

# MARTIAL LAW 1981-1983



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Śląskie Centrum  
Wolności i Solidarności

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In the picture: a column of tanks heading for the Katowice Steelworks in Dąbrowa Górnicza, 13 December 1981 / SKPG

# THE GENESIS AND IMPOSITION OF MARTIAL LAW



General Juruzelski announcing the imposition of martial law and informing that power in the country has been taken over by the Military Council of National Salvation, 13 December 1981 / KARTA Center



People attending Mass at the A. Warski Steelworks in Szczecin, 14 December 1981. Photograph by J. Undro / PAP

The summer of 1980 saw workers' protests but the authorities did not decide to use force. Instead, they chose the 'lesser evil' — making a temporary concession, they permitted the establishment of the Solidarity Independent Self-Governing Trade Union. Preparations for martial law had begun practically the moment Solidarity was set up. First lists of people to be interned were drafted as early as in October 1980. The martial law was eventually introduced on the night of 12–13 December 1981. Troops and the militia appeared on the streets of towns and cities. A number of workplaces were militarized, with some of them taken over by the military (for instance, the radio and television). Telephones did not work, curfew was introduced, correspondence was censored, and borders were closed. The trade unions and other independent organizations were first suspended and then delegalized. Many of their activists were interned or arrested.

Demonstration in Katowice on the occasion of the May 3rd Constitution Day, the celebration of which was banned by the communists, 1981. Photograph by Władysław Morawski / ŚCWIS



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On 13 December 1981 the world learned about the establishment of the Military Council of National Salvation. Composed of 22 higher rank military men (from Lieutenant Colonel upward), it was headed by the Polish Prime Minister and the First Secretary of the Central Committee of the Polish United Workers' Party, General Wojciech Jaruzelski. The WRON was an extra-constitutional organ. Although it formally took over power in the country (the propaganda called it the "martial law administrator"), decisions were actually made by Jaruzelski with a group of his closest co-workers, called the directory. The WRON was an object of ridicule and numerous jokes, as the acronym resembles the Polish word *wrona* — a crow. Hence, it was commonly referred to as 'the crow'.



**Caricature of the Military Council of National Salvation — leaflet printed by opposition organizations depicting a crow attacking an unsuspecting eagle / KARTA Center**

# THE MILITARY COUNCIL OF NATIONAL SALVATION (WRON)



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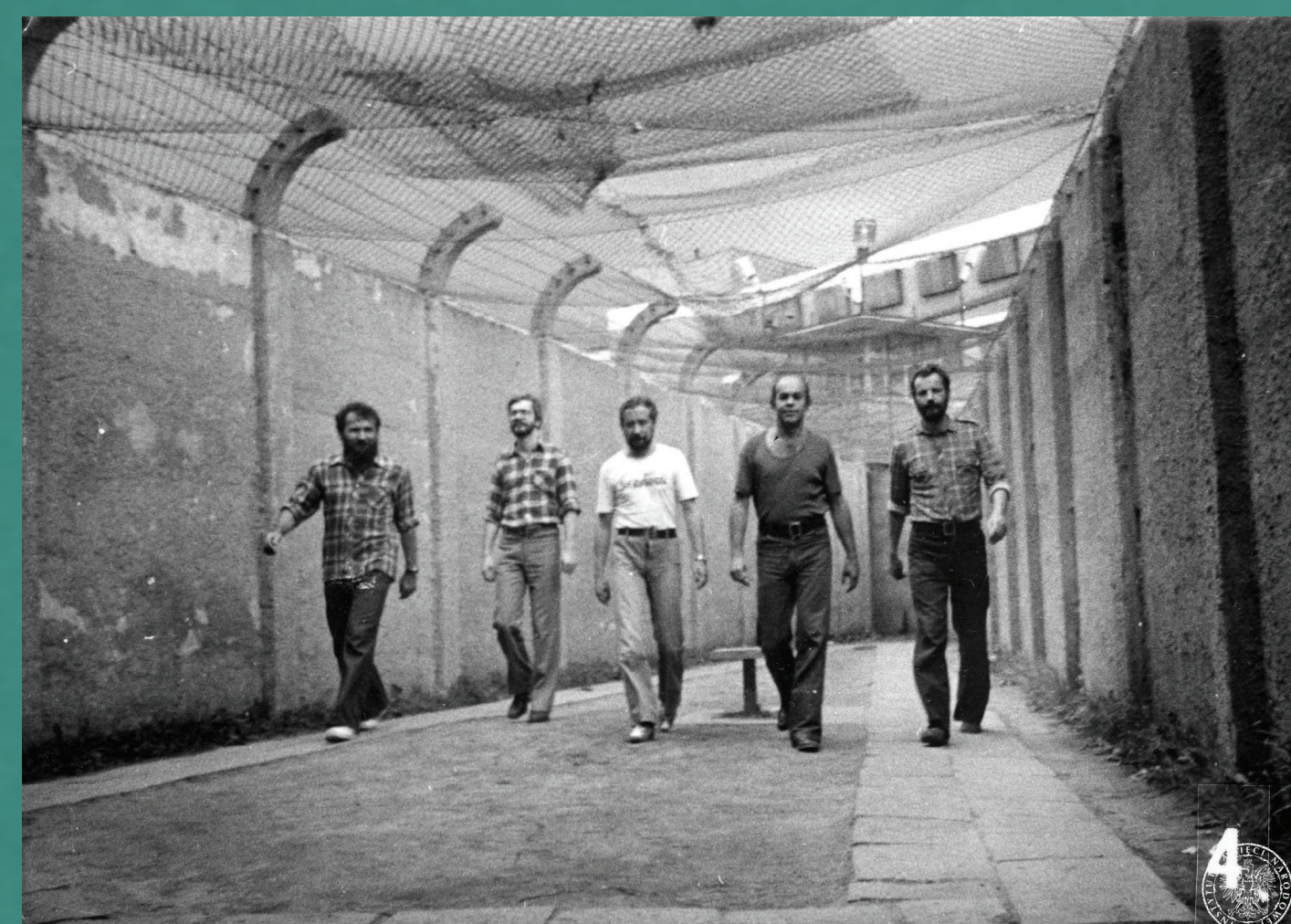
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Meeting of the Military Council of National Salvation,  
14 December 1981 / NAC

