission on National Education, the world's first state ministry of education. This body set up a uniform national educational system emphasizing mathematics, natural sciences, and language study. The commission also stressed standardizing elementary education, integrating trade and agricultural skills into the elementary school curriculum, and improving textbooks at all levels.

### **1. Eras of Repression**

The historical partition of the Polish lands challenged the work of the Commission on National Education, because Germany, Austria and Russia sought to destroy Polish national consciousness by Germanizing and Russifying the education system. During the 123-year partition, pockets of resistance continued teaching and publishing in Polish, and some innovations such as vocational training schools appeared. In general, the Austrian sector had the least developed educational system, whereas the smallest disruption in educational progress occurred in the Prussian sector.

Between 1918 and 1939, the newly independent Poland faced the task of reconstructing a national educational system from the three separate systems imposed during partition.

Although national secondary education was established in the 1920s, the economic crisis of the 1930s drastically decreased school attendance. Among the educational accomplishments of the interwar period were the establishment of state universities in Warsaw, Wilno (Vilnius), and Poznan (available only to the upper classes), numerous specialized secondary schools, and the Polish Academy of Learning.

Between 1939 and 1944, the Nazi occupation sought to annihilate the national Polish culture once again. All secondary and higher schools were closed to Poles, and elementary school curricula were stripped of all national content during this period. In response, an extensive underground teaching movement developed under the leadership of the Polish Teachers' Association and the Committee for Public Education. An estimated 100,000 secondary students attended classes in the underground system during the Nazi occupation.

Under the communist regime, the massive task of postwar educational reconstruction emphasized opening institutions of secondary and higher education to the Polish masses and reducing illiteracy. The number of Poles unable to read and write had been estimated at three million in 1945. In harmony with the principles of Marxism-Leninism, wider availability of education would democratize the higher professional and technical positions previously dominated by the gentry-based intelligentsia and the wealthier bourgeoisie. Because sweeping industrialization goals also required additional workers with at least minimum skills, the vocational school system was substantially expanded. At least in the first postwar decade, most Poles welcomed the social mobility that these policies offered. On the other hand, Poles generally opposed Marxist revision of Polish history and the emphasis on Russian language and area studies to the detriment of things Polish – practices especially stringent in the first postwar decade, when Stalinist doctrine was transferred wholesale from the Soviet Union and dominated pedagogical practice. During this period, all levels of Polish education were plagued by shortages of buildings and teachers. Capital investment lagged far behind the grandiose goals of centralized planning.

Educational reform was an important demand of widespread Polish demonstrations against Stalinism in 1956. Under the new PZPR first secretary, Wladyslaw Gomulka, government educational policy rejected the dogmatic programs of Stalinism, and in their place began the first period of (fragmentary) postwar educational reform. Religious instruction was restored, at the option of parents; by 1957 over 95% of schools had resumed offering such instruction. In the vocational program, agricultural training schools were added, and technical courses were restructured to afford greater contact with actual industrial operations. By 1961, however, state doctrine followed the generally conservative turn of Polish politics by again describing the goal of education as preparing workers to build the socialist state.

The Law on the Development of Education Systems, passed in 1961, established four formal principles that reiterated the goals of the pre-1956 system and endured throughout the rest of the communist era. The educational system was to prepare qualified employees for industry, to develop proper attitudes of citizenship in the Polish People's Republic, to

propagate the values of the working classes everywhere, and to instill respect for work and national values. Education was specifically described as a function of the state, and schools were to be secular in nature. Religious institutions could sponsor schools under strict limitations, however, and the church was permitted to establish a network of separate religious education centers to compensate for this restriction. In 1968 the return of strict communist dogma to school curricula was an important stimulus for a national wave of student demonstrations. Although the Gierk regime sought broad educational reform when it took power in 1970, the uneven progress of reform programs in the 1970s led to further unrest and diminished the role of education in state control of society.

In the communist era, two levels of educational management existed. At the central level, the Ministry of National Education was the chief organ of state administration. That agency prescribed course content, textbooks, principles of school operation, standards for admissions and scholarship awards, examination procedures, and interschool relations throughout the country. At the local level, superintendents established personnel policy, hired and trained personnel, and oversaw other local institutions having educational functions. The daily functioning of each individual school was administered by a headmaster and a pedagogical council.

## **2. The Drive for Educational Reform**

In the Solidarity movement of 1980, student and teacher organizations demanded a complete restructuring of the centralized system and autonomy for local educational jurisdictions and institutions. In response, the Jaruzelski government issued sympathetic statements and appointed committees, but few meaningful changes ensued in the 1980s. Although an educational crisis was widely recognized, and experts advised that education could not be viewed in isolation from Poland's other social problems, the PZPR continued making cosmetic changes in the system until the party was voted out of office in 1989. The political events of that year were the catalyst for fundamental change in the Polish educational system.

The round table discussions of early 1989 between the government and opposition leaders established a special commission on educational questions, which was dominated by the Solidarity view that political dogma should be removed from education and the heavily bureaucratized state monopoly of education should end. That view also required autonomy for local school administrations and comprehensive upgrading of material support. Accordingly, the Office of Innovation and Independent Schools was established in 1990 to create the legislative basis for governmental support of private schools established by individuals and civic organizations. In a compromise with the communists remaining in parliament, state subsidies were set at 50% of the state's per-student cost. The new private schools featured smaller classes of 10 to 15 students, higher teacher salaries, and complete freedom for educational innovation. Tuition was to be high, from 40,000 to 50,000 zloty per month (for value of the [zloty](#), see Glossary), with scholarships available for poorer students with high grades. In the first 18 months, about 250 new private schools appeared, 100 of which were affiliated with the Catholic Church. In 1990 the total enrollment of 15,000 reflected parental caution toward the new system, but the

figure rose steadily throughout the 1990s. The Ministry of National Education viewed the alternative schools as a stimulus for reform of the public school system.

In 1990 the Ministry of National Education established interim national minimum requirements, while offering teachers maximum flexibility in choosing methodology. The drafts of new educational laws to replace the 1961 law called for the “autonomy of schools as societies of students, teachers, and parents,” with final responsibility for instructional content and methods. Controversy over the laws centered not on their emphasis on autonomy and democracy, but on the relative status of interest groups within the proposed system. Disagreements on such issues postponed the effective date of the new Polish educational laws.

The most controversial aspect of the new laws was the status of religious education in public schools. A 1991 directive from the Ministry of National Education required that every student receive a grade in religion or ethics. For many Poles, this meant an invasion of the constitutional right to keep silent about religious convictions, as well as recognition of a church educational authority rivaling secular authority. Many other Poles, however, considered separation of the church from education to be a continuation of communist policies and a weakening of the national moral fabric.

### **3. Structure of the Educational System**

Poland’s post-communist educational legislation left intact the public structures established by the 1961 educational law. In that system, the first stage was kindergarten, attended by children between three and seven years of age. City kindergarten schools were open from seven to 11 hours per day and designed their programs to accommodate the schedules of working parents. Schools in rural areas were open from five to eight hours, depending on the season and on agricultural requirements. The level of education and auxiliary services was generally much lower in rural schools, and kindergarten attendance there was roughly half of that in the cities. Some primary schools also had kindergarten sections, whose graduates continued to the next level in the same institution. In 1992 the 23,900 kindergartens in operation included 11,000 separate kindergartens and 12,900 kindergarten sections. The cost of kindergarten education was now shared by the government and parents. Under the communist system, the cost of kindergarten education had been paid wholly by the parents.

Eight years of primary school were obligatory in both the communist and the post-communist systems. Children entered this phase at age seven, and remained until they completed the program or until they turned 17. Foreign language instruction was widely available. Some special schools were available for students gifted in the arts or sports, and special courses were designed for physically or mentally handicapped students.

Poland’s acute shortage of classroom space required double shifts and large classes (30 to 40 students) in most primary schools. Some schools provided after-school programs for students in grades one to three whose parents both worked; older students, however, were released at the end of the school day, regardless of their home situation. In 1992 some 5.3

million children were in primary school; new enrollments dropped 2.9% from the previous year.

In 1991 over 95% of primary school graduates continued to some form of secondary education. By 2002 this figure remained unchanged. Admission to the secondary level was by examination and overall primary school records. In general, the students with the highest primary achievement went into a college preparatory track, and those with the lowest into a trade school track. Generally, among pupils completing primary school in the 1990s, about 40% went to three-year trade schools (specializing in various trades, from hairdressing to agriculture), 25% to four-year vocational lycea and to technical schools, and 26% to college preparatory schools. Of the three categories, only the first provides a trade immediately upon graduation. Students in the other two categories require further education at a university or at a two-year post-secondary school to prepare them for employment. Some college preparatory schools combine a variety of non-technical subjects in their curricula; others specialize in humanities, mathematics and physical sciences, biology and chemistry, sports, or classical subjects. Students passing final exams in the college preparatory program are permitted to take university entrance exams.

