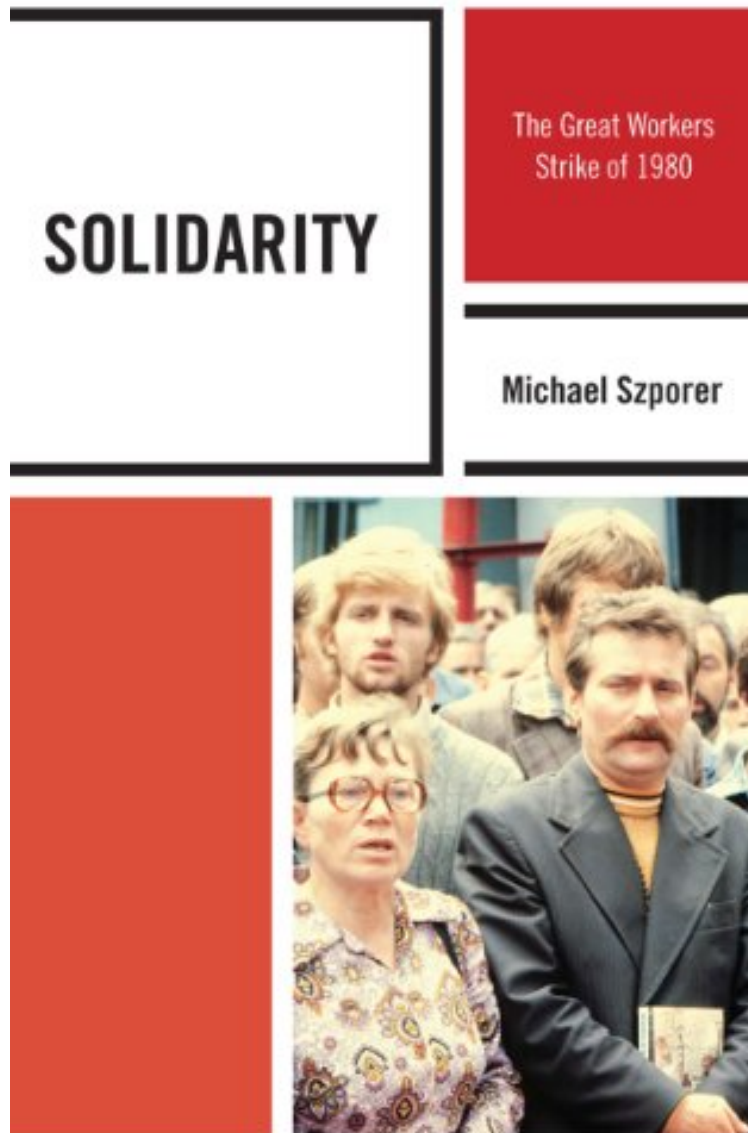


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# Solidarity: The Great Workers Strike of 1980 (The Harvard Cold War Studies Book Series)

*Michael M. Szporer*

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**Michael M. Szporer : Solidarity: The Great Workers Strike of 1980 (The Harvard Cold War Studies Book Series)** before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Solidarity: The Great Workers Strike of 1980 (The Harvard Cold War Studies Book Series):

1 of 2 people found the following review helpful. Noteworthy addition to the library on history of Solidarity movement  
By Leszek Strzelecki  
This book would do much better in terms of popularity among readers if not for the ridiculously high price (presently \$80.00). To add insult to the injury I hear the publisher expects the book to be recommended textbook on the history of Poland among students of political sciences. Be it the case or not, the price is clearly way too high and the results are for everybody to see. Another, although not as serious, problem with this book is the fact that it was written quite a few years ago and it now suffers a bit from the passage of time. This book is a number of conversations (about twenty or so) the author conducted with very eminent activists, even leaders of the Solidarity Trade Union but those conversations occurred several years ago, mostly in the early 2000's. But the rating is about the content of the book and about the quality of work the author himself did, not about the aspects that Mr. Szporer had no control of. And he did a very good job indeed. The book is a collection of conversations with the leading members of the Solidarity movement and its supporters including such personae like Adam Michnik, Jacek Kuron, who both were very early dissidents in Poland who started their political activities in the 60-ties; Tadeusz Mazowiecki, the first non-communist Prime Minister of free Poland (from 1989), Bogdan Borusewicz, one of the main organizers of the Gdansk strike in 1980, now the Speaker of the Senate, Andrzej Gwiazda, at a time second in command at Solidarity Trade Union, or Anna Walentynowicz whose firing from the Gdansk shipyard in 1980 gave direct impulse to ignite the historic strike. Not all of the interviewed people are famous but all of them were important figures in the events leading to the strike (like activists of the underground free trade union movement in the 1970-ties), or in the Gdansk Strike (of 1980) itself. The particularly interesting thing about this book is the record of these people's opinions about political and social realities of the time, their stories about what motivated them to take active role in political opposition and, finally, their opinions about what eventually came out of this entire effort. Some of them, like Andrzej Gwiazda, became very disenchanted with the post-communist realities saying this is not what they actually fought for. In its concept the book is somewhat reminiscent of Teresa Toranska now classic positions "Them" or "Us", in depth conversations with some former prominent Polish Communists who played leading roles in the Stalinist system in Poland in the years 1944-1956 (Oni) and with the leaders of the Solidarity movement who were in charge of creating a new, post-communist order in Poland after the collapse of Communist rule. This book perhaps doesn't reach that same level of in-depth analysis - Toranska's conversations, especially in "Them", were almost interrogations - still, what all these activists interviewed by Szporer had to say is very informative, revealing and add considerably to the body of knowledge about that particular period in the history of Poland which, arguably, had global implications by initiating process of the collapse of communism in Central Europe and the Soviet Union itself. The reader has a chance to get a glimpse of how it was, why or what came out of all of this process.

