

Gabriel Doherty

ÉIRE – SOLIDARNOŚĆ: THE IRISH RESPONSE
TO THE RISE OF SOLIDARNOŚĆ, 1980–1981
(PART I)

Abstract

This article examines the response in Ireland (north and south) to the rise, growth and suppression of Solidarność, from its creation in the aftermath of the Gdańsk shipyard strike of August 1980 to the imposition of martial law in the country in December 1981.

Słowa kluczowe: Irlandia, Polska, Solidarność.

Key Words: Ireland, Poland, Solidarność.

Poland used to be one of these strange places in which we took no interest at all. Granted that we began to be somewhat more inquisitive when we found that a prelate from that country had been chosen as Pope, it was not until he had actually walked amongst us that we really started to learn at least where it was on the map. It is impossible at this range to guess how the present industrial and perhaps also political disputes in Poland will develop, but at least this is a foreign news ‘story’ in which we will continue to take a keen interest.¹

We may not be racial kin of the Poles – but we do share their religion, and a Pope.²

Do we get a true picture here of Soviet involvement in situations like Afghanistan or Poland? I don’t think so. The reason is that you get your information from American and British papers who use quite a limited number of Western agencies. You very rarely use information from the Soviet Union and therefore your media gives a one-sided account of events. In order to get a correct reflection one should know the point of view of every side.³

¹ “Connacht Tribune”, 22 August 1980.

² Editorial in the “Irish Independent”, 12 August 1981.

³ Interview with Alexey Nesterenko, Soviet ambassador to Ireland, “Sunday Independent”, 25 October 1981.

... in Poland events have occurred which remind us of the inestimable value of the freedom and peaceful society which we enjoy in Ireland and which place our complaints in a new perspective.⁴ Solidarity is not a trade union movement, but a political organisation with objectives of overthrowing the government.⁵

... if I had the choice of living in a country ruled by General Jaruzelski or the Pope, I would choose the General any day ... I never saw [Solidarność leader Lech Wałęsa] as a trade union official, I could never see beyond his Marian badge.⁶

Introduction

It is generally accepted that the formation of the Solidarność trade union in Poland in the autumn of 1980 was a significant milestone in the Cold War, and in twentieth century European history more generally. The creation of such an organisation – the first trade union within the Soviet Union’s sphere of influence that was independent of Communist party control – was a clear rupture with previous practice, whereby ‘official’ trades unions were, in effect, part of the state apparatus (in Lenin’s words, ‘transmission belts’ for conveying party wishes to the workers). There is, as one would expect, a healthy historiographical debate as to the precise weight to be attached to the development. Some argue that it was the first lasting fissure within the Soviet bloc and as such was the precursor to the eventual collapse of communism in Poland and the neighbouring states at the end of the decade. Others suggest that the imposition of martial law in the country on 13 December 1981 destroyed the union as an effective opposition, and thus the reasons for the subsequent systemic failure are to be found elsewhere. What is undeniable, however, is that the ‘Polish August’ (the shorthand phrase connoting the industrial unrest centred on the Gdańsk shipyard that induced the regime to concede the demand for free trades unions, and other reforms, in several related agreements on and around 31 August 1980),⁷ and the subsequent Solidarność-led ‘self-limiting revolution’, offered a set of challenges to the ruling communist regime that it was incapable of meeting short of its ultimate recourse to military repression.

⁴ “Anglo-Celt”, 25 December 1981.

⁵ Brian Anderson, delegate of AUEW-TASS, addressing the Irish Congress of Trade Unions annual conference in 1982. *Report of Proceedings at Annual Delegate Conference Belfast 1982*, Dublin 1982, p. 209.

⁶ Mike Jennings, General Secretary, Irish Federation of University Teachers, in Brian Hanley, Scott Millar, *The Lost Revolution: the Story of the Official IRA and the Workers’ Party*, Dublin 2009, p. 439.

⁷ There were, in fact, three distinct agreements concluded between the government and striking workers at this time: Szczecin (30 August 1981), Gdańsk (31 August) and Jastrzębie (3 September). For the sake of convenience these will be referred to hereafter either as the ‘the Gdańsk accords’ (when referring to the several agreements) or, when referring to a specific agreement, by the name of the locality (eg ‘Gdańsk agreement’).

While most research on the *Solidarność* phenomenon in the English language has, naturally enough, focussed on events within Poland, there have been a small number of studies on its impact elsewhere, with two recently-published works being particularly useful.⁸ Other, briefer, treatments have examined, amongst other matters, the response of the union movement and press in America,⁹ the reaction of the Vatican,¹⁰ the support accorded to the movement in Britain,¹¹ and the impact of Polish developments on the security question in the region, most particularly after the imposition of martial law.¹² Nearly all of the long list of books on the subject of the *Solidarność* movement also, of course, refer *inter alia* to the international response accorded to the events in Poland.

Hitherto there has been no study of these events from an Irish perspective, which is a little surprising given that, even when one sets asides the clichés and with all the caveats that must accompany such a sweeping statement, the historical experience and contemporary collective social outlook of the two countries was comparable, even if the numbers of Polish-born residents in Ireland has, until recently, always been small.¹³ The Catholic and nationalist

⁸ *The Solidarity Movement and Perspectives on the Last Decade of the Cold War*, eds L. Trepanier, S. Domaradzki, J. Stanke, Krakow 2010; *Solidarity with Solidarity: Western European Trade Unions and the Polish Crisis*, ed. I. Goddeeris, Lanham 2010. The states covered by the former study are the Soviet Union, Bulgaria, the Netherlands and America, while the latter examines union responses in Sweden, Spain, Italy, Great Britain, France, the Federal Republic of Germany, Denmark, Belgium and Austria.

⁹ J. Shevis, *The AFL-CIO and Poland's Solidarity*, "World Affairs" 1981, vol. 144, no 1, pp. 31–35; R.M. Smith, *The treatment of the Polish crisis in the American press*, "The Polish Review" 1985, vol. xxx, no. 1, pp. 81–97.

¹⁰ H. Stehle, *Church and Pope in the Polish crisis*, "The World Today" 1982, vol. 38, no. 4, pp. 139–148. All biographies of Pope John Paul II pay detailed attention to this aspect of his papacy. See, in particular, G. Weigel, *Witness to Hope*, New York 2001, pp. 396–496.

¹¹ See G. Hart, *For Our Freedom and Yours: a History of the Polish Solidarity Campaign of Great Britain, 1980–1994*, London 1995, for an account of one of several such groups active in Britain in the 1980s.

¹² H. MacDonald, *The Western alliance and the Polish crisis*, "The World Today" 1982, vol. 38, no. 2, pp. 42–50; J. Steele, *How the West does not serve Poland*, "Third World Quarterly" 1982, vol. 4, no. 2, pp. 298–303; M. Kampelman, A.M. Haig, Jr., *The western reaction to Poland*, "World Affairs" 1982, vol. 144, no. 4, pp. 467–511; E. Moreton, *The Soviet Union and Poland's struggle for self-control*, "International Security" 1982, vol. 7, no. 1, pp. 86–104; H.-D. Genscher, *Toward an overall western strategy for peace, freedom and progress*, "Foreign Affairs" 1982, vol. 61, no. 1, pp. 42–66. A more extensive study of the response of the United States and the Soviet Union to developments in Poland is to be found in A. Rachwałd, *In Search of Poland: the Superpowers' Response to Solidarity, 1980–1989*. Washington 1990.

¹³ Norman Davis, doyen of English-speaking historians of Poland, has referred to the 'fascinating discrepancy between the objective circumstances of modern Ireland and modern Poland, which are somewhat different, and the subjective psychology of the two nations, which is remarkably congenial.' His conclusion is that 'the Irish are distinctly *Polskowaci*, the Poles distinctly *irlandizujacy*.' N. Davies, *Europe East and West*, London 2007, p. 24. Some of the of the small number of Poles living in Ireland in 1980–1981 had come to the country to study with

traditions common to both countries were obvious points of contact, but what was sometimes overlooked in Irish discussions of the rise of Solidarność was the enduring robustness of the labour movement in Ireland. As luck would have it, the industrial wing of this movement was in one of its more assertive phases in 1980-81, as reflected in a number of high profile strikes and other forms of industrial action, while the political wing was in one of its periodic troughs. Taken together this combination of factors gives the Irish perspective on Polish affairs during these months interest and relevance, from the perspective of both countries.

Ireland was, of course, experiencing an existentialist crisis of its own in 1980-81. This took many forms, including electoral instability, an economic collapse which, if it could not quite match Poland's travails, made Ireland its closest western European equivalent, virulently-contested moral debates, and, above all, the poison introduced into the Irish body politic by the H-Block hunger strikes in Northern Ireland. This set of problems combined to ensure that Polish developments had to jostle with a domestic agenda that threatened to eclipse everything else when it came to grabbing the attention of Irish newspaper editors, television producers, ministers, political activists, trade unionists, bishops, artists, émigrés and the general public alike.