Most technical programs are five years in length. Such programs are offered in economics, art, music, theater production, and teacher training (a six-year track). Many students live at secondary technical schools, because some districts have only one such school. The government and parents share room and board expenses; tuition is free. The Polish Catholic Church also operates 14 high schools, at which the curricula were state-mandated until 1989.

To enroll at the university level, students have to pass entrance exams. Institutions at this level include full universities, poly-technical schools, academies, and specialized colleges. The poly-technical schools offer theoretical and applied training in such fields as electronics, engineering, computer science, and construction. Academies specialize in medicine, fine arts, economics, agriculture, sports, or theology. Specialized colleges train students in pedagogy, oceanography, and art. Enrollments continued to increase throughout the 1990s.

As a rule, students pursue postgraduate degrees as members of an academic team working under a single professor. Continued progress through the academic ranks depends on regular evaluation of scholarly activity and publications, and failure to meet requirements means removal from the program. Polish postgraduate studies programs, which culminate in doctoral degrees, suffer from lack of material support, low salaries, and low demand for individuals with advanced degrees in the job market. In the late 1980s, these factors made the dropout rate very high and forced the cancellation of several programs. Between 1982 and 1992, Poland suffered a serious “brain drain” in higher education and the sciences, as more than 15,000 scientists emigrated or changed their profession.

## **H. The Penal System**

Under both communist and post-communist governments, the Polish penal system operated under national authority. Beginning in 1956, the system was under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Justice through its Main Bureau of Penal Institutions. Institutions were categorized by the criminal records of the inmates and the severity of their crimes. Each institution had a prison commission that classified inmates and adjusted their treatment according to behavior.

Adopted in 1969, the Penal Code of the Polish People's Republic was one of the most punitive in Europe in actual practice, although the code's rhetoric was quite liberal. Nominally, members of the judiciary had free access to prisons to investigate prisoner grievances, examine documents and assess prison conditions. In actuality, the Polish judiciary was completely controlled by the government and therefore had no capacity for remedial action. Likewise, codified prisoner privileges such as medical treatment and access to libraries seldom existed in practice. In 1981 Western experts estimated that the penal system managed between 130,000 and 200,000 prisoners – a rate of imprisonment per 100,000 citizens of 350 to 580, compared with 212 in the United States and 25 in the Netherlands.

At its inception in 1980, Solidarity began distributing previously unseen information about Polish prison conditions. Patronat, an organization lobbying for liberalized prison policies, emerged in 1981 but was repressed in 1982. The political tensions of the early 1980s triggered a wave of prison strikes affecting two of every three penal institutions in Poland between 1980 and 1982. Press reports on the riots revealed chronic deficiencies in the system. Food standards did not meet human nutritional needs. Prisoners were routinely beaten, tortured, and denied medical treatment. Large prison populations caused overcrowding, and sanitation and recreational facilities were inadequate. Hard labor – the standard method of inmate rehabilitation – featured dangerous working conditions, and refusal to work led to solitary confinement and other harsh penalties. An uncodified set of prison regulations introduced in 1974 had given prison guards arbitrary power to inflict a wide range of punishments. Those punishments were a key motivation of inmate strikes in the early 1980s. Prisoners could complain only as individuals, never as a group, and until the riots occurred the workings of the prison system were completely hidden from the Polish public.

## **I. Health and Welfare**

The fall of centralized state planning and the onset of massive economic and social reform put new strains on Poland's health and welfare systems, whose nominally full and equal coverage had been increasingly faulty in the 1980s. In the last decade of communist rule, national health care suffered from poor material support, inaccessible medical personnel and facilities, and poor organization. At the same time, critical national health indicators for the 1970s and 1980s showed many negative trends. Likewise, access to social services, nominally equal for all workers, was limited by the availability of welfare funds in individual enterprises during the communist era. Because no national standards

existed, some enterprises offered their employees no social services at all, while others offered a wide range. By 1989 the material position of low-income families and pensioners was especially desperate. The economic “shock therapy” begun in 1990 by the Balcerowicz Plan further reduced the level of guaranteed health and welfare services, to which a large part of Polish society had become accustomed under the communist regime.

## **1. The Health Care System**

The constitution of 1952 guaranteed universal free health care. In the last two decades of the communist era, however, such care became progressively less dependable for those without informal support networks or enough money to buy health care outside the official system. As early as 1970, Polish governments recognized the need to reform the cumbersome, inefficient national health care system, but vested interests in the central planning system prevented meaningful change. From the beginning, administration of the system was inefficient. The structure of the medical profession did not supply enough general practitioners, and medical personnel such as dentists and nurses were in short supply. Treatment facilities were too few and crowded, preventive medicine received little attention, and the quality of care was generally much poorer in rural areas. As in other communist countries, the finest medical facilities were reserved for the party elite. In the post-communist reform period, constriction of the state budget and fragmentary privatization of medical practices made the availability of health care unpredictable for many Poles. After inheriting a deteriorating health care system, Polish policy makers placed their near-term hopes on reducing bureaucracy, encouraging self-government in the medical profession, shifting resources to more efficient departments, and streamlining admissions and diagnosis procedures.

In 1992 Poland had 57 hospital beds per 10,000 citizens, about half the ratio of beds available in France and Germany. The ratio had been declining since the 1960s; in 1991 alone, however, over 2,500 beds and nearly 100 clinics and dispensaries were eliminated in the drive for consolidation and efficiency. Already in the mid-1980s, about 50% of the medicines officially available could not be obtained by the average Pole, and the average hospital had been in service for 65 years. The reform budgets of the 1990s included gradual cuts in the funding of the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare. The long-term goal of Polish health policy was a complete conversion of state budget-supported socialized medicine to a privately administered health system supported by a universal obligatory health insurance fee. Under such a system, fees would be shared equally by workers and enterprises. Interim funding was to depend heavily on a patchwork of voluntary contributions and local and national health care taxes. Planners project that the state budget will continue contributing to the national health care fund until the insurance system becomes self-sufficient. The state would now contribute directly, however, bypassing the old health care bureaucracy.

## 2. The Welfare System

The communist central planning system made a wide variety of payments to subsidize citizens in certain categories and encourage or discourage the activities of citizens in other categories. By the mid-1980s, the planning labyrinth created by this system was such a fiscal burden that severe cuts were made in some payments. Like the health system, Poland's welfare system underwent substantial decentralization and restructuring, and all parts of the system suffered from limited funding in the transition period that began in 1989. Although a higher percentage of the population needed welfare services because of high unemployment in that period, the need to reduce the government's budget deficit caused drastic cuts in many services. Eventual reversal of this trend depends on the speed with which Poland's economy rebounds from its transition crisis, and on the efficiency of the new welfare bureaucracies.

## 3. Structural Change

Until 1989 social policy making was centralized in the Planning Commission of the Council of Ministers. The post-communist reforms placed social policy responsibility in the Ministry of Labor and Social Policy and the Ministry of Health and Welfare, with the aim of liberating social policy from its communist-era linkage with economic policy considerations. The social welfare policy of the post-communist governments was planned in two phases. The first stage included short-term measures to offset the income losses of certain groups resulting from governmental anti-inflation policies. These measures varied from the setting up of soup kitchens and partial payment of heating bills to reorganization of the social assistance system. The second, long-term policy stage aims at rebuilding the institutions of the system to conform to the future market economy envisioned by planners. Communal and regional agencies are to assume previously centralized functions, and authority is to be shared with private social agencies and charities.



*Park in central Warsaw (photo by Gina Peirce)*

### **III. Economy**

While it was Eastern Europe's largest producer of food, Poland based its sizeable and varied industrial sector on ample coal supplies that made it the world's fourth largest coal producer in the 1970s. The most productive industries, such as equipment manufacturing and food processing, were built on the country's coal and soil resources, respectively. Even into the early 1990s the energy supply depended almost entirely on coal.

After World War II, Poland's new communist rulers reorganized the economy on the model of state socialism established by Joseph Stalin in the Soviet Union. The result was the predominance of heavy industry, large enterprises, and a top-heavy centralized bureaucracy controlling every aspect of production. Considerations such as consumer demand and worker job satisfaction, familiar in Western capitalist systems, were ignored. Isolated from the processes of the marketplace, pricing and production levels were set to advance the master plans of the ruling party. The socioeconomic disproportions that resulted from this isolation were a burdensome legacy to the reform governments in the early post-communist era.