# INTERNMENT



Detainees' protest at the internment center in Kwidzyń, 14 August 1982 / AIPN Gdańsk



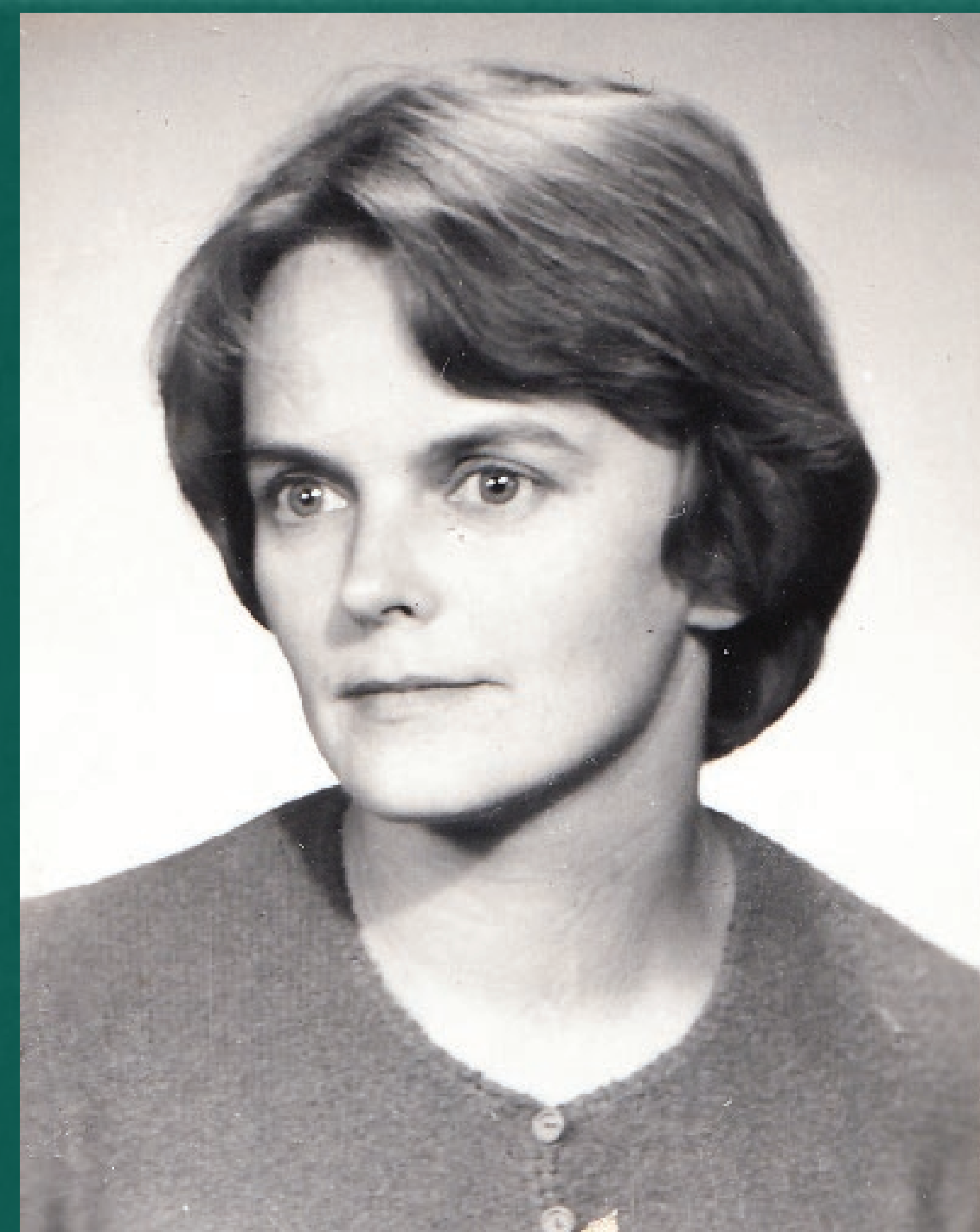
Detainees at the internment center in Białoleka, from left to right: Henryk Wujec, Lech Dymarski, Janusz Onyszkiewicz, Jacek Kuroń, and Jan Rulewski; 1982 / AIPN Warsaw