But there *was* a public debate on Solidarność in Ireland, even if it was more evident at certain times than others (with the Gdańsk shipyard strike and the imposition of martial law marking the twin peaks of interest), and was more impassioned among certain sectors than others. The discussion certainly lacked the dedicated forum that might have been provided by a body such as the modern Institute of International and European Affairs, and which, in its absence, should have been provided by the Department of Foreign Affairs or the universities. Even the journal *Irish Studies in International Affairs* (then, admittedly, in its infancy) seems to have implemented a self-denying ordinance, where international affairs was construed to mean developments beyond Ireland's shores, thereby excluding consideration of their domestic impact. If this is true it is a pity for the rise of Solidarność offered an opportunity to contemplate, in the context of seminal events unfolding daily on the far side of the continent of Europe, the shifting matrix of strengths, weaknesses, values and prejudices that framed the Irish national psyche of the day. Looking back with the benefit of thirty years of hindsight, knowing all that has happened in between in both Poland and Ireland, the principal features of this debate repay investigation.

This article is divided into sections, each of which examines the response to events in Poland from a specific perspective – government policy, the Oireachtas

funding from the Polish Government-in-exile in the post-war period: see J.A. Murphy, *The College: a History of Queen's/University College Cork*, Cork 1995, pp. 284–285 for one such group. Prominent amongst this cohort was Jan Kaminski, subsequently a Dublin restaurateur, owner of a successful travel company, and first Chairman of the Irish Polish Society.

(the Irish parliament), the Irish trade union movement, the Roman Catholic church and so on. The discussion commences with an examination of media (primarily newspaper) coverage of events in Poland, as an object of attention significant in itself, as the principal conduit by which developments in Poland were made known to an Irish audience, and also as a forum in which much of the public debate in Ireland was conducted. The principal focus of the time period is the period between August 1980 and December 1981, with some observations on relevant developments after that date.

Media

Press

Whatever else can be said about developments in Poland during the period under review, it cannot be denied that they were consistently newsworthy. Every newspaper in the country, from the large-circulation national daily and Sunday papers to the provincial press, referred to events in Poland at some point during that period, with the nationals running articles on an almost daily basis. In terms of the simple quantity and frequency of coverage, it was without question the single most discussed ‘foreign’ news item during these months, even if, given the nature of ‘news’ itself, the extent of coverage varied on a day-to-day basis, and on some days amounted to little more than the briefest of paragraphs. On numerous occasions, however, it made the front pages of one or more of the national dailies, and in certain editions was the lead item. Periods when it was most ‘in vogue’ with editors included the strike in the Gdańsk shipyard from 14 to 31 August; the controversy over the attempt by the state’s Supreme Court to amend the charter of the Solidarność union by inserting a clause recognising the Communist party’s ‘leading role’ (a crisis only finally resolved by the court’s climb-down on 10 November 1980); the two ‘invasion scares’ of December 1980 and March-April 1981; Solidarność’s first National Congress, the first round of which took place between 5-10 September 1981, with the second sitting between 26 September and 7 October; and finally in the fortnight following the imposition of martial law in the early hours of 13 December 1981.

A brief summation of the principal events in Ireland during the same period will help to frame a better understanding of the domestic response to events in Poland. The H Block hunger strikes (the first lasting from 27 October to 18 December 1980; the second, and far more traumatic, from 1 March to 3 October 1981) constituted, by some distance, the single most significant running news story during the period covered by this article, with the death of Bobby Sands on 5 May 1981 (following his election to Westminster in the Fermanagh and South Tyrone by-election a month earlier) being the subject of wall-to-wall

coverage for days thereafter. Other prominent stories included the Anglo-Irish summit of 8 December 1980 in Dublin (during which Charles Haughey famously claimed the ‘totality of relationships’ between Ireland and the United Kingdom had been discussed); the announcement, in January 1981, by the Irish Rugby Football Union of their intention to arrange a tour of South Africa later that year;¹⁴ the deaths of forty-eight young people in the St Valentine’s night fire in the Stardust ballroom in Artane, Dublin, and the subsequent, emotionally-charged, commission of inquiry; the hi-jacking of an Aer Lingus flight to London (2 May 1981); and the general election of 11 June and subsequent election of Garret Fitzgerald as Taoiseach (30 June). When to this list was added a daily litany of negative economic news – which produced, amongst many other things, two particularly disruptive petrol strikes, in September 1980 and March 1981, and huge demonstrations in Dublin by farmers (December 1980) and PAYE workers (January 1981) – it will be clear that, seminal as the daily events in Poland were recognised to be at the time, in the hubbub of busy, parochial newsrooms in Dublin and elsewhere in the country they were just one more item for which room had to be found.

With regard to the national dailies, consistently the best coverage was that accorded by the “Irish Press” (circulation c. 100,000), then under the editorship of Tim Pat Coogan. In common with its competitors, its day-to-day reportage naturally drew heavily upon the information provided by the international news agencies (especially UPI, Reuters, AFP, PA, the London “Times”), although in contrast to, say, the “Irish Times”, and in keeping with house style, these intermediate sources were not usually acknowledged by name. Its defining characteristic in such matters lay in its emphasis upon directly quoting from a wide variety of wide variety of Polish (and occasionally Russian) language sources, carefully distinguishing between state/official outlets such as “Trybuna Ludu” (the newspaper of the of the Polish Communist party, the PZPR), PAP (the state’s official news agency), “Polityka” (a nominally autonomous, but avowedly Communist, magazine) and (in the case of Soviet-related information) “Pravda”, and opposition publications such as those produced with the tacit or explicit imprimatur of the Polish Catholic hierarchy or the plethora of independent journals, magazines and newspapers that came into existence in the wake of Solidarność’s phenomenal growth. As the result of a strike by journalists the paper did not appear between 18 and 23 December 1981, and this absence, of course, limited its scope in dealing with the aftermath of the imposition of martial law, but this hiatus aside the “Press’s” approach was characterised by reliable and insightful reportage and editorialising.

¹⁴ This decision produced a sustained storm of criticism, which in its turn produced some barbed responses as to the failure of some of the same critics to speak out on the injustices visited on Poland. See part two of this article, footnote 82.

A particular strength of its coverage of Polish affairs lay in a series of specially-written articles by two young freelance journalists, Jacqueline Hayden and Carol Coulter. The former, a young graduate of Trinity College Dublin, had, quite by coincidence, made contact with the Gdańsk Free Trades Unions activist cadre immediately prior to the start of the shipyard strike.¹⁵ Her range of contacts included many of Solidarność's most famous luminaries, such as (amongst others) Lech Wałęsa, Anna Walentynowicz, Andrzej and Joanna Gwiazda, and Jan and Krystyna Lityński. Such connections gave her particular insights into the internal workings, debates, growth, strengths and weaknesses of the movement, and of social, economic and political alignments in the country more generally. This knowledge was put to good use and ensured that her pieces were among the most insightful penned for an Irish audience on the topic at this time. The first three – which interlaced analysis of high-level manoeuvrings with reports of grass-roots experiences and perceptions – appeared while the strike itself was on-going.¹⁶ Other, more synoptic, reports followed on a weekly basis in September, and still more, on topics as diverse as the position of Wałęsa, the impact of food shortages, and the vulnerability of the Polish Communist party, appeared intermittently throughout 1981.¹⁷ Carol Coulter, now legal editor of the “Irish Times” but then at the outset of her career, also contributed to the “Press’s” Polish output, albeit less frequently than Hayden.¹⁸

The “Irish Independent” was then, as now Ireland’s largest-selling daily (circulation c. 180,000). Under the proprietorship of Tony O’Reilly since 1977, it was at this time in the early stages of its long odyssey from the enthusiastically Catholic editorial line it had pursued for most of its existence. It was precisely this informed Catholic perspective, however, that provided a steady anchor to much the paper’s coverage of Polish affairs, even if it also meant that it was both inclined at times to slip into language redolent more of the era of Joseph McCarthy than détente,¹⁹ and predisposed to read too much into such actions as

¹⁵ For an account of her initial contacts with what were to become Solidarność’s inner cadre, see J. Hayden, *Poles Apart: Solidarity and the New Poland*, Dublin 1994, pp. ix, 17–20.

¹⁶ The reports were dated 20, 21 and 25 August 1980. The last, consisting of a profile of a rank and file Warsaw dissident activist, known solely as ‘Bogdan’, was particularly insightful in conveying to an Irish audience the harsh realities of life for those who opposed the regime.

¹⁷ See, for example, her analysis of the outlook and evolution of Lech Wałęsa, which appeared in the “Irish Press” on 14 March 1981.

¹⁸ See, for example, her article on the reaction of the Polish community in London to events in their homeland in the “Irish Press”, 26 August 1980. Like Hayden, Coulter also contributed articles to the “Irish Times” during this period.