Poland's abundant agricultural resources remained largely in private hands during the communist period, but the state strongly influenced that sector through taxes, controls on materials, and limits on the size of private plots. Many small industries and crafts also remained outside of direct state control.

The Polish economy also was isolated from the international economy by the postwar nationalization of foreign trade. Reforms in the 1970s and 1980s gradually gave individual enterprises more direct control over their foreign trade activities, bypassing much of the state planning machinery. Until 1990, however, Polish trade policy remained severely limited by its obligations to the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance ([Comecon](#)--see Glossary), which was dominated by the Soviet Union. Although price supports helped Poland's balance of trade within the system, they also encouraged inefficient and low-quality production that discouraged trade with the rest of the world.

Failure of central state planning to yield economic growth inspired social unrest and official policy reform in the 1970s and the early 1980s, but no real change occurred until the installation of a non-communist government in mid-1989. With massive public support, the first post-communist government imposed a shock therapy reform program in 1990. This program included privatization of all parts of the Polish economy and a rapid shift from the unrealistic state planning system to a Western-style market economy. The momentum of the early reform days flagged in the next two years, however. By the mid-1990s, signs of economic progress were very uneven. Consumer goods became much more available, but the continued existence of inefficient state enterprises lowered productivity significantly, while unemployment rose and inflation became a serious threat after initially being reduced to virtually zero.

In its efforts to Westernize its economy after 1989, Poland relied heavily on expertise and financial support from international financial institutions. Although its substantial hard-

currency debt was partially forgiven in 1991, the remains of the communist management system hindered efficient use of foreign capital and discouraged the foreign investment that Poland vigorously sought. Thus, by the mid-1990s, what was initially planned as a brief period of painful economic adjustment had become a much longer ordeal that had brought mixed results.

### **A. The Economy Under the Communist System**

After World War II, a centrally planned socialist system was transplanted to Poland from the Soviet Union without any consideration for the differences in the level of development of the country, its size and resource endowment, or cultural, social and political traditions. The inadequacies of that system left Poland in an economic crisis by the late 1980s.

The communist system was able to mobilize resources, but it could not ensure their efficient use. High but uneven rates of growth in the net material product ([NMP](#)--see Glossary), also called “national income” in Marxist terminology, were recorded over a rather long period. However, these gains were made at the expense of large investment outlays. Lacking support from foreign capital, these outlays could be financed only by severe restriction of consumption and a very high ratio of accumulation (forced saving) in the NMP.

During the communist period, the same cycle of errors occurred in Poland as in the other state-planned economies. The political and economic system enabled planners to select any rate of accumulation and investment, but in the absence of direct warning signals from the system, accumulation often exceeded the optimum rate. Investment often covered an excessively broad front and had an over-extended gestation period; disappointingly low growth rates resulted from diminishing capital returns and from the lowering of worker incentives by excessive regulation of wages and constriction of consumption. Planners reacted to these conditions by further increasing the rate of accumulation and the volume of investment.

Investment funds mobilized in this wasteful way then were allocated without regard to consumer preference. Planners directed money to projects expected to speed growth in the economy. Again, considerable waste resulted from overinvestment in some branches and underinvestment in others. To achieve the required labor increases outside agriculture, planners manipulated participation ratios, especially of women, and made large-scale transfers of labor from rural areas. Shortages of capital and labor became prevalent, despite government efforts to maintain equitable distribution.

An example of inefficient state planning was the unpaid exchange of technical documentation and blueprints among Comecon members on the basis of the Sofia Agreement of 1949. The countries of origin had no incentive to make improvements before making plans available to other members of Comecon, even when improved technology was known to be available. For this reason, new factories often were obsolete

by the time of completion. In turn, the machines and equipment produced by these factories froze industry at an obsolete technological level.

The institutional framework of the centrally planned economy was able to insulate it to some extent from the impact of world economic trends. As a result, domestic industry was not exposed to foreign competition that would force improvements in efficiency, or to foreign innovations that would make such improvements possible. Above all, the isolation of the system kept domestic prices totally unrelated to world prices.

Prices were determined administratively on the basis of costs plus a fixed percentage of planned profit. Because every increase in production costs was absorbed by prices, the system provided no incentive for enterprises to reduce costs. On the contrary, higher costs resulted in a higher absolute value of profit, from which the enterprise hierarchy financed its bonuses and various amenities. When the price was fixed below the level of costs, the government provided subsidies, ensuring the enterprise its planned rate of profit. Enterprises producing the same types of goods belonged to administrative groups, called associations in the 1980s. Each of these groups was supervised by one of the industrial ministries. The ministry and the association controlled and coordinated the activities of all state enterprises and defended the interests of a given industry. The enterprises belonging to a given industrial group were not allowed to compete among themselves, and the profit gained by the most efficient was transferred to finance losses incurred by the least efficient. This practice further reduced incentives to seek profits and avoid losses.

In this artificial atmosphere, prices could not be related to market demand; and without a genuine price mechanism, resources could not be allocated efficiently. Much capital was wasted on enterprises of inappropriate size, location and technology. Furthermore, planners could not identify which enterprises contributed to national income, and which actually reduced it by using up more resources than the value added by their activities. The inability to make such distinctions was particularly harmful to the selection of products for export and decisions concerning import substitution, i.e., what should be produced within the country rather than imported.

## **B. The Shock Therapy Strategy**

The gravity of the economic crisis and the immediate threat of hyperinflation caused the post-communist government of Prime Minister Tadeusz Mazowiecki to choose a “shock strategy.” Called the Balcerowicz Plan after its chief architect, Minister of Finance Leszek Balcerowicz, the program received approval and financial support from the International Monetary Fund ([IMF](#)--see Glossary). On January 1, 1990, a program for marketization was introduced together with harsh stabilization measures, a restructuring program, and a social program to protect the poorest members of the society. The program included liberalizing controls on almost all prices, eliminating most subsidies, and abolishing administrative allocation of resources in favor of trade, free establishment of private businesses, liberalization of the system of international economic relations, and introduction of internal currency convertibility with a currency devaluation of 32%.

At the same time, a very strict income policy was introduced. Although prices were allowed to rise suddenly to equalize supply and demand, nominal wage increases were limited to a fraction of the overall price increase of the previous month. Very heavy tax penalties were imposed on state enterprises whose wages exceeded these ceilings. This policy reduced real incomes and the real value of accumulated balances, which, combined with inadequate supplies of goods and services, had caused prolonged inflationary pressure. Together with the lifting of restrictions on private economic activity, import policy reform, and internal convertibility, this wage and price policy re-established market equilibrium.

### **C. Foreign Trade**

Centrally planned economies typically minimized trade with free-trade markets, because their central bureaucratic systems could not adjust quickly to changing situations in foreign markets. The high degree of self-sufficiency that was a declared economic objective of Comecon made trade with the West a difficult undertaking for an economy such as Poland's. On the other hand, the agreements that characterized trade within Comecon – which basically amounted to bilateral barter – often made the expansion of trade within the organization problematic as well.

The state monopoly on foreign trade was an integral part of centrally planned economic systems. Even after some decentralization of this field in Poland during the 1980s, the Ministry of Foreign Economic Relations maintained direct or indirect control of all foreign trade activities. Originally, trading activities in the communist system were conducted exclusively by the specialized foreign trade organizations (FTOs), which isolated domestic producers of exports and domestic buyers of imported goods from the world market. Then, in the late 1980s, some state and cooperative production enterprises received licenses from the Ministry of Foreign Economic Relations to become directly involved in foreign trade, and by 1988 the number of economic units authorized to conduct foreign trade had nearly tripled. Nevertheless, many enterprises still preferred the risk-free, conventional approach to foreign trade through an FTO, relying on guaranteed Comecon markets and avoiding marketing efforts and quality control requirements.

Prior to 1990, the Polish foreign trade system included the following elements: a required license or concession to conduct any foreign transactions; allocation of quotas by planners for the import and export of most basic raw materials and intermediate goods; state allocation and control of exchange and transfer of most foreign currencies; an arbitrary rate of currency exchange lacking any relation to real economic conditions; and artificial leveling of domestic and foreign prices by transfers within a special account of the state budget. Even among Comecon countries, Poland's foreign trade had particularly low value. Its share of total world exports, only 0.6% in 1985, dropped to 0.4% in 1989. The share of imports dropped even lower, from 0.5% to 0.3%, in the same period.

In early 1990, Poland entered a painful process of massive transformation, for which reintegration into the world economy was a primary objective. The first post-communist

government dismantled the existing foreign trade mechanism and replaced it with a mechanism compatible with an open market economy. This change eliminated license and concession requirements for the conduct of foreign trade activities, eliminated quotas except in trade with the Soviet Union, introduced internal convertibility of the zloty and free exchange of foreign currencies, and accepted the rate of exchange as the main instrument of adjustment of exports and imports, supported by a liberal tariff system.