Based on administrative decisions made by Provincial MO Commanders and not on court decisions, internment was a new form of repression used for the first time on such a scale. Most of the individuals detained in internment centers were opposition activists. Nearly 10,000 people (including Solidarity Chairman Lech Wałęsa and over 1,000 women) were subjected to this form of repression. Most of the interned were young people, vast majority of whom came from towns and cities. The youngest interned individuals were 17 years old. At the turn of 1982 and 1983 the authorities introduced an 'intelligent form of internment' that is the draft of opposition activists, mostly under the pretense of maneuvers. Over 1,700 people were subjected to this form of repression.

Door to Jan Ludwiczak's apartment, the Chairman of the In-House Solidarity Commission at the Wujek Mine, forced open by MO functionaries on the night of 12-13 December 1981. Photograph by Stanisław Świdorski / SKPG

# MARTIAL LAW REPRESSIONS

Internment was not the only form of repression used during the martial law. Dozens or even hundreds of thousands of people were subjected to various forms of repression. Arrests and apprehensions, dismissals from work, and expulsions from university or school were used to a varied degree against supporters of the opposition. Magistrate courts punished over 207,000 people under the martial law decree, including nearly 4,500 people who got prison time. Courts, mainly courts martial, sentenced approx. 12,000 people. A few death sentences in absentia were passed, for instance, on Zdzisław Najder, who was an opposition activist and the chief of the Polish branch of Radio Free Europe. After 13 December 1981 the communists also vetted the cadres of several institutions, that is in fact conducted a political purge. Many opposition activists and their families were forced to emigrate. The martial law was a period of the most widespread and brutal repressions in People's Poland, second only to the Stalinist times.



**Ewa Kubasiewicz was sentenced to ten years for organizing and directing a strike at the Gdynia Maritime University as well as for distributing a leaflet which called for active opposition to the martial law. It was the longest sentence passed for organizing a strike during the martial law / Photograph from Ewa Kubasiewicz-Houée's collection**

**During the martial law Anna Walentynowicz was subjected to various forms of repression, such as internment, temporary arrest, suspended prison sentence, and dismissal from work. In December 1983 she was arrested in Katowice for an attempt to commemorate the victims of the pacification of the Wujek mine, for which she was imprisoned in Lubliniec. Photograph by Wojtek Laski / East News**