¹⁹ ‘Poland: Bishops fear invasion so ... NOW CHURCH BACKS THE REDS’ proclaimed the front page headline on 13 December 1981 (in the immediate aftermath of the first Soviet invasion scare). This followed the statement issued by the Polish Catholic hierarchy on 12 December at the end of a two-day meeting, which singled out for special criticism Jacek Kuroń and other named activists of the KOR (Komitet Obrony Robotników or Workers’ Defence Committee, a pressure group that was formed in 1976 to publicise the excesses of the Communist regime in Poland).

the appointment of Jerzy Ozdowski as Deputy Prime Minister on 21 November 1980. While Ozdowski was a practising Catholic (the first to be appointed to such a senior position of state), he could in no way have been said to have been independently-minded. His appointment, the paper failed to notice, was more about optics than substance as the key positions within the party's upper echelons remained resolutely closed to anyone from such a background.²⁰

This Catholic perspective suffused much of the paper's coverage of the rise of Solidarność, particularly in its first six months, and enabled it to gauge, quite accurately and amongst other things, the extent, and limits, of the Polish hierarchy's influence on the movement,²¹ the inter-relationship between devotional practices, Communist party tactics and specific demands and grievances of the union in particular localities,²² and the influence of Catholic social doctrine thereon.²³ These insights were shared to a large degree with the analysis proffered by the "Irish Press", and in this respect the two papers offered Irish readers a commentary on events that was more complete than was on offer from many better known titles in other parts of Europe.

Another strength of the paper's coverage lay in the articles and leaders supplied by Seán Cantwell, the paper's foreign editor and a Russian speaker with a particularly detailed knowledge of developments in central and eastern Europe. He certainly made mistakes, the most obvious being his confident prediction, in an article on 10 November 1980, that the Polish Supreme Court would rule against the registration of Solidarność. When the decision went the other way, the following day's (unattributed) report merely noted that the decision had 'produced a situation which leaves many completely baffled' – including, it may confidently be said, Cantwell himself! Most of the time, however, his analysis was perceptive, if inclined to caution and marred by a certain degree of

²⁰ The paper opined that the appointment 'would be a milestone in the process of reconciliation between the regime and the church.' "Irish Independent" 21 November 1981. It was wrong in this assertion, although it was not the only paper, in Ireland or elsewhere, whose assessment of the significance of the appointment proved faulty. Garton Ash dismissed him thus: 'Now he sat, a small, apologetic man in the corner of a large empty government office, shuffling papers and receiving foreign journalists.' *The Polish Revolution: Solidarity 1980–82*, p. 168.

²¹ The paper gave particular prominence to pronouncements of the Polish hierarchy on the crisis. For one example among many see the coverage accorded to the view expressed by the Bishop of Gdańsk, the Right Reverend Lech Kaczmarek, on 23 August 1980, simultaneously sympathising with the strikers' efforts to improve their lot and cautioning them against demanding more than the government could give. See also above, footnote 19.

²² The report in the "Independent" on 3 September 1980, for example, reported how, immediately after the conclusion of the Gdańsk agreement miners in Silesia had gone on strike against new shift rosters which, while they had led to increased output, had made it impossible for many of them to attend Sunday mass.

²³ See the section on the Catholic church in part two of this article for a discussion of the debate in Irish Catholic circles of the extent to which the Papal encyclical *Laborem Exercens*, issued on 14 September 1981, was influenced by contemporary debates in Poland.

repetition. Armed with a flair for the memorable phrase (on 9 November 1981 he likened keeping track of the swirl of daily events in Poland to ‘minding mice at a crossroads’), he had a high opinion of Wałęsa’s instinct for progressive compromise.²⁴ He was outraged at the hesitant response of the Irish and other European governments to the imposition of martial law, and as the paper’s chief leader writer at this time he gave full vent to his anger in several editorials on the matter.²⁵ In so doing he struck a moral tone that was not inappropriate given the issues at stake.

The quality of the coverage afforded to Poland in this period by the “Irish Times” was decidedly uneven. In terms of column inches it certainly devoted more attention to the topic than its counterparts, and accorded the story a higher priority – thus, between August 1980 and December 1981 it editorialised on Poland on over sixty occasions (compared to 20 for the “Press” and 45 for the “Independent”), and had it as an item on the front page over 90 times (compared to 21 for the *Press* and 45 for the “Independent”). In Judy Dempsey, moreover – another young graduate who found herself in Poland when the industrial unrest of July 1980 mutated into the ‘Polish August’ – it had an ideal source for its reportage from the country. Over the following sixteen months and more she supplied a stimulating commentary on the daily flow of events (interspersed with more discursive pieces on salient issues), which has stood up remarkably well notwithstanding the passage of time. Her observations were particularly acute when it came to the travails, dilemmas and evolution of the Polish Communist party, and her ability to pick out the key players in the various factions in it humanised the apparatchik class for the Irish reader – a not insignificant achievement given the secretive and conformist ethos of that group.²⁶

²⁴ ‘Lech Walesa deserves a place in Polish history along with all the great heroes in the tragic take of that country. Though he modestly plays down the role, his probably one of the greatest social innovators in the Communist world, having found a way to tackle an oppressive system without raising one fist or firing one gun.’ “Irish Independent”, 7 September 1981.

²⁵ Perhaps the most memorable was that which appeared on 30 December 1981. He spoke in vigorous terms of the betrayal of the Polish people by European governments, including Dublin, which had ‘trailed along with the wishy-washy EEC attitude to Poland instead of speaking up for itself, condemning what has happened there and trying to find ways of bringing it home to the new regime that they have brought trouble on themselves.’ The failure to even consider, let alone apply, punitive measures meant in his view that ‘we have handed Poland back into the repressive region behind the Iron Curtain. We have helped to shackle the Poles to their fetters again. We have caused merriment in the Kremlin.’ He clearly spoke for many when he asked ‘What must ordinary Poles think of us as they end their year under a military Government which has shown them no mercy and yet gets lenient treatment from the west.’

²⁶ A good example was provided on 10 June 1981, to coincide with key meetings of the party’s Politburo and Central Committee, which explored the increasingly assertive nature of the party’s conservative wing and which explored the leaders and ethos of such groupings as the Grunwald, Warsaw 80, and Katowice Forum factions.

If Dempsey's columns were compulsory reading for the Irish reader interested in Polish events at this time, the same, unfortunately, could not be said for the paper's editorials, which were characterised by limited knowledge, inane pronouncements, flat contradictions, and a tendency to make predictions as to the future course of events, the confident nature of which was only matched by their consistent, and occasionally comic, inaccuracy. The tone was set in the very first week of the Gdańsk shipyard strike when the paper opined on 16 August that the 'reckless courage' of the Poles made them unafraid of the Soviet threat, and, six days later, that there was 'little point in pouring over the "lessons" of Hungary and Czechoslovakia' because 'Poland is a different country, with its own deeply ingrained traditions, and this is another time.' On both occasions the leader demonstrated a lamentable lack of understanding of the consciously 'self-limiting' nature of the Polish venture, which was predicated precisely on the avoidance of the mistakes of 1956 and 1968, so as to minimise the risk of external interference in Polish affairs. The editorials at this time also exaggerated the direct influence of the KOR group on the Gdańsk strike (patronisingly suggesting in its editorial on 25 August that, unaided, mere workers were incapable of looking 'beyond pay and prices to the system responsible'). As late as a week into the strike it carried on its front page a photograph captioned: 'A woman worker from the Lenin Shipyard addresses striking shipyard workers in Gdańsk', seemingly unaware that the figure in question was Anna Walentynowicz, even then one of the most recognisable figures in the movement (indeed, in Poland generally), whose sacking had given rise to the strike in the first instance.

On the same date the editorial was prepared to concede that while 'it would be a mistake to attach too much importance to what had happened in Czechoslovakia', on mature reflection, there was indeed 'a loitering ghost of analogy' between Prague in 1968 and Gdańsk twelve years later – thereby beginning the process of climbing out of the analytical hole it had dug for itself a few days before. The following quote, when speaking of the position of party secretary Edward Gierek and taken from the same editorial, is its own best commentary on the lack of editorial appreciation of the most basic parameters of the Polish imbroglio at this time: 'Is it conceivable that he and his colleagues can agree to trades unions completely divorced from the State apparatus? That they can accept the right to strike, or unhampered freedom of expression? The answer is a resounding "no."' Mere days later, of course, the Gierek government gave its answer when it signed the Gdańsk agreement, the first article of which, did indeed, provide for 'Acceptance of free trade unions independent of the Communist Party and of enterprises, in accordance with convention No. 87 of the International Labour Organization concerning the right to form free trade unions.'

The lesson, however, was not learned, for in November and in the context of the battle for the registration of Solidarność with the Supreme Court, the lead writer was again engaging in confident prediction, this time with regard

to the disputed insertion into the union's constitution of a clause referring to the party's 'leading role'. It was clear, ran the editorial of 8 November, 'that the Soviet Union has insisted that this be done. If it is not done, there will be a direct confrontation between the Russians and the Poles. There are no two ways about this. The Kremlin, in the context of its imperialist thinking, cannot afford to let Poland out of its Communist laager – which is what the absence of the clause would lead to.' In fact the Soviets has made no such demand, the court did indeed register the union's constitution absent the clause, and there was no such direct confrontation (however much disquiet the development undoubtedly caused in Moscow).

