

## In what ways were Western influences significant in the demise of communism in Poland?

The 1989 demise of communism in Eastern Europe was a seminal moment in the twentieth century, and Poland was key in that it was the first regime to collapse. Western influences, defined here as loans to the Polish regime, US President Ronald Reagan, British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, the Helsinki Agreements, and the Vatican and Pope John Paul II, were significant in that they contributed to the demise of communism in Poland. This essay identifies three crucial ways in which they were significant. Firstly, they added to the economic malaise experienced by the Polish economy, but as will be argued, the economic crisis precipitated in part by western influences, was a necessary but not sufficient cause of the Polish revolution<sup>1</sup>. The key causes for the fall of the regime can instead be found in normative factors around the notion of legitimacy – defined here as popular normative support – and the lack of it held by the regime. Therefore, the two other key impacts of western influences, namely the re-constitution of civil society, and the contribution to the debasement of the regime's claims to legitimacy, are more significant, because within them are the key reasons for the regime's collapse.

Firstly, western influences further ailed the structural economic problems experienced by the Polish regime. Most significant in this was the significant amount of hard currency debt owed to Western countries. J.F. Brown argues that 'massive hard currency debt' undermined the attempts of the regime led by General Jaruzelski to better its economic situation. This debt stood at \$38bn in 1989, up from \$1bn in 1970<sup>2</sup>, with forty per cent owed to the USA and West Germany, and the same amount owed to Britain, France, Austria and Italy<sup>3</sup>. Indeed, this debt further undermined the regime's only credible claim to maintaining the loyalty of its citizens; namely the fulfilment of their basic needs, and therefore it no doubt went some way to Jaruzelski's momentous decision to open round-table negotiations with the opposition in 1989. This is a point touched upon by Daniel Thomas, who argues that Poland's debts undermined its ability to maintain popular conditional compliance through 'price stability, increased wages, and investment.'<sup>4</sup> One key early impact which indebtedness had was to force the Gierek regime to put up food prices in 1980, as part of an attempt to avoid defaulting on western loans. Schopflin writes that these price rises 'triggered the series of strikes that eventually contributed to the setting up of Solidarity'<sup>5</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Garton Ash, T. *The Polish Revolution: Solidarity*. London: Grantia in association with Penguin. 1991. Page 35

<sup>2</sup> Brown, J.F. *Surge to Freedom: The End of Communist Rule in Eastern Europe*. USA: Duke University Press. 1991. Page 81

<sup>3</sup> Ibid

<sup>4</sup> Thomas, D. *The Helsinki Effect: International Norms, Human Rights, and the Demise of Communism*. Princeton: Princeton University Press. 2001. Page 167.

<sup>5</sup> Schopflin, G. *Politics in Eastern Europe, 1945-1992*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers. 1993. Page 184

President Reagan also contributed to Poland's dire economic situation through the medium of sanctions, which he imposed in 1981 after Jaruzelski's decision to enact martial law as part of an effort to suppress the newly-formed Solidarity. These sanctions included the suspension of shipments to Poland of agricultural and dairy products, the ending of Polish civil aviation privileges, and crucially, Reagan lifted Poland's most favoured nation trade status, which made it difficult for it to 'negotiate with the international agencies that held its debt'<sup>6</sup>. He also halted the renewal of the 'Export-Import Bank's line of export credit insurance to Poland'<sup>7</sup>. Given the regime's extremely poor trade deficit, which in 1981 stood at \$2bn<sup>8</sup>, the extra pressure imposed by this latter sanction on Poland's struggling export market would have been significant, whilst the former contributed further to the problems caused by such significant hard currency debt. These sanctions were partly lifted in 1984 in recognition of the release of political prisoners, and were entirely removed in 1987 when Jaruzelski liberalised press censorship, which Stokes highlights led to the Polish press questioning communist theory itself, being critical of the Government's economic performance, and even suggesting 'radical marketizing and pluralizing reforms'<sup>9</sup>. Therefore, sanctions imposed by Reagan went some way to the Jaruzelski regime rowing back on repression, which strengthened the political opposition. Further, given the length of time in which the sanctions were in place – for much of the 1980s – Goldman argues that they 'ultimately helped bankrupt the Polish economy', and in doing so, contributed to the late-1980s economic crisis that was a factor in the 1989 'collapse of Communist Party rule'<sup>10</sup>.

