



Poland

TERMS & NAMES

Solidarity

Lech Walesa

Czeslaw Milosz

censorship

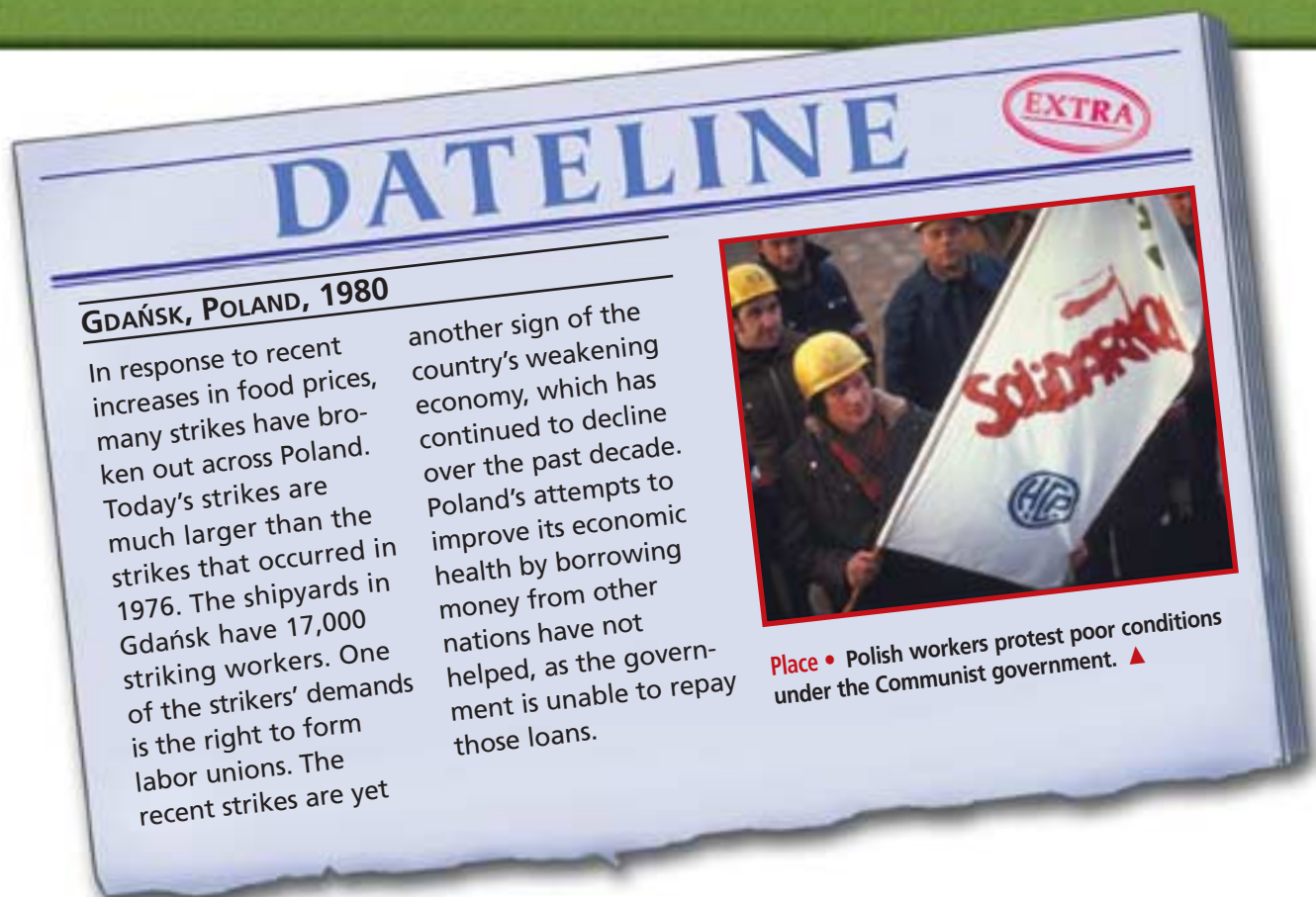
dissident

MAIN IDEA

Poland has gone through the difficulties of establishing a new democratic government and a new economic system.

WHY IT MATTERS NOW

Poland is an excellent example of the success that has been achieved by the newly independent Eastern European nations.



Political and Economic Struggles

The strikes and riots of the 1970s and 1980s were not the first actions Polish citizens took against their government. In 1956, Polish workers had rioted to protest their low wages.

In fact, there have been political and economic struggles in Poland since World War II ended in 1945. At that time, Communists took over the government and set strict wage and price controls.



GEOGRAPHY SKILLBUILDER:

Interpreting a Map

1. **Location** • Name a port city in Poland.
2. **Location** • How many different countries border Poland?

Solidarity In 1980, labor unions throughout Poland joined an organization called **Solidarity**. This trade union was led by **Lech Walesa** (LEK vuh•LESS•uh), an electrical worker from the shipyards of Gdańsk (geh•DAHNSK).

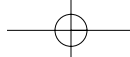
In the beginning, Solidarity's goals were to increase pay and improve working conditions. Before long, however, the organization set its sights on bigger goals. In late 1981, members of Solidarity were calling for free elections and an end to Communist rule. Even though Solidarity had about 10 million members, the government fought back. It suspended the organization, cracked down on protesters, and arrested thousands of members, including Walesa.