This erroneous interpretation of Soviet intentions and capabilities (which, in fairness to the paper, was common to many of the press and intelligence agencies of much of western Europe and America) was repeated time and time again. It seems to have been obsessed with the threat of possible Soviet or Warsaw Pact aggression and well-nigh oblivious to the possibility of the type of military coup that actually transpired in December 1981. When no such invasion had taken place by July of 1981 the line changed, possibly in response to the deliberations of, and personnel changes wrought by, the just-concluded party congress. Now, the paper observed, 'the generation of optimism, of faith in the future by the Congress seems to be a reality.' 'Poland,' it concluded, 'had grounds for hope' – although such thoughts were clearly far from the minds of General Jaruzelski who was even then engaged in the detailed planning for the imposition of martial law five months later. In short, the paper completely misread both the direction from which the threat to *Solidarność* would come, and its nature – although, to repeat, it was far from alone in this mistake.

While there was little excuse for the egregious errors of the paper's editorials, save for the fact that these were shared with others, they were compounded by other facets of its coverage of the *Solidarność* phenomenon. The most significant can be most charitably described as an indulgence of Soviet propaganda. These ranged from puff pieces, by then considered passé even in the left-leaning and liberal European press, extolling the virtues of the Soviet model, to full op-ed columns, such as those by the veteran Soviet apologist Claud Cockburn, then entering the final year of his life in his home in Ardmore, county Waterford. At different times he contrived to argue both that American warnings against a Soviet invasion in December 1980 should be interpreted as 'the preparation of world opinion for some aggressive action by the Americans' themselves,²⁷ and that the food shortages in Poland, which were becoming acute by August 1981, were to be ascribed to the shortcomings of the Polish private peasant class and

²⁷ "Irish Times", 10 December 1980. See the mocking response from Karel Bačik in his letter to the paper 18 December 1980.

not at all to the inanities arising from state regulation of agriculture.²⁸ These are but two examples of the partisan, errant nonsense frequently indulged in by Cockburn and facilitated by the paper's editor.

In short, looking at the totality of its coverage and notwithstanding the honourable exception of Dempsey's exemplary reporting, the self-styled 'paper of record' was at this time anything but in its treatment of Polish affairs.

The principal Sunday papers, notably the "Sunday Independent" and the "Sunday Press", despite having the obvious advantage over their daily counterparts of longer production times, were disappointing in their coverage of Polish developments. There were exceptions – the "Sunday Press" in its number on 7 December 1980, for example, carried worthwhile articles on the background to the crisis, then at fever pitch due to the fear of a Russian invasion, while the "Sunday Independent" registered a minor scoop in its number of 25 October 1981, when it carried a long interview with Alexey Nesterenko, the then Soviet ambassador to Ireland, during which he spoke out against what he saw as biased reporting on Polish affairs in the Irish press (see the quote at the beginning of this article). In the main, however, the Sunday papers added little of value to the public's understanding of the Solidarność phenomenon – which was all the more unfortunate given their substantially greater sales when compared to the dailies.

The provincial papers, of course, lacked meaningful access to independent sources of information on international affairs, or dedicated foreign correspondents, and were thus as dependent as their own readership on the output of the national press, radio and television to keep abreast of Polish developments. There were exceptions to this rule, however, which arose in the main from personal and local connections with religious organisations versed in affairs behind the Iron Curtain. A good example was Waterford's "Munster Express", which in its weekly column 'De La Salle notes' occasionally carried feedback coming from members and students of that order's schools in Poland.²⁹ Cavan's "Anglo-

²⁸ *Ibidem*, 19 August 1981. Without any apparent hint of irony he noted that, with regard to the aggressive stance adopted by Solidarność on many issues, 'It has seemed to many outside observers, and it has certainly seemed to the Russians, that some external force has been in operation.' In the same article he lavished praise on the Soviet Union, which had just announced additional economic assistance to Poland. 'It is,' he said, 'a situation which brings deep relief to all Europe and in particular to the West German Government' – although, characteristically and tellingly, he failed to mention even in passing the massive package of food aid from the EEC to Poland then in the course of preparation. For a response to his observations on the shortcomings of the Polish peasantry see the letters from Cathal Guimard in Galway, and Janusz Bugalski, in the "Irish Times", 23 October 1981 and 19 November 1981 respectively.

²⁹ See, for example, the article in the paper's edition of 26 September 1980, which spoke of an encounter with a Polish former De La Salle student, who was both 'very proud of the bloodless revolution' then being carried through by Solidarność and 'found the West European acceptance of Communism confusing.'

Celt”, likewise, in its weekly ‘The church’ column made regular reference to the Vatican’s interest in affairs in the Pope’s homeland.

The imposition of martial law generated heightened levels of interest amongst the provincial papers, all of which condemned the move, using language markedly more emotive than their national counterparts. The “Derry People and Donegal News” of 26 December 1981, for example, spoke of a country ‘where murder and repression on a vast scale attempt, yet again, to crush the spirit of a valiant and long-suffering people’; the “Connacht Tribune” in its Christmas number urged the Irish government to use its voice ‘at the bar of world opinion, denouncing in the strongest possible manner this monstrous destruction of budding freedom’; while the “Connaught Telegraph” on Christmas Day decried the fact that while ‘for eighteen months it [Poland] enjoyed the fresh smell of freedom, the sheer delight of living in a country which was free ... now the jackboot is heard in the squares and along the streets.’ This negative sentiment evident across the entire sector is strongly suggestive of the general mood amongst the Irish people, not just in response to General Jaruzelski’s step but with regard to the entire course of events in the country in the previous eighteen months.

Ireland was not exactly over-burdened with current affairs journals in the early 1980s, and those that were in existence played no role in the cultivation of public knowledge of Polish matters. Of the three that had meaningful circulations, the longest-established, the left-leaning “Hibernia”, folded in October 1980, and the two others – the Belfast-based “Fortnight” and the Vincent Browne-controlled “Magill” – were almost entirely devoted to national and parochial issues, with negligible coverage of developments beyond Ireland’s shores.

Television and radio

Regrettably, none of the RTÉ news bulletins (television or radio) relating to developments in Poland broadcast during the years 1980-81 are readily available in the station’s archives. It is, therefore, impossible to determine how accurate and beneficial such items were in informing the Irish public on a day to day basis as to the significance of the evolving situation there – albeit, given the nature of such news broadcasts (with its understandable focus on national questions and few matters being allocated more than a couple of minutes’ airtime), and the absence of any resident correspondent in Poland, it seems that its coverage consisted of simple reportage, taken from western agency reports, with little accompanying commentary or analysis.³⁰

³⁰ The Soviet ambassador to Ireland complained that the uncritical acceptance of western agency reports distorted the true picture of events in Poland. See footnote 3 above.

Occasional slots devoted to Polish matters did find a place on the station's current affairs programmes at this time ('Frontline' in 1980, 'Today Tonight' in 1981). For example, a four minute slot devoted to the factual background to the Gdańsk negotiations was broadcast on 'Frontline' on 26 August 1980, with an even briefer (sub-2 minute) slot, devoted to the deliberations of the first round of Solidarność's National Congress (which had concluded the day before) aired on 11 September the following year. That, however, seems to be the sum total of the coverage accorded to the subject, prior to the imposition of martial law.

As has been seen above, this development gave a temporary fillip to interest in the subject, albeit given the effective media blackout imposed by the Polish authorities on Sunday 13 December 1981 the segment of 'Today Tonight' devoted to Poland broadcast on the following Monday night could offer nothing by way of visual imagery that could meaningfully complement the equally limited information coming from other sources.

The only significant broadcast item relating to Poland was an interview on 'Today Tonight' between Senator James Dooge (the Minister for Foreign Affairs) and the show's presenter, Brian Farrell, on 4 January 1982, immediately after the former had attended a meeting of EEC Foreign Ministers in Brussels called to organise a joint approach to the problems arising from martial law. The discussion ranged over many questions, including possible EEC sanctions and Poland's foreign debts. The following excerpts are particularly interesting:

Farrell: Wouldn't many people take the view that Ireland, in particular – a small country, often in its own past a beleaguered country, and still overwhelmingly a Catholic country – might have been expected to push for a greater sense of solidarity with Solidarity [than was indicated in the communiqué at the end of the meeting]?

Dooge: I think there was. If you look at the communiqué. Let me take paragraph 1. 'The Ten utterly disapprove of the development of the situation in Poland.' Let me take paragraph 3: 'The Ten therefore appeal urgently to the Polish authorities to end as soon as possible the state of martial law, to release those arrested, and to restore a general dialogue with the church and Solidarity.' There is the position of the Ten. How much further in regard to principles, in regard to objectives, could Ireland be expected to go?

Farrell: But there is no kind of denial of the legitimacy of the present Polish regime, although, in fact, the communiqué does disapprove of the actions taken, and it does say the promises in regard to liberty and reform have simply been translated into repression.

Dooge: The Government headed by General Jaruzelski, is the de facto Government of Poland. If we want to do anything for the Polish people, if we want to make any contribution towards renewal of the dialogue which was leading to reform in Poland, then it must be done through that government. It is that government we are talking to.

...

Farrell: What kind of extra measures do you think this country might take in, so to speak, a private capacity? Is there any question, for instance, of accepting refugees?