Margaret Thatcher did not have a deleterious influence on worsening Poland's economic situation, in that she opposed Reagan's imposition of sanctions on Poland because a British company involved in deals with Polish and Russian companies was adversely financially affected by the resultant cancelling of the construction of an oil pipeline between Siberia and Western Europe<sup>11</sup>. Similarly, Campbell argues that Thatcher believed sanctions to be unnecessary, given her belief that the Polish regime and Soviet Union more generally would collapse in time because of 'economic failure and a lack of legitimacy'<sup>12</sup>. Indeed, this point is why it is necessary to go beyond economic factors in seeking to explain the collapse of the Polish regime. Regardless of western sanctions or

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<sup>6</sup> Stokes, G. *The Walls Came Tumbling Down*. New York: Oxford University Press. 1993. Page 116

<sup>7</sup> Lescaze, L. 1981. *Reagan takes economic action against Poland*. Washington: Washington Post. Available at: [https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/1981/12/24/reagan-takes-economic-action-against-poland/77d14879-cc44-4682-bc3f-5717c70bc845/?utm\\_term=.80f2578179d7](https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/1981/12/24/reagan-takes-economic-action-against-poland/77d14879-cc44-4682-bc3f-5717c70bc845/?utm_term=.80f2578179d7) [Accessed: 10/01/17]

<sup>8</sup> Stokes, G. *The Walls Came Tumbling Down*. Page 118

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.* Page 116-117

<sup>10</sup> Goldman, M. *Revolution and Change in Central and Eastern Europe*. New York: M.E. Sharpe, Inc. 1997. Page 19

<sup>11</sup> Campbell, J. *Margaret Thatcher, Volume Two: The Iron Lady*. London: Vintage. 2008. Page 267

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.* Page 282

indebtedness to western nations, the structural deficiencies of the communist economic system – with prices having no relation to real world values<sup>13</sup> – may have meant that it would have collapsed in time anyway. Further, Thomas notes that indebtedness to Western countries and the hardship caused by sanctions did not correlate with an increase in the human-rights based mobilisation amongst the opposition. Thomas demonstrates this by comparing Poland and Czechoslovakia, noting that human-rights based mobilisation ‘increased dramatically’ in both countries, despite the fact that Poland’s debts were ‘roughly ten times greater’ than those of Czechoslovakia. He instead argues that mobilisation is better explained by ‘principled beliefs’ of individuals who commit anti-regime acts despite dire consequences and with little foreseeable material gain<sup>14</sup>. Consequently, it is fair to argue that other factors in this analysis were more significant in the explanation of the demise of communism in Poland.

One such crucial factor was the development of organised opposition in Poland, and western influences were very significant in this regard. Firstly, Ronald Reagan, through what became known as the ‘Reagan Doctrine’, provided support and technical assistance to anti-regime groups such as Solidarity. The National Security Decision Directive number 32, written in 1982, states that this support was designed to ‘encourage long-term liberalizing tendencies within the Soviet Union and allied countries’<sup>15</sup>. This support, which came after the banning of Solidarity and the imposition of martial law, was crucial in keeping the organisation alive until its legalisation in 1989. Paul Kengor alludes to this fact, writing that Reagan committed to ‘save and sustain Solidarity’ after the imposition of martial law, because he saw the potential for it to ‘bring down the whole house of cards’<sup>16</sup>. As well as receiving equipment such as printing presses, computers, radios, transmitters and fax machines as a result of Reagan’s support, Solidarity were also able to fund their underground newspaper, *Tygodnik Mazowsze*. This was, writes Kengor, ‘widely read and respected’, and its message was distributed through Radio Free Europe, which was also funded by Reagan’s administration<sup>17</sup>. Radek Sikorski, a recent Polish foreign minister, wrote that “everyone and his brother” listened to RFE<sup>18</sup>, with its crucial importance demonstrated by the fact that only the Polish regime were able to operate radio stations. It was therefore a key source of anti-regime information. Overall, Reagan’s support for Solidarity from 1981 to 1988 is thought to have totalled \$50mn, with

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<sup>13</sup> Weigel, G. *The Final Revolution*. New York: Oxford University Press. 1992. Page 123

<sup>14</sup> Thomas, D. *The Helsinki Effect*. Page 274

<sup>15</sup> NSDD-32. Available at: <https://fas.org/irp/offdocs/nsdd/nsdd-32.pdf> [Accessed: 10 January 2017]

<sup>16</sup> Kengor, P. *The Crusader. Ronald Reagan and the Fall of Communism*. New York: Regan Books. 2006. Page 86

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.* Page 288

<sup>18</sup> Interview with Joseph Dudek, Radek Sikorski. March 2003. In: Kengor, P. *The Crusader*. Page 388

Richard Pipes writing that this support made Solidarity's survival possible, and 'ultimately compel[led] the communists to yield power'<sup>19</sup>.

