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Review by **Robert Brier**, German Historical Institute Warsaw (DHI Warschau)

Events in Poland in the years 1980-1981 are widely considered to have had a major impact on the Cold War. The formation of the independent trade union Solidarity, which later swelled to a social movement comprising nine million people, sent shockwaves through a political system claiming to embody the interests of the working class. An aspect of this history that has not yet received its due attention, however, is that after the imposition of martial law in December 1981, Polish trade union militants and oppositionists engaged in a foreign policy of sorts: both from within Poland itself as well as through émigré groups they lobbied Western governments, political parties, human rights or trade union activists, public intellectuals, etc., to provide material and political support for the cause of human rights.

Idesbald Goddeeris' article, which is part of a larger effort,¹ provides an important step in filling this lacuna. He focuses on Solidarity's Coordinating Office Abroad – an institution which was set up in Brussels in 1982 by a group of Polish trade union activists who had been stranded in the West by martial law. Committees of solidarity with Solidarity were founded all over the Western world after December 1981; the Coordinating Office, though, was different in that the trade union's underground leadership gave it an official mandate to represent Solidarity at the international level. Its director Jerzy Milewski eventually cut his ties with most other committees trying to centralize the international support campaign for Solidarity in Brussels. In narrating the Office's history, Goddeeris asks how successful it was in raising Western support and whether its official recognition and legitimacy was a factor contributing to this possible success.

¹ Idesbald Goddeeris, ed., *Solidarity with Solidarity: Western European Trade Unions and the Polish Crisis, 1980-1982* (Lanham: Lexington, 2010).

The bulk of Goddeeris' paper consists of a thorough discussion of the Office's lobbying efforts. It was active at three levels: national and international trade union federations who were Solidarity's most important supporters; international institutions and intra-governmental conferences such as the United Nations Commission on Human Rights (UNCHR), the Conference for Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE), and especially the U.N.'s International Labor Organization (ILO); and individual governments and policy makers.

In all three fields, the Office achieved a number of notable successes: Throughout the 1980s, Western trade unions provided significant political, material, and humanitarian support for Solidarity. In 1986, at a time at which Solidarity was still outlawed in Poland, it was accepted as a member into the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions and the World Congress of Labor. Trade unions also played a major role in the Office's main success at the level of international organizations; in 1983, the ILO established a commission to investigate whether martial law violated some of the organization's conventions. The final report, countering the Polish authorities' claims that Solidarity was a political organization, prompted Poland to leave the ILO – a step the Polish government revoked in 1987. Solidarity delegates also raised the human rights situation in Poland at CSCE follow-up meetings in Madrid in February 1982 and March 1983 as well as at subsequent sessions of the UNCHR in 1982, 1983 and 1984.

At the CSCE and the UNCHR, interest in the Polish situation began to wane by the mid-1980s. Milewski, though, managed to counter this trend by meeting Western political leaders. Most importantly, American President Ronald Reagan received him in the Oval Office on 21 October 1985; less than a month earlier, Wojciech Jaruzelski had come to a UN session to New York without being met by a single representative of the Reagan administration. An even more substantial success for the Office was the decision of the American Congress in July 1987 to provide one million dollars in funds for Solidarity with almost no strings attached.

With his article, then, Goddeeris makes a major contribution to contemporary Polish history as well as to the history of Cold War human rights advocacy. The archival materials he draws on are top-notch; they include a set of sources which even the doyen of Polish opposition history, Andrzej Friszke, overlooked. On this basis Goddeeris gives a convincing account of Milewski's international activities. At the end of his article, he discusses allegations that Milewski had collaborated with Poland's secret service and convincingly shows that the existing evidence contradicts these charges (121-124).

Given the far-flung character of the Office's lobbying activities, Goddeeris at times needs to address questions arising not only from the situation in Poland or international politics but also issues such as labor relations in the U.S. during the 1980s: The AFL-CIO's criticism of Reagan's policies vis-à-vis Poland as too weak has to be seen within the context of domestic conflicts between American labor and the U.S. President. In the

limited space of a journal article, Goddeeris rises to the challenge of contextualizing the Coordinating Office's activities within these and other domestic debates.

Goddeeris concludes that the actual success of the Office should not be exaggerated; despite his often symbolic successes, Milewski rarely, if ever, managed to change actual policy and the Office remained at the mercy of its supporters' benevolence. Whether or not one agrees with this conclusion probably comes down to whether one sees the glass as half-full or half-empty. Goddeeris is certainly correct that all the mentioned successes were achieved only with significant support from other trade unions and Western governments; the Office was thus heavily dependent on the changing spirit of the times as exemplified, for instance, by waning support in international institutions. Milewski may have characterized his increased contacts with Western leaders after 1985 as a change of strategy; in truth, it seems, that this was rather the result of new opportunities which arose when Western governments wanted to balance their lifting of the diplomatic embargo on Poland with clear signs that they had not given up on Solidarity.