Dooge. The question of refugees was discussed today, and indeed, the question of refugees has already been looked at in this country. An inter-department group met on Christmas Eve, actually, to discuss the practicalities if we were to receive refugees. But like many other things the position with regard to refugees is not clear. There are a number of people in Austria who left Poland and who do not want to return. There have not been refugees in the ordinary sense of people coming out across the border since the imposition of martial law. Now the thing is, if the situation develops, and there are people in Austria or elsewhere who wish to come to this country then Government will look very carefully at this situation. In regard to refugees you must be careful, because you have to consider whether you are going to accept these people as refugees in transit – to go somewhere else – or are you going to accept them and try to absorb them into your own community. We don't have a very large Polish community here already so there might be difficulties for Poles in settling down, making a living, integrating themselves into the community here. These are all things that have to be considered before a decision is made...

This interview apart, however, it must be said that RTÉ, by virtue of the inadequate nature of its coverage of such a major development in contemporary European affairs, simply failed in its public service remit.

Government

Preliminary

In this review of the response of the Irish government to the rise of *Solidarność*, we shall start with some general considerations before going on to analyse both the government's public position and its private thoughts on the matter. The most important of the general considerations is the history of the relations between the two states. Summarised briefly these had been cordial, if intermittent, during the 1920s and 1930s, when both states were finding their feet after independence; decidedly frosty during the period from the late 1940s to the early 1960s, when Ireland's foreign policy was characterised by a strident anti-Communism (Ireland was the last western European democracy to withdraw *de jure* recognition from the Polish Government-in-exile in London, as late as 1963); and tepid during the 60s, before finally warming slightly in the 1970s when formal diplomatic relations between the two states were established in the middle of the decade.³¹ It is worthwhile noting that the justification given by the Irish Department of Foreign Affairs for prioritising the establishment of such relations with Poland (along with the USSR itself) first of all the member states of the Warsaw Pact was that Poland was 'a special case in view of its affinities, historical and religious, with

³¹ For a fuller discussion of the evolution of Irish-Polish state relations see the introduction to my article *Irlandia, NATO i strach przed inwazją w Polsce 1980–1981*, „Wolność i Solidarność” 2013, no. 5, pp. 88–108.

this country.³² Financial reasons, however, precluded the possibility of a resident Irish ambassador in Warsaw, and so in 1980-81 both states had non-resident ambassadors, the Irish ambassador to Poland being accredited to Stockholm, while his Polish counterpart to Ireland was based in The Hague. One unfortunate consequence of this arrangement that is of relevance here was that there was invariably some days delay in communicating speeches, newspaper reports and the like from Poland to Dublin, given the need to have same translated and sent from Warsaw to Stockholm, and thence to headquarters.

Three other considerations of a general nature also need to be borne in mind before a discussion of policy formulation can be undertaken. The first is that, as a consequence of the thirty year rule governing the release of state papers in Ireland, most of the detailed documentation relating to policy has but recently become available in the National Archives in Dublin, and as a consequence there is an inevitable dearth of detailed research on the topic. Secondly, these records are, of course, focussed on relationships between the Polish and Irish states, and commentary on developments relating to *Solidarność* are only one part (albeit an important one) of the collection.³³ Finally, the events in Poland came after a long period of *détente* in international affairs (even taking the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan into account). It was certainly the first major disturbance in the general pattern of European power politics since Ireland's accession to the EEC, and, having thus not been privy to European discussions over such matters as the Hungarian crisis of 1956, or in the invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968, the Irish government had to 'learn on the job', as it were, about how to play its part in the collective European response to the rapidly changing situation in Poland.

Public responses

The principal context within which the Irish government publicly articulated its policy towards Poland during 1980-81 was the various EEC meetings that took place at this time, most particularly the periodic Heads of Governments summits, of which there were four during the period under review. The Irish delegation subscribed to the general communiqués issued at the end of each of these meetings, and the relevant extracts from this communiqués as they relate to Poland provide a convenient summary of the shifts in the collective position of EEC members:

³² See the memorandum on the subject from the Department of Foreign Affairs dated 28 Deireadh Fomhar (October) 1971 contained on the file 'Poland: diplomatic relations', D/T 2008/148/327, National Archives, Dublin.

³³ An interesting illustration of the point came in a memorandum from the Ambassador in Stockholm to Dublin on 2 February 1981, when he noted the ultra-democratic instinct of the union, noting '*Unfortunately* [my emphasis], it is not centrally controlled.' Contained on file DFA 2011-39-1741 'Trade unions in Poland', National Archives, Dublin.

Luxembourg 1–2 December 1980

The European Council expressed its sympathy for Poland and outlined the position of the Nine as follows:

1. In their relations with Poland, the Nine conform and will conform strictly to the United Nations Charter and to the principles of the Helsinki Final Act.
2. In this context, they would point out that in subscribing to the principles, the States signatory to the Final Act have undertaken in particular to:
 - respect the right of every country to choose and freely develop its own political, social, economic and cultural system as well as to determine its own laws and regulations;
 - refrain from any direct or indirect, individual or collective intervention in internal or external affairs which fall within the national competence of another signatory State regardless of their mutual relations;
 - recognize the right of all people to pursue their own political, economic, social and cultural development as they see fit and without external interference.
3. The Nine accordingly call upon the signatory States to abide by these principles with regard to Poland and the Polish people. They emphasize that any other attitude would have very serious consequences for the future of international relations in Europe and throughout the world.
4. They state their willingness to meet, insofar as their resources allow, the requests for economic aid which have been made to them by Poland.

Maastricht, 23–24 March 1981

The European Council reaffirms its position on Poland as expressed in its statement of 2 December 1980. This statement is as valid today as it was then.

The Council notes that Poland has shown that she is capable of facing her internal problems herself in a spirit of reason and responsibility. It is in the interest of the Polish people that Poland should continue to do so in a peaceful manner and without outside interference. It is also in the interest of stability in Europe.

The Council is following recent developments in Poland with great concern. It underlines the obligation of all States signatory to the Helsinki Final Act to base their relations with Poland on the strict application of the Charter of the United Nations and the principles of the Final Act.

It emphasizes that any other attitude would have very serious consequences for the future of international relations in Europe and throughout the world.

The European Council heard a report by Mr Genscher on his recent visit to Poland.

The European Council recalls that the Ten have already responded, both individually and in the Community framework, to the Polish request for economic support. They are disposed, within the limits of their means and in collaboration with others, to continue their contribution to the recovery of the Polish economy so as to complement the effort of the Polish people itself.

Having regard to the present situation, the European Council expressed understanding for the Polish wishes for extra food supplies. It requested the Commission and the Council, in agreement with the partner countries which are already taking part in the Paris discussions, to examine these wishes as soon as possible. It called on the Council, the Commission and the Member States to decide on their participation in this action as a matter of urgency.

London 26–27 November 1981

The European Council heard a report from Lord Carrington [British Foreign Secretary] about the visit of the Polish Foreign Minister to London on 20 November. They took note of past and current

Community programmes to supply food at special prices to Poland and welcomed the Budget Council's recent acceptance of an initiative from the European Parliament to make additional sums available for this purpose. The Heads of State or Government reaffirmed their willingness, within the limits of the means of the Community and its Member States and in collaboration with others, to respond to the requests of the Polish Government for continued support for the efforts of the Polish people to promote the recovery of their national economy. They believe that the rescheduling of the Polish debt and the provision of new credit would make an important contribution to that end.

Interestingly there was no specific reference to Poland in the communiqué issued after the Luxembourg summit of 29–30 June 1981.

Not surprisingly there was a flurry of public statements issued in the aftermath of the imposition of martial law, either on the part of Dublin alone, or in conjunction with its European partners. Of those made directly on behalf of the government the most significant was the statement made by Minister for Foreign Affairs James Dooge to the Seanad (Upper House of the Irish parliament) on 18 December (see below). This was supplemented later that day with a short statement by the Irish delegation to the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe, which was meeting in Madrid, expressing 'concern at developments in Poland' and reiterating the sentiments contained in Dooge's speech. On the 23rd of the month, in conjunction with the ambassadors of the other EEC member states and at the particular urging of the French government, the Irish ambassador to The Hague called on the Polish ambassador there (who was of course accredited to Ireland) to deliver a *démarche*, protesting against the infringement both of trade union rights and of the freedom of the press since the imposition of martial law.³⁴

Two additional public statements issued in the name of the EEC after the imposition of martial law, and to which Ireland was a party, should also be mentioned. The first was issued by the Foreign Ministers of the Community when they met on 15 December to consider their response to the imposition of martial law:

The Foreign Ministers of the member states of the European Community are concerned at the development of the situation in Poland and the imposition of martial law and the detention of trade unionists. They have profound sympathy for the Polish people in this tense and difficult time. They look to all the signatory states of the Helsinki Final Act to refrain from any interference in the internal affairs of the Polish People's republic. They look to Poland to solve these problems herself and without the use of force, so that the process of reform and renewal can continue. The Foreign Ministers of the Ten are continuing to follow events in Poland with particular attention, and agreed to remain in close consultation on this question.

³⁴ For the defensive response of Ambassador Bartoszek see the telex of the same date from the Irish Ambassador to the Hague to the Department of Foreign Affairs on file DFA 2011-39-1741 'Trade unions in Poland', National Archives, Dublin.