In the summer of 1980, the eyes of the world turned to the Gdansk shipyard in Poland which suddenly became the nexus of a strike wave that paralyzed the entire country. The Gdansk strike was orchestrated by the members of an underground free trade union that came to be known as Solidarnosc [Solidarity]. Despite fears of a violent response from the communist authorities, the strikes spread to more than 800 sites around the country and involved over a million workers, mobilizing its working population. Faced with crippling strikes and with the eyes of the world on them, the communist regime signed landmark accords formally recognizing Solidarity as the first free trade union in a communist country. The union registered nearly ten million members, making it the world's largest union to date. In a widespread and inspiring demonstration of nonviolent protest, Solidarity managed to bring about real and powerful changes that contributed to the end of the Cold War. Solidarity: The Great Workers Strike of 1980 tells the story of this pivotal period in Poland's history from the perspective of those who lived it. Through unique personal interviews with the individuals who helped breathe life into the Solidarity movement, Michael Szporer brings home the momentous impact these events had on the people involved and subsequent history that changed the face of Europe. This movement, which began as a strike, had major consequences that no one could have foreseen at the start. In this book, the individuals who shaped history speak with their own voices about the strike that changed the course of history.

Szporer (communications, arts, and humanities, Univ. of Maryland Univ. College) has put together a collection of 25 eyewitness accounts of intellectuals and workers who were involved with the creation of the Solidarity trade union and the advent of the workers strike at the Gdansk Shipyard in summer 1980. In effect, the book consists of the author asking questions and recording the answers of leading participants who organized the first non-Communist workers union and strike behind the Iron Curtain. The book is a fascinating and valuable documentary of how a group of workers and intellectuals formed a workers union in defiance of the Polish Communist and Soviet-backed government, and then leveraged the union into a political challenge to the Soviet Bloc. Surprisingly, the Solidarity leaders did not have the support of the Polish Roman Catholic Church at first; all they had was their unity of purpose and their courage. The book has an appendix that includes a chronology of events and some documents from the Russian archives related to Solidarity. Summing Up: Recommended. (CHOICE) Michael Szporer's Solidarity the Great Workers Strike of 1980 is a fascinating story, told in many voices, of the world's largest strike to date which signaled the fall of the Soviet empire. Solidarity's peaceful revolution is the beginning of the 21st century, a correction of the lie

perpetrated by the October Revolution. It is a story of people mobilizing a nation and taking down a totalitarian ideology with minimum loss of life. While at the time I closely followed the ups and downs of the events in Poland, I found the inside story of the movement that changed our world very revealing and remarkably human. I highly recommend this brilliant work to anyone interested in the real history of a major event that contributed to ending the Cold War. (Lt. General Edward Rowny, former Chief U.S. Strategic Arms Negotiator)

Michael Szporer's *Solidarity: The Great Worker's Strike of 1980* is a very valuable contribution to the history of the first successful anti-Communist movement in the Soviet camp. It consists mainly of interviews with leading figures in this movement elucidating their thinking and their moods. (Richard Pipes, Harvard University)

A marvelous historical record of the great workers' protest that led to the downfall of 'workers' state,' first in Poland, then in the Soviet Union. Through documents, photographs, and interviews with leading participants, including Lech Walesa, Michael Szporer sheds important new light on the Gdansk shipyard strike of August 1980 and the role it played in the collapse of communism. Solidarity advisor Bronislaw Geremek is correct to conclude that the Berlin wall 'started falling in the Gdansk shipyard.' (Michael Dobbs, Washington Post correspondent in Poland and the Soviet Union, 1980-1991, and author of "Down with Big Brother: The Fall of the Soviet Empire.")

Most Americans don't understand how or why the Cold War ended. But Michael Szporer's definitive book on the brave Polish 'Solidarity' underground will both inform and inspire them. Pope John Paul II told the Poles, 'Be not afraid!' and they proceeded to free not only Poland but all of Eastern Europe. (Georgie Anne Geyer, syndicated columnist and author of "Predicting the Unthinkable, Anticipating the Impossible.")

The book is and will be a very important, if not the main source document on the process of the formation of free trade unions (WZZ) in Poland in 1980, and the opinion of their leaders on the effects of creeping, the Polish revolution of 1980-89. (Polish News)

About the Author Michael Szporer is professor of communications, arts and humanities at the University of Maryland University College.