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## **From 1956 to 1980: „Solidarity” as an autonomous workers’ self-organization**

Years 1980-81 brought one of the most important events in recent Polish social and political history: the emergence of Solidarity – an independent trade union and an immense social movement. With 10 million members in 40 million society Solidarity can be easily ranked among the biggest formalized organizations of modern history.

There are two dominant narrations explaining this phenomenon: the liberal one (adopted by Timothy Garton Ash and Andrzej Friszke among others) stresses the role of intellectual elites in forging the movement – especially the so called KOR, Workers Defense Committee established in 1976. The conservative-patriotic approach exposes the influence of Catholic Church and John Paul II (the argument elaborated by Jan Kubik), often placing the Solidarity in the category of national liberation struggles.

The view put forward in the lecture adopts a polemical stance towards both interpretative strategies and focuses on the process of autonomous workers self-organization. The year 1956 occupies an important place in this narrative as it was marked by the first violent and explicit conflict between the Party and the workers. As the lecture intends to show – building upon the work of such researchers as Padraic Kenney, Lawrence Goodwyn, Zbigniew M. Kowalewski, David Ost and Sławomir Magala – it was the first undeniable display of the most important ideological and political rift that destabilized the Polish People’s Republic throughout its existence: the one between workers aiming at social control over means of production and the Party betting on state ownership and centralized control. Ironically – and contrary to the Party’s position that dubbed Solidarity “the anarcho-syndicalist perversion” – it was the workers’ movement, not the Party, that represented a genuine communist attitude while the Party indulged in what may be called “a Leninist perversion” – a post-Bolshevik, conservative vision of the Party as a kind of vanguard caretaker of the workers representing them in front of themselves and controlling the means of production in their name (and, supposedly, in their best interest). Thus the “carnival of Solidarity” from the period 1980-81, and prefigured in the year 1956, can justly be considered as the high times of communism in Polish People’s Republic – and the entire Soviet Bloc for that matter.

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