

**PRESIDENT LECH WALESZA**  
**FORMER PRESIDENT OF POLAND**

Lech Walesa burst into the world spotlight in 1980 during the infamous Lenin Shipyard strike in Gdansk, Poland. Workers, incensed by an increase in prices set by the Communist government, were demanding the right to organize free and independent trade unions.

On August 14, Walesa, an electrician who had long been active in the underground labor movement, arrived at the barricaded shipyard just as the dispirited workers were on the verge of abandoning their strike. Scaling the shipyard walls, he delivered a stirring speech from atop a bulldozer. Revitalized by his passion, the strike spread to factories across the nation. Christened “Solidarity,” the strike became a social revolution. Walesa entered into negotiations with the government, convincing it to grant legal recognition to Solidarity and the right to form independent unions and to strike to workers. This became the Gdansk Agreement, which Walesa signed on August 31.

For his heroic efforts, Walesa was named “Man of the Year” by *Time* magazine, *The Financial Times*, *The London Observer*, *Die Welt*, *Die Zeit*, *L’Express*, and *Le Soir*. Over the next 18 months, however, relations between Solidarity and the government became progressively worse until, on December 13, 1981, the Polish government declared martial law. It suspended the activities of all unions and arrested thousands of Solidarity members, including Walesa. In the fall of 1982, the government officially outlawed Solidarity.

Walesa was released that same fall. Under his leadership, Solidarity continued to exist as an underground organization. Celebrated worldwide as a symbol of the hope for freedom, Walesa was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1983. For the next five years, the country became marked more and more by chaos and labor unrest. Acknowledging that it could no longer control the country, the government re-legalized Solidarity and invited it to join the Communist Party in forming a coalition government. In the resulting election, Solidarity won almost every contest.

His leadership, having ended Communist rule and planted the seeds of freedom and democracy in his beloved country, Walesa was ready to take on a new role to serve Poland. On December 9, 1990, he became its first democratically elected President, winning more than 74 percent of the votes cast. His term in office set Poland firmly on the path to becoming a free market democracy.

Through his unwavering commitment, Walesa made Poland a model of economic and political reform for the rest of Eastern Europe to follow and earned it the honor of receiving one of the first invitations to join an expanded NATO. He now heads the Lech Walesa Institute whose aim is to advance the ideals of democracy and free market reform throughout Eastern Europe and the rest of the world. For more information please visit [www.apbspeakers.com](http://www.apbspeakers.com).

**TOPICS INCLUDE:**

- The Impact of an Expanded NATO on Global Security
- Democracy: The Never-Ending Battle
- Solidarity: The New Millennium