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Jacek Kuron: An Activist of Solidarity's Future

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Introduction

Jacek Kuron became an influential part of the Solidarity movement during the 1980's and served as one of the movements advisors. Kuron has been a part of protest movements from even before Solidarity came into being. His protesting career started back when he and another student Karol Modzelewski wrote a letter to the ruling party for their graduate project in 1964. Since then Kuron has made himself into a man that works for the workers of Poland and their rights. His involvement in Solidarity turned into something a little different than other people's involvement for he acted as an advisor, making sure that he has the leaders of solidarity follow the program as they have created it to be but does not share the spotlight. Many historians that have written about the Solidarity movement no matter what part of the movement they are written about mentions Kuron several times as he became an influential player in the movement. Jacek Kuron influenced the development of the opposition in Poland, specifically the programs of the Committee for the Defense of Workers (KOR) in 1976 and the Solidarity movement from 1980-1981, based on a critique of the Polish Party-State that he had developed as a lecturer at the University of Warsaw in 1964.

Poland became the only country in the Soviet Bloc that became independent through a democratic process rather than a revolution. Kuron's involvement in opposition and activism being examined spans the sixties through the eighties leading up to his involvement in Solidarity in 1980-1981. The Solidarity movement served as Poland's first free workers union that worked with the Party-State to achieve rights for workers. The work of Jacek Kuron laid the foundation for Solidarity to achieve their success and the introduction of pluralism. During the sixteen-month period the Solidarity movement created opportunities that allowed some separation from the Party-State. This kind of unheard of leniency never happened in other Soviet countries where

the resistance would have been destroyed before it even began. Even after the Solidarity movement got outlawed in December of 1981 the spirit and underground operations survived and continued the work until 1989 where Solidarity and its supporters took back the country democratically rather than a bloody revolution. This movement could not have succeeded without the help of some influential leaders like Kuron. His moderate stance guided Solidarity along a path that was not radical enough to have a desire to destroy the Party-State but not subservient to the State either.

This project is focusing Jacek Kuron's involvement in Solidarity and other opposition groups through the lens of different sections of the movement. Solidarity as a worker's movement becomes a beneficial subject that looks through the eyes of its own leadership which shows the dedication workers must have as they continue to push back against the state oppressing them. By seeing the movement through Kuron's stance it would then let historians see what made Solidarity fight for rights the way they do. For example, when the organization met with the state they signed an agreement to legalize the movement in exchange for letting the Party-State retain its authority. Kuron held a major role in the opposition and worked to be involved whether that being giving orders to the group from prison or giving some advice as to what to move on to next. Historians view on Kuron focus more on his achievements before Solidarity and how those experiences influenced the movement.

Historians since the early 1980s have taken several different approaches to the Solidarity movement. These can be from looking at the structure of the movement, the reasons the movement even came into an existence, the various attempts the group made to become a movement for the people that opposed communism but went too far, and several others. In his book *The Polish Revolution: Solidarity* written in 1983, Timothy Garton Ash discusses the

different points in the Solidarity movement as he participated. While he used other works of writers in the early 1980s he focuses the point of his writings towards the main parts of the movement like the Lenin shipyards in 1980. Garton Ash gives a brief history of the region in the beginning to the reader that is useful if they have never read about this region before and gives an introduction into the relationship between Poland and the U.S.S.R.(Russia). Through comparisons between the two countries Garton Ash states that these countries would never be compatible unless something drastic occurred due to their ideologies for society being different. Garton Ash began looking at what he believed to be an illegitimate Soviet rule that then led to Solidarity.¹ If a foreign power tries to take over a country without proper cause or a claim it would be met with resistance. When talking about Jacek Kuron, Garton Ash talks highly of him. Garton Ash introduces Kuron early on as the most dynamic political activists of KOR or the Committee for the Defense of Workers.² This can be due to Kuron's work in co-authoring the "Open Letter to the Party" with Karol Modzelewski in 1964. This document focused on the injustices and problems in Poland and brought them into the public eye and those ideas had influence in the creation of KOR. Garton Ash describes Kuron as a man of great esteem and fortitude. There is even mention of him helping keep watch with a student monitoring the strikes day in and day out.³

Political opposition came into the spotlight quite a lot as Kuron's work on the "Open Letter to the Party" became a work looked at as a beginning point in protesting.⁴ This shows fear from the Party-State as they are losing control of their nation as the people begin to take it back. Garton Ash's approach to the Solidarity movement and the events that occur come from being in

¹ Timothy Garton Ash, *The Polish Revolution: Solidarity*, (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1983), 6.

² Ash, 21.

³ Ash, 33.

⁴ Ash, 90.

Poland during the events. He took part in the strikes in the Lenin shipyards and documented the events as they unfolded. Garton Ash's work became so influential that it has been referenced time and time again in other works when looking at the Solidarity movement. The down side to Garton Ash's writings are that there are some parts that would feel romanticized to make the movement seem even grander in scale. Exaggeration when writing about events taking place at the time comes from the writing needing to be remembered if the events change nothing. There are historians that take Garton Ash and use his work to explain the organization of the movement rather than just the events.

David Ost examines the Solidarity movement as an organization in *Solidarity and the Politics of Anti-Politics* written in 1990. Through becoming a recognized union in Poland many other groups formed under the Solidarity umbrella including groups that disagreed with each other. There are groups that appeared on both left and right of the political spectrum which causes problems in how things wanted to be run. The most interesting part about Ost's argument is that he believes that Solidarity ended up as a societal movement and not a political one.⁵ Different sides stand in opposition to one another under Solidarity, but they stand united against the Party-State. The Party-State retaining power through the Gdansk agreement in 1980 shared an opinion of Jacek Kuron's after his Letter to the Party in 1964 where they want to work with the Party-State to create change. According to Ost when Kuron got released from jail for the letter in 1967, he and Modzelewski set out to start a new workers revolution. While not a direct founder of Solidarity, Kuron and Modzelewski's ideas had been adopted by Solidarity. Other Polish writers have already begun writing about Kuron at this point where one writer says that he is "The most leftist" person in the country.⁶ Ost continues to follow Kuron in the events leading

⁵ David Ost, *Solidarity and the Politics of Anti-Politics*, (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1990,) 1.

⁶ Ost, 11.

to solidarity as it becomes known that Kuron co-founded the Worker's Defense Committee or KOR.⁷ Overall Ost views Kuron as a strong leader that has a large background in resisting the oppression of the state. Through his work in KOR he laid the groundwork for the Solidarity movement and the eventual freedom of Poland. Ost continually states these things through the sources that he uses, including newspaper articles, both censored official papers and underground uncensored papers. Using these sources gives Ost strong arguments on how the Solidarity movement changed from a "nonpolitical" entity into one through worker reform and got attacked and forced underground because of it. With a major focus being placed on the leaders of the solidarity movement this provides a weakness in the arguments being presented. While Ost may not focus highly on the members' view of this movement another focuses a lot on it.

A pair of authors that focus on the public views of the Solidarity movement are Jan Kubik and Jack Bloom. Both focus on the view of the populace but from different angles, written in 1994 Kubik's *The Power of symbols against Symbols of Power* focuses on symbols and rituals and how those shaped the solidarity movement. With several interviews, ceremony accounts, and pictures Kubik shows how the average person viewed the movement as one where citizens are in support of Solidarity. Kuron appears briefly in Kubik's work as it would seem he focuses more on the symbols rather than the people involved. The information he provides however makes some interesting points in Kuron's character when talking about the Solidarity movement. Kubik when talking about the group's goal states that Kuron favors a social-democratic option where the system stays but the people gain autonomy.⁸ These provide credence to the notion that Kuron focuses on pluralism which can be obtained through a social-democratic system. Talk

⁷ Ost, 70.