Margaret Thatcher focussed support in the direction of Solidarity of a different kind to that offered by Reagan. Sikorski writes that her visit to Poland in 1988 – in which she insisted as a condition of her visit that she be allowed to visit with Solidarity's leaders – was an 'important factor' behind the Communist Party's decision to open negotiations with Solidarity<sup>20</sup>. Further weight is given to his analysis by the observations of Bernard Ingham, Mrs Thatcher's press secretary, who travelled with her in the 1988 visit. He recalls that the Polish opposition – which included Solidarity leader Lech Walesa – were 'all over the show', and she consequently 'urged them to come together and decide what they wanted; otherwise they would get nowhere'<sup>21</sup>. Indeed, Walesa himself cites Thatcher's support as 'crucial', in that it was a symbol of the support of the 'democratic world'<sup>22</sup>. He argues that without her 1988 decision to meet with Solidarity, 'there would have been no victory', and instead there would have been 'delay, greater difficulties, or even our destruction'<sup>23</sup>. Walesa's allusion to Thatcher's moral form of support is picked up by others. Campbell notes how she lent Solidarity a form of legitimacy that the Polish regime lacked by both insisting that she meet them during her 1988 visit, and in talking of it being "the only expression of opposition to Communism and Socialism in Poland"<sup>24</sup>. Dalibor Rohac similarly alludes to this symbolism where he writes that, 'in part, her role was symbolic... twenty thousand poles [greeted] her enthusiastically [during her 1988 visit]'. He continues that the value of her visit was 'enormous', in that it gave hope to both Solidarity and 'the entire dissident movement'. Rohac concedes that it is difficult to assess the direct influence of Thatcher in the fall of the Polish regime, but correctly asserts that it was 'less than two months' between her meeting with Solidarity – and separately with the regime – and Jaruzelski's momentous decision to 'start talks' with them<sup>25</sup>. Filip Mazurczak is more circumspect on the impact of Thatcher's influence, and argues that she was privately 'sceptically disposed' towards Solidarity.

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<sup>19</sup> Pipes, R. *VIXI: Memoirs of a Non-belonger*. New Haven: Yale University Press. 2005. Page 167

<sup>20</sup> Sikorski, R. April 2013. *Margaret Thatcher: A Cold War angel and a democratic miracle*. London: *The Telegraph*. Available at: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/politics/margaret-thatcher/9982098/Margaret-Thatcher-A-Cold-War-angel-and-a-democratic-miracle.html> [Accessed 10 January 2017]

<sup>21</sup> Bernard Ingham. Personal communication. January 2017

<sup>22</sup> Walesa, L. April 2013. Margaret Thatcher dies: Lech Walesa on valuing her good spirit and decisiveness. London: *The Telegraph*. Available at: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/politics/margaret-thatcher/8523996/Margaret-Thatcher-dies-Lech-Walesa-on-valuing-her-good-spirit-and-decisiveness.html>. [Accessed 10 January 2017]

<sup>23</sup> Goldndebri (2007). *Thatcher in Poland*. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cADKFsQRI2s> [Accessed: 2<sup>nd</sup> January 2016]

<sup>24</sup> Campbell, J. *Margaret Thatcher*. Page 628

<sup>25</sup> Rohac, D. *What Margaret Thatcher did for Eastern Europe*. London: *The Spectator*. Available at: <http://blogs.spectator.co.uk/2013/04/what-margaret-thatcher-did-for-eastern-europe/> [Accessed 11<sup>th</sup> January 2017]

