



# STRIKE, DISCIPLINE AND COLLECTIVE BARGAINING



Lech Walesa, leader of the Solidarnosc movement. May 1989

*How did a single dismissal at a Polish shipyard crack open the Soviet empire and give birth to a ten-million-strong union?*

**01** **CONTEXT**

When and where the method emerged

**02** **STRATEGY**

How the method works

**03** **RESULT**

Immediate and political effects



## 01 · CONTEXT

# GDANSK, WHERE IT ALL BEGINS

*In the summer of 1980, Poland is living under a repressive communist regime, with no trade-union freedom. Unions are under the Party's control, strikes are banned, and demonstrations are broken up. The announcement of yet another price rise turns anger into open rupture. At the Lenin Shipyard in Gdansk, workers' frustration boils over. What begins as a local strike quickly becomes the first serious crack in the European communist bloc.*

*The trigger is specific. Anna Walentynowicz, a shipyard worker and trade-union activist, is dismissed. Seen as arbitrary and unjust, the decision acts like a spark. Workers down tools. Quickly, the strike spreads beyond a single workplace: the shipyards, the ports, then entire sectors of the country grind to a halt. The strikers create a decisive instrument: an Interfactory Strike Committee (MKS), tasked with coordinating demands and organising a national movement.*

## 02 · STRATEGY

# "SOLIDARNOŚĆ": SOLIDARITY IN ACTION

*The movement relies on a non-violent, methodical strategy (peaceful occupations, strict discipline, and collective bargaining). Around the shipyards, broad support takes hold, turning a workers' dispute into a national cause. On 31 August 1980, the Gdansk Agreements authorise the creation of a trade-union independent of the Party: Solidarnosc, meaning "solidarity". Within months, the movement brings together ten million Poles.*



### 03 · RESULT

## REPRESSION AND THE SUPPORT OF JOHN PAUL II

*Faced with this surge, General Jaruzelski imposes martial law in December 1981 and bans Solidarnosc. Its leaders are arrested, but the movement does not disappear. It endures thanks to the decisive backing of the Catholic Church, embodied by Pope John Paul II, himself Polish, and whose moral authority protects and legitimises the resistance. In the end, repression fails, and Solidarnosc becomes firmly embedded in society.*

*In 1989, Solidarnosc takes part in the Round Table Talks, paving the way for the first partially free elections in the Eastern Bloc. Poland's democratic transition begins. But the movement's legacy is complex. Once in power, its political heirs splinter. Solidarność thus remains both the founding symbol of regained freedom and the starting point of a Poland that has remained deeply polarised.*