⁸ Jan Kubik, *The Power of Symbols against the Symbols of Power*, (The Pennsylvania University Press 1994), 157.

about Kuron helping to gather information about the opposition and dispersing it out shows how much this cause means to him despite perhaps not wanting full freedom.⁹ While Kubik states that this is a simplified version of what it could be, but it has information that compliments both Garton Ash and Ost in giving a more rounded picture of Solidarity as a movement and Kuron as a political activist.¹⁰ In Jack Bloom's work *Seeing through the eyes of the Polish Revolution: Solidarity and the struggle against Communism in Poland* written in 2013, he looks at the public like Kubik but focuses on the citizens. Bloom focuses on the views on the citizens themselves whether they are part of solidarity or not which make an interesting dynamic comparing the groups. He does this through interviews he has conducted and using documents of the time. The unity that Bloom's argument brings comes into being as a reactionary response to the political and economic hardships placed on the people.¹¹ Without the focus of women in either of these works a full comprehension of the movement cannot be reached but there are some that directly deal with such a topic.

Women are an essential part of Solidarity and that is no better argued than in 2005's *Solidarity's Secret: The Women Who Defeated Communism in Poland* by Shana Penn. In her monograph Penn talks about how women are what kept Solidarity together when it went underground because they kept the press going. Whenever Penn talks about Kuron as a Solidarity leader she talks about the influence he has even from prison. Kuron's ideas that he has promoted for years through the "Open Letter to the Party" in 1964 painted him as one that can be trusted as he knows their struggles to oppose the government. At first it would seem as Kuron is not as radical the state would make him out to be where he and other Solidarity leaders are

⁹ Kubik, 184.

¹⁰ Kubik, 5.

¹¹ Jack Bloom, *Seeing Through the eyes of the Polish Revolution: Solidarity and the Struggle against Communism in Poland*, (Brill Boston 2013), 4.

accused of being too moderate.¹² This makes sense since as in Kubik's work he would have preserved the current state in some capacity, but it also means that the leaders are stating between the state and the increasingly radical protesters that would prefer to destroy the state first and work on a system afterward. Kuron's influence reached women from his prison cell, as women ran the press Kuron offered advice on how to run everything while he and other leaders are locked up.¹³ This shows how dedicated Kuron became to the cause by continuing to resist despite routinely being placed in a jail cell. While Kuron gave the instructions and advice women played a major role in keeping the hope of Solidarity alive.

During the revolutions of 1989, Poland achieved independence through democratic means. Gale Stokes explores the decline of communism since the invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968 in *The Walls Came Tumbling Down* published in 1993. With many societal and political movements during the transition into a free state Stokes makes it a point to show how unique Poland can be and how they are able to set up a new government quickly.¹⁴ This can be due to the leadership of Jacek Kuron which Stokes identifies as a main leader in this movement. Stokes talks about how lectures that were being given by Kuron during the mid to late 1970s as part of a KOR training and information session got broken up with police intervention.¹⁵ Which shows how much of a threat Kuron poses to the Party-State. Another thing that Stokes brings up is an article written by Kuron that states how if one lives the life that the state gives a person then that becomes a political statement.¹⁶ A compliance complex where a person must rely on the system

¹² Penn Shana, *Solidarity's Secret: the women who defeated communism in Poland*, (The University of Michigan Press 2005), 86.

¹³ Penn, 151.

¹⁴ Gale Stokes, *The Walls Came Tumbling Down: The collapse of Communism in Eastern Europe*, (New York: Oxford University Press 1993), 9.

¹⁵ Stokes, 29.

¹⁶ Stokes, 25.

becomes the enemy in how people think about their lives and whether they are living it for themselves or are slaves to the system. This is a book filled with western sources, meaning sources created to the west of the iron curtain which can leave some things out that come with using more sources from the period other than interviews.

While Stokes focuses on the collapse of communism as a gradual decline there is another writer that believes it to be a carnival. The carnival being the gathering of people that work towards the same goal and to enjoy oneself as he describes men with guitars paying sing-alongs and other unique sights. Padraic Kenney and his book *A Carnival of Revolution* published in 2002. look at the collapse of Communism in 1989 in Central Europe. The calm revolution in Poland does not turn violent and is peacefully achieved whereas compared to other Soviet controlled areas where tensions turn into conflicts for independence. Kenney talked about how one of the Solidarity leaders Jacek Kuron wrote to the underground paper that exploding against the state would cause more problems than its worth.¹⁷ Overall Kenney wrote about Kuron in a manner that paints him in the light of an average person meaning that anyone could have achieved what he did but in this case no one else was up to the task. Most of the time he appears in the text it states how his being a leader and being more moderate lead to him receiving a seat at the negotiating table as Poland began to gain their independence.¹⁸ Something both Stokes and Kenney do is not focus directly on Poland but the entirety of Central Europe with is something that can be a strength and weakness. Weakness due to them perhaps missing information that they would not if they focused on Poland and strength as it compares the uniqueness of Poland to the other countries.

¹⁷ Padraic Kenney, *A Carnival of Revolution: central Europe 1989*, (Princeton University Press 2002), 2.

¹⁸ Kenney, 250.

When looking at Kuron from a scholarly view he is known for a few things and considered a valuable leader in Solidarity. Kuron being the co-author of the “Open Letter to the Party” in 1964 led authors like Garton Ash to view Kuron as a key figure in the opposition in Poland. His work on the letter shows briefly in these sources even if they do not outright mention it as some of the ideas established in that letter would become the basis for KOR and later Solidarity. Looking at Kuron’s work, scholars do not see him as a radical figure, they view him as a leader of KOR and of Solidarity. Gales stokes views Kuron as a main leader of the Solidarity movement. Kuron’s influence in Solidarity thus it would be important to see where that influence came from.

Going forward documents that will be looked at will be done chronologically from before the Open Letter in 1964 through an interview conducted in 1982. When talking about his involvement Kuron shares how he started young and became involved in several different opposition groups. Solidarity evolved over time, Kuron’s opinions on the state of Poland and workers rights also evolved which has been displayed in the narratives of historians over time. It is interesting in how the priorities of research have changed over time, in that the more recent the work the focus shifts away from the Solidarity movement as a movement to the people of the movement and how they participated. This can be due to at the time of Solidarity writers focused on making sure the teachings and unity of the movement remained whereas decades after it occurred and has been well documented historians gravitate towards the people and determine their involvement in the whole system. Being able to use the primary sources in conjunction with the variety of historian’s interpretations will help create a more rounded picture of Kuron’s work and activism from the writing of the “Open Letter to the Party” to be an advisor to the Solidarity movement. Primary sources surrounding this subject are going to mainly consist of documents

that Kuron had a hand in making or interviews that have been documented either on film or text. Seeing as Kuron being a one of the leaders of Solidarity it would stand to reason that many of the things that he is a part of or written shows his dedication to the cause.

Many of these sources are found in anthologies of primary source documents relating to wither the time or Poland itself. The “Open Letter to the Party” a document written by Kuron and Karol Modzelewski during their time at Warsaw university in 1964. This source looked to reveal the injustices of the Party-State and offers solutions for problems such as people not having enough living space.¹⁹ The Gdansk agreement which is the agreement between Solidarity and the Party-State to recognize Solidarity as an independently run labor union and in exchange the Party-State retains their power in the country.²⁰ Another source is KOR’s appeal to society that occurred in 1978 where the KOR group announced to society that they need to fight back against the oppression they are under.²¹ The significance of this source comes from the fact that Kuron co-founded KOR thus his words and ideas are a part of the appeal. An interview with the Kuron himself has been included in the project, in the interview he words are defensive but commanding in how he talks about their being boundaries that should not be crossed and that they have a long way to go.²² The last is a source that talks a lot about the situation in Solidarity after gaining their liberty. The way all these sources will be connected are through a series of Webstories interviews with Kuron. These interviews cover opposition efforts before the letter including Kuron learning what he stands for, and how Solidarity first functioned as a union.

¹⁹ Jacek Kuron, Karol Modzelewski, “An Open Letter to the Party,” *New Politics*, Spring 1966 <http://www.unz.com/print/NewPolitics-1966q2-00005/> (accessed 5/7/18).

