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## Solidarity in Decline

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SOLIDARITY has risen to the top of the Polish government, but as a trade union and grass-roots movement it is in decline. Like its communist nemesis, Solidarity faces a drop in membership, a loss of loyalty, and a waning base of support.

The opportunity to vote against the generally despised communists in the recent legislative election was irresistible to many Poles. But these same Poles are not necessarily joining Solidarity, or committing their energy to its political activity.

Three weeks after Solidarity's legalization in 1980, the organization had 3 million members. More than two months after its second legalization in 1989, Solidarity spokesman Janusz Onyszkiewicz reported half that membership. I recently spoke to Solidarity leaders and organizers in many districts. Everywhere they are modest in their projections. In the region of Rzesow, the union two months after legalization had barely 10 percent of the members it attracted during the corresponding period of 1980. In the mining region of Katowice, once a Solidarity stronghold, only 10 percent of the workers in one large mine had signed up, compared with 70 percent eight years ago.

Beyond mere numbers, Solidarity today is a different phenomenon from the one that arose a decade ago. Then, it was a broad-based populist movement, creating unprecedented ties among intellectuals, workers, and farmers and shattering the traditional barriers in Poland's class-bound society. It awakened an idealism and euphoria difficult to convey to those who did not experience it.

This time, unlike in 1980-81, Solidarity is more successful in farming regions than in the cities, and many villages are more systematically organized than before. Elsewhere, however, people whose lives were so altered in 1980-81 are today cautious and weary.

An elementary-school teacher remembered how nine years ago almost all of her colleagues had rallied to set up a chapter in her school the moment Solidarity arose. But now, only five of 45 had joined by June. What has made the difference? The most common answer from organizers is that having seen the promises of earlier days dissolve, having lived through a decade of frustration and decline, people are skeptical about whether anything will effect meaningful improvements.

Solidarity is no longer united. A young generation of radicals - most of whom were barely in junior high school when Solidarity was born - won't have anything to do with Mr. Walesa. The still-underground "Fighting Solidarity," the youthful opposition faction, opposes his negotiations with authorities. It calls him and his cohorts "traitors" and "collaborators," the most damning epithets in Polish politics. Some youths boycotted the elections.

Walesa calls "Fighting Solidarity" imprudent. But its members, facing an average 15-year wait for an apartment and a lack of other prospects, see little cause for hope in negotiating with the government.

Also conspicuously absent from Solidarity are the managers and engineers of industry, who used to be active unionists. Now its main supporters and organizers are blue-collar workers.

But even Solidarity's future as a trade union is being called into question. Like the Communist Party, its main support lies in large, outmoded, unproductive factories that the government is closing one by one. Even at enterprises that remain open, Solidarity - as a trade union called upon to defend workers' rights - finds itself at odds with the most dynamic new bodies of thought that have swept through the educated Polish community: economic reform and free-market libertarianism.

These new ideas find avid supporters within both Solidarity and the Communist Party, who often advocate austerity measures, and the closing of unproductive enterprises. Those industry professionals who previously engaged in strikes with Solidarity questioned their economic sense and did not join the wave of strikes last fall.

Given inevitable further declines in living standards, wildcat strikes are widely predicted for the coming months. Solidarity will be faced with uneasy choices. The union's success in maintaining discipline and control is by no means assured.

Danuta Skorenko, a local Solidarity organizer, says: "We'll have to join spontaneous strikes or risk being considered Reds. A third force is coming into play - the younger generation. They don't believe much in Solidarity, and they're more rigid and uncompromising."

The Communist Party, too, is fraught with severe problems. Of course, the identity and generational crises that inflict the party do not translate directly into a loss of power. Under the law, the party still plays a leading role in almost all institutions.

But the party is bankrupt ideologically. It lacks viable programs. Few new members or young people are joining; recruitment efforts are demoralized. Members admit the party is disintegrating, and will have to recast its workers' class slogans if it is to survive.

Solidarity leaders, by taking over the top levels of government and entering into the Senate and Parliament, are operating as a de facto political party. But like the Communist Party, if Solidarity wants to survive at the grass roots, it will have to regroup and refocus in order to keep pace with Poles determined to move on.

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