On the other hand, however, the last example also demonstrates that the Office had succeeded in achieving one of its most important goals: keeping Solidarity's relegalization on the international agenda and countering Warsaw's claims that it had ceased to be a trade union. This was no small feat given that the Office started as a group of Polish trade unionists stranded in the West, some of whom – such as Seweryn Blumsztajn – did not even know a Western language. Moreover, even in Western societies, the Office's lobbying efforts could encounter passivity or resistance. While many people in the West sympathized with Solidarity's cause, not all of them, most notably West German Social Democrats, were convinced that pressuring the Polish government was the most efficient way to help the Poles. Additionally, many in the West feared that too decisive a stance on Poland could jeopardize détente. Despite these obstacles, Andrzej Friszke believes that the Brussels Office made a substantial contribution to allowing the underground leadership to operate clandestinely.² Here, though, Goddeeris is certainly correct to point out that this support came from numerous sources, not only the Brussels Office.

Two small corrections are in order. Future president Aleksander Kwaśniewski was never a member of the Politburo (or even only the Central Committee). More importantly, while Willy Brandt's (and the SPD's) position vis-à-vis the opposition in Poland was ambivalent, it is not true that Brandt refused to meet Lech Wałęsa when he visited Poland in 1985. Brandt and his staff seriously considered accepting Wałęsa's invitation to come to Gdańsk; insisting on a meeting threatened to jeopardize the entire visit, however, and so Brandt met a group of lay Catholics instead, including Tadeusz Mazowiecki, one of

² Andrzej Friszke, "Tymczasowa Komisja Koordynacyjna NSZZ 'Solidarność' (1982-1987)," in *Solidarność podziemna 1981-1989*, ed. idem. (Warszawa: ISP PAN/Stowarzyszenie "Archiwum Solidarności", 2006), 69.

Solidarity's top advisors. The former chancellor's visit to Poland, moreover, initiated an exchange of letters between him and Wałęsa.³

Neither these (at any rate, small) corrections nor the different conclusion one might draw from Goddeeris's observations question his overall achievement. Indeed, the relevance of his article may even go beyond Poland's history in a Cold War context. The Brussels Office's activities, after all, are an early example of the kind of transnational human rights advocacy characteristic of contemporary international politics. Political scientist Clifford Bob argued against too rosy a view of transnational activism according to which activists altruistically join forces, rise above narrow national interests, and support various humanitarian causes. Instead, transnational networks too are organizations which have to act strategically and compete over scarce resources such as recognition or funding.⁴ The story of Solidarity's Coordinating Office, as told by Goddeeris, confirms this view. On one hand, Goddeeris' article shows the amount of solidarity Polish oppositionists enjoyed. On the other, though, he also gives a somewhat sobering account of the relationship in the Polish émigré community. In contrast to their organization's namesake virtue of solidarity, Polish émigrés were engaged in fierce discussions over strategy and the right to represent Solidarity which even led to mutual allegations of treason (93-95). Moreover, when Milewski succeeded in securing \$1 Million in aid from Congress, Solidarity's main American supporters, the AFL-CIO and the National Endowment for Democracy (NED), did not rejoice but rather felt bypassed and even threatened by these developments (116-117).

With regards to the Cold War, the history of Solidarity's Coordinating Office confirms scholars like Sarah Snyder whose fine recent book has demonstrated the central role of the CSCE for human rights activism.⁵ The follow-up conference at Madrid was an important forum to raise awareness for the human rights situation in Poland; at the March 1983 meetings, the Brussels Office distributed a report by the Polish Helsinki Committee. As Goddeeris' article also shows, however, the CSCE was something of a double-edged sword. The requirement to adopt resolutions unanimously prevented the conferences from making clear statements regarding Poland; moreover, Western participants were concerned that too clear a stance regarding Poland might jeopardize

³ On this topic see two admirably well-balanced articles by Bernd Rother, "Willy Brandts Besuch in Warschau im Dezember 1985," in *Versöhnung und Politik: Polnisch-deutsche Versöhnungsinitiativen der 1960er Jahre und ihre Bedeutung für die Entspannungspolitik*, ed. Friedhelm Boll, Wiesław Wysocki, and Klaus Ziemer (Bonn: J.H.W. Dietz, 2008); Bernd Rother, "Zwischen Solidarität und Friedenssicherung: Willy Brandt und Polen in den 1980er Jahren," in *Nie mehr eine Politik über Polen hinweg: Willy Brandt und Polen*, ed. Friedhelm Boll and Krzysztof Ruchniewicz (Bonn: J.H.W. Dietz, 2010).

⁴ Clifford Bob, *The Marketing of Rebellion: Insurgents, Media, and International Activism* (Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

⁵ Sarah B. Snyder, *Human Rights Activism and the End of the Cold War: A Transnational History of the Helsinki Network* (Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

the entire Helsinki project (106). Goddeeris' article also shows that, while the CSCE was doubtlessly very important, it was neither the only forum for human rights activism nor was it the most important one; for Solidarity, the Soviet bloc's largest opposition movement, the ILO seems to have been more important.

In sum, then, Goddeeris' fine study is an important contribution to the literature on Poland and to international history during the Cold War. Hopefully, it will stir additional and comparative research in this field.

Robert Brier is a historian. He works as a research associate at the German Historical Institute. His research focuses on Polish and international history in the nineteenth and twentieth century. In particular, he studies cultural and intellectual history, the history of dissent and opposition under Communism, and international human rights advocacy during the Cold War. He has published in edited volumes as well as in journals such as *East European Politics and Societies*.

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