²⁰ “The Gdansk Agreement” in *From Solidarity to Martial Law: the Polish Crisis of 1980-1981*, ed. Andrzej Paczkowski and Malcolm Byrne (New York: Central European University Press, 2007), 70.

²¹ “KOR’s Appeal to Society” in *Eastern Europe Transformation and Revolution 1945-1991*, ed. Lyman Legters (D.C Health and Company 1992), 248.

²² “Not to Lure the Wolves out of the Woods” in *Eastern Europe Transformation and Revolution 1945-1991*, ed. Lyman Legters (D.C Health and Company 1992), 253.

The Open Letter

Jacek Kuron during the early 1960s worked towards a revolution to fix the countries problems. Kuron's work towards a revolution comes from a belief that the way to fix the country comes from a worker's revolution. As he states, "I just felt that now it was up to us and we'd be the ones who would move the foundations of the world."²³ With this belief in mind he wanted to implement change that would improve society. He got asked about how he viewed his workers revolution. Kuron's response to this became "Po Prostu," translated meaning "just".²⁴ Since his first activist outings he knew a revolution needed to occur and the he needed to be a part of it. Lastly Kuron knows that what he fights for may not be lawful rather it being the just thing to do.

Kuron's just revolution came into being with his goals focusing on pluralism and a proletarian revolution. A proletarian revolution starts with the workers taking control of the means of production with no one being more influential than another. This would create a Socialist State a path that Communism nations steered away from.²⁵ In this Socialist State Kuron mentions in an interview with pluralism being one of the major factors in his plan. Kuron states how he discovered pluralism over time and its importance, "without pluralism democracy was out of the question."²⁶ Pluralism being a system where there are two or more parties coexist with one another. Having a multiparty system leads to discussion and debate a subject currently vacant from the one-Party-State. The end goal of the revolution Kuron states would be a socialist state run by committees,

²³ Jacek Kuron, *A "Coup" in the University Student's Union*, Web of Stories, <https://www.webofstories.com/play/jacek.kuron/51> (Accessed 5/7/18)

²⁴ Kuron, *A "Coup" in the University Student's Union*.

²⁵ Jacek Kuron, *I discover Pluralism* Web of Stories, <https://www.webofstories.com/play/jacek.kuron/63> (accessed 5/7/18)

²⁶ Kuron, *I discover Pluralism*

Took over university ZMS, set up workers universities, made contact with factories, created a student-workers front with a programme of basic, radical, this time very radical transformations of the democratic order based on pluralism.²⁷

This revolution would not begin due to the lack of support for revolutionary action. Kuron believed that something needs to happen otherwise the state in Poland would become worse.

The Open Letter created by Kuron and Karol Modzelewski came into being in 1964 due to new influence from the University of Warsaw and actions the State has taken regarding activists in Poland. Kuron states that moles are sent by the Party-State to gather any information regarding activities that would be a threat.²⁸ The actions being taken by the Party-State strengthen Kuron's arguments and stance on the Party-State being an entity that needs changing for the betterment of society. Kuron used his position as a lecturer at the University of Warsaw to continue his activist activities to the disapproving indifferent of university professors. The message that Kuron and other activists received from professor's states that "all we'd do was annoy the giant and then the tanks would roll in and we'd have Budapest over here." The warning brings reference to the Soviet occupation of Budapest during the Hungarian Revolution of 1956 an event that Kuron remembers. University professors however did not attempt to stop activists, according to Kuron they opposed regulation and often came to the aid of any activist student on the verge of being expelled. Kuron and Modzelewski gained influence over time which led to the creation of their "Open Letter to the Party."²⁹ This open letter would be the foundation of a state opposite of the current one and one that works through reforms through the market via trade unions. Kuron states that a mole intercepted the letter before it got published and distributed. In response to this Kuron and Modzelewski published it themselves with their

²⁷ Jacek Kuron, *Plan for radical changes*, Web of Stories, <https://www.webofstories.com/play/jacek.kuron/65> (accessed 5/7/18).

²⁸ Jacek Kuron, *The Open Letter*, Web of Stories, <https://www.webofstories.com/play/jacek.kuron/67> (Accessed 5/7/18).

²⁹ Kuron, *The Open Letter*.

names attached to it. This action reflects when Kuron stated that it would be up to them to “move the foundations of society” and believing that what he stands for to be just and right for society. When the letter got published Kuron and Modzelewski were arrested. Kuron served three years in prison for writing the document that would inspire future opposition movements in Poland.³⁰ Kuron in his interview stated that at the bottom of the letter that both Modzelewski and himself would serve three years for their crime against the State which happened just as he believed it would.

The “Open Letter to the Party” in 1964 goes over eleven main points that Kuron and Modzelewski saw as the main problems with society. Despite the Party-State appearing as a entity where any person can influence the way the country grows and develops, they show how bureaucracy tainted the ideas set out by Marx. Throughout this letter Kuron and Modzelewski dismantles the illusion of the Party-State and sheds light onto what it truly became, a monopolistic party.³¹ While Kuron and Modzelewski actively disagree with how the Party-State runs they still respect them where they do not attack the Party-State for what they have done rather they attempt to open people’s eyes and asks them to become more aware of their surroundings. Several of the major themes that are talked about through this letter are economic struggles, class struggles, bureaucracy, dictatorship, with some mentions of Karl Marx and his ideas.

Kuron and Modzelewski identified bureaucracy as an important problem in Poland and they explain the problems of bureaucracy in Polish society extensively in the letter. The role of bureaucracy in Poland commanded obedience of the populace forcing those who did not agree

³⁰ Kuron, *The Open Letter*.

³¹ Jacek Kuron and Karol Modzelewski, “An Open Letter to the Party,” 6.

with it out of the Party with little to go back to. Kuron and Modzelewski describe Polish people not really living in a socialist society:

ACCORDING TO OFFICIAL doctrine, we live in a socialist country. This thesis is based on the identification of state ownership of the means of production with social ownership. The act of nationalization transferred industry, transport, and banking into social property, and production relations based on social property are allegedly socialist.³²

Kuron and Modzelewski are working towards a more Marxist viewpoint on society with society itself owning everything with little room for bureaucracy. The act of ownership Kuron and Modzelewski state in the letter is more prevalent in their society than in a capitalist one due to a worker in a capitalist not being entitled to ownership of any kind where as in Poland the system should allow said entitlement.³³ This ownership and the means of production comes from the Party State where the opinions of the many are overshadowed by the voices of a few.

Kuron and Modzelewski argue that despite Poland being a socialist country where everyone should have equal status there are still class divides that are causing discord in society. The Polish United Workers' Party (PUWP) serves as Poland's government body that makes decisions for the benefit of the country. However many of the decisions according to Kuron and Modzelewski are made in the Party's upper elite before anyone else has the chance to look at it. Peasants and workers are unable to enact change, Kuron and Modzelewski state "no important decision can be made and carried out without the approval of the Party authorities."³⁴ Kuron and Modzelewski share interpretations of how the Party-State moves away from a general view of Party hierarchies where those on top make large decisions and hand orders down to the workers who make at most basic decisions.³⁵ Kuron and Modzelewski state that because of the

³² Kuron and Modzelewski, "Open Letter to the Party," 6.

³³ Kuron and Modzelewski, "Open Letter to the Party", 6.

³⁴ Kuron and Modzelewski, "Open Letter to the Party", 6.