The second was a demarche on behalf of the Ten, made by the United Kingdom as President of the Community, to the Polish government on 22 December:

The Governments of the Ten have heard with great concern the numerous reports of the suppression of trade union rights, internment, inhuman conditions of detention and even deaths in Poland in recent days. They denounce the grave violation of the human and civil rights of the Polish people which is implied in these reports. They have noted the Military Council's stated desire to return to renewal and reform, but are concerned that this stated aim seems difficult to reconcile with the actual situation.

In their declaration of 15 December their Foreign Minister made clear their views. The Ten consider they must now express the growing concern shared by public opinion and Governments about developments in Poland. Moreover, they consider that in Europe, where mutual trust is based on respect of the Helsinki Final Act, the current repression in Poland constitutes clear violation of the fundamental principles of this Act which they cannot ignore.

Private thoughts

The public statements of position and policy of the Irish government were, of course, the outcome of a long process of deliberation within official circles, most notably the Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA). There were four particularly significant features of this discussion, and these shall be examined in turn.

1. The paramount necessity for unity

The Irish government was acutely conscious of the fact that it was a small, and on its own, insignificant player in international affairs – but it was also aware that it was a member of several international organisations, such as the United Nations, the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe, and, most pertinently, the European Economic Community, and it sought to project Irish ideas through these institutions onto the regional and global stage. (It is important to bear in mind that there were also international organisations of which it was *not* a member – of which the most important for the purposes of the current discussion was NATO. An analysis of the consequences of this situation is given below.) In order for Ireland to make good this ambition, it was, of course, necessary for unity and agreement to be realised within these organisations; such unity was, therefore, both an Irish aim and interest. There were two main areas where it sought to further such consensus: within the EEC and between it and the USA. The former point was highlighted in an interesting cable to Dublin from Ireland's embassy in Tokyo in June 1981, wherein a discussion on the Polish situation between the Irish ambassador to Japan and his Czechoslovak counterpart was relayed. The discussion covered the possibility of a threat to international security developing in Poland, at which point the Czechoslovak ambassador 'pointed to the weakness of western Europe at this time, implying

that with the political situation in doubt in France, Italy, and, to some extent, the FRG, the leaders in these countries would not be in a position to react in unison.³⁵ There was also, of course, at this time, a major dispute between the United Kingdom and her European partners over Community finance, and while this did not spill over into disagreements regarding Poland there was always the danger that it could.

With regard to the need to maintain a common line with Washington this was evident at all times – indeed Ireland's was probably was the loudest voice within the Community on the issue (not least for the self-interested reason that such agreement would be a means by which Irish interests could be pursued). The possibility of such a split was very much in the minds of Irish diplomats during the first Polish 'invasion scare' of December 1980, when the Irish embassy in Washington cabled Dublin to the following effect: 'If there is a direct Soviet intervention in the Polish situation, it seems likely that a difference of European and American views, such as occurred after Afghanistan, could recur.'³⁶ Twelve months later, in a similar communication from the same source, this threat seemed to have become a reality. The occasion was a meal in late December 1981 between Secretary of State Al Haig and EEC ambassadors in Washington, during which Haig was reported to have stated that, as regards Poland, 'He would be less than frank if he did not say they were disappointed in the degree of support they were getting from their European friends.'³⁷

There was a local dimension to this concern with American opinion over Poland, which arose in the context of the troubled situation in Northern Ireland. The local 'northern dimension' to Ireland's response to Solidarność is explored in more detail later, but this diplomatic aspect was far from irrelevant, as was made clear in the aftermath of the imposition of martial law. A cable from the Washington embassy to Dublin on 30 December 1981 serves to illustrate the point:

Apart from the objective circumstances of the Polish situation, which are compelling in themselves, we have an interest in co-operating with the US at a time when there is positive movement in the US attitude to Northern Ireland, and when, for economic reasons, we find it difficult to comply with other suggestions made to us by the US, notably as regards Libya ... This type of action contem-

³⁵ Cable from the Irish embassy, Tokyo, to the Department of Foreign Affairs 12 June 1981, contained on file DFA 'Trade unions in Poland', 2011-39-1741, National Archives, Dublin. In the same conversation, the Czechoslovak ambassador let it slip that in his opinion 'unfortunately Poles are not like Czechs: "they are romantic rather than realistic"!'.

³⁶ Cable from the Irish embassy, Washington, to the Department of Foreign Affairs 12 December 1980, contained on file DFA 'Trade unions in Poland', 2011-39-1741, National Archives, Dublin. The embassy noted that the Germans took 'a considerably more relaxed view' of the possibility of a Soviet intervention than the Americans.

³⁷ Cable from the Irish embassy in Washington to the DFA, 31 December 1981, contained on file DFA 'Martial law in Poland', 2011-39-1739, National Archives, Dublin.

plated in regard to Poland would cost us nothing economically but would please the US at a time when we are actively cultivating US goodwill.

The Libyan reference was to American pressure to increase the pressure on the regime of Colonel Muammar Gaddafi, an overture Ireland felt obliged to resist given the nature of her economic interest in the country, while the reference to Northern Ireland was based on the (as it turned out entirely mistaken) belief that the Regan administration might be persuaded to take a more interventionist line on Northern Ireland when compared to previous administrations – so long as Ireland ‘played ball’ over Poland.

2. The importance of the Helsinki Final Act

Having been an active participant in the deliberations of the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe – a process that ultimately led to the passage of the Helsinki Final Act in 1975 – the Irish government saw many advantages in anchoring its policy with regard to Poland in its provisions. Two points in particular were emphasised. The first was an insistence that the Polish authorities respect the Act’s provisions governing respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. These were seen to be vital if the trade union rights wrested from the state by the striking workers in Gdańsk were to be respected and expanded. The second was more problematic, and was designed to guard against the possibility of an invasion of, or other form of intervention in, Poland by the Soviet Union. It encompassed, in some form or other, nine of the ten points that formed the ‘Declaration on Principles Guiding Relations between Participating States’ – but most of all the principle of non-intervention in the internal affairs of other states.³⁸

There were two obvious problems with this approach. The most important was the tension inherent between the two principles, for the first involved reminding signatory states to the Act of their obligations to respect the human and other rights of their citizens, while the second was predicated on the assumption that signatories could not and would not interfere with the internal affairs of other states – and it was by no means always easy to see how, if a state reneged on its obligations as regards the first principle, it could be forced to do so without other states violating the second. This was particularly acute in the aftermath of the declaration of martial law in the country – an action which, for all the problems it caused, at least had the merit in the eyes of the EEC of not having a direct Soviet involvement (the Americans, however, disagreed strongly). Quite clearly, martial law involved the rowing back on many of the concessions involving

³⁸ The other eight were: sovereign equality, respect for the rights inherent in sovereignty; refraining from the threat or use of force; inviolability of frontiers; territorial integrity of states; peaceful settlement of disputes; equal rights and self-determination of peoples; co-operation among states; fulfilment in good faith of obligations under international law.

human rights and fundamental freedoms that had wrung from the authorities over the previous sixteen months. Yet, given that the Soviets had not intervened directly, the EEC obviously had to tread a fine line lest it be accused by Warsaw and Moscow of the same charge of external interference that the West had been prepared to level against the USSR.

In short, the lack of an effective enforcement mechanism to underpin the Final Act – a criticism that had been levelled against it from the moment it was agreed – continued to vitiate its impact. Speaking cynically, however, this was its principal attraction for the Irish Government, for it enabled Dublin, along with its European allies, to criticise Warsaw, without it being obliged to take potentially damaging steps to force the Polish regime back into line. There was one unforeseen difficulty here however, which arose from the fact that Ireland had taken a seat on the United Nations Security Council for 2 years from 1 January 1981. The Americans were particularly keen to utilise the UN to embarrass both Warsaw and Moscow, and Ireland could, therefore, expect to find itself under particular pressure to toe the American line in this forum. The Poles were, of course, aware of this danger, and were not slow to convey none-too-subtle hints to Dublin of the dangers for Ireland of compliance with an aggressive American line. The best example of this came when Bartoszek, the Polish ambassador accredited to Ireland (resident, as stated above, in The Hague), called into the Irish embassy there on 1 January 1982 with the following message (taken from a note of a telephone call of the same date from The Hague to HQ in Dublin):

The Polish authorities continue to emphasise that any attempt to internationalise the problem will only lead to complicating the internal situation of Poland or of the UN ... The Polish Authorities recall that from 1 January Poland is also a member of the Security Council and as such Poland hopes for fruitful cooperation, as in the past, with the Irish Mission in all matters coming within the competence of the Security Council and of importance for international relations.³⁹

The second major problem that arose from reliance on Helsinki derived from the situation in Northern Ireland. The Irish government, more than most in Europe, was not overly keen on the ‘no interference in internal affairs’ clause in the Final Act, for the simple reason that it claimed sovereignty over the six county area of Northern Ireland – a territorial claim that was incorporated into the state’s constitution. While there was little support for its position in international law, Dublin viewed Northern Ireland as part of its ‘national territory’, and it was on this basis that it had consistently demanded from the British government at

³⁹ ‘Message received from the Ambassador in The Hague by telephone 1-1-82’ contained on file DFA ‘Martial law in Poland’, 2011-39-1739, National Archives, Dublin. Interestingly there is no reference to this specific exchange, and surprisingly few to Poland in general in a recently-published memoir by Noel Dorr, who was Ireland’s representative on the Security Council in 1981-2, *A Small State at the Top Table: Memories of Ireland on the UN Security Council, 1981–82*, Dublin 2011.

the bare minimum some input into the government of the area (a demand that was de facto conceded in the 1985 Anglo-Irish Agreement). While the Soviet Union had no such claim on the territory of Poland (though, of course, part of that territory had indeed been incorporated into imperial Russia during the period of the partitions, and the Yalta agreement had left some historic Polish territory under Russian control), there was always the danger, should Dublin stress the 'external interference' line too strongly, that it could be accused of saying what was sauce for the Irish goose in Northern Ireland was not sauce for the Soviet gander in Poland.