#### **D. Post-Communist Policy Adjustments**

In early 1990, the Mazowiecki government planned to maintain Poland's high export volume to the Soviet Union for an indefinite period. The goal of this plan was to ensure a long-term position for Poland in that important market and to protect domestic industry from a further decline in production and increased unemployment. Subsequently, however, an export limit became necessary to avoid accumulating an excessive surplus of useless transferable rubles. In 1992, after the Soviet Union split into a number of independent states, the Polish government had no indication of whether existing balances would ever be exchanged into convertible currencies, or under what conditions that might happen.

In December 1991, Poland reached agreement on associate membership in the European Community (EC), now referred to as the European Union (EU). Having taken this intermediate step, the Polish government set the goal of full EU membership by the year 2000. Among the trade benefits of Poland's entry into the EU would be the gradual removal of EU tariffs and quotas on Polish food exports; immediate removal of EU tariffs on most industrial goods imported from Poland and full membership for Poland in the EU free trade area for industrial goods; EU financial aid to restructure the Polish economy; and agreements on labor transfer, rights of settlement, cultural cooperation, and other issues. The agreement, which required ratification by the Polish government, all member nations of the EU, and the European Parliament, went into operation in the early 1990s. Poland was accepted into the EU in May 2004.



*Demonstration in Warsaw in favor of EU membership (2003). Photo by Gina Peirce.*

## Polish Bank Notes



Photo courtesy of <http://www.slawek.com>

### E. Economic Prospects

Poland was the first of the East European Comecon nations to initiate a move from a centrally planned economy to a Western-type market economy. In many ways, however, the economic crisis that the post-communist governments inherited in Poland was more severe than that in other countries undergoing the same transition. The early stages of Poland's transformation proved more difficult, more painful, and took longer than expected. Nevertheless, the first three post-communist years brought a number of important achievements: elimination of shortages in the domestic consumer market; considerable reduction in the rate of inflation; the quick dismantling of the mechanism of the command economy; marketization and liberalization of economic life; internal

convertibility of currency; a very rapid “small privatization” and a more uneven “large privatization”; the creation of some of the legal and institutional framework that is fundamental to a market economy; and an impressive expansion in hard-currency exports. The banking system had moved decisively away from the previous state monopoly system, but the many banks that existed (over 80) still did not constitute a full Western-style commercial system. The stock market that was established in 1990 awaited the impetus of faster privatization to expand beyond its initial modest scale. Overall, by 2000, these initial steps had built a rather sound base for further progress in the near term and provided reason for guarded optimism over the long term.

The political aspects of economic policy-making were problematic in the early reform years, as factionalism hindered government implementation of needed legislation. The impact of politics was especially noticeable in the privatization process, which was slowed dramatically by three changes in the privatization ministry between 1989 and 1992 and by attendant bickering over methodology and priorities. Nevertheless, by possessing relatively favorable human and natural resources and having taken some of the basic steps to repair the distortions of centralized management, the Polish economy showed signs of progress throughout the 1990s. Geographic location, despite being the cause of many tragic events in Poland’s history, provides a potentially major advantage in the new context of a united Europe. Good commercial relations with neighbors on both sides – Germany, Ukraine, Belarus, and Russia – promise rapid recovery from the end of the Comecon era.



*Park in central Warsaw, Tomb of Unknown Soldier in background (photo by Gina Peirce)*

## **IV. Politics and Government**

Faced with an increasingly severe economic crisis and social unrest that had been building throughout the 1970s, the communist government reluctantly conceded legal status to an independent labor federation, Solidarity (Solidarnosc), in August 1980. After monopolizing power for 35 years without genuine sanction from Polish society, the communist Polish United Workers' Party (Polska Zjednoczona Partia Robotnicza, PZPR) found itself in contention with an alternative source of political power that had a valid claim to represent the country's working people. Under the threat of general strikes and facing economic and political chaos, the regime grudgingly reached a series of limited compromises with Solidarity in 1980 and early 1981.

After the government's initial concessions, however, Solidarity militants insisted on substantially broader concessions. In response, PZPR hard-liners used the memories of the Soviet Union's violent reaction to Czechoslovakia's moderate political reforms in 1968 to justify the imposition of martial law in December 1981. Solidarity was declared illegal. General Wojciech Jaruzelski, who earlier that year was named prime minister and then first secretary of the PZPR, appointed trusted military men to key government positions and de-emphasized communist ideology. Through the rest of the decade, the government sought in vain to recover a degree of legitimacy with the people and to overcome the country's severe economic problems. The overtures of the Jaruzelski government failed, however, to win the support of the Polish people. In a key 1987 national referendum, voters refused to support the government's package of painful reforms needed to halt the economic slide. Eventually, the government came to realize that improvement of the economic situation was not possible without the explicit support of the Solidarity opposition. At that point, the government had no choice but to enter negotiations with Solidarity.

In 1989, round table talks between the opposition and the communist government spawned a flurry of legislation and constitutional amendments that merged democratic reforms with institutions and laws inherited from four decades of communist rule. The unexpected speed with which communist governance ended in Poland put the country's anti-communist opposition in charge of the search for appropriate new political institutions. The subsequent hectic experiment in democracy yielded mixed results between 1989 and the mid-1990s, when the restored Republic of Poland was still attempting to find its political bearings.

At that point, the young democracy's centers of power had not yet been able to define their span of control and their relationship to one another. Institutional ambiguity was exacerbated by the outcome of the long-awaited parliamentary elections of October 1991, which seated 29 political parties in the powerful lower house, the Sejm. To form a coalition government from such diverse parties, none of which held more than 14% of the total seats, was a daunting task in itself. The greater challenge, however, lay in creating a political culture of negotiation and compromise that would make stable democracy feasible over the long term.

A key element in the development of any Western-style democracy is the unrestricted dissemination of accurate information and diverse opinion. In this respect, Poland underwent a less abrupt transition than other post-communist states. A prolific, independent press had evolved from modest beginnings in the early 1970s, surviving the setback of martial law, and expanding its activities as government censorship diminished after the mid-1980s. Following the Round Table Agreement of early 1989, the press gave voice to an ever-widening spectrum of political and social opinion. But the end of generous state subsidies in favor of a profit- and competition-based system bankrupted hundreds of Polish publishing enterprises. Radio and television adjusted less rapidly to the changed political environment and remained under closer government control than the print media.

Despite a constantly changing constellation of political parties and coalitions that produced five prime ministers in three years, Poland maintained a consistent and successful foreign policy during the transition period. By mid-1992, Poland had achieved many of its long-range policy goals, including sovereignty over its foreign affairs; a Russian commitment for complete withdrawal of Soviet/Russian combat forces from Polish territory; bilateral friendship treaties with most of its neighbors; German recognition of the permanent Oder-Neisse border; associate membership in the European Community (EC); and observer status in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). At that point, Poland already had traveled a considerable distance on its “path back to Europe”. The West responded to Poland’s democratization and marketization reforms by granting trade concessions, debt relief, and a range of economic and technical assistance.

### **A. Government Structure**

The three years following the Round Table Agreement of 1989 were a period of dramatic but uneven change in the governmental structure of the Republic of Poland. The Round Table Agreement itself moved Poland decisively away from a Soviet-style unitary hierarchy, in which the formal government was merely a bureaucracy to implement decisions made by the extra-constitutional organs of the Polish United Workers’ Party (PZPR in its Polish acronym). The agreement created a tripartite structure in which power was distributed among the executive, legislative, and judicial branches of government. By mid-1992, the Polish government had evolved into a presidential and parliamentary democracy with an increasingly independent judiciary. The adoption of the “Little Constitution” promised to resolve ambiguities in the executive powers of the president and the prime minister and to clarify the scope of control of the bicameral National Assembly.

### **B. Judicial System**

The constitution of 1952 reflected the communists’ disdain for the concept of judicial independence. As in the Soviet system, the Polish judiciary was viewed as an integral part of the coercive state apparatus. The courts were not allowed to adjudicate the constitutionality of statutes. Instead, the function of constitutional review was within the purview of the legislative branch until 1976, when it passed to the Council of State. A

key provision of the Round Table Agreement was the reemergence of an independent judiciary, a concept rooted in the Ustawa Rzadowa, the constitution of 1791. By 1992 most of the communist political appointees had left the Supreme Court, and at all levels new judges had been recruited from among qualified academic and courtroom barristers. On the other hand, by the late 1990s, Poland's body of laws still contained a motley assortment of Soviet-style statutes full of vague language aimed at protecting the communist monopoly of power rather than the rule of law itself.