³⁵ Kuron and Modzelewski, "Open Letter to the Party", 6.

bureaucracy and the Party elite becoming the power elite the Party-State is able to do whatever it sees fit including taking full control of production and leaving the workers, a class of people the State was supposed to stand for in the dark.³⁶ The power that the Party wields forces citizens to stay in line as Kuron and Modzelewski explain:

Every rank-and-file member is entitled to his opinion, but he has no right to organize others who think as he does to follow his program, and he has no right to organize a propaganda and electoral struggle for the realization of that program.³⁷

Kuron and Modzelewski illustrate that while anyone can say whatever they want to say they are unable to act on what they mean for fear of Party-State intervention. Controlling the means of production would let the Party-State control the populace as if a citizen disobeys they could be cast out of society unable to survive with no influence over their surroundings.³⁸

The wages for workers Kuron and Modzelewski write about were determined by the difference between current wages in 1964 and those of the past in the 1950s and prior.³⁹ Kuron's and Modzelewski's opinion on wages are based on many different sources and ideologies like the Marxist interpretation focused solely on industrial production which Kuron and Modzelewski disagree with.⁴⁰ This focus comes from wanting to show a financially successful Poland. Kuron and Modzelewski use the estimates of Professor Kalecki, a Marxist economist, to show that the average wage of work he did since 1937 had risen 45%. For workers' wages increased 30%, a large increase for a country torn apart during the Second World War.⁴¹

Kuron and Modzelewski shared information gathered by food physiologists and the results of a research project to depict the conditions the Polish people were living in. They

³⁶ Kuron and Modzelewski, "Open Letter to the Party", 7.

³⁷ Kuron and Modzelewski, "Open Letter to the Party", 7.

³⁸ Kuron and Modzelewski, "Open Letter to the Party", 6.

³⁹ Kuron and Modzelewski, "Open Letter to the Party", 10.

⁴⁰ Kuron and Modzelewski, "Open Letter to the Party", 9.

⁴¹ Kuron and Modzelewski, "Open Letter to the Party", 10.

explain, “According to a research project conducted at the Warsaw Motorcycle Factory in 1957, 23% of the workers ate meat for dinner once a week or less, and 25% ate it twice a week.” The consumption of meat was low to where roughly 42% of families have a budget for a hardly adequate cut of meat or worse.⁴² Families then were not receiving the best forms of protein can lead to malnutrition and other health problems. Since Poland has a socialist system, they have universal healthcare to take care of those problems with supplements and other medications, another way for the State to control the populace.⁴³

Living space for workers’ families are also inadequate. Workers are given apartments to stay in however, the quality of them is not high enough to warrant the work being done for them. The Warsaw Motorcycle Factory workers are also surveyed about their living arrangements where many of them have small living quarters with varying access to water. “Only 1% of the apartments had hot running water, and 46% had cold running water, 25% had a water closet in the apartment, 7% had a bathroom in the building.” Living space correlates to the status of the water situation where according to this study “52% of the families had less than 6 sq. meters of living space.”⁴⁴ With their living situations Kuron and Modzelewski describes how workers are barely getting by and in many ways are starved to satisfy the bureaucracy. Kuron and Modzelewski use this data to argue that the Polish Party-State was not living up to the ideals it had established as a socialist society.

The nature of the economic system in Poland gave power to the Party-State, which it abused towards its own ends Kuron and Modzelewski argue. They explain how in a capitalist system, businesses are only for profit and little else. In this system it would always be the few

⁴² Kuron and Modzelewski, “Open Letter to the Party”, 11.

⁴³ Kuron and Modzelewski, “Open Letter to the Party”, 13.

⁴⁴ Kuron and Modzelewski, “Open Letter to the Party”, 12.

against the many with the wealthy with more wealth than the masses.⁴⁵ A Communist system looks at the national capital rather than an individual person's capital. Meaning that the system caters to the whole of the masses rather than those that have the most money. According to Kuron and Modzelewski this causes a problem in that if the State controls everything the nation becomes a monopolistic system where the bureaucracy can benefit themselves.⁴⁶ The bureaucracy works to disadvantage workers for two main reasons, one being they believe they are owed money for their work and the fact that labor power is something they do not own or fully control. To disadvantage the workers they are paid the absolute minimum they can be while maintaining a sense of being for a workers democracy.⁴⁷ Besides keeping pay low the bureaucracy keeps accumulating money through the communist system of increased production and creating a surplus of products.⁴⁸ Regulations of pay and work environment are given to technocrats that are the supervisors of the workers that are not given the same benefits of the bureaucracy thus they work against them. Kuron and Modzelewski show this system has many problems and the way it runs will cause problems in the future:

One is often told that the present economic crisis is caused by a faulty system of central administration and that these shortcomings can be overcome by an administrative reform from above. This reasoning mistakes the effect for the cause. A belief that the management system can be changed within existing conditions is obviously Utopian.⁴⁹

A system cannot be changed from above if the management is corrupted or faulty. Kuron and Modzelewski argue that a worker's democracy cannot have a bureaucracy because having a bureaucracy recognizes different social classes. In a Communist system where everyone should

⁴⁵ Kuron and Modzelewski, "Open Letter to the Party", 16.

⁴⁶ Kuron and Modzelewski, "Open Letter to the Party", 17.

⁴⁷ Kuron and Modzelewski, "Open Letter to the Party", 18.

⁴⁸ Kuron and Modzelewski, "Open Letter to the Party", 21.

⁴⁹ Kuron and Modzelewski, "Open Letter to the Party", 22.

be equal in status having a select few people standing above everyone else is not a democracy rather a dictatorship.⁵⁰

The origin of the system that Poland operates under came into being due to a mix of timing and capitalism. Kuron and Modzelewski argue that as the Soviet Union pushed their influence onto Poland, Poland could not do much of anything due to the country not having a strong enough economic base. Poland's reliance on other industrial imperialist powers forced it into becoming a backwards country. They wrote, "Their economies were dominated, one way or another, by the capital of industrially developed, imperialist states." Polish citizens became dependent on other countries and did not have a will of their own, with the Soviets moving in their influence easily took hold. When Soviet influence took hold, major changes began taking place. The most notable being a large push towards industrialization and the raise in the working class, in the early 1950s.⁵¹ Workers in intelligence work or other white-collar jobs suffered a pay decrease while other people are forced out of their surpluses to focus everything on production. The Party State turned Poland into a class dictatorship by the bureaucracy who took control.⁵²

This system helped Poland's economy during the 1950s but after a while it lost much of its efficiency. The industrialization of the country Kuron and Modzelewski argue looks unstable and prone to collapse if forced.⁵³ Growth becomes the objective of the Party-State and it looks to create new means of production whenever possible. The resources not used for "minimal growth in consumption is used to produce new means of production."⁵⁴ The economy in Poland increased tremendously by seventy-four percent during 1950-1955 showing the system does

⁵⁰ Kuron and Modzelewski, "Open Letter to the Party", 20.

⁵¹ Kuron and Modzelewski, "Open Letter to the Party", 25.

⁵² Kuron and Modzelewski, "Open Letter to the Party", 26.

⁵³ Kuron and Modzelewski, "Open Letter to the Party", 28.

⁵⁴ Kuron and Modzelewski, "Open Letter to the Party", 28.

have uses that benefit society. Economic increases began to plateau and started decreasing at the start of the 1960s.⁵⁵ Kuron and Modzelewski cited five reasons for the decline in the economy with all of them occurring at the State level. These five reasons being large amounts of inflation due to large amounts of growth, less raw materials to use which give workers less work, Wasteful spending by the Party-State an example being between the years of 1961 and 1963 the State lost twenty-one billion zloty, automation leading to less work, and finally the Party-State importing more than they are able to export.⁵⁶ With the large amounts of changes that occurred at once along with bureaucratic corruption lead to an economic crisis that hurts workers. The economic crisis can also be attributed to the sole focus on industry while leaving much of the agriculture of Poland in the hands of the State.

The agriculture of Poland left in the hands of the State instead of private farmers caused a crisis that left farmers starving in favor of more industry. Kuron and Modzelewski have stated that the State is the sole supplier for Poland while also being the sole purchaser of produce. With the system in this state peasants have prices rising that they are unable to pay due to the State buying produce at a price that leaves peasants with nothing. Kuron and Modzelewski argue this point saying how eighty-five percent of peasants are not getting the sufficient amount of meat in their diets despite being the people that raise the livestock.⁵⁷ Along with not getting enough meat peasants eat many more potatoes, data gathered by Kuron and Modzelewski between show peasant families on farms per member eat between 216 Kg. and 269 kg. depending on the size of the farm. Kuron and Modzelewski argue that peasants were targeted for limited consumption:

⁵⁵ Kuron and Modzelewski, "Open Letter to the Party", 29.