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# PACIFICATIONS

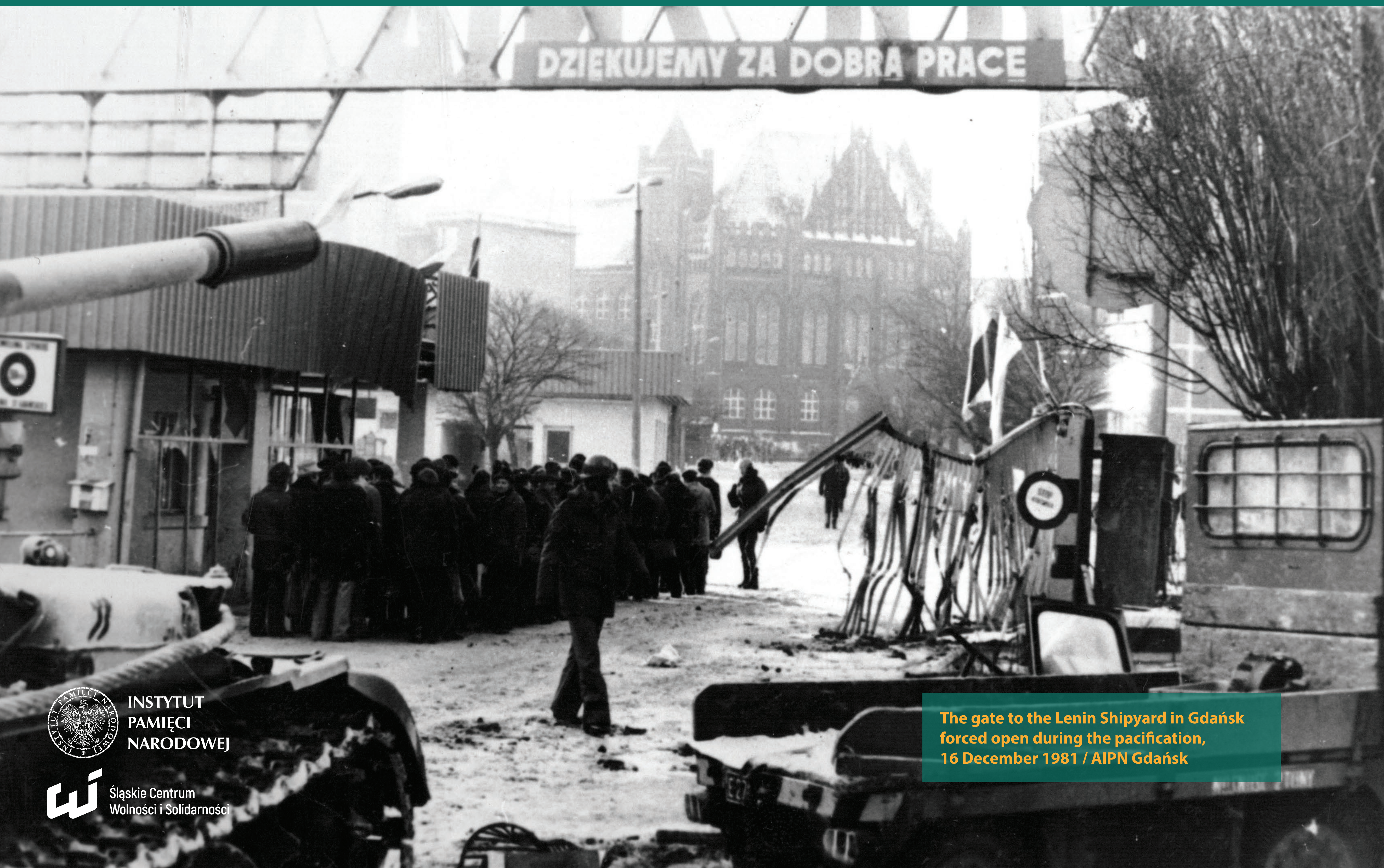


The military and the Citizens' Militia attacking strikers at the Katowice Steelworks, Dąbrowa Górnicza, December 1981 / SKPG

Tanks were used to pacify the Wujek mine, 16 December 1981. Photograph by Marek Janicki / ŚCWIS

After the imposition of the martial law occupation strikes were staged in over 200 workplaces throughout the country. According to the data of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, 40 of them were pacified. Force was used on the largest scale in the following workplaces: the Lenin Steelworks, the Gdańsk and Szczecin shipyards, the Warsaw Steelworks, Ursus, the State Aviation Works in Świdnik, and in the Wujek, Borynia, and Staszic mines. The pacifications at the July Manifesto mine in Ja-

strzębie Zdrój on 15 December 1981 and at the Wujek mine in Katowice on 16 December 1981 had a particularly dramatic course as the intervening functionaries of a Special Platoon of the Motorized Reserves of the Citizens' Militia used firearms, as a result of which 4 miners died in Jastrzębie Zdrój and in Katowice 9 died and 23 became wounded. The protest of the miners from the Piast mine in Bieruń Stary was the longest one, as it continued until 28 December 1981.



The gate to the Lenin Shipyard in Gdańsk forced open during the pacification, 16 December 1981 / AIPN Gdańsk



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# SOLIDARITY IN THE UNDERGROUND

