

## How secure was the Soviet Union's control of Eastern Europe?

Focus on: Poland and Solidarity

### What was Solidarity?

- It was a **trade union** formed in the **early 1980s** (An alliance of workers, intellectuals and the Catholic Church)
- Originated at the Lenin Shipyard in Gdansk, Poland
- Led by **Lech Walsia** (An electrician)
- At its height it had **c.9 million members**



### Why was Solidarity formed?

- In response to widespread **dissatisfaction with communist rule** (similar story to Hungary and Czechoslovakia)
- The Polish economy was doing badly - Main protest over food shortages and increasing prices of food and lack of consumer goods.

### Was this the first time there had been protests in Poland?

- No - there were riots in 1956
- These were 'subdued' as Khrushchev introduced a new 'more moderate' leader - Gomułka & Poland introduced a number of economic reforms moving away from rigid communist doctrine.
- There was no attempt to leave the Warsaw Pact, the Red Army remained in place and Poland continued to form part of the 'buffer zone' between the East and West. (So no Soviet invasion needed!)
- However, between 1956 to 1980s, there were ongoing protests.
- Stalin is reputed to have said, 'communism suits Poland like a saddle suits a pig'!

### What did Solidarity demand?

- **August 1980 - 21 demands**, including lower food prices but also the right to organise free trade unions and the right to strike.
- They also began a campaign for ALL workers in the Eastern Bloc.

### What was the Polish Government's response?

- They agreed to the 21 demands **BUT**
- February 1981 the leadership changed to General Jaruzelski
- Under pressure from the Soviet Union (which held military manoeuvres on the Polish border) - Jaruzelski imposed **martial law**
- Lech Walsia and 10,000 solidarity members / leaders were imprisoned!
- Solidarity was 'suspended'

### Why did the Soviets want Solidarity 'suspended'?

- Solidarity has become more **political** ('From bread we will get freedom) – it was highlighting the **failings of communism** in Poland including inefficiency and corruption
- The economic situation was worsening – unemployment rising, wages low, rationing was in place.
- The Soviet Union felt the Polish leadership was losing control – they were concerned 'people power,' would overwhelm and reject the communist government.

### What happened in 1985?

- Mikhail Gorbachev came to power in the USSR
- He said he would not interfere in Eastern Europe
- He had two liberal policies – **Glasnost** (openness) and **Perestroika** (restructuring)
- Poland had free elections in August 1989 + elected a non-communist government (The beginning of the end of communism)