### **C. Political Parties**

For four decades before the historic Round Table Agreement, Poland had three legal political parties: the ruling communist PZPR and its two subservient coalition partners, the United Peasant Party and the Democratic Party. The first communist regime to gain power had outlawed the major pre-World War II parties – National Democracy, the Labor Party, and the Polish Peasant Party. The PZPR was formed in 1948 with the merger of the Polish United Workers' Party and the Polish Socialist Party. Realizing the lack of popular support for communism and public fears of Soviet domination, the Polish communists eschewed the term “communist” in their official name.

In return for acknowledging the leading role of the PZPR, the two major coalition partners and three smaller Catholic associations received a fixed number of seats in the Sejm. Although one member of the latter category, Znak, was technically an independent party, its allotment of five seats gave it very limited influence. Typically, the United Peasant Party held 20-25% of the Sejm seats, and the Democratic Party received about 10%. Despite the nominal diversity of the Sejm, the noncommunist parties had little impact, and the Sejm was essentially a rubber-stamp body that enacted legislation approved by the central decision-making organs of the PZPR. Following the Soviet model, political parties and religious associations, as well as all other mass organizations, labor unions, and the press, only transmitted policy and programs from the central PZPR hierarchy to Polish society.

The years 1956, 1968, 1970, 1976, and 1980 were turning points in the evolution of organized political opposition in Poland. With the death of Stalinist leader Boleslaw Bierut in 1956, Poland entered a brief period of de-Stalinization. The PZPR relaxed its intimidation of the intelligentsia, artists, and the church. The Znak group emerged and experimented as a semiautonomous vehicle of dialogue between the PZPR and society. But with the Soviet-organized invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968, the PZPR again suppressed dissent and expelled outspoken Znak delegates from the Sejm. The 1970 shipyard strikes, which claimed hundreds of victims, brought down the regime of Wladyslaw Gomulka (1956-70) and demonstrated the potential of workers to oppose unpopular PZPR policies. In 1976 the arrest of striking workers convinced a group of intellectuals, led by Jacek Kuron and Adam Michnik, to form the Committee for Defense of Workers (Komitet Obrony Robotnikow or KOR), which was the most successful opposition group until Solidarity.

## **D. The Birth of Solidarity**

When the government enacted new food price increases in the summer of 1980, a wave of labor unrest swept the country. Partly moved by local grievances, the workers of the Lenin Shipyard in Gdansk went on strike in mid-August. Led by electrician and veteran strike leader Lech Walesa, the strikers occupied the shipyard and issued far-reaching demands for labor reform and greater civil rights. The workers' top priority was establishment of a trade union independent of communist party control and possessing the legal right to strike. Buoyed by a wave of popular support and formally acknowledged by other striking enterprises as their leader, the Gdansk workers held out until the government capitulated. The victorious strikers hailed the [Gdansk Agreement](#) (see Glossary) of August 31 as a veritable social contract, authorizing citizens to introduce democratic change to the extent possible within the confines of the communist system.

Solidarity, the free national trade union that arose from the nucleus of the Lenin Shipyard strike, was unlike anything in the previous experience of Comecon nations. Although primarily a labor movement led by workers and represented by its charismatic chairman Walesa, Solidarity attracted a diverse membership that quickly swelled to 10 million people, or more than one of every four Poles. Because of its size and massive support, the organization assumed the stature of a national reform lobby. Although it disavowed overtly political ambitions, the movement became a de facto vehicle of opposition to the communists, who were demoralized but still in power. With the encouragement of Pope John Paul II, the church gave Solidarity vital material and moral support that further legitimized it in the eyes of the Polish population.

In the 16 months following its initial strike, Solidarity waged a difficult campaign to realize the letter and spirit of the Gdansk Agreement. This struggle fostered a degree of openness unprecedented in a communist East European society. Although the PZPR ousted Gierek as first secretary and proclaimed its willingness to cooperate with the fledgling union, the ruling party still sought to frustrate its rival and curtail its autonomy in every possible way. In 1980-81, repeated showdowns between Solidarity and the party-state usually were decided by Solidarity's effective strikes. The movement spread from industrial to agricultural enterprises with the founding of Rural Solidarity, which pressured the regime to recognize private farmers as the economic foundation of the country's agricultural sector.

Meanwhile, the persistence of Solidarity prompted furious objections from Moscow and other Comecon members, putting Poland under constant threat of invasion by its Warsaw Pact allies. This was the first time that a ruling communist regime had accepted organizations completely beyond the regime's control. It was also the first time that an overwhelming majority of the workers under such a regime were openly loyal to an organization fundamentally opposed to everything for which the party stood. Even an estimated 30% of PZPR members belonged to an independent union in 1981.

The tide began to turn against the union movement in late 1981. In the midst of the virtual economic collapse of the country, many Poles lost the enthusiasm that had given Solidarity its initial impetus. The extremely heterogeneous movement developed internal splits over personality and policy. Walesa's moderate wing emphasized nonpolitical goals, assuming that Moscow would never permit Poland to be governed by a group not endorsed by the Warsaw Pact. Walesa sought cooperation with the PZPR to prod the regime into reforms and avoid open confrontation with the Soviet Union. By contrast, the militant wing of Solidarity sought to destabilize the regime and force drastic change through wildcat strikes and demonstrations.

The government adopted a harder line against the union, and General Wojciech Jaruzelski, commander in chief of the Polish armed forces, replaced Stanislaw Kania as party leader in October 1981. Jaruzelski's very profession symbolized a tougher approach to the increasingly turbulent political situation. At the end of the year, the government broke off all negotiations with Solidarity, and tension between the antagonists rose sharply.

## **E. Politics and the Media**

Prior to the return of democracy in 1989, Poland's independent press defied state censorship and flourished to an extent unknown in other East European communist states. Active publication by opposition groups in the 1970s formed a tradition leading to the well-organized distribution of officially censored materials in the contentious decade that followed.

As early as 1970, underground groups had begun issuing opposition literature that included short-lived periodicals, strike announcements, and brochures. By 1976, opposition groups were better organized and began issuing influential carbon-copied and mimeographed serials. In the autumn of that year, the Committee for Defense of Workers began producing its *Biuletyn Informacyjny* (Information Bulletin). During the period between 1976 and 1980, about 500 uncensored serial titles were recorded, some with circulations of more than 20,000 copies. At the same time, underground book publishing flourished, as over 35 independent presses issued hundreds of uncensored monographs.

Following the Gdansk Agreement of August 1980, Poland saw a new explosion of independent publishing. In addition to *Tygodnik Solidarnosc* (Solidarity Weekly), whose circulation was limited to 500,000 copies supplemented by 10 regional weeklies, Solidarity and its rural affiliate published hundreds of new periodicals. Assisted by donations of printing equipment from the West, about 200 publishing houses had emerged by December 1981, when martial law abruptly curtailed independent publishing.

During Solidarity's first period of legal activity, reprints of opposition literature from abroad, particularly the influential émigré journals *Kultura* (Culture) and *Zeszyty Historyczne* (Historical Notebooks), were especially popular.

## **V. Environment**

Poland suffered as heavily as any other East European country from the environmental negligence inherent in the central planning approach to resource development. Although some warnings reached the public during the 1980s, the communist regime typically had portrayed economic activity in the capitalist countries as the true enemy of the environment. Investigations after 1989 revealed that enormous damage had been inflicted on water, air, and soil quality and on forests, especially surrounding the industrial centers in Polish Upper Silesia and the Krakow region. But because the economy had depended for over 40 years on unrestrained abuse of Poland's natural resources, environmental planners in the early 1990s faced the prospect of severe economic disruption if they abruptly curtailed the industrial practices causing pollution.

### **A. Environmental Conditions and Crises**

In 1991, Poland designated five official ecological disaster areas. Of the five, the densely concentrated heavy industrial belt of Upper Silesia had suffered the most acute pollution. In that area, public health indicators such as infant mortality, circulatory and respiratory diseases, lead content in children's blood, and incidence of cancer were uniformly higher than in other parts of Poland and dramatically higher than indicators for Western Europe. Even today, experts believe that the full extent of the region's environmental damage is unknown. The situation was exacerbated by overcrowding; 11% of Poland's population lived in this region. With 600 persons per square kilometer, Upper Silesia ranked among the most densely populated regions of Europe. In 1991 the region's concentrated industrial activity contributed 40% of Poland's electrical power, more than 75% of its hard coal, and 51% of its steel. Current statistical figures are similar.

A variety of statistics reflect the effects of severe environmental degradation in Upper Silesia. In 1990 the infant mortality rate was over 30 deaths per 1,000 births, nearly five times the levels in some countries of Western Europe; and some 12,000 hectares of agricultural land had been declared permanently unfit for tillage because of industrial waste deposition. Between 1921 and 1990, the average number of cloudy days per year had increased from 10 to 183. Average life expectancy in southern Poland was four years less than elsewhere in the country. It has only slightly improved today.