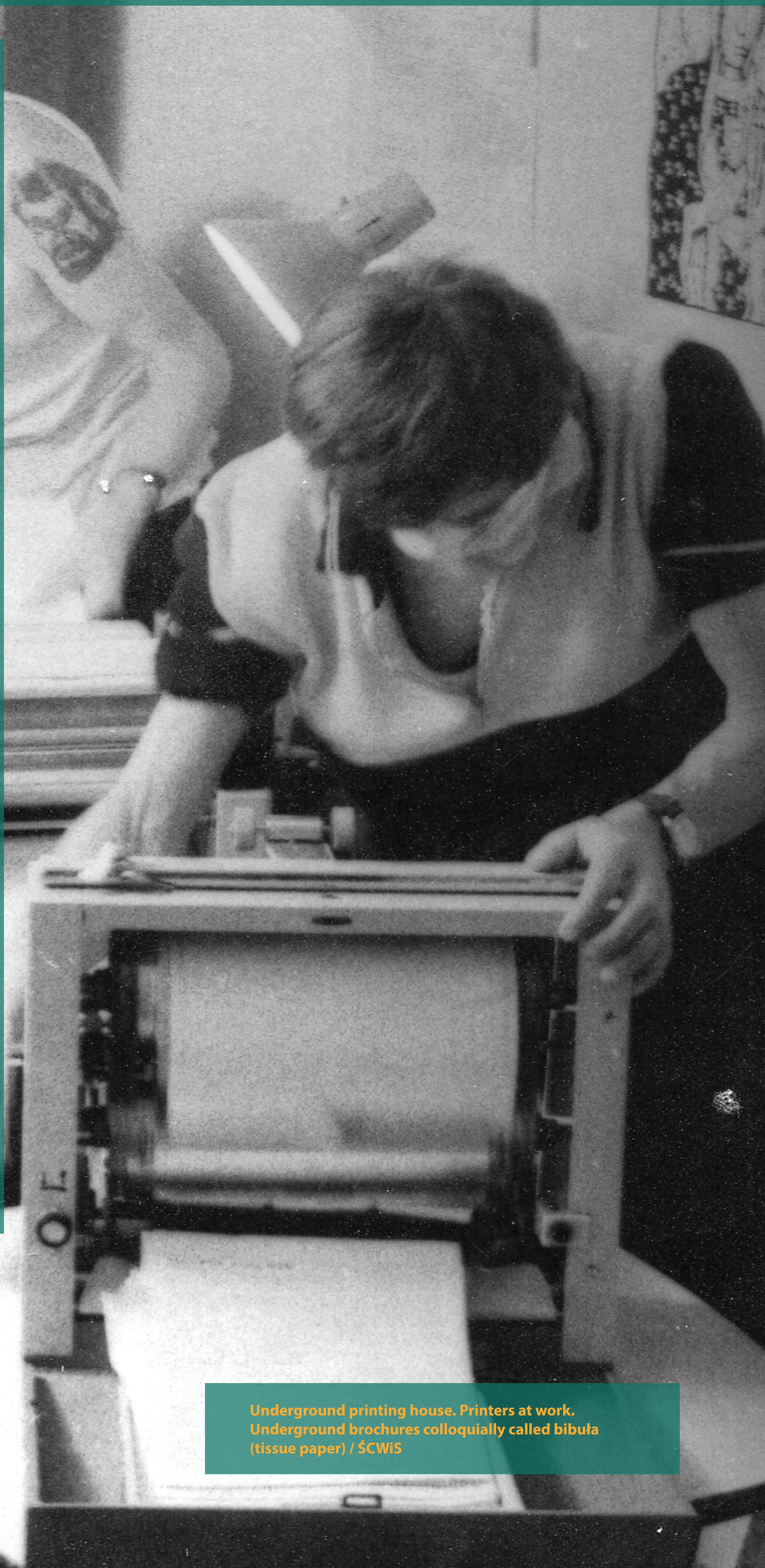
Underground Solidarity structures and strikes and demonstrations began to be organized on 13 December 1981. The oppositionists created underground in-house, inter-house, and regional structures, and also began to publish underground periodicals. In January 1982 national Solidarity authorities were established — the National Resistance Committee, followed in April by the Interim Coordinating Commission of Solidarity, which became the union's national leadership for a few years. Other opposition structures, for instance, the Independent Students' Association, were also being developed. June 1982 saw the establishment of Fighting Solidarity. Aside the press and other underground publications there was also the underground radio. It broadcast mostly under the banner of Solidarity and less often of the Fighting Solidarity and the Independent Students' Association.



An opposition leaflet promoting the independent Solidarity Radio / AIPN Warsaw



Counterdemonstration organized by underground Solidarity in Gdańsk, 1 May 1982. Photograph by Leszek Jerzy Pękalski / PAP



Underground printing house. Printers at work. Underground brochures colloquially called bibuła (tissue paper) / ŚCWIS



**A clash with the Motorized Reserves of the Citizens' Militia on Szeroka Street in Gdańsk, 3 May 1982. In several places one can see tear gas coming out from grenades tossed by the Motorized Reserves of the People's Militia Motorized Reserves. Photograph by Bogusław Nieznalski / AIPN Gdańsk**

The actions of the Motorized Reserves of the Citizens' Militia became a symbol of the authorities' brutality during the martial law. It was a militia formation used for suppressing street demonstrations and strikes. ZOMO functionaries used batons, tear gas, petards, water cannons, and in certain cases also firearms.



**Leaflet distribution and graffiti became an inseparable element of the opposition's activity during the martial law. Cracow, 1982-1983 / KARTA Center**

**An independent demonstration in the Warsaw Old Town. The ZOMO dispersing the protests using water cannons, 3 May 1982. Photograph by Tomasz Tomaszewski / KARTA Center**



# MOTORIZED RESERVES OF THE CITIZENS' MILITIA (ZOMO) — THE PARTY'S BEATING HEART



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# THE WORLD REACTS TO THE IMPOSITION OF THE MARTIAL LAW



Demonstration in Canberra, Australia, December 1981 / PASO

On 23 December 1981 the USA imposed economic sanctions on the People's Republic of Poland. The Swedish government was one of those which reacted strongly, while the governments of France and the FRG showed restraint in their condemnation of the Polish communists, which was in contrast to the stance taken by their societies. Dozens of thousands of people on the streets of Paris, London, and other European cities manifested their support for the repressed Solidarity members. Collections and charitable actions were undertaken to send necessities to Poland. Similar reactions could be observed on other continents. During his speech delivered at St. Peter's Square John Paul II accentuated the entire world's solidarity with the Polish nation, emphasizing the inalienable human and national rights.