⁵⁶ Kuron and Modzelewski, "Open Letter to the Party", 29-32.

⁵⁷ Kuron and Modzelewski, "Open Letter to the Party", 38.

from the point of view of the peasant, a high degree of involvement with the market is not a means to maximize consumption but—on the contrary—is achieved at the price of limiting the basic consumption of the peasant family.⁵⁸

Peasant families are the most pressured group of people despite them being the ones that grow the produce for the State. The State has peasants sell their product “voluntarily” to them, this becomes the only option as the State also being the sole supplier sells the peasants what they need to survive.⁵⁹ The goal of the State regarding agriculture is to drain the agriculture of everything it has and use that to promote more industry which has begun to cause economic crisis’s in Poland.⁶⁰ Kuron and Modzelewski state how these crisis’s lead to the first anti-bureaucratic revolution in 1956-1957 based on economic hardship and this causing unrest in society.⁶¹

The Open Letter to the Party serves as the foundation of the opposition movements in Poland from 1964 until the dismantling of Communism in Poland. Kuron and Modzelewski’s position through this letter argues for change, but they do not want the destruction of the Party-State. Rather they wish to work with the Party-State, to start an open dialogue that would lead to the betterment of society using the system itself to work through problems. If the workers controlled the means of production not just a few elites, everyone in society on some level would be equal.⁶² They do not attack the Party-State out of spite or anger, they focus on the shortcomings of the current system, so improvements can be made. Kuron and Modzelewski implemented their own program as part of this letter. This program focused on the creation of

⁵⁸ Kuron and Modzelewski, “Open Letter to the Party”, 39.

⁵⁹ Kuron and Modzelewski, “Open Letter to the Party”, 39.

⁶⁰ Kuron and Modzelewski, “Open Letter to the Party”, 40.

⁶¹ Kuron and Modzelewski, “Open Letter to the Party”, 44.

⁶² This is interesting in how it tries to flip the hierarchal system on its head, switching it from a top down perspective where the few give orders to the many to the many doing most of the work and telling the others what is left. It is quite a fascinating perspective for society which looks like it could work with a lot of structure put into place.

worker councils to run everyday affairs, representation by district, workers must organize themselves in a multi-party system, and hope that this program would spread throughout the Soviet Bloc.⁶³ The content of the letter served as an invaluable asset to the opposition movements that would appear in the 1970s. Shortly after publishing this Open Letter Kuron and Modzelewski got arrested.

The arrest of Kuron and Modzelewski after the open letter got published in 1964 led to an increase of activity for the opposition. Groups like the Young Seekers of Contradiction, another opposition group at the University of Warsaw in 1964, started operations to protest Kuron's and Modzelewski's arrest and to get them out of prison.⁶⁴ Kuron explained that "putting a leader in prison helps a movement hugely."⁶⁵ The Party-State perceives this movement as a threat and groups that stand against the Party-State they would be more willing to join giving the movement more influence. The opposition wanted to make itself known so it took every opportunity to spread their message.

KOR

The Committee for the Defense of Workers or KOR became a major group that provided guidance to other opposition groups. KOR began in response to workers strikes in 1974 and 1976 in Poland along with other forms of corruption. An example being the murder of Jan Brozyna, who got beaten to death by authorities. Authorities in the police according to KOR fabricated the investigation and the trial of the murderers who got set free afterwards.⁶⁶ Kuron was conscripted

⁶³ Jacek Kuron and Karol Modzelewski, "An Open Letter to the Party," *New Politics*, Summer 1996, pp. 72-100, 85-92.

⁶⁴ Jacek Kuron, *Imprisonment aided our political activity*, Web of stories, <https://www.webofstories.com/play/jacek.kuron/68> Accessed (4/30/18).

⁶⁵ Kuron, *Imprisonment aided our political activity*.

⁶⁶ "KOR's Appeal to Society" in *Eastern Europe Transformation and Revolution 1945-1991*, ed. Lyman Legters (D.C Health and Company 1992), 250.

in the army in the 1970's and served for a few years.⁶⁷ He went to Warsaw on leave and learned of a new committee being formed. When he heard about this committee Kuron believed that it would be a group concerning citizen rights, made up of older people. His reasoning revolves around how other opposition groups are formed with old people establishing the committee then younger workers and citizens joining afterwards. However, younger citizens that join would be arrested and force the groups to disband. The Party-State would not arrest older citizens. Older people are untouchable and safe from persecution according to Kuron. KOR would go a different route in that it formed with young activists like Kuron at the helm. Kuron viewed a committee that works for the defense of worker's being a brilliant idea and joined with Jan Jozef Lipski, Piotrek Naimski and Antoni Macierewicz to establish KOR. This committee would not include any of the untouchables and work for the workers. Committee members would approach workers one by one to ask if they wanted to join the group but let the worker have the final say. Kuron in this committee focuses on working with the ideas other members come up with. He states that "it wasn't I who thought things up but that I latch on to these ideas."⁶⁸ Kuron has ideas of his own as in the open letter he shares his ideas for a better system however, he looks to make any idea work in the most optimized way.

The beginning of KOR can arguably be seen with the signing of the Letter of 59 in 1976. This open letter gave the opportunity for the names of activists to be placed in the open. The original plan of using "untouchables" to sign the letter with the activists being behind everything did not sit well with Kuron. He wanted everyone to get their names out there, so citizens would know their names. Kuron states this in a way that expresses the urgency of the situation: "we

⁶⁷ Jacek Kuron, *The beginning of KOR*, Web of Stories, <https://www.webofstories.com/play/jacek.kuron/86> Accessed (4/30/18).

⁶⁸ Kuron, *The beginning of KOR*.

need to sign it, our names need to be known.”⁶⁹ KOR became a symbol for workers as a group that will help them when the Party-State will not.

Kuron viewed KOR as being the next step in activism in Poland, they work to help workers as the Party-State continues to hurt the families of workers. Mass arrests and riots have become more common place in society. Police will search people’s homes for anything that could lead to more arrests.⁷⁰ It got to a point where cities were being occupied by police. At the end of the mass arrests there are over twelve thousand workers in prison. As these atrocities take place there needed to be a group that would work to relieve the suffering of those placed in prison, KOR became that body. Kuron explains that if students arrive at people’s homes asking if they would need anything after a family member has been arrested they would not get far. But, if they are a part of an organization they would have a better chance so KOR became the hat the relief workers worked under.⁷¹ Kuron also wanted to get a newspaper started for the organization to share current events not censored by the Party-State. In the end a pamphlet and bulletin are created to the amazement of Kuron as he did not expect a pamphlet, even though it printed what the bulletin covered.⁷² The creation of KOR occurred to counterbalance the Party-State which started doing whatever it wanted with no repercussions as workers and citizens sat idly by.

KOR in 1978 released the “KOR’s Appeal to Society” in which they discuss how the Party-State has continued to ignore the pleas of the workers who do not have enough resources to keep up with the demands of the Party-State. The main themes of this appeal are like those expressed in the “Open Letter to the Party” Kuron and Modzelewski wrote a decade prior. The

⁶⁹ Kuron, *The beginning of KOR*.

⁷⁰ Jacek Kuron, *Why KOR was formed*, Web of stories, <https://www.webofstories.com/play/jacek.kuron/87> (Accessed 4/30/18).

⁷¹ Kuron, *Why KOR was formed*.

⁷² Kuron, *Why KOR was formed*.

difference is this appeal aims to expose the corruption of the State and to rally citizens to start pursuing changes. This appeal is split into eight sections. With the themes of corruption and unresponsiveness of the Party-State, a shift can be seen in Kuron's view of activism from wanting to work with the State to acting against it due to their corruption.