He also contrasts Reagan's crucial financial support of Solidarity with Thatcher's, which he says was limited to 'kind words'<sup>26</sup>. However, Ingham convincingly explains this initial scepticism by acknowledging that her relationship with Solidarity was 'ambiguous from the start', but in putting this ambiguity down to the fact of her 'approach to the unions in the UK and their abuse of power'<sup>27</sup>. Mazurczak's diminishing of Thatcher's moral support as 'kind words' is also challenged by both Campbell and O'Sullivan. Campbell argues that she 'passionately supported' Solidarity<sup>28</sup>, and O'Sullivan alludes to the fact that Thatcher's public show of sympathy added significant weight and legitimacy to their cause<sup>29</sup>. For example, in 1988 she made a point of visiting the grave of Father Popieluszko, who was murdered by the regime in 1984. Ingham writes that Poles turned out for this event 'in large numbers', and that 'you could feel the crackling in the air developing into a determination to be free of the Soviet yoke'<sup>30</sup>. Though Ingham is perhaps being a little sentimental in his choice of language, it is indeed telling that as many as twenty thousand people turned out to greet Mrs Thatcher in her 1988 visit to the Gdansk shipyard<sup>31</sup>. Overall, Margaret Thatcher's support, which as has been shown came in moral and symbolic form rather than financial, added weight and a sense of legitimacy to the cause of Solidarity, and was therefore key in encouraging the development of organised opposition.

The Helsinki Agreements – which required signatories, including Poland, to respect liberties such as freedoms of expression, religion and the press<sup>32</sup> – also encouraged the development of the opposition. Firstly, opposition groups such as the Worker's Defence Committee (KOR) – which later became the Committee in Defense of Human and Civil Rights – and the Movement for the Defense of Human Civil Rights (ROPCiO) were founded soon after Poland's signing of the Helsinki Final Act in 1975<sup>33</sup>. The focus of the former was on providing free legal assistance and material aid to workers who had been imprisoned by the regime<sup>34</sup>. The latter was committed to monitoring the regime's adherence to the terms of the Helsinki Accords, and its work included making public statements about violations<sup>35</sup>. Thomas argues that the activities of these groups were important factors in the

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<sup>26</sup> Mazurczak, F. *Margaret Thatcher and the Collapse of Communism*. New Eastern Europe. Available at: <http://www.neweasterneurope.eu/interviews/670-margaret-thatcher-and-the-collapse-of-communism>. [Accessed: 11<sup>th</sup> January 2017]

<sup>27</sup> Bernard Ingham. Personal communication. January 2017

<sup>28</sup> Campbell, J. *Margaret Thatcher*. Page 267

<sup>29</sup> O'Sullivan, J. *The President, the Pope and the Prime Minister: Three who Changed the World*. Washington: Regnery Publishing, Inc. 2001. Page 298

<sup>30</sup> Bernard Ingham. Personal communication. January 2017

<sup>31</sup> Associated Press. *20,000 Cheer as She Meets Walesa in Gdansk : Thatcher Finds 'Spirit of Poland'*. Available at: [http://articles.latimes.com/1988-11-05/news/mn-776\\_1\\_lech-walesa](http://articles.latimes.com/1988-11-05/news/mn-776_1_lech-walesa). [Accessed 11<sup>th</sup> January 2017]

<sup>32</sup> Goldman, M. *Revolution and Change in Central and Eastern Europe*. Page 16

<sup>33</sup> Thomas, D. *The Helsinki Effect*. Page 200

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.* Page 169

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.* Page 171

founding of Solidarity, in that they solidified the importance of human rights norms to the activities of the opposition<sup>36</sup>. He also notes the key fact that, after the 1975 Final Act, opposition groups began to discard what he calls the 'self-imposed taboo' against 'explicitly linking human rights protection to political change'. Further, the human rights norms established by Helsinki were key in bringing together the crucial coalition of workers, the Church and intellectuals, all of whom were key in Solidarity's founding. Walesa himself argues this point, writing that the activists and the Helsinki process 'clearly contributed' to the coalition which became Solidarity<sup>37</sup>. Finally, Thomas' most crucial point, which is central to this analysis, is that the mobilisation in the name of human rights that sprung up following the Helsinki Final Act, did not fall away with the renewed repression that came in the late '70s and onwards. On the contrary, he writes that said mobilisation 'left in its wake' the 'nascent attitudes and structures of civil society', made up of both individuals who were used to demanding 'protection for their rights', as well as organisations with the 'skills and connections' to keep an eye on state activities<sup>38</sup>. In essence, given the nature and character of the opposition to the Polish regime, its adherents were not sufficiently cowed into silence by tools of coercion – such as the 1981 imposition of martial law – and their activities continued, with the aforementioned moral and financial support of western influences.