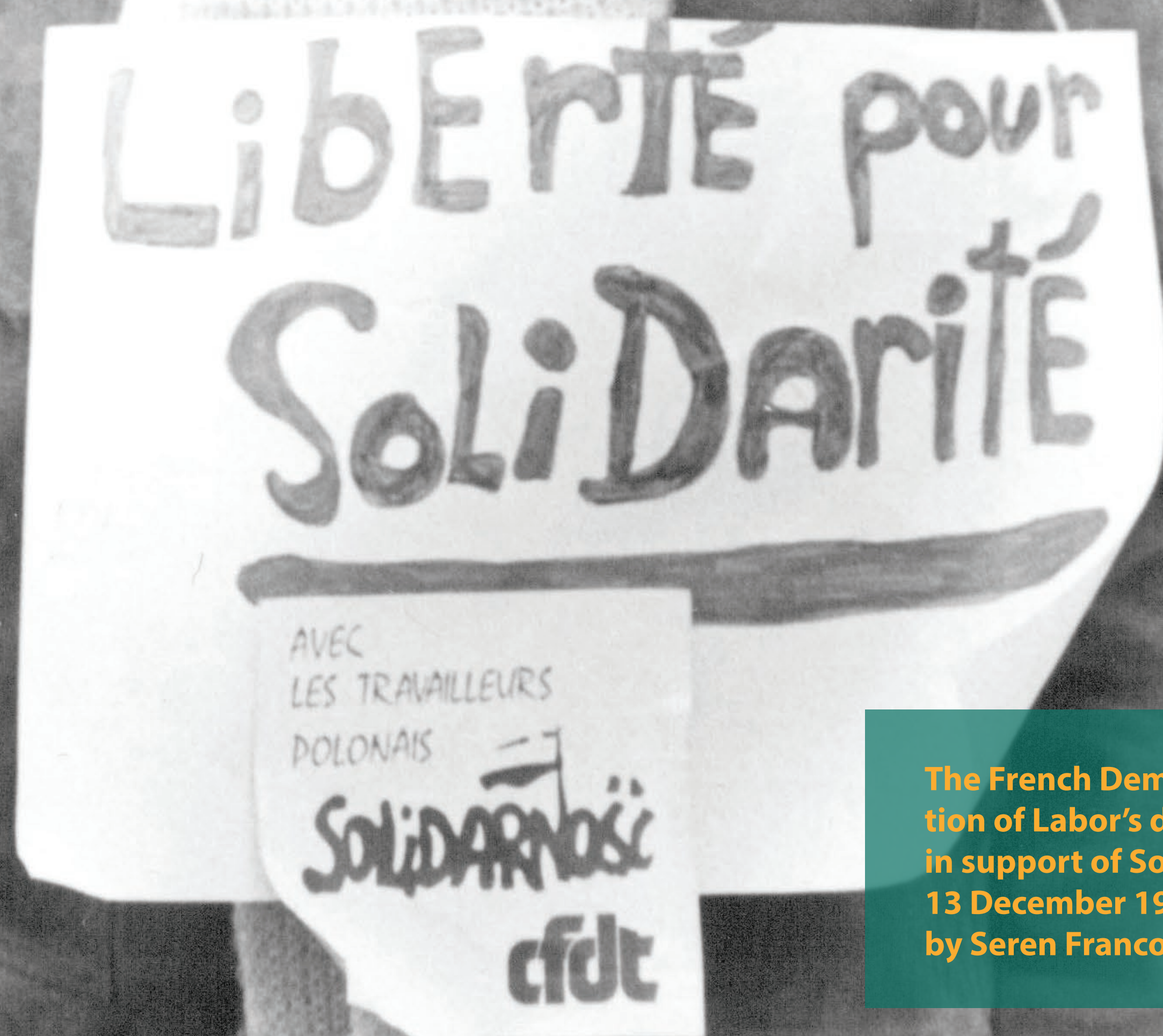
March in solidarity with Solidarity organized in Lima, Peru, 28 December 1981. Photograph by Jacek Bogucki / KARTA Center