The lack of food resources for citizens shows an aspect of the Party-States corruption. There is a shortage of food despite the Party-State being the sole supplier of foodstuffs as they purchase it from the peasants. Inflation and hidden price increases are making it difficult for families to purchase any kind of food including bread. Products like meat are rare to come by and many families do not eat meat or have very little due to the increased pricing. KOR explained how peasants often eat the least meat despite it being the peasants that raise the animals.⁷³ While malnutrition can be a large problem the medical system should make up for the lack of nutrition in workers diets. However, the medical system also has problems due to the Party-State.⁷⁴ Over time the medical services in Poland worsened with there being less medicine and overcrowding in the hospitals leaving more citizens ill in unsanitary conditions.

Apartments were much harder to come by in 1978. KOR brings up this valid concern in that workers are on a waiting list for an apartment that grows longer as more workers come to the cities. Workers were not given much room in an apartment, as the Open Letter to the Party had explained some workers had three square meters of space.⁷⁵ The long wait coupled with the treatment workers were forced under shows a system that does not care about the worker but rather the Party-State. Workers are forced to work long days, ten to twelve hours and the only reason for the harsh treatment comes down to the incompetence of the Party-State. To cover up

⁷³ "KOR's Appeal to Society," 248.

⁷⁴ "KOR's Appeal to Society," 249.

⁷⁵ Kuron and Modzelewski, "Open Letter to the Party", 12.

the economic hardships those in charge try to force workers to work harder to make up for the messes the Party-State caused.⁷⁶ Workers in Polish society were treated as mere tools showing the separations of classes that exist in society. KOR explains how workers have little freedom from working unless they wish to lose much of their pay:

The fact that miners were deprived of free days to compensate them for free Saturdays, that work is required on Sundays, and that a single day's absence even for the most valid of reasons (such as death in the family or illness) leads to a loss of approximately 20 percent of a month's salary – all this can be compared only with early capitalist exploitation.⁷⁷

Since the Party-State squandered much of the supply they accumulated which results in higher food prices, it also shows that the Party-State needs workers to be working consistently with no days off for any reason. To continue the facade of the Party-State functioning well.

KOR explains that the Party-State had become corrupt and due to this, workers suffer greatly. Social inequality has become the norm in Polish society due to the rising prices that hurt workers but do not hurt the Party-State. Authorities had been given more privileges than workers in terms of healthcare, housing, and salary, being better and more readily available. These figures are also given special recreation areas that only they may use due to their position in society.⁷⁸ Equal opportunity in Poland according to KOR had become nonexistent. Workers are not paid enough to lift themselves through the hierarchy and for those in authority “one can observe children inheriting the privileged positions of their parents.” Children of privileged parents are not subjected to the lifestyle of workers thus they are unable to comprehend why changes need to be made in society. Police in Poland help strengthen the power of those in the Party-State. Judges refuse to see complaints made by workers despite them protesting the corruption taking place.⁷⁹

⁷⁶ “KOR’s Appeal to Society,” 249.

⁷⁷ “KOR’s Appeal to Society,” 249.

⁷⁸ “KOR’s Appeal to Society,” 249.

⁷⁹ “KOR’s Appeal to Society,” 250.

KOR tries to explain using these examples that everyone is not equal in Poland rather people have never been more unequal.

Problems are caused through the economic crisis where the State does not have access to the material it needs to sustain itself and farmers have not been helping. Poland lost many of its resources due to poor investments by the Party-State. Materials like coal, fertilizer, and building materials are no longer in abundance leading to many young workers moving to the cities. The poorest investment the Party-State makes according to KOR deals with farming, more specifically state funded farming. KOR points out that, a hectare of land in private hands is more productive than a hectare in state agriculture.⁸⁰ Instead of pursuing the more productive option the state continues to funnel money into a form of production that loses money and valuable resources that have caused hardships for workers.

Workers and citizens in Poland had been complacent in letting the Party-State run unchecked to the point of corruption. KOR expresses how those who would submit to the Party-State are ruining Polish culture. The reasoning for the statement comes from the lack of freedom in science and humanities publications, instead having these be replaced with publications filled with doctrine that favors the Party-State. Censorship had become a tool used by the Party-State to keep workers ignorant of their surroundings, this also works to undermine Polish culture. Poles are unable to express themselves through the traditions that have been passed down if the Party-State disapproves. Despite how the state attempts to cover up the weakening culture through methods like music festivals. KOR argues that “Multifaceted entertainment and numerous pop song festivals are shabby substitutes for culture.”⁸¹ KOR argues that workers

⁸⁰ “KOR’s Appeal to Society,” 250.

⁸¹ “KOR’s Appeal to Society,” 250.

should not be fooled by these shabby substitutes but rather should strive for change and to show off true Polish culture not regulated by the Party-State.

Not knowing the problems of society according to KOR are not entirely the fault of the workers rather the Party-State has woven an illusion of society as they want workers to believe. The Party-State censoring information keeps problems going on in the country out of the public eye. It does not help when many statistics are falsified, KOR using the newspaper publication *Zycie Warszawy* argue for sixty-five percent of statistical data gathered being falsified. The Party-State made decisions based on the false information which led to workers being hurt the most. In the eyes of the state they believed that they had a solution for the economic hardships and implemented policies.⁸² These policies, KOR argues are not only unorganized and arbitrary but they also cause more harm than good, they include:

- The freezing of investments has led to billions in losses because construction that had already started was never completed.
- Drastic limitations in imports have led to weeks of idleness in factories across Poland.
- The plunderous export of food stuffs has increased shortages on the domestic market.
- The dissolution of the planning system, together with the simultaneous denial of the market economy and the retention of the anachronistic system of directing enterprises by order and commands, has eliminated all regulatory mechanisms from the economy.⁸³

KOR highlights these to show the necessity for workers to act. The State refuses input from the citizens while at the same time citizens began to no longer identify with the state.⁸⁴ The lack of cooperation between the Party-State and workers led to a rift that cannot be mended without radical changes. This showed the stance of those in opposition in Poland. The State being unable to work with the workers and vice versa caused those in opposition to see no other option but to actively work against the State.

⁸² "KOR's Appeal to Society," 251.

⁸³ "KOR's Appeal to Society," 251.

⁸⁴ "KOR's Appeal to Society," 251.

KOR's appeal to society contained reference and similarities with the "Open Letter to the Party" that Kuron helped write fourteen years prior in 1964. These similarities are due to a lack of action by the Party-State to resolve these conflicts in a reasonable amount of time. Housing is still difficult to come by. The Party-State should be giving workers housing instead giving them hardly any room or leaving them on a waiting list. This problem escalated as the economy began to fail, more workers from the countryside came to the cities making the waiting list longer. Financial difficulties got worse by the time of KOR's appeal, while the open letter also brought up the issue it continued to escalate in 1978. There are similarities between the two documents however the situation is dire during the time of the KOR appeal. The Party-State has become more corrupt leading to a change in perspective. For Kuron this change came in not believing they will be able to work with the Party-State to achieve new rights unless the Party-State initiated it.

Solidarity

In 1980 the Interfactory Strike Committee (MKS) decided to go on strike in the Lenin shipyards in Gdansk. Kuron had a hand in planning the strike along with other opposition organizers.⁸⁵ The firing of Ania Walentynowicz caused the strike to occur, with her unable to work and for her to be taken away by party officials for a time it angered the workers enough to conduct a strike. Her firing comes because of Walentynowicz working with an illegal union. Workers are the ones that wanted to the strike, and they prepared leaflets for the event to spread the word of what will happen and their demands. Once the strike began Kuron started receiving phone calls from people in the area confirming the actions of the workers. While Kuron was not present at the strike in Gdansk he receives phone calls about the strike from a worker in the

⁸⁵ Jacek Kuron, *The decision to strike*, Web of Stories
<https://www.webofstories.com/play/jacek.kuron/111> (Accessed 5/7/18).

shipyards health center confirming the event. A different source calls Kuron to say that they received word that there is not a strike occurring, Kuron's answer to that being "choose for yourself who you want to believe—interpress or us." Kuron received knowledge of the demands that the strike committee are making to the state as laid out in the twenty-one demands and the Gdansk agreement.⁸⁶

For these demands to be obtained the Party-State needed to believe it had no other choice but to work with the strikers to avoid a rebellion. An agreement was made between the strike committees of Gdansk, Gdynia and Szczecin to consolidate their demands.⁸⁷ A united front would have a larger chance of success than if the committees are separate. The name Solidarnosc or Solidarity comes from a shipyard newspaper of the same name.⁸⁸ The nature of the opposition movement changes after the strike, the Gdansk Agreement created a free trade union which became the platform for opposition.