Water and air pollution affect the entire country, however. A 1990 report found that 65% of Poland's river water was so contaminated that it corroded equipment when used in industry. After absorbing contaminants from the many cities on its banks, the Vistula River was a major polluter of the Baltic Sea. River water could not be used for irrigation. In 1990, about half of Poland's lakes had been damaged by acid rain, and 95% of the country's river water was considered undrinkable. Because Polish forests are dominated by conifers, which are especially vulnerable to acid rain, nearly two-thirds of forestland had sustained some damage from air pollution by 1990. In 1989, Polish experts estimated total economic losses from environmental damage at over \$3.4 billion, including soil erosion, damage to resources and equipment from air and water pollution, and public health costs.

In 1988 about 4.5 million hectares, or 14.3% of Poland's total area, were legally protected in national and regional parks and reserves. However, all 14 national parks were exposed to heavy air pollution, and half of them received substantial agricultural, municipal, and industrial runoff.

A special environmental problem was discovered when Polish authorities began inspecting the military bases that had been occupied by Soviet troops for 46 years. Uncontrolled fuel leakage, untreated sewage release, noise pollution from air bases, and widespread destruction of vegetation by heavy equipment were among the most serious conditions observed when inspections began in 1990. The government of Prime Minister Tadeusz Mazowiecki was late in pursuing the issue with the Soviet government, however, and in 1991 the Soviet Union continued its longstanding refusal to pay fines and natural resource usage fees required by Polish law. In 1992, the Poles dropped all demands for compensation as part of the Soviet troop withdrawal protocol.

## **B. Environmental Groups**

The burst of political activity in the late 1980s and the early 1990s included establishment of over 2,000 organizations with environmental agendas. A precedent for such groups was set in 1980, when the Green Solidarity movement forced closure of an aluminum plant in Krakow. The diverse groups that appeared in the next decade achieved some additional successes, but lack of cohesion and common goals deprived the movement of political influence.

Among the objects of protest in the 1980s were Poland's lack of a national plan for dealing with ecological disasters; construction of a Czechoslovak coking plant near the Polish border; continued reliance on high-sulfur and high-ash coal in electric power plants; and the severe environmental damage caused by Soviet troops stationed in Poland. In 1986 the explosion and resulting fallout from the Soviet Union's Chernobyl nuclear power plant galvanized environmental activism, which in Poland was dominated by the professional classes. However, environmental groups faced several obstacles. Volunteer recruitment, a critical aspect of organizational development, was hindered by the necessity for many Poles to work two jobs to survive. Refining practical operational priorities proved difficult for organizations whose initial inspiration came from broad statements of environmental ethics.

By 1992, the agendas of the many activist groups remained fragmented and dissimilar. Meanwhile, the most influential political parties were split between advocates of preserving jobs ahead of protecting the environment, and those who saw unchanged economic activity as the paramount danger to the health of workers and society. Public attitudes toward environmental problems also have been divided. In a recent nationwide survey, only 1% of Poles cited the environment as the country's most serious problem, although 66% rated environmental issues "very serious." By contrast, 72% cited economic issues as the country's most serious problem.

## **C. Government Environmental Policy**

Poland established a Ministry of Environmental Protection and Natural Resources in 1985, but the new department exerted little authority. Between 1987 and 1988, for example, government investment in environmental protection increased by only 6%. In 1990 the initial post-communist environmental timetable was to achieve “substantial” reduction of extreme environmental hazards in three years, and to reach the level of European Community ([EC](#)--see Glossary) requirements in 7 to 10 years. In early 1991, the ministry drafted a new state ecological policy, the core of which eliminated the communist rationale of “social interest” in the arbitrary consumption of natural resources. Instead, the new policy fixed responsibility for the negative results of resource consumption at the source. The Ministry of Environmental Protection and Natural Resources officially identified the 80 enterprises causing the most pollution and promised to shut them down if pollution was not reduced. The role of nongovernmental environmental organizations in policy-making was recognized officially for the first time. In late 1991, a State Environmental Protection Inspectorate was established, with broad powers to regulate polluting industries. Penalties for environmental damage also were increased at that time.

At the same time, government policy steered carefully away from measures that would sacrifice economic development, and policy-makers debated the appropriate standards for comparing immediate economic growth with the estimated longer-term gains of beginning a rigorous cleanup program. Accordingly, in 1990 the Ministry of Environmental Protection and Natural Resources adopted a policy of “eco-development,” emphasizing modernization and restructuring measures that theoretically would curtail pollution while they streamlined production operations. The policy included distribution of information to the public to gain acceptance of economic sacrifice for environmental improvement; linkage of environmental law to the new market mechanism slowly being created; promotion of awareness in Western Europe of the transnational impact of Poland’s air and water pollution; and application of foreign capital and technology to environmental cleanup problems. At the end of 1990, Western banks began opening credit lines for Polish environmental protection, and plans for some multinational ecological enterprises included Poland. In 1991 the United States government agreed to forgive part of Poland’s debt in exchange for domestic investment in pollution control.

## **D. Natural Resources**

Poland’s rapid postwar industrialization was supported by a combination of readily available natural resources, especially economically important minerals. After the era of communist economics and politics ended in 1989, however, industrial policy-makers contemplated major changes in the balance of resource consumption.



*The Tatra Mountains*

Photo courtesy of <http://www.europa.eu.int/>

Coal is Poland's most important mineral resource. In 1980, total reserves were estimated at 130 billion tons. The largest coal deposits are located in Upper Silesia in the southwestern part of the country, where large-scale mining began in the 19th century. Silesian deposits, which are generally of high quality and easily accessible, accounted for about 75% of the country's hard coal resources and 97% of its extraction in the 1980s. The Lublin region of eastern Poland was exploited in the 1980s as part of an expansion program to supplement Silesian hard coal for industry and export. However, development of this relatively poor, geologically difficult, and very expensive field ended in 1990. A number of unprofitable Upper Silesian mines also were closed in the early 1990s.

Poland has significant quantities of lignite in the district of Zielona Gora in the west, and in two districts located in the central part of the country between the Vistula and Oder rivers. This low-quality fuel has been used on a large scale for the production of electricity, despite its very damaging effect on the environment. There was a gradual reduction of lignite extraction and use in the 1990s.

Natural gas is extracted mostly in Upper Silesia, Lower Silesia, and in the southeastern part of the country. Production expanded in the 1960s and 1970s, then declined in the 1980s. In 1989, domestic production covered 43% of the country's total requirement.

A major offshore oilfield was discovered in the Baltic Sea in 1985. Including that field and the older fields in the Carpathian Mountains in southeastern Poland, total oil reserves were estimated at 100 million tons in 1990. Poland remained heavily dependent on the Soviet Union for petroleum throughout the 1980s.

Large reserves of sulfur at Tarnobrzeg and Staszow in the south-central region make that material Poland's most important nonmetallic export mineral. Favorable geological conditions have supported large-scale operations in three mines yielding about 5 million tons annually. About 3 million tons of sulfuric acid, along with several other chemicals, are produced each year.

Poland has limited deposits of some nonferrous metal ores. The most significant is copper, which is extracted in large quantities at 10 mines in Lower Silesia in southwestern Poland. Copper production expanded greatly after discovery of major new deposits in the 1960s and 1970s. In 1990, annual copper ore output was about 26 million tons, and 51% of electrolytic copper was exported. Also, in 1982 Poland had the world's fifth-largest deposits of lead and zinc (which occur in association). The annual output of lead and zinc ore was about 5 million tons, which supported annual production of 164,000 tons of zinc and 78,000 tons of lead. In 1990, about 76% of Poland's zinc and nearly all of its lead were used by domestic industry.

Although Poland had some fairly large iron ore deposits, this ore requires enrichment before processing. Until the 1970s, the main source of iron ore was the district of Czestochowa, but output there declined sharply in the early 1980s, and other deposits were of poor quality or provided such small quantities that exploitation was unprofitable. The country depended on iron imports from the Soviet Union and Sweden to support the rapid expansion of the steel industry that was a high priority in the communist era.

Rich deposits of salt provide an important raw material for the chemical industry. Salt mining, which began in the Middle Ages, was concentrated in the Wieliczka-Bochnia area near Krakow until the middle of the 20th century. The major salt mining operations then moved to a large deposit running northwest from Lodz in central Poland. Salt is extracted in two ways: by removing it in solid form, and by dissolving it underground and then pumping brine to the surface. Annual output declined from 6.2 million tons in 1987 and 1988 to 4.7 million tons in 1989. Other mineral resources in Poland include bauxite, barite, gypsum, limestone, and silver (a byproduct of processing other metals).