The Vatican and Pope John Paul II were also crucial in encouraging the development and maintenance of organised opposition to the Polish regime. Firstly, the Church in Poland was an ideational competitor to the state. As Weigel eloquently puts it, Catholicism was the 'prime institutional bearer of the national identity'<sup>39</sup>, with 93 percent of the population having been baptised<sup>40</sup>. Therefore, the election of Karol Wojtyla – the then Archbishop of Krakow – to the Papacy in 1978 was immensely significant, as was his near-immediate return to Poland as Pope John Paul II in the following year. Thomas argues that John Paul's 'repeated references to human rights' during his visit, helped to hasten 'the awakening' of Polish society<sup>41</sup>. In addition, John Paul's influence was perhaps crucial in the non-violent character of the protests that gave rise to Solidarity, as well as the strikes that precipitated the opening of round-table negotiations a decade later. In alluding to Poland's tradition of sometimes-violent opposition to foreign invasion and occupation, John Paul willed protesters in 1979 to be "nonconformist" in their non-violence, saying that the future of Poland depended on it<sup>42</sup>. This non-violence was indeed crucial, because if bloodshed and violence

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid. Page 167

<sup>37</sup> Walesa, L. *A Way of Hope*. New York: H. Holt. 1987. Page 97

<sup>38</sup> Thomas, D. *The Helsinki Effect*. Page 279

<sup>39</sup> Weigel, G. *The Final Revolution*. Page 121

<sup>40</sup> Ibid. Page 125

<sup>41</sup> Thomas, D. *The Helsinki Effect*. Page 151

<sup>42</sup> Weigel, G. *The Final Revolution*. Page 135

had occurred, it is likely that the response of the regime – as well as the Soviet Union – may have been to eviscerate the Polish opposition in order to quell the spread of violence. Further, violence would have doubtless undermined the moral cause of the opposition, which was something that the likes of the Pope were keen to maintain. On this point, Timothy Garton Ash writes that, in their non-violence, workers ‘blew a hole’ in the ‘Leninist myth’ that the working class ‘cannot see beyond immediate economic wants’. Instead, they sought the ‘higher plane of human rights and participation’<sup>43</sup>. Therefore, it is again clear that the demise of the Polish communist regime was indeed about more than economic factors.

Wojtyla as Pope made three visits to Poland, and Weigel argues that the final two, in 1983 and 1987, helped to lay the foundation for the legalisation of Solidarity. Not only did he give sermons on the meaning of “solidarity” during his visits, but also gave added credence to Walesa’s leadership of Solidarity by meeting him in 1983. Further, though not on the same scale as Reagan, the Pope gave financial support to Solidarity in order to finance underground publications<sup>44</sup>. Finally, J.F. Brown sums up the influence of the Vatican and John Paul II well. He writes that the Pope’s election in 1978 helped to generate the ‘wave of national assurance’ that contributed to the emergence of Solidarity, whilst his 1987 visit, where he ‘called openly’ for Solidarity’s legalisation, ‘hastened its return to public life’<sup>45</sup>. Without this crucial support, he argues that ‘Solidarity might never have advanced to the round table’. Indeed, as with Mrs Thatcher, John Paul acted as a moral symbol of hope, and added weight and legitimacy to the cause of the opposition, as well as providing financial support, and therefore his and the Vatican’s contribution were very significant in the demise of the Polish communist regime.

Finally, western influences were significant in that they contributed to the debasement of any claim to legitimacy which the Polish regime made. Reagan’s use of rhetoric went some way to damaging the regime’s claim to legitimacy. In a speech to Parliament in the United Kingdom in 1982, alongside Thatcher, Reagan talked of the fact that, despite having “more than thirty years to establish their legitimacy”, none of the East European regimes had risked “free elections”, because “regimes planted by bayonets do not take root.” He also focussed on what he perceived to be the ideological shortcomings of Communism, saying that as long as they preached “the supremacy of the state” over ordinary people, they were “the focus of evil in the modern world.”<sup>46</sup> Similarly, he continued that the Soviet Union was “an evil empire”, and in similar vein to the Pope, talked of it being a duty

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<sup>43</sup> Garton Ash, T. *The Polish Revolution: Solidarity*. Page 73

<sup>44</sup> O’Sullivan, J. *The President, the Pope and the Prime Minister*, Page 181

<sup>45</sup> Brown, J.F. *Surge to Freedom*. Page 80

<sup>46</sup> Reagan, R. *The Greatest Speeches of Ronald Reagan*. Florida: NewsMax.com. 2002. Page 107

to “oppose it [the regime] with all our might”<sup>47</sup>. Though only words, this undoubtedly gave further credence to the feeling of the Polish people that the regime was not a legitimate authority. Indeed, Weigel argues that Reagan’s rhetoric discredited the ‘dramatically different conception of the human person’ that the regime had in comparison to the opposition, who were engaging in a ‘moral struggle’<sup>48</sup>.