While Kuron agrees with standing in opposition to the State, he feared the concept of an independent trade union and at first did not want it to be created. The way Kuron heard the news of the new union came from a member of the police as he was imprisoned at the time.⁸⁹ In an interview with Kuron he discusses his genuine fear in this situation. In his exact words he states, "Fuck me, what's going to happen now?" Kuron feared trade unions. He believed them to not be an outlet for opposition due to their nature. He believed them to be a bureaucratic machine that they would be unable to control thus it will collapse not being able to accomplish its goal. Remaining cautious of the situation Kuron assisted with its functions. Soon after hearing about

⁸⁶ Kuron, *The decision to strike*.

⁸⁷ Jacek Kuron, *Where did the name Solidarnosc come from?*, *Web of Stories*, <https://www.webofstories.com/play/jacek.kuron/112> (Accessed 5/7/18).

⁸⁸ Kuron, *Where did the name Solidarnosc come from?*.

⁸⁹ Jacek Kuron, *Independent trade unions*, *Web of Stories*, <https://www.webofstories.com/play/jacek.kuron/116> (Accessed 5/7/18).

the union, Kuron along with other opposition members got released from prison.⁹⁰ Once released in 1980 Kuron traveled to Gdansk to assess the situation. With him still being wanted by the State due to his activist background he needed to sneak around to get into the city by train.⁹¹ Once there he attended a meeting with several other opposition leaders such as Lech Walesa and Andrzej Wasilewicz to plan next steps. Kuron stated that at the general meeting that would happen after the current meeting that he would be made an advisor. This makes sense in that an organization would need an advisor that has a lot of experience being an activist and knowing when things go too far. Kuron also received a certificate that named him part of the strike committee thus protecting him from the authorities.⁹²

The Gdansk Agreement signed by members of the strike committee and the Party-State served as the beginning of the end for the Party-State as they are unable to refuse cooperation with the new union. This agreement goes over the twenty-one demands the MKS sent to the State and what the decisions of each point are. Workers gained every demand in some compacity with the State agreeing with a few points leading to more rights and freedoms. The State received recognition from the newly established union as being the governmental body in Poland.⁹³ Kuron may not have been at the signing of the agreement but the ideas he has expressed through the open letter and KOR are present.

The creation of the trade union brought many freedoms and obstacles that the Solidarity movement needed to overcome. Points one and two of the Agreement focus on the creation of the trade union that would become the Party-State's main opposition. In this union any worker

⁹⁰ Kuron, *Independent trade unions*.

⁹¹ Jacek Kuron, *The greatest diploma I've ever received*, *Web of Stories*, <https://www.webofstories.com/play/jacek.kuron/117> (Accessed 5/7/18).

⁹² Kuron, *The greatest diploma I've ever received*.

⁹³ "The Gdansk Agreement," in *Eastern Europe Transformation and Revolution 1945-1991*, Ed. Lyman Legters (D.C Health and Company 1992), 255.

will have the right to join and it will govern itself without Party-State interference.⁹⁴ Solidarity will work for the workers and be involved in State decisions regarding anything related to workers pay, or wellbeing. This union works to become a vanguard of workers' rights and will use this new platform to work towards that goal. The union can strike as it sees fit and they will work with the Party-State on issues.⁹⁵ Working with the Party-State as an idea reflects Kuron's original stance when writing the Open Letter and it looks that this new union will give the Party-State a chance to work with them rather than against them.

Gaining new freedoms became the largest success of this agreement, giving the workers and citizens' rights that they have not known in decades. For example, the freedom of expression and publication let religion and free speech to be in the public eye again. Worker's and citizens are allowed access to public documents that previously only were seen by those in the Party-State. Government officials are to propose legislation regarding censorship and removing restrictions on the media. The Agreement includes a section about the owners of the media, "the radio and television as well as the press and publishing houses must offer expression to different points of view. They must be under the control of society."⁹⁶ Along with expression in general more rights are to be guaranteed by the government. Point five of the document deals solely with making sure that the existence of the new union would be assured. The government acknowledged the unions existence published it in the media.⁹⁷ Kuron stated in an interview his fear of having an independent trade union and it shows when this union would let in any worker that wished to join thus having many more people to keep track of.⁹⁸

⁹⁴ "The Gdansk Agreement," 255-257.

⁹⁵ "The Gdansk Agreement," 256.

⁹⁶ "The Gdansk Agreement," 257.

⁹⁷ "The Gdansk Agreement," 258.

⁹⁸ Kuron, *Independent trade unions*.

Several of the points in the agreement following the unions acknowledgment are about gaining rights and goods workers should have been receiving the entire time. To help get workers on their feet after the strike ending the agreement lays out a payment plan for strikers. They are paid forty percent of their wages as normal pay while the other sixty being holiday pay. On top of the strike pay, the minimum wage would be raised by two thousand zloty a month.⁹⁹ Workers will then have money to spend on goods and services they need. This relates back to the talks in the open letter referring to how Kuron and Modzelewski would argue the bureaucracy kept wages low as workers starved. Another major problem identified in the Open Letter and KOR's Appeal to Society concerned the lack of consumption of meat in families. The Gdansk agreement contained three points concerning this. Ensuring the supply, introducing rationing, and only exporting surplus goods are how the agreement decided to proceed in this issue that has been plaguing the country for a minimum of a decade and a half.

Kuron's influence shows in two other points in the Gdansk Agreement, these being basic needs for workers. Housing accommodations continue to be difficult for workers to receive. The Party-State will be preparing a solution for housing workers and their families. This issue being seen in both the Open Letter and KOR's appeal continuing to go unfulfilled shows why this became one of the demands workers wanted. The other point regarding health care comes down to the systems being funded immediately after this Agreement is made official in August 1980.¹⁰⁰ Workers in the fields of medicine and education additionally have been underfunded for a time, if a worker would become ill with a serious affliction they would not have the best care due to the lack of medical personnel.

⁹⁹ "The Gdansk Agreement," 258.

¹⁰⁰ "The Gdansk Agreement," 260.

The Gdansk Agreement laid the foundation for a free Polish State and Kuron had major influences on the content of the agreement. Kuron wanted to create publications for the opposition to get current events out to everyone, this led to the movement demanding freedom of press and expression. The wanting to be known and believing that the people would be the ones to create change occurred. The everyday struggles that Kuron and Modzelewski point out in their Open Letter transferred over to this agreement. It shows that Kuron's words resonated with the workers of Poland letting them take control of their lives. Kuron did not agree with every part of the agreement believing that the creation of a union would cause chaos. Eventually Kuron would grow comfortable with the union and serve as an adviser for them.

In a Web of Stories interview Kuron shares his beliefs that if the union became autonomous it will collapse. He stresses this point saying that things would escalate into complete chaos with nothing on the store shelves and it would be an even worse situation.¹⁰¹ He feared the amount of work this new union would have to accomplish. They need to work with the government to get anything done, a situation that many workers did not like. Members of Solidarity must also make decisions on every small situation as the structure of the union had not been finalized being freshly created.¹⁰² Kuron speaks to the sacrifices that society are making for the union, working together to achieve a society best for all. While the actions of Solidarity will be defined over time Kuron shares that Solidarity's first session did not go smoothly.