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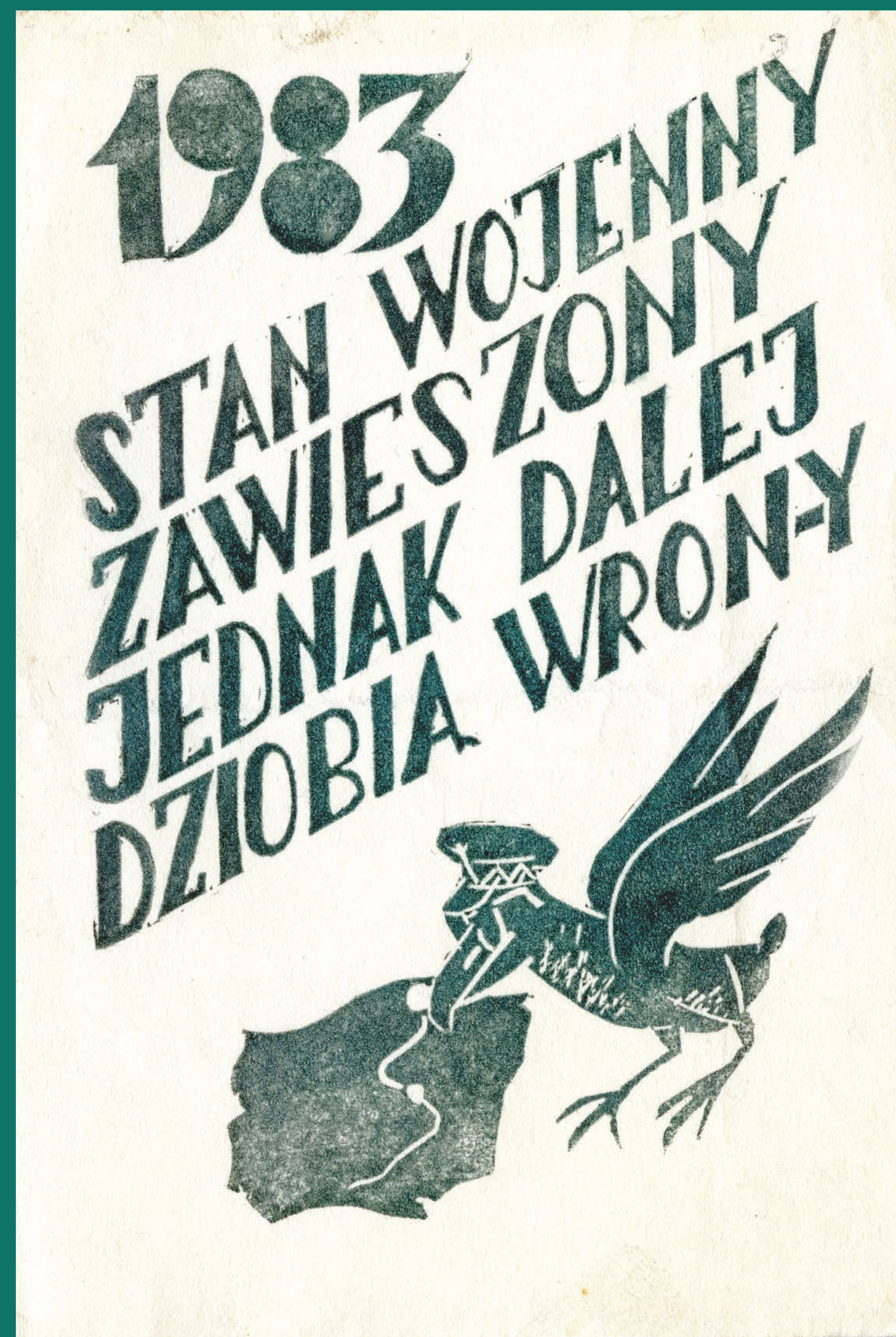


The French Democratic Confederation of Labor's demonstration in support of Solidarity. Paris, 13 December 1981. Photograph by Seren Francois / CFDT



The repressions continued despite the lifting of the martial law. Opposition activists became victims of, for instance, assaults and assassinations. One of the assassinated activists was Father Jerzy Popiełuszko, Solidarity's chaplain. Father Jerzy Popiełuszko's funeral. Warsaw, 3 November 1984. Photograph by Bogdan Kułakowski / SCWiS

The martial law was suspended on 31 December 1982 and officially lifted on 22 July 1983, after John Paul II's second pastoral trip to his homeland. However, many of its regulations, particularly those aimed at counteracting the opposition continued to be enforced in the following years. Thus, it is no wonder that according to some oppositionists, the martial law lasted until 1989.



