

## From the Editors

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A few years ago, at a leading American liberal arts college, a famous scholar delivered a lecture devoted to a comparison of the three great social movements of the twentieth century: anti-colonial, national liberation efforts in India, anti-Apartheid struggle in South Africa, and the Civil Rights Movement in the United States. All three, in the face of the overwhelming might of their oppressive opponents, rejected violence as the means to achieve their goals; all three were led by charismatic leaders, Gandhi, Mandela, and Martin Luther King, respectively; and all three, against the odds, succeeded in achieving their immediate goals (even if their long-term outcomes have not been fully satisfactory). We do not mention the name of the scholar, because we want to focus not on what was said and how (and it was a sagacious, enlightening, and perfectly delivered lecture, showing how the anger of the oppressed can be converted into moral and political victory by non-violent means) but on what was missing in it. The fourth great, non-violent, successful social movement of the twentieth century and its charismatic leader, Polish Solidarity and Lech Wałęsa, seemingly a perfect illustration of the speaker's thesis, were not mentioned at all.

Not only in this talk. Solidarity, forty years after its birth, has not become an emblematic case of a social movement in the public discourse outside of Poland (perhaps with the exception of its eastern neighbors still struggling to shake off communism's legacies). It has not become a paradigmatic case for students of social movements either—there are primers, textbooks, and anthologies in this field that do not cover it at all.

Why is that so? The non-violent character of the so-called First Solidarity (1980–1981) was total (unlike, say, the South African case): over the course of the sixteen months it lasted, during country-wide strikes and demonstrations, not a single windowpane was broken. When forced underground for another eight

years, only marginal offshoots of the movement preached violence (without necessarily practicing it). Its eventual victory was achieved at a negotiating table (the RoundTable of 1989), not through storming a government palace or a prison under arms. It was a massive movement, by any comparison. At its peak in 1981, it involved almost ten million employees (blue-, white-, and pink-collar) of the state-owned companies, enterprises, and agencies that formally joined the Solidarity trade union, and another six million private farmers who became members of the so-called Rural Solidarity, all in a nation not quite forty million people strong. Its victory exceeded all expectations, as it led not only to the end of Communist Party rule in Poland, but to the collapse of communist regimes across Europe. And Wałęsa, a worker turned revolutionary turned the nation's president, remains a textbook example of a charismatic leader.

So where to look for a compelling explanation of Solidarity's absence from the global public discourse? Is it because it happened on the Oriental peripheries of the West, behind the Iron Curtain, to boot? Even if this movement arguably contributed more than any other factor to the lifting of the Iron Curtain, the quasi-colonial attitude towards a "far-away country, of which we know nothing," perhaps still prevails. India or South Africa may be even further away, but they at least were part of the British, not Soviet, empire.

Is it because of the language barrier? All important statements from and about the movements led by Gandhi, Mandela, and Martin Luther King were articulated in English, and those related to Solidarity were not. But while the discourse within and on Solidarity has indeed been conducted in Polish, there is an abundance of readily available texts, either translated or originally composed in English (as well as French, German, Italian, and other Western languages), from documents, to ideological manifestos, to descriptive reports, to refined, sophisticated scholarship. Again, we will refrain from naming any authors here, because by recognizing some, we must unavoidably do injustice to countless others. Suffice it to say that there is probably no major theory of social movements or of revolution that has not been examined through confrontation with evidence from Solidarity's experience.

Is it because Gandhi, Mandela, and King were not only charismatic leaders but also fine intellectuals, who generated powerful writings addressed to their

followers and to the world, now explored by consecutive generations of students, while Wałęsa was a worker, often (although not always . . . ) very effective as a speaker, but by no means an *homme de lettres*? It is Václav Havel who occupies the post of the emblematic Central European intellectual-revolutionary, and deservedly so. Yet Solidarity's message was also forcefully articulated by intellectuals. Here we do need to name a few, such as Jacek Kuroń, Adam Michnik, or Father Józef Tischner, and, yes, Karol Wojtyła/John Paul II. Their major works, laying the philosophical, moral, and political foundations of the movement, have been translated into English and many other languages.

Or has Solidarity's experience faded from the global public discourse because the people of Poland themselves have failed to cultivate its memory? The Solidarity revolution provided Poland with the perfect set of symbols for the foundational myth of a free, sovereign, and democratic Third Republic (following the first, Noble Commonwealth of early modern times, and the interwar Second Republic). Events, from the 1980 Gdańsk Agreements to the 1989 RoundTable; the trauma of martial law followed by a landslide victory in the not-yet-fully-free elections; visual symbols (Solidarity's logo with its powerful, unmistakable font); a set of able, charismatic leaders—not only Wałęsa, but also scores of other workers and intellectuals; and the very ethos of solidarity that facilitated both survival in the hard times underground and the unity that was necessary to first launch the movement and then to score the ultimate victory. In the history of revolutionary movements, a similar constellation of myth-serving events, processes, and personalities indispensable for nation-building was generated perhaps only by the American Revolution—a fact not missed by scholars, Polish and foreign.

But soon some Solidarity veterans, often motivated by personal ambition or animosity, and followed by young generations of politicians eager to establish themselves as distinctive actors, began to call what was glorious by other names. The RoundTable was presented as a collusion between figures of the old regime and corrupt dissident intellectuals who had seized Solidarity's leadership. The reforms necessary to save the Polish economy as a betrayal of working-class interests. And Wałęsa, the leader of Solidarity from even before day one—as a traitor, an agent of the communist secret services (because as a young, unexperienced worker he agreed to meet with and talk to security officers). The

opportunity to establish a foundational myth built upon a victory, for the first time in Poland's modern history, was lost, once and for ever.

If the Poles themselves were able to turn Solidarity, a diamond among social movements, into ashes—why should the world take the trouble to redeem it?

The task of preserving Solidarity's record and securing its place in global knowledge now rests with scholars. In Poland, new generations of historians, sociologists, political scientists and others, among them many too young to remember those days, have been making extensive efforts to sift through archival materials, to test new hypotheses stemming from new theories, to "write down the words, the deed, the date."

*EEPS* has already published in OnlineFirst a few articles stemming from such research and will continue to do so in the months to come, making them available in consecutive issues of the journal. They do not line up into a cohesive special issue or section, as they follow different theoretical inspirations and apply different methodological approaches. Some, in a tradition solidly established among Polish historians, limit the application of theory in favor of presenting newly uncovered archival material or reinterpreting already known documents and statements, coupled with critical commentary. They do not, therefore, follow the pattern of the research article that dominates today in international humanities and social sciences and is typically applied as a standard for articles accepted by *EEPS*. But no matter how modest their ambitions, they enrich our understanding of Solidarity as an example to set alongside other canonical twentieth-century social movements.

In the near future, we plan to make available a virtual anthology selected from past *EEPS* articles devoted to Solidarity and related phenomena, including political dissent and social unrest in Poland and other countries of the region.

Why Solidarity has not become an emblematic social movement remains a scholarly mystery, though perhaps not a political one. *EEPS* cannot change this, no matter the quantity and quality of articles it publishes on the subject. Academic journals don't change the course of history. They only help to record it, for the sake of those who one day may wish to seek solutions.

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