Thatcher added further moral weight by similarly discrediting the regime’s claim to legitimacy. As has already been touched upon, her insistence that she meet with Solidarity’s leaders during her 1988 visit, was an example of how she helped to discredit the regime. Sikorski argues that her meeting with Walesa established him as ‘an alternative leader’. He also writes that she believed in the ‘justice and morality of a free society... and not just the evil but also the anthropological mistakenness of communism’<sup>49</sup> Again, Sikorski here is touching upon the issue that the demise of communism in Poland is best explained by far more than economic factors, that it was instead about both the failure of the regime to understand human nature, and also the moral struggle which the opposition were engaged in. Therefore, as with Reagan, Thatcher was an important factor in adding weight to the opposition and likewise discrediting the regime’s claim to legitimacy.

The Polish regime’s signing of the Helsinki Agreements went further to harm the regime’s claims to legitimacy. Firstly, Thomas notes that the Polish constitution had historically contained ‘relatively liberal’ provisions on human rights that had been ignored in practice by successive regimes. He writes that this changed after Helsinki, in that activists linked ‘domestic norms to the regime’s international commitments’<sup>50</sup>. This of course meant that it made it harder for the Polish regime to suppress dissent and protest, in that in doing so they would potentially be violating the aforementioned agreements which they had signed up to. Goldman writes that this legal obligation to be ‘more tolerant’ of dissent helped to weaken the Polish regime’s attempt at claiming ‘popular and international legitimacy’<sup>51</sup>. Further, given its inability to maintain genuine popular legitimacy, a central tool used by the Polish regime was that of coercion. However, in signing the international agreements at Helsinki, it had undermined its ability to use coercion, and given the aforementioned ever-increasing assertiveness of the opposition, this fact of course further hastened its demise. On this point, Thomas cites the example of patterns of repression before and after the Helsinki ‘follow-on’ meetings, which were designed to monitor their progress. He writes that, whilst in 1976 activists were arrested for “disseminating false literature”, in 1977 as a review meeting approached, and

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<sup>47</sup> Gaddis, J.L. *The Cold War: A New History*. New York: Penguin. 2005

<sup>48</sup> Weigel, G. *The Final Revolution*. Page 22

<sup>49</sup> Sikorski, R. April 2013. *Margaret Thatcher*.

<sup>50</sup> Thomas, D. *The Helsinki Effect*. Page 103

<sup>51</sup> Goldman, M. *Revolution and Change in Central and Eastern Europe*. Page 16

despite an increase in oppositional activity, ‘no Polish citizens were charged with such offences’. Similarly, it was in May 1977 that physical attacks on KOR members stopped<sup>52</sup>.

McDermott and Stibbe also raise the crucial points that, as well as the Agreement exposing the Polish regime to public criticism, and ‘increasing pressure on them to implement domestic reforms’, it ‘forced certain activities to be judged by criteria outside the control of the Party’<sup>53</sup>. This is indeed fundamental, because one crucial tenet of Communist ideology – subscribed to by the Polish regime – was the supremacy of the Party in all affairs. Thus, in signing an international agreement which undermined this, the regime destroyed yet another pillar of its claim to legitimacy.

Finally, the signing of the Agreements led to the creation of domestic monitoring groups such as ROPCiO, mentioned above, and the Polish Helsinki Committee in 1982. Thomas notes that the latter, which was renamed the Helsinki Committee, went on to ‘investigate reports of human rights abuses’ and to convey information abroad to organisations such as the United Nations. He rightly concludes that said monitoring ‘helped restrain the more reactionary elements in the regime’, and even contributed to ‘the lifting of repression as the economic crisis worsened [in the late 1980s]’<sup>54</sup>.

Indeed, the opening of negotiations with Solidarity can be attributed at least in part to Helsinki, because the legalisation of the group was just one example of the concessions deemed necessary by Jaruzelski to placate the opposition in the face of the new legal environment generated by Helsinki. Therefore, the regime was both unable to claim itself as a legitimate authority – given its violations of agreements it had signed up to – and also unable to utilise, without public and international backlash, its key tool of coercion, which it had relied on consistently in the past to keep it in power.