3. The prioritisation of 'soft power', especially food aid

The Irish government, in common with its EEC partners, was keen to do what it could under Community aegis to stabilise the dangerous situation that had developed in Poland in late 1980. Given the highly restricted nature of Community competence when it came to matters of foreign policy, it was felt that the most practical manner in which such assistance could be rendered would be through the provision of cheap, or perhaps even free, food aid, taken from the large stockpiles of such food produced by member states under the Community's Common Agricultural Policy. There were a large variety of issues that had to be dealt with on foot of this initiative, of which the two most important were deciding upon the respective contributions of each of the member states, and (what proved to be surprisingly tricky) arranging for the provision of the requisite credit facilities to Poland to cover the cost of the supplies. Even though the food was offered at a generous discount to prevailing world prices (of the order of 10-15%) it was clear, given the abysmal state of public finances (in particular, the crushing burden of its foreign debt repayments) that Poland could not pay 'up front' for the food aid coming from the EEC, but would have to defer payment – with the added risk, in the event of a default on its debt repayments (a scenario many were expecting), that the entire cost of the food, and the food itself, would be lost.

Of course the different member states, by virtue of their different sizes and varying state of their national finances, were not in an equal position to participate in the food aid programme – which makes it all the more remarkable that Ireland not alone did so, but was the most generous single donor (supplying c. 4,000 tonnes of cheap beef), based on per capita GDP. The following is a table of the relative donations by the member states in the first tranche of aid, agreed in December 1980 (there would be four all told in 1980–81), based on this measure of GDP per capita.⁴⁰

⁴⁰ Memorandum from the Secretary, Department of Industry and Commerce to the secretary, Department of Foreign Affairs 18 February 1981 contained on file DFA 'Humanitarian aid', 2011-39-1738, National Archives, Dublin.

Ireland	100
Denmark	95
Netherlands	36
Belgium	26
UK	19
FRG	12
France	11
Italy	3

While Denmark came close to matching Ireland's generosity, the larger, more prosperous states, such as the UK, Federal Republic of Germany, France and Italy were clearly far more circumspect when it came to assisting Poland in this most practical form. To what should one attribute this spontaneous generosity? While there was some measure of self-interest at stake (for example, the belief was expressed that Poland might reciprocate in the near future with the supply of cheap coal to Ireland), the main driving force seems to have been a genuine sense of empathy with the increasingly hungry masses of Polish people – a state of affairs that provoked uncomfortable resonances with Ireland's own experiences during the Famine era. In the words of Ireland's ambassador to Poland, when writing to Dublin from his Stockholm base: 'We have in the past pleaded special circumstances for ourselves but never have our needs been as serious as are the Poles now.'⁴¹

4. Challenges *and* opportunity

The Polish imbroglio between August 1980 and December 1981 presented Ireland with both difficult challenges and an unprecedented opportunity to influence European policy on a major issue that was a potential threat to security on the European continent. To take the former first, there is evidence in the internal documentation produced by the DFA of doubt as to the extent to which it, as a small state of very limited international influence, was taken seriously in the field of international power politics as it related to Poland, and equal uncertainty as to whether it could or should develop a distinct national line on the issue. During the course of an inter-departmental meeting within Irish government on the subject of the supply of credits for the food aid mentioned above, the DFA representative made the following interesting observation: 'while obviously Irish economic assistance would not be decisive, nevertheless if we

⁴¹ Letter dated 23 February 1981, contained on file DFA 'Humanitarian aid', 2011-39-1738, National Archives, Dublin. For a full account of Ireland's participation in this aid programme see my article 'Ireland, Europe and the provision of food aid to Poland 1980–81' in *Irish Studies in International Affairs* (forthcoming).

lay claim to having a serious foreign policy we cannot ignore the wider situation. We would not wish to be isolated in the EC as the only country not making some effort.⁴² A slightly different expression of hesitancy is to be found in an internal DFA memorandum on the same subject two weeks later: ‘Our credibility as advocate of détente may well be undermined in the eyes of our partners if we fail to match them in making a positive response to the Polish request.’⁴³

A challenge of a different sort emerged at the very end of the year, following a request from the Austrian government on 21 December for assistance in dealing with the large number of Polish refugees that found themselves in that country following the imposition of martial law. Notwithstanding the fact that the country was in poor financial shape to offer asylum to many of those whom the Austrians wished to ‘ship on’ (if any were, in fact, interested in coming to Ireland, a point that was in doubt), but in keeping with the generosity shown by it on foot of its participation in the food aid programme, the Irish government explored the issue with all due diligence, even going to the extent of assembling a meeting of representatives of different government departments late on Christmas Eve 1981 to consider the logistics of the matter – a meeting that concluded by expressing the willingness of all those involved to participate in just such a programme if the need arose.⁴⁴

The opportunity for Ireland to project itself onto the international stage as a consequence of the Polish crisis was attributable, paradoxically, to her long-standing policy of neutrality – a stance that had its origins in an isolationist streak within the Irish nationalist tradition. The principled and dogged pursuit of this policy since the Second World War meant that in 1980 Ireland was the only member of the EEC that was not simultaneously a member of NATO. In the context of the perceived threat of a Soviet military intervention in Poland (whether in the form of an outright invasion, or in conjunction with the Polish military), NATO took the decision that it would not, indeed could not, respond to such a move with military action of its own (as Polish territory lay outside its operational area), but rather that it would support diplomatic and economic action against the Soviet Union through other organisations, such as the EEC. In a most interesting – and much over-looked – aspect of the Polish crisis, especially from December 1980 through to April 1981, this allowed Ireland to argue that there should be a co-ordinated *European* security response, distinct

⁴² ‘Report of meeting – Credits for the supply of agricultural produce to Poland’, 20 January 1981, contained on file DFA ‘Humanitarian aid’, 2011-39-1738, National Archives, Dublin.

⁴³ ‘Draft for inclusion in memo to Government on Polish credits’ 4 February 1981, contained on file DFA ‘Humanitarian aid’, 2011-39-1738, National Archives, Dublin.

⁴⁴ See handwritten notes of the meeting and typescript conclusions. 24 December 1981 contained on file DFA ‘Polish refugees’, 2011-39-1740, National Archives, Dublin. In fact no such programme was put into effect, as it was realised that few, if any, of the Polish refugees in Austria wished to settle permanently in Ireland.

from (if in many respects duplicating) NATO's own contingency plans, that would encompass political and economic measures, but not military ones.

Full details of the highly secret contacts regarding Poland between NATO and the Irish government – conducted through the Irish embassy in London and the British Foreign and Commonwealth Office – are available elsewhere.⁴⁵ The principal point of interest here is that it was Ireland, precisely because she was neutral, that was best placed to frame a specifically European perspective on the most appropriate Community policy response towards Poland. The point was well expressed at a working dinner of the Political Directors of each member state on 7 April 1981, during which Ireland first mooted the possibility of EEC contingency planning towards Poland, when the Italian representative commented that, when it came to Polish affairs, Ireland was in the position of being more European than the rest of the Ten.⁴⁶ In the event the fact that there was no overt Soviet military intervention in Poland meant that the Irish initiative ultimately came to nothing. It is suggested here, however, that it represented, albeit in embryonic form, one of the earliest expressions of the desire within the Community for it to adopt a distinct institutional presence in international affairs – in effect, a common foreign and security policy.

The Oireachtas (Irish Parliament)

Interest in proceedings in Poland amongst members of the Oireachtas at this time was understandably patchy, with most discussion taking place as part of general debates on foreign and EEC policy, with the occasional question directed at the Taoiseach or the Minister for Foreign Affairs. The fact that the Gdańsk agreement was signed in the middle of the inordinately long Summer recess of 1980 (which stretched from 26 June to 15 October) meant that the initial surge of interest following the formation of Solidarność had dissipated before deputies of the twenty first Dáil (lower house) and senators of the fourteenth Seanad (upper house) had the opportunity to explore the Polish conundrum in their respective chambers.