Opposition leaflet dated 22 July 1983 / Archive of the Remembrance and Future Center

# THE LIFTING OF THE MARTIAL LAW



Meeting with Holy Father John Paul II during his second pastoral trip to Poland, Cracow, 23 June 1983. Photograph by Bogdan Łopieński / KARTA Center



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Miners carrying a wounded man to an ambulance. As a result of the fire opened at the striking Wujek miners by a special unit of the ZOMO 9 miners died and 23 became wounded / ŚCWIS



Lithograph commemorating martial law victims. Internment camp, Nysa, 1982 / public domain



A group of men carrying fatally wounded Michał Adamowicz, a victim of the 31 August 1982 pacification in Lublin. Photograph by Krzysztof Raczkowiak / AIPN Łódź



Funeral of Grzegorz Przemek — the high school graduate beaten to death at an MO station in Warsaw. The event became a great manifestation of opposition to police brutality, Warsaw, 19 May 1983. Photograph by Erazm Ciołek / AIPN Warsaw.

It is impossible to provide an exact number of martial law death toll. It remains unknown how many people died due to lack of timely medical assistance because phones did not work. At least a few dozen people had died by the end of the 1980s as a result of the authorities' actions. Those were victims of pacifications of workplaces, suppression of demonstrations, assassinations of opposition activists and supporters (for instance, Piotr Bartoszka and Father Jerzy Popiełuszko) conducted by 'unknown perpetrators', as well as the brutality stemming from the Ministry of Internal Affairs' functionaries' sense of impunity. The youngest casualty was a Warsaw high school student, 17-year-old Emil Barchański. There were more such casualties, for instance, Grzegorz Przemek, Marcin Antonowicz, Wojciech Cielecki, and Grzegorz Luks, all of who were only 19 years old.

# MARTIAL LAW VICTIMS

# COMMEMORATION



People laying wreaths at the monument to the killed Wujek miners, operational photograph taken by the Security Service / AIPN Katowice

The imposition of the martial law was initially commemorated during specially organized anniversaries. In the later years the oppositionists celebrated anniversaries of this event. An important role was played by independent culture — stamps printed by the underground post office, musical compositions, and poetry. For Silesia inhabitants a symbol of the communist repressions became the wooden cross by the Wujek mine, which during that period was under constant Security Service surveillance. The people who came to it to pay tribute to the killed miners were in danger of being repressed by the authorities. Later those tragic events were also commemorated in other cities, but it was the 33-meter cross erected on 15 December 1991 by the Wujek mine that became a symbol of memory of the martial law victims. In 2002 the Polish parliament made 13 December the Martial Law Victims Day.



Portraits of the Wujek miners killed during the pacification which were featured on stamps printed by the underground post office / ŚCWIS

Demonstration in connection with the sixth anniversary of the imposition of the martial law, Gdańsk, 13 December 1987. FMW Archive / KARTA Center



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# "LIGHT A CANDLE FOR FREEDOM"



Nine Miners Race — annual form of commemoration of the martial law organized by the Silesian Freedom and Solidarity Center, Katowice, 16 December 2017. Photograph by Olgierd Górny / ŚCWIS

A popular form of manifesting solidarity with the repressed opposition activists and their families was lighting candles in windows. That custom was initiated at the beginning of the martial law by, for instance, John Paul II, who on 1981 Christmas Eve manifested his support for his suffering compatriots. U.S. President Ronald Reagan encouraged similar gestures, arguing that candles burning in millions of American homes would show that the flame of freedom could not be extinguished. The Institute of National Remembrance has been referring to those words for several years within the framework of the Light a Candle for Freedom campaign.



ZAPAL  
ŚWIATŁO  
WOLNOŚCI

13 grudnia  
19.30

The 33-meter cross commemorating the 9 killed Wujek miners was erected in 1991 in the spot from where the ZOMO special platoon had fired. Photograph by M. Kołton / ŚCWIS



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# MARTIAL LAW IN NUMBERS

The martial law lasted **586 DAYS**.

**70,000 SOLDIERS AND 30,000 MO FUNCTIONARIES** were put on the streets in the first hours of the martial law imposition operation.

Approximately **10,000 PEOPLE** were interned during the martial law.

**9 MINERS** died during the most brutal event of the martial law — the pacification of the Wujek mine in Katowice.

**12,000 PEOPLE** were sentenced on political grounds.

Over **207,000 PEOPLE** were sentenced by magistrate courts under the martial law decree.

The youngest casualty was a Warsaw high school student,

**17-YEAR-OLD** Emil Barchański.

The boycott of the radio and television announced by actors lasted

**320 DAYS**.

According to official data, **10 PERCENT** of journalists were dismissed while another **10 PERCENT** were repressed and harassed.

The curfew usually lasted **8 HOURS** (from 10 p.m. to 6 a.m.), during which citizens could not be in public places.

The ZOMO's assault club, known as lola, was **A 61-CENTIMETER-LONG** rubber-covered metal stick.

From the imposition of the martial law until the end of the 1980s

**A FEW HUNDRED THOUSAND** Poles left the country for political and economic reasons.



Demonstration organized by underground Solidarity to protest against the martial law. Gdańsk, 1 May 1982. Photograph by Leszek Jerzy Pękalski / PAP



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