BACKGROUND

Poland's capital and largest city is Warsaw. The nation's citizens are called Poles.



Region • In 1980, Solidarity leader Lech Walesa gained the support of labor unions. Ten years later, he became Poland's president. ◀



Region • Poland's senate helps ensure that all the country's citizens have representation. ◀

Reading Social Studies

A. Recognizing Important Details What led to free elections in Poland?

BACKGROUND

The Polish president, who is elected every five years, is the head of state.

A Free Poland

In the late 1980s, economic conditions continued to worsen in Poland. The government asked Solidarity leaders to help them solve the country's economic difficulties. Finally, the Communists agreed to Solidarity's demand for free elections.

When the elections were held in 1989, many Solidarity candidates were elected, and the Communists lost power. In 1990, Lech Walesa became the president of a free Poland.

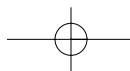
A New Constitution Today, Poland is a parliamentary republic. The country approved a new constitution in 1997. This constitution guarantees civil rights such as free speech. It also helps to balance the powers held by the president, the prime minister, and parliament.

Parliament Poland's parliament is made up of two houses. The upper house, or senate, has 100 members. The lower house, which has 460 members, chooses the prime minister. Usually, as in the United Kingdom, the prime minister is a member of the largest party or alliance of parties within parliament.

A number of seats in parliament are reserved for representatives of the small German and Ukrainian ethnic groups in Poland. In this way, all Polish citizens are ensured a voice in their government.

A Changing Economy

Besides a new government, the Poles have also had to deal with a changing economy. In 1990, Poland's new democratic government quickly switched from a command economy to a free market economy. Prices were no longer controlled by the government, and trade suddenly faced international competition.



Inflation Although Polish shops were able to sell goods that had not been available before, prices rose quickly—by almost 80 percent. With this inflation, or a continual rise in prices, people’s wages could not keep up with the cost of goods.

Many Polish companies, which could not compete with high-quality foreign goods, went out of business. This, in turn, resulted in high unemployment. As more and more people lost their jobs, Poland’s overall standard of living fell.



An Improving Economy In time, new Polish businesses found success, giving more people work. Inflation started to drop. By 1999, inflation was down to around 7 percent. By 2000, Poland no longer needed the economic aid it had been receiving from the United States.

One way to measure the strength of a country’s economy is to look at consumer spending. Between 1995 and 2000, Poles bought new cars at a high rate of half a million each year. Today, Poland has 2 million small and medium-sized businesses. The success of these small businesses is another sign of Poland’s healthy economy.

Region • With Poland’s economy on the rise, unemployment has decreased. ▲

Poland’s Culture

The history of Poland has been one of ups and downs. In the 1500s and 1600s, Poland was a large and powerful kingdom. By 1795, Russia, Prussia, and Austria had taken control of its land, and Poland ceased to exist as an independent country. Poland did not become a republic until 1918, after World War I. Throughout the centuries, however, Poland has had a rich culture.

Literature Polish literature is full of accounts of struggles for national independence and stories about glorious kingdoms won and lost by heroic patriots.

One of Poland’s best-known writers of recent times is **Czesław Miłosz** (CHEH•slawv MEE•lohsh) (b. 1911). Miłosz published his first book of poems in the 1930s. After World War II, he worked as a diplomat in the United States and then France.

BACKGROUND

A famous Polish general and patriot, Thaddeus Kosciuszko (TAHD•ee•oos kos•ee•US•koh), fought on the side of the colonists during the American Revolution.



Milosz, who became a professor at the University of California at Berkeley, won the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1980.

Reading Social Studies

B. Analyzing Motives Why did the Communist government control the media?

Censorship Under Communist rule, the Polish media were controlled by the government. The government decided what the media could and could not say. It outlawed any information that did not support and praise the accomplishments of communism. As a result of this **censorship**, many writers could not publish their works. Some of them became dissidents. A **dissident** is a person who openly disagrees with a government's policies.

Supporting the Arts In order to help Polish writers, the government now allows publications printed in Poland to be sold tax-free. To help Polish actors, screenwriters, and directors, movie theaters are repaid their costs for showing Polish movies. Public-sponsored television stations are supported not only by free-market advertising but also by fees the public pays to own television sets.



Place • In 1978, Poland's pride was greatly boosted when Polish-born John Paul II was elected pope. He was the first non-Italian to be elected pope in 456 years. ▲

SECTION 5 ASSESSMENT

Terms & Names

- 1. Identify:** (a) Solidarity (b) Lech Walesa (c) Czeslaw Milosz
(d) censorship (e) dissident

Taking Notes

- 2.** Use a chart like this one to compare and contrast one aspect of Poland with the same aspect of the United Kingdom, Sweden, France, or Germany.

Poland	Other Country

Main Ideas

- 3. (a)** How did the Polish government respond to Solidarity's goals?
(b) What was the outcome of Poland's free election in the late 1980s?
(c) Describe the recent changes in the economy of Poland.

Critical Thinking

4. Summarizing

How would you describe what life was like in Poland before the changes of 1990?

Think About

- ♦ strikes and riots
- ♦ the Communist government
- ♦ censorship

ACTIVITY -OPTION-

Reread the information about Solidarity. Write a short **speech** that might have been given to gain support for the organization in the 1980s.