*Wawel Castle, Krakow (photo by Gina Peirce)*

## **VI. Other**

### **A. The United States-Poland Relationship**

Over the years, a special relationship has evolved between the peoples of Poland and the United States. Poles and persons of Polish ancestry made enormous contributions at every stage in the development of the United States. For Poles, family ties and genuine admiration for the U.S. negated decades of official anti-American propaganda during the communist era. As official relations between Washington and Warsaw deteriorated after the December 1981 imposition of martial law, the United States maintained communication with the centers of Polish opposition, including leaders of labor, the intelligentsia, and the Roman Catholic Church. During the 1980s, U.S. policies of economic sanctions against the regime and support for the opposition contributed to the ultimate fall of the communist government.

Immediately after Jaruzelski imposed martial law in 1981, the United States invoked economic sanctions against Poland. In 1982, the U.S. suspended most-favored-nation trade status and vetoed Poland's application for membership in the International Monetary Fund (IMF). In the following years, Warsaw repeatedly blamed such U.S. policies for Poland's economic distress. During the period from 1981 to 1985, the Polish government claimed that U.S.-inspired sanctions and Western refusal to reschedule debts and extend additional credit had cost the Polish economy \$15 billion in export income and other losses.

Despite the end of martial law and limited amnesty for political prisoners in 1983, relations with the United States did not improve. In the mid-1980s, Warsaw's determined efforts to prove its loyalty to the Soviet Union made rapprochement with Washington impossible. Poland supported the Soviet version of events surrounding the shooting down of a Korean Airlines passenger plane in 1983, an incident that greatly heightened U.S.-Soviet tensions. In 1984, Warsaw joined the Soviet boycott of the Los Angeles Olympic Games in reprisal for the U.S. boycott of the previous games in Moscow. Jaruzelski delivered a scathing attack against U.S. sanctions policy in a 1985 speech at the United Nations. Then in 1986 the Polish government condemned the U.S. air strike against Libya.

Official relations between Washington and Warsaw began to improve after the Jaruzelski government's 1986 general amnesty released all political prisoners. By early 1987, the administration of U.S. President Ronald Reagan lifted all economic sanctions and restored Poland's most-favored-nation trading status. Vice President George H.W. Bush visited Warsaw the following October and promised U.S. support for debt rescheduling in return for the Polish government's pledge to respect human rights. In 1988, however, the United States decided to withhold economic aid until Poland reestablished political pluralism.

After the Round Table Agreement of mid-1989, the United States moved quickly to encourage democratic processes and assist economic reform in Poland. Toward this goal,

President Bush initially promised some \$100 million in economic assistance, and a three-year package totaling \$1 billion was proposed later in the year. In November, Walesa visited Washington and addressed a joint session of the U.S. Congress, which greeted his unprecedented speech with promises of additional economic assistance. The Congress enacted the Support for Eastern European Democracy Act (SEED) to streamline the delivery of humanitarian aid and assistance for the development of democracy and free market institutions in post-communist Eastern Europe. An interagency coordinating council led by the U.S. Department of State was established to direct assistance to Eastern Europe.

The privately managed Polish-American Enterprise Fund (PAEF) was created in May 1990 to provide credit for Polish entrepreneurs to start businesses. Contingent on the level of congressional funding, the PAEF estimated that it would make \$130 million in loans in 1991. Another non-governmental organization, the Overseas Private Investment Corporation, began providing loans, loan guarantees, insurance and advice to facilitate U.S. private investment in Poland and other East European countries. In 1990, the United States led an international effort to create the \$200 million Polish Stabilization Fund, which was instrumental in making the zloty convertible with Western currencies (for value of the [zloty](#), see Glossary).

As a major player in such international financial institutions as the [World Bank](#) (see Glossary), the IMF, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development ([OECD](#)--see Glossary), the [Paris Club](#) (see Glossary), and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development ([EBRD](#)--see Glossary), the United States led the effort to provide debt relief and other economic assistance to Poland. In early 1991, the United States pledged a further 20% reduction of Warsaw's debt to Washington. In a mid-1992 visit to Warsaw, President Bush praised Poland's political and economic reforms and proposed using the currency-stabilization fund to spur private-sector growth.



*Building in Lodz (photo by Gina Peirce)*

## B. Famous Polish Discoverers, Travelers and Scientists

Name	Birth/Death	Major Achievements
Ignacy Domeyko	1802-1889	Mineralogist, geologist, and member of a secret student society at Vilno University. He created the scientific foundations for exploitation of natural resources in Chile and established a network of meteorological stations.
Marian Falski	1881-1974	Educational expert and author of the famous elementary book <i>Nauka pisanie i czytanie</i> (Learning to Write and Read).
Kazimierz Funk	1884-1967	Biochemist who introduced the name “vitamin”, created the science of vitamins, and isolated the first vitamin.
Kazimierz Gzowski	1813-1898	Construction engineer who organized a company that build the Grand Trunk Railway from Toronto to Sarnia (1853-57) and an international bridge across the Niagara River at Fort Erie (1873); founder of Canadian Society of Civil Engineers in 1887.
Jan Heweliusz	1611-1687	Astronomer who created the Astronomical Observatory in Gdansk (1640), constructed the biggest telescope in the 17 <sup>th</sup> century (length of 50 meters), elaborated maps of the Moon, and discovered changes in magnetic declination.
Leopold Infeld	1898-1968	Theoretical physicist, co-worker with Albert Einstein, and specialist in the field of theory of relativity.
Oskar Kolberg	1814-1890	Folklorist, ethnographer, musician, and composer. Author of a monumental work ( <i>Nation. Its customs, way of life, spoken language, traditions, proverbs, ceremonies, witchcraft, rejoicings, songs, music and dance</i> ), which gave the richest description of Polish folk culture.
Mikolaj Kopernik (Copernicus)	1473-1543	Astronomer, mathematician, economist, and physician. In his work <i>On the Revolutions of the Heavenly Spheres</i> , he presented the heliocentric theory of the world, which he created. He was also the first to formulate a law about the replacement of better money by worse.
Ignacy Lukasiewicz	1822-1882	Pharmacist and creator of the Polish oil industry. He separated kerosene from mineral oil and invented the kerosene lamp.

Alfred Tarski	1902-1983	Mathematical logician and philosopher. He introduced the distinction between language and metalanguage in <i>The Concept of Truth in Formalized Languages</i> , made numerous contributions to decision theory and model theory, and pioneered the application of algebra to the study of formal systems.
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## C. Other Famous Poles and Polish-Americans

**Mieczysław G. Bekker** – Scientist who built the first vehicle used on the moon (the moon rover used by Apollo 15 in 1971).

**Zbigniew Brzezinski** – Professor of political science; National Security Advisor in the administration of U.S. President Jimmy Carter (1977-1981).

**Jan Karski** – Diplomat and professor of political science. Author of report concerning conditions in the Warsaw Ghetto and concentration camps early in World War II, when he attempted to bring the atrocities committed by Germans in Europe to the attention of Allied governments and societies.

**Tadeusz Kosciuszko** – Political leader and philosopher; brilliant military strategist; U.S. Revolutionary War hero (he built West Point).

**Jerzy Kosinski** – Writer (*The Painted Bird* and other works).

**Jan Krol** – First Polish-American Cardinal (from Philadelphia).

**Wladimir B. Krzyzanowski** – Soldier who organized the Polish Legion that fought in the Civil War; the first governor of Alaska.

**Czeslaw Milosz** – Poet and writer who won the Nobel prize for literature (1980).

**Stan Musial** – Baseball player (St. Louis Cardinals); Sportsman of 1957; Baseball Player of the Decade, 1946-56.

**Ignacy Jan Paderewski** – Pianist, composer and statesman; loved by the American audience; played an important role in establishing free Poland after World War I; Prime Minister.

**Roman Polanski** – Film director, famous for “Rosemary’s Baby”, “Chinatown” and other movies.

**Kazimierz Pulaski** – Soldier; Revolutionary War hero; Father of the American Cavalry.

**Tadeusz Sendzimir** – Engineer; author of over 50 inventions in mining and metallurgy.

**Stanislaw Ulam** – Mathematician; co-creator of the atomic and hydrogen bombs.

**Korczak Ziolkowski** – Sculptor; creator of the statue of Crazy Horse in the Dakota Black Hills; member of the team of artists that carved the heads of U.S. presidents in Mt. Rushmore.

Source: <http://www.hum.amu.edu.pl/~zbxw>

## Glossary

### *Bolsheviks*

Members of the radical political faction that staged the Bolshevik Revolution in Russia under the leadership of Vladimir I. Lenin, and in 1918 formed the Russian Communist (Bolshevik) Party, precursor of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union.