The first, brief, reference to developments in Poland took place in the context of the account given by Charles Haughey to the Dáil on 9 December 1981 of the discussions that had taken place during the recent European Council meeting in Luxembourg (the details of which are discussed above). His primary concern was with the threat of a Soviet invasion, the fear of which was then at its height. He affirmed Ireland's support for 'the right of the Polish people to develop freely their own political system and without any interference from outside', and

⁴⁵ See G. Doherty, *Ireland, the EEC, NATO and the Polish 'invasion scares' 1980–81*, *op. cit.*

⁴⁶ 'Dinner discussion of Political Directors' 7 April 1981 contained on file DFA 2-011-39-1739 'Martial law', National Archives, Dublin.

stressed the need for ‘all participating states to the Helsinki Final Act’ to observe the principles of same. He suggested that Ireland would look ‘favourably’ on any requests for aid, ‘in so far as resources allow’. Garret FitzGerald, leader of the Opposition, appreciated the sensitivities of the moment, noting that Haughey had said ‘all that could be said helpfully at present,’ while gently chiding the caveat attached to the provision of aid. Frank Cluskey, leader of the Labour party, also endorsed the implicit warning given by the Council as to ‘the grave dangers of interference’ by the Soviet Union in Polish affairs vis the future of *détente*.⁴⁷ While there was a slightly more pointed exchange the following day between Fine Gael’s Jim O’Keeffe and Brian Lenihan (with the former demanding that the Irish government go beyond the Council statement and convey its concerns and position directly to the Soviet Union),⁴⁸ the evaporation of invasion fears immediately thereafter, combined with the Christmas recess, led to the near disappearance of Poland as an issue in the Dáil for a full year.

During this period, there was the occasional ministerial question in the Dáil, usually seeking clarification on Ireland’s undertaking to supply food aid,⁴⁹ and brief discussions of (or, more accurately, allusions to) the relevant sections of the reports of additional European Council meetings held in Maastricht in March 1981 (also in part overshadowed by a renewed Soviet invasion threat) and in London the following November.⁵⁰ As with so many others in Irish life, it was the imposition of martial law that heightened the interest of Oireachtas members in the Polish question. As the crackdown had occurred so close to the end of the Dáil session it was not possible to do anything more than give the briefest of mentions to the Polish situation during the debate prior to the adjournment of the Dáil for the Christmas recess on 18 December 1981.⁵¹ The following Fianna Fáil motion, originally proposed at the end of that month and in the names of Séamus Brennan, Brian Lenihan, David Andrews, Ben Briscoe, was tabled for 26 January 1982, but lapsed due to the machinations preceding the dissolution of the Dáil the following day:

⁴⁷ *Dáil Debates*, vol. 325, 9 December, cols 663 (Haughey), 673 (Fitzgerald), 677 (Cluskey).

⁴⁸ *Ibidem*, vol. 325, 10 December, cols 832-3. Lenihan replied that in light of the ‘sensitive’ and ‘volatile’ nature of the situation, ‘the least said the better beyond making one’s position quite clear.’

⁴⁹ See, for example, *ibidem*, vol. 327, 10 March 1981, cols 1084-5.

⁵⁰ *Ibidem*, vol. 328, 26 March 1981, cols 387, 398; vol. 331, 2 December 1981, col. 909. Rather humorously, Garret Fitzgerald, now Taoiseach, was obliged to include the same qualification regarding the provision of aid by the EEC ‘within the means available’ to the Community that he had described as ‘grudging’ when used by Haughey a year before.

⁵¹ Garret Fitzgerald, wrapping up the debate, spoke of the Irish people’s ‘fellow feeling’ with the Poles during ‘these tense and tragic days’, and referred to the Irish Government’s expression of concern at the European security Conference at the turn of events in Poland.

That Dáil Éireann condemns the abrogation of Civil Rights in Poland and the military repression of the Polish people and condemns any outside interference in Poland's internal affairs, and expresses its support for the right for the Polish people to self determination and for their efforts to establish the right to organise peacefully;

Demands the immediate restoration of full freedom of action and negotiating rights to the Solidarity movement, and urges the Irish Government to ensure that aid from Ireland and other member countries of the EEC is made available directly to the Polish people;

Calls on the Irish Government actively to use every forum available to it to ensure that the views of the Irish people are brought to the attention of the people of Poland.⁵²

It was, therefore, left to the Seanad to stage the only extended debate in the Irish parliament on the Polish situation during the period covered by this study. The motion, debated on 18 December 1981, read: 'That Seanad Éireann takes note of the present situation in Poland.'⁵³ The anodyne nature of the wording (with the absence of any expression of concern at, let alone condemnation of, the actions of the Polish junta) was at odds with the words of Gemma Hussey in moving same, when she spoke of the grief felt by the Irish people as they witnessed the 'saddening and apparently deepening crisis' in Poland. James Dooge was the first contributor, who, in stating the Government's position, reiterated the line expressed by the EEC Foreign Ministers following their meeting in London earlier that week. There was agreement that Soviet interference in Polish affairs was to be avoided, but beyond that less evidence of consensus. For example, Eoin Ryan, who seconded the motion, spoke of the Irish people having 'watched with admiration the struggle by the Polish people, by *Solidarność*, in recent months against doctrinaire policies, restrictive measures and particularly against the dead hand of Communist administration.' John A. Murphy, Professor of History in University College Cork, responded, rather bizarrely, that 'A number of people in Poland would take the view that there has been a longer struggle to establish socialism in Poland and its fellow-countries in the eastern bloc and that that struggle is not going to be in vain' – in effect, it would seem, placing himself on the side of the communist and military authorities and in opposition to *Solidarność*. He further criticised the western press for 'scare-mongering' about threats of Soviet invasions – although given that the Soviets had indeed made concrete plans for an intervention in Poland, there would appear to have been little public benefit arising from the suppression of such reports by the press. He warned against external interference – American as well as Soviet – in internal Polish affairs, but then singled out the Regan administration for its suspension of the aid programme to Poland, while, contrariwise, saying that 'the Soviet Union should be given due credit for its prudence at least, if nothing else, in not intervening.'

⁵² I wish to thank Kieran Coughlan, clerk of the Dáil, for this information.

⁵³ *Seanad Debates*, vol. 96, 18 December 1981, cols 1768–82.

Other contributions were similarly unenlightening. Even as experienced and judicious an observer as T.K. Whitaker (Ireland's most distinguished civil servant) seemed to have been misled by the Polish authorities' propaganda effort in their build-up to, and creation of a rationale for, the imposition of martial law. He observed that 'It was unfortunate that their [ie the leaders of Solidarność] aim could in the latter days have been represented in an extreme form such as an immediate take-over of power.' This is almost certainly a reference to the selective leaking by the Polish government of secretly-taped discussions between Solidarność leaders in Radom in early December, during which Wałęsa had appeared to call for confrontations with the authorities, and the overthrow of the regime.⁵⁴ Such confidential exchanges were less a statement of undeclared intent on Wałęsa's part, but rather a significant element of his leadership style, whereby he disarmed his critics (and there were many) within the movement by espousing their demands, and in so doing channelling them into less dangerous channels. In the fetid atmosphere of the time, however, when the true picture was so difficult to discern, one could forgive Dr Whitaker for the mistake. Mary Robinson (later President of Ireland and United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights), too, spoke on the motion, but had little to add, beyond an expression of disappointment at the reaction of the American government in suspending its aid programme. Indeed during the debate as a whole there was far more criticism of the role played by the United States in the developing situation than of the Soviet Union's – which was itself a less than flattering comment on the extent of the residuum of unthinking antipathy towards the former within certain political circles in Ireland.

The motion passed without dissent, and the undistinguished nature of the discussion was its own best comment on the generally low level of awareness of Polish affairs among Oireachtas members at this time.

⁵⁴ See the "Irish Press", 8 December 1981.

Gabriel Doherty

IRLANDIA – SOLIDARNOŚĆ: IRLANDZKA REAKCJA
NA POWSTANIE SOLIDARNOŚCI, 1980–1981
(CZEŚĆ I)

Streszczenie

Niniejszy artykuł podejmuje analizę reakcji Irlandii (północnej oraz południowej) na powstanie, rozwój oraz likwidację Solidarności od chwili strajku sierpniowego w stoczni gdańskiej po wprowadzenie stanu wojennego 13 grudnia 1981 roku. Autor rozpoczyna swój wywód od analizy reakcji mass mediów na wydarzenia w Polsce, aby przejść do zaprezentowania różnorodnych reakcji takich podmiotów polityczno-społecznych jak: rząd, parlament, irlandzka lewica, irlandzkie związki zawodowe, Irlandia Północna, Kościół katolicki w Irlandii, irlandzka Polonia, środowiska artystyczne oraz opinia publiczna. Na podstawie bogatych materiałów źródłowych autor wykazuje, że reakcja Irlandczyków na powstanie Solidarności była zdecydowanie pozytywna, chociaż – rzecz jasna – zdarzały się głosy przeciwne. Większość społeczeństwa nie miała szczególnych okazji, aby manifestować swoje poparcie i pozytywną opinię w konkretny sposób, tym niemniej przy nadarzających się okazjach reakcje były spontaniczne, szerokie i pozytywne. Zdecydowanie przeważała sympatia i solidarność z celami i środkami stosowanymi przez Solidarność, które utożsamiano z innymi walkami narodowymi Polaków.