Solidarity would have quickly collapsed if Kuron did not step in and advised against certain decisions made during Solidarity's first session. As a new body with no experience Solidarity meet for the first time to conduct business. Ninety people representing forty-two

¹⁰¹ Jacek Kuron, "Everyone took part in creating Solidarnosc" *Web of Stories*, <https://www.webofstories.com/play/jacek.kuron/119> (Accessed 5/7/18).

¹⁰² Kuron, "Everyone took part in creating Solidarnosc."

regions were present.¹⁰³ Despite being a new group Solidarity already had its share of problems to deal with. The first of these being workers taking more raises than they should. These raises called “walesowki” were paid to lower income workers like farmers and factory workers that have not received a raise as part of the Gdansk Agreement. The government willingly gave out the raises to anyone who asked after getting through a system so confusing they most likely would not receive anything. Solidarity decided to take a stand against this issue by going around to different factories and telling workers to not take a raise if they already received one.¹⁰⁴ Kuron’s focus involved other issues such as introducing a registration fee. He did the calculations himself despite Kuron saying that he never learned how to count. Until the end of the session nothing got done, when the trains began to get ready to shuttle people away the amount of proposals being seen and passed grew tremendously. One proposal caused Kuron to step in as it threatened to dismantle Solidarity and that was to get rid of the regional branch system.¹⁰⁵ If this system got removed scandal could break out saying that there would not be fair representation and the management are becoming like the Party-State. If this happened Solidarity would have collapsed. This situation showed Kuron using his knowledge to realize the consequences of an action and work to prevent the action from occurring.

In 1982 Kuron participated in an interview with a publication in West Germany talking about Solidarity and the state Poland has found itself in. Poland has been placed under martial law and Solidarity has been forced underground since the end of 1981. The main topics of this interview were the current situation regarding potential Soviet intervention, internal conflicts, and the work of Solidarity. Another topic that gets discussed briefly concerned the role of the

¹⁰³ Jacek Kuron, “Solidarnosc in session” *Web of Stories*, <https://www.webofstories.com/play/jacek.kuron/120> (Accessed 5/7/18).

¹⁰⁴ Kuron “Solidarnosc in session.”

¹⁰⁵ Kuron, *Solidarnosc in session*.

west and how they view the situation in Poland. Kuron tells the interviewer that he is disappointed that the west would rather spread propaganda like saying the Soviets are invading rather than understanding the reality of the Solidarity movement.¹⁰⁶ Kuron insists on answering question in his own voice rather than as a spokesperson from KOR.¹⁰⁷ The tone of the interview breathes an air of confidence from Kuron as he explains that the State does not have much of a choice in what happens anymore.

Kuron's opinion of the Party-State had changed to the point where he believed that the Party-State or outside nations such as the Soviet Union no longer had control over the people of Poland. While Solidarity had been forced underground the organization still operated in secret. Kuron explains how it would be difficult for the Soviets to invade as it would escalate into a full war that they would not be able to maintain.¹⁰⁸ Beyond this there are also boundaries that Solidarity cannot cross, this being government collapse.¹⁰⁹ Despite the might of Solidarity they need the government to stay so anarchy would not ensue. Government collapse would also cause Solidarity as a movement to fall apart due to the differing opinion of members. Kuron shows that he always thinks of the big picture and makes sure that chaos cannot set in despite the growing anger of workers. The anger of workers comes from the government refusing to uphold their end of the Gdansk agreement.¹¹⁰ The anger is justified and Kuron has realized by the time of the KOR's Appeal that the government would not work with the opposition. The anger also comes from an internal conflict between factions of Solidarity.

¹⁰⁶ "Not to Lure the Wolves out of the Woods," in *Eastern Europe Transformation and Revolution 1945-1991*. Ed. Lyman Legters, (D.C Health and Company 1992), 262.

¹⁰⁷ "Not to Lure the Wolves out of the Woods," 263.

¹⁰⁸ "Not to Lure the Wolves out of the Woods," 262.

¹⁰⁹ "Not to Lure the Wolves out of the Woods," 263.

¹¹⁰ "Not to Lure the Wolves out of the Woods," 264.

Conflict between factions in Solidarity leads to problems both internally and externally. Intellectuals and workers stand at odds with one another in their beliefs on how to deal with the Party-State but Kuron believes this to be less serious than it appears. Kuron argues that it revolves around each group having a difference in opinion rather than actively being against one another. Workers have expectations of the government that are not being met resulting in them becoming more radical to where Kuron and other members of KOR must go to each group that threatens to strike and insist they not do anything rash. Kuron along with other intellectuals focus more on the larger picture in how outside countries would react if the government would fail and would rather focus on reforming the Party-State slowly.¹¹¹ The workers are being impatient, this could be a result of gaining several rights at once causing a want for more. The work of Solidarity rests on these groups working together, they can despite their different beliefs due to a mutual distrust of the current government and having advisers like Kuron to help guide them.

Solidarity according to Kuron will eventually need to disband sections of itself to work as their own autonomous units to create a worker's democracy. Kuron's response to a question about the state of Solidarity from this interview shows how his view has adapted, "if you asked me this question a few weeks ago the answer would be the union should just be a union." Adding on to that answer Kuron explains the path Solidarity should take, "Solidarity is in a unique situation. It should not hesitate in pursuing just reform but a solution." Kuron believes that the opposition have a chance to not just change policy but becoming the main solution to the many problems that plague Poland due to Party-State inactivity. Kuron in 1982 still sees a role for the Communist monopoly in their society, this being limited to the police force.¹¹² They would not stand above the law, but they will continue having influence in government and their power

¹¹¹ "Not to Lure the Wolves out of the Woods," 264.

¹¹² "Not to Lure the Wolves out of the Woods," 266.

would suit them best there.¹¹³ After everything that had happened in his activist career Kuron believes communism still has its place in society.

Conclusion

The activism of Jacek Kuron affected Poland greatly on its journey towards freedom. As an activist since university in Warsaw, Kuron worked for the people of Poland against the rule of the Party-State. In 1964 Kuron along with Karol Modzelewski wrote the Open Letter to the Party” that showed the injustices the Party-State has inflicted on the workers such as small living quarters if they had any or not getting enough meat in their diets. Upon publishing this letter Kuron and Modzelewski are thrown in jail for three years. They did it knowing what the consequences were and due to their actions laid the framework for opposition movements in the future.

Kuron in the 1970s became one of the founders of KOR a committee based around defending the rights of workers. He brought up many ideas during this time in expanding their influence to get more to join them. A newspaper was also started to spread current events that would normally be censored by the media. In 1978 KOR release an Appeal to Society where they explain the problems of the nation with a few ideas from the Open Letter being included. The point of the appeal was to get society to take a stand against the injustices of their country instead of being complacent. While Kuron wants to work with the State when he wrote the Open Letter he believes that there is no longer a change of that unless it starts on the side of the State.

During the time the Gdansk agreement got signed in 1980 Kuron was imprisoned. When he received word of everything that occurred he was both horrified and excited. The excitement coming from the State and Workers are negotiating to give workers more rights which is

¹¹³ “Not to Lure the Wolves out of the Woods,” 267.

something that Kuron has been working towards for years. The fear comes in the form of the Solidarity union as he believed there would be no means of controlling it. The entire movement could collapse if the union runs on its own. Kuron believed this at first but over time he became an invaluable advisor to the Solidarity movement that had struggles starting up.

Scholars depicted Kuron as a leader in KOR and Solidarity with acknowledgement that he helped author the Open Letter. From his ideas in the “Open Letter” and the “KOR’s Appeal to Society” he looks to be a moderate on a political scale adapting to changes that are always occurring in Poland. Some believe him to lean left which makes sense considering the system he wants to build being a worker’s democracy based on pluralism. Many of these authors cite other opposition leaders greatly like Lech Walesa but talk to a smaller extent about Kuron’s contributions. Kuron did state that he is not an idea person, while he does have ideas he latches onto other people’s ideas and makes them work. He is an advisor that Solidarity needed at the beginning as they did not know what they were doing regarding how to hold meetings and almost voting to dissolve the entire organization. Kuron fought for the rights of workers and he laid the ground work for a free Poland.

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