### *Byzantine*

Medieval Christian civilization that combined European and Asian cultures on an ancient Greco-Roman foundation. Centered at Byzantium (known as Constantinople from A.D. 330 to 1930, and later called Istanbul), the Byzantine Empire occupied western Turkey and the Balkans and, as the center of Orthodox Christianity, exerted a strong influence on many of the Slavic peoples of Eastern Europe.

### *Comecon (Council for Mutual Economic Assistance)*

A multilateral economic alliance headquartered in Moscow; existed from 1949-1991. Members in 1990 included Bulgaria, Cuba, Czechoslovakia, the German Democratic Republic (East Germany), Hungary, Mongolia, Poland, Romania, the Soviet Union, and Vietnam. Also referred to as CMEA and CEMA.

### *Enlightenment*

Philosophical and spiritual movement in Europe in the 17th and 18th centuries; concerned with the relationship of God, nature, reason and man; often challenged the tenets of conventional Christianity.

### *European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD)*

A bank founded under the sponsorship of the European Community (*q.v.*) in 1990 to provide loans to East European countries (Bulgaria, the Czech and Slovak Republics, Hungary, Poland, Romania, the Soviet Union, and Yugoslavia) in order to establish independent, market-driven economies and democratic political institutions. Some 58 countries were shareholders in 1992.

### *Gdansk Agreement*

The first of several major concessions made by the Polish communist government to the rising Solidarity movement in late 1980. The agreement granted public expression to many groups in Polish society that were previously restricted; promised new economic concessions; removed discredited communist officials; and recognized workers' right to establish free trade unions.

### *glasnost*

Russian term, literally meaning "openness," applied in the Soviet Union beginning in the mid-1980s to official permission for public discussion of issues and public access to information. Identified with the tenure of Mikhail S. Gorbachev as leader of the Soviet Union.

### *gross domestic product (GDP)*

The total value of goods and services produced exclusively within a nation's domestic economy, in contrast to the gross national product (*q.v.*). Normally computed over one year.

*gross national product (GNP)*

The total value of goods and services produced within a country's borders and the income received from abroad by residents, minus payments remitted abroad by nonresidents. Normally computed over one year.

*Habsburg Empire*

Also known as the House of Austria, one of the principal European dynasties between the 15th and 20th centuries. Controlled a variety of separate monarchies, reaching its most powerful stage in the 16th century under Emperor Charles V of the Holy Roman Empire (*q.v.*). After 1867, what remained of the empire was commonly known as Austria-Hungary.

*Holy Roman Empire*

Official successor under papal authority to the Roman Empire; endured from A.D. 800 to 1806. The title "king of the Romans," first given to Charlemagne, was borne by a long succession of German kings. Centered in Germany, the empire at its peak (13th to 16th century) extended from the Low Countries to Czechoslovakia and southward into Italy. It was weakened by struggles with the Roman Catholic Church and the Reformation, then scattered by the results of the Thirty Years' War (*q.v.*), 1648.

*International Monetary Fund (IMF)*

Established with the World Bank (*q.v.*) in 1945, the IMF is a specialized agency affiliated with the United Nations and responsible for stabilizing international exchange rates and payments. Its main business is providing loans to its members when they experience balance of payments difficulties.

*London Club*

A group of 500 major international commercial banks lending money under the auspices of the International Monetary Fund (*q.v.*) to Poland for economic development, on the condition of continued economic reform.

*North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)*

An alliance founded in 1949 by the United States, Canada, and their postwar European allies to oppose the Soviet military presence in Europe. Until the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact (*q.v.*) in 1991, NATO was the primary collective defense agreement of the Western powers. Its military and administrative structure remained intact after the threat of Soviet expansionism had subsided.

*Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD)*

Founded in 1961 to replace the all-European Organization for European Economic Cooperation, OECD helps member governments to form and coordinate economic and social aid policies in developing countries. In 1992, 24 nations had full membership, including Australia, Canada, New Zealand, and the United States.

*Ottoman Empire*

A Muslim empire that controlled southeastern Europe, the Middle East, and most of North Africa between the 16th and 18th centuries, and lesser territories from 1300 until 1913. Ottoman occupation was a major influence on all civilizations of southeastern Europe and caused ethnic animosities that remained after the disintegration of the empire.

*Paris Club*

A group of 17 Western countries lending money under the auspices of the International Monetary Fund (*q.v.*) to Poland for economic development, on the condition of continued economic reform.

*perestroika*

Russian word meaning “restructuring,” applied in the late 1980s to an official Soviet program of revitalization of the Communist Party, economy, and society by adjusting economic, social and political mechanisms. Identified with the tenure of Mikhail S. Gorbachev as leader of the Soviet Union (1985-1991).

*Prague Spring*

Period of attempts to institute political and economic reforms in Czechoslovakia, led by Communist Party First Secretary Alexander Dubcek, in 1968. The Soviet Union and four Warsaw Pact (*q.v.*) allies responded by invading Czechoslovakia and forcing Dubcek out of power.

*Reformation*

Sixteenth-century movement against dogma of the Roman Catholic Church, in favor of grace through faith, the authority of the Scriptures, and the direct relationship of believers with God. While met with resounding force by the established church, the Reformation influenced Christian practice to varying degrees in all European countries, resulting in a schism between the Roman Catholic Church and Protestant reformers.

*Teutonic Knights*

In full, Knights of the Teutonic Order, an organization of German crusaders founded in Palestine in 1190. From their base in Prussia, they consolidated the Eastern Baltic into a powerful feudal state in the 14th century, nominally as agents of the Roman Catholic Church. This expansion aroused hostility and revolts, which with Polish and Lithuanian support defeated the knights decisively at Grunwald in 1410. After the rapid decline of their military power and influence in the 15th century, the Teutonic Knights disbanded in 1525.

*Thirty Years' War*

Conventional name for a 50-year struggle (1610-60) of various factions, including Protestant nobles and French kings, against the Holy Roman Empire (*q.v.*) and its ruling Habsburg Dynasty for control of parts of Europe, including the Baltic coast. The fiercest period of the war was 1618-48, hence the misnomer *Thirty Years' War*.

*Treaty of Versailles*

Signed at the Paris Peace Conference in June 1919, this treaty dictated the peace terms ending World War I. Harsh terms imposed by the Allies on Germany were cited as a major factor in the rise of Adolf Hitler and the genesis of World War II.

*Warsaw Pact*

Informal name for Warsaw Treaty Organization, a mutual defense organization founded in 1955 that included the Soviet Union, Albania (which withdrew in 1961), Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, the German Democratic Republic (East Germany), Hungary, Poland and Romania. The Warsaw Pact enabled the Soviet Union to station troops in the countries to its west to oppose the forces of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (*q.v.*). The pact was the basis of the invasions

of Hungary (1956) and Czechoslovakia (1968). The Warsaw Pact disbanded in July 1991.

*Western European Union (WEU)*

A pact signed in 1948 by West European states as a regional defense, cultural, and economic pact, the WEU became inactive in 1954 but was revived in 1984 to improve European military preparedness and activity in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (*q.v.*). Statements were subsequently issued on European security and other international issues. Members in 1993 were Belgium, France, Germany, Great Britain, Greece, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Portugal and Spain.

*World Bank*

Informal name for a group of four affiliated international institutions: the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD), the International Development Association (IDA), the International Finance Corporation (IFC), and the Multilateral Investment Guarantee Agency (MIGA). The IBRD, established in 1945, had as its primary purpose making loans to developing countries for specific projects. The IDA, legally separate but administered by the IBRD, furnished credits to the poorest developing countries on easier terms than those of the IBRD. The IFC supplemented IBRD activity through loans to stimulate private enterprise in the less developed countries. The MIGA was founded in 1988 to insure private foreign investment in developing countries against noncommercial risks. The four institutions were owned by the governments of the countries that subscribed their capital. For a state to participate in the World Bank group, prior membership in the International Monetary Fund (*q.v.*) was required.

*zloty*

Polish national currency, nominally divided into 100 groszy. It became convertible with Western currencies on January 1, 1990. In March 1990, US\$1 equaled 9,824 zloty; in March 1991, the exchange rate was US\$1=9,520 zloty; and in March 1993, it was US\$1=16,330 zloty.

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## Pictures of Poland



The Cloth Hall (Art Gallery) in Krakow



Old Town Square in Warsaw



Auschwitz



The Old Market Square, Krakow



The Barbican, Krakow



The Castle Square, Krakow



The Royal Castle, Warsaw



Nowy Swiat Street, Warsaw



The Ujazdowski Castle, Warsaw



The Belweder Palace, Warsaw



The Wilanow Palace, Warsaw

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