'Solidarity' in Poland, 1980-1990

The background

Polish attitudes

1. **National feeling** was strong. Poles wanted their country to be free to make its own policies even if it was closely allied with the USSR.
2. **The Catholic Church.** Despite Soviet disapproval, this was strong in Poland. The Church wanted the freedom to:
   a. preach as it wished
   b. run its own schools.
3. **Living standards.** Poles wanted an end to shortages of food and other goods.
4. **Freedom of expression.** Poles, backed by the Church, wanted a free press and the right to discuss issues openly.

The rule of Gieriec, 1971-1978

Gieriec became party leader after widespread riots against price rises.
1. He aimed to introduce some reforms while keeping firm control.
2. Economic reforms led to some improvements in living standards; but Poland went further into debt and food shortages continued.
3. In 1976 police angered Poles by causing deaths and injuries while putting down strikes against proposed price rises.

Pope John Paul II

1. In 1978 the Polish Cardinal Wajtja was elected Pope.
2. This caused a surge in Polish nationalist, and anti-Government, feeling.
3. The Church became an even stronger focus of opposition to the Government.

Solidarity

Shipyard workers, led by Lech Walesa in Gdansk (pre-war Danzig), formed a movement called 'Solidarnosc'. It campaigned for:
1. workers to have the right to form trade unions independent of the State
2. the Government to:
   a. grant Poles more freedom
   b. improve standards of living and working.

Solidarity, 1980

**Strikes**

1. In 1980 there were more food shortages and price rises as the Government failed to improve Poland's economy.
2. In protest, workers in the shipyards along the Baltic coast went on strike.
3. The Government decided to negotiate. It feared the use of force would inflame the whole population.

**The agreement**

1. The workers agreed to accept:
   a. the leading role of the Communist Party in Poland
   b. the Socialist economic system
   c. Poland's links with the USSR and the other East European Communist countries.
2. The Government agreed to:
   a. the right to strike
   b. the right to form independent trade unions
   c. more open discussion of Government policy
   d. a relaxation of censorship
   e. improved wages and working conditions.

What was the significance of Solidarity's achievement?

1. An authoritarian Communist regime which did not allow opposition had been forced to make concessions by:
   a. the action of industrial workers backed by popular opinion
   b. the use of non-violent methods.
2. The Communist government:
   a. was incapable of solving Poland's economic difficulties
   b. had lost the confidence of the people
   c. did not dare to use force against the strikers.
3. The USSR with Gorbachev as leader (page 85), still wanted one-party Communist rule in Poland
4. The Soviet Union was unwilling to use force to maintain control.

1980-1989

- The USSR
   1. decided that Polish military rule is the only way to maintain a one-party system
   2. backs the appointment of General Jaruzelski as the new Polish leader.

- Poland
   1. Jaruzelski
      a. imposes martial law
      b. arrests Walesa and other union leaders.

1981-1982

- Solidarity
   1. demands free elections.
   2. The Church and Solidarity
      a. provide focus of opposition to the Government.
      b. The Government struggles to improve Poland's economy.

1983-1987

- Solidarity
   1. Jaruzelski
      a. ends martial law
      b. refuses to legalize Solidarity again.

1988

- Solidarity
   1.Jaruzelski
      a. legalizes Solidarity
      b. reforms
   2. The Church
      a. demands free elections.
      b. The Government
         i. agrees to legalize Solidarity
         ii. Jaruzelski sacked
         iii. Jaruzelski forced to appoint a non-Communist Prime Minister

1989

- In return for Solidarity's help in solving the country's problems, Jaruzelski agrees to
  1. legalise Solidarity
  2. increase press freedom
  3. host elections while reserving a majority of seats for Communists

1990

- Walesa elected President of Poland in free national elections.