The Vatican were also fundamental in attacking the regime’s claims to legitimacy. Weigel writes – in paraphrasing the Polish philosopher Leszek Kolakowski – that the Polish regime was confronting an institution (the Vatican) with ‘genuine authority’, as opposed to the ‘hollowness’ of its own claims of a ‘People’s Republic’<sup>55</sup>. Garton Ash expands on this point, writing that, in the Church, an ‘entire world of learning and culture’ existed independently ‘of the state that claims to control it’<sup>56</sup>. The role of John Paul II in helping to de-legitimise the regime was also key, and this is a point made well by Janusz Onyszkiewicz, who became Solidarity’s spokesman in 1981. He argues that the regime was a well-defined “they” and an “artificial crust”, in contrast to a “we” – civil society – that only became

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<sup>52</sup> Thomas, D. *The Helsinki Effect*. Page 190

<sup>53</sup> McDermott, K and Stibbe, M. *Revolution and Resistance in Eastern Europe: An Overview*. In: McDermott, K and Stibbe, M. Eds. *Revolution and Resistance in Eastern Europe*. Oxford: Berg. 2006

<sup>54</sup> Thomas, D. *The Helsinki Effect*. Page 208

<sup>55</sup> Weigel, G. *The Final Revolution*. Page 128

<sup>56</sup> Garton Ash, T. *The Polish Revolution: Solidarity*. Page 152

clear upon the accession of Karol Wojtyla to the Papacy<sup>57</sup>. Further, John Paul II implicitly attacked what Weigel describes as the ‘Marxist claim’ that religion was the expression and cause of ‘human alienation’ by talking of the Church’s “religious relationship with man” that was “natural”<sup>58</sup>. As has already been mentioned, John Paul also argued that the “future of Poland” would depend on those who were “mature enough to be non-conformist”<sup>59</sup>. In essence, he was further chipping away at the regime’s claim to legitimacy, by implying a “future” without the regime that was dependent on the success of the non-violent protests. Finally, a Foreign Office report from 1987 referred to the Pope’s visit of the same year, saying that the authorities were ‘taken by surprise’ by the forceful nature of his message, and that said message was ‘explicitly anti-communist’; it was ‘music to most Polish ears’<sup>60</sup>. Indeed, in his 1987 visit, the Pope had explicitly criticised the regime’s suppression of the private sector<sup>61</sup>. This was of course a further attack on the foundation of communist ideology, in that it undermined the socialist idea of a planned economy. Overall, it is clear that the Vatican and Pope John Paul II did much to damage both the regime’s claims to legitimacy, and also their tools of suppression and their norms of governance.

In conclusion, this analysis has tried to highlight the role of western influences in the demise of the communist regime in Poland by identifying three major ways in which they were significant. In the first theme, the contribution to economic malaise, it was western credits and loans which had the most impact. However, as has been stated on several occasions throughout, the character of the Polish revolution was not economic, in that those who opposed the regime did so only in small part because of economic concerns. Further, the structural deficiencies of the Communist economy meant that even without the impact of western loans – which were one symptom of said deficiencies – the system was unsustainable. Instead, the main motivation of the opposition was the normative issue of the regime not being a legitimate source of authority. Therefore, western influences were more significant in the two other key factors, namely the development of organised opposition, and the undermining of both the regime’s claims to legitimacy and its use of tools of suppression and governance. In the former, President Ronald Reagan provided predominantly material support, whilst Margaret Thatcher, the Vatican and the Helsinki Agreements added rigour and a sense of legitimacy to the Polish opposition, predominantly in the form of rhetorical, moral and symbolic support. In the latter, both Thatcher and Reagan used rhetorical weapons to

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<sup>57</sup> Interview with Janusz Onyszkiewicz. In: Weigel, G. *The Final Revolution*. Page 131

<sup>58</sup> Weigel, G. *The Final Revolution*. Page 131

<sup>59</sup> Ibid. Page 135

<sup>60</sup> Barder, B. L. 1987. *Poland: Annual Review for 1987*. Available at: <http://margaretthatcher.org/document/111005> [Accessed at: 11<sup>th</sup> January 2017]

<sup>61</sup> Ibid. Page 153

undermine the regime's claims to legitimacy, and to critique their style of governance, whilst the Vatican and Helsinki subjected the regime to extra-territorial and competing sources of authority, which revealed the absence of their own and hence hastened their demise.

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