

The Fall of Communism in Poland: A Chronology

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| 1918 | November | <i>Poland regains its independence after 123 years of foreign occupation</i> |
| 1926 | May | <i>Józef Piłsudski overthrows the parliamentary government in a military coup</i> |
| 1939 | September | <i>Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union invade Poland; the government goes into exile and the "Home Army" (AK) is formed to direct the resistance</i> |
| 1941 | June | <i>Nazi Germany invades the Soviet Union</i> |
| 1943 | January-May | <i>The Jewish Uprising in Warsaw</i> |
| 1944 | August-October | <i>The Polish Uprising in Warsaw</i> |
| 1945 | January | <i>Russian troops enter Warsaw</i> |
| | February | <i>Stalin, Churchill, and Roosevelt meet at Yalta, finalizing plans to divide Europe into separate spheres of influence</i> |
| | June | <i>"The Government of National Unity" is formed in Poland, dominated by communists but including Stanisław Mikołajczyk, the head of the exile government, as a Vice-Premier</i> |
| 1947 | January | <i>The communists win a rigged election</i> |
| | October | <i>Mikołajczyk flees the country</i> |
| 1948 | December | <i>The Polish Socialist Party and The Polish Workers' Party (the communists) merge to form Polish United Workers' Party (PZPR)</i> |
| 1954 | March | <i>Joseph Stalin dies</i> |
| 1955 | May | <i>The Warsaw Pact is signed</i> |
| 1956 | February | <i>Khrushchev gives his "secret speech" denouncing Stalin at the 20th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in Moscow</i> |
| | June | <i>Strike breaks out in Poznań, protesting both working conditions and Soviet domination; fighting breaks out between police and demonstrators; tanks are called in to restore order; at least 74 people die, and several hundred are injured</i> |

- October** *The 8th Plenum of the Central Committee of the PZPR names Władysław Gomułka as the new First Secretary; he is widely hailed as a reformer, with the slogan of “a Polish road to socialism”*
- October-November** *The Hungarian Revolution is crushed by a Soviet invasion*
- 1964 October** *The Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union replaces Nikita Khrushchev with Leonid Brezhnev*
- October** *The Polish Episcopate writes letter to German Episcopate expressing their wish for reconciliation; the famous phrase “we forgive, and we ask for forgiveness” provokes attacks from the regime*
- 1966** *Throughout the year, the Catholic Church and the regime produce competing commemorations of the 1000th anniversary of the baptism of the first historically documented Polish ruler, Mieszko I*
- 1968 March** *Student protests against censorship are met with police violence and repression; the regime responds with an “anti-Zionist” campaign directed at the protestors (some of whom were Jewish); thousands of Jews are pressured to emigrate*
- August** *Soviet, Polish, Hungarian, Bulgarian and East German forces invade Czechoslovakia, putting an end to the “Prague Spring”*
- 1970 December** *Price hikes lead to strikes in Gdańsk and other cities; police intervention leads to riots; the army is sent in to end the unrest; at least 45 people were killed, and thousands injured; Władysław Gomułka is replaced by Edward Gierek as First Secretary*
- 1975 August** *The Helsinki Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe commits all signatories (including Poland) to show “respect for human rights and basic freedoms, including freedom of thought, conscience, religion and convictions for every individual”*
- 1976 June** *Price hikes lead to strikes in Radom, Warsaw, and elsewhere; police intervention leads to riots*
- September** *KOR (The Committee for the Defense of the Workers) is formed by Adam Michnik, Jacek Kuroń, and others, to aid those repressed in the wake of the June strikes*

- 1978 April** *Lech Wałęsa, Andrzej Gwiazda, and others create the “Committee for Free Trade Unions on the Coast”; later Zbigniew Bujak, Zbigniew Janas, and others create a parallel organization in Warsaw*
- October** *Cardinal Karol Wojtyła is chosen as Pope John Paul II*
- 1979 June** *Pope John Paul II visits Poland*
- 1980 July** *Price hikes lead to strikes throughout the country*
- August** *The “Interfactory Strike Committee” at the Gdańsk shipyards, under the leadership of Lech Wałęsa, emerges as a representative body for the national work-stoppage; the strikes force the government to accept the creation of a free trade union (“Solidarity”), to respect basic civil and human rights, and to raise wages*
- September** *Stanisław Kania replaces Edward Gierek as First Secretary*
- 1981 February** *General Wojciech Jaruzelski is named Premier*
- March** *Talks between Solidarity and the government reach a crisis; Solidarity organizes a four-hour national warning strike to force the regime to continue negotiating*
- April** *Ration cards are introduced for meat*
- May** *Rural Solidarity is legally registered; Primate Stefan Wyszyński dies and is replaced by Józef Glemp*
- October** *Wojciech Jaruzelski replaces Stanisław Kania as First Secretary*
- December** *Declaration of martial law; Solidarity is outlawed; approximately 10,000 people are arrested; 6,000-10,000 people emigrate; violence is limited, but 9 people are killed when police attack striking miners in Silesia*
- 1982 April** *Announcement of the creation of the Provisional Coordination Commission of Solidarity; leaders in hiding include Zbigniew Bujak, Władysław Frasyniuk, and Bogdan Lis*
- August** *On the anniversary of the signing of the Gdańsk Agreement that created Solidarity, demonstrations are held all over Poland; four people are killed, over 5,000 are detained*
- November** *Primate Glemp emphasizes the distance of the Church from the “struggles of social groups” and declares that “the Church will always stand on a position of peace”*
Solidarity announces an 8-hour warning strike, but their appeal is generally ignored; Leonid Brezhnev dies
- December** *Most internees are released*
- 1983 May** *Grzegorz Przemyski, the 19-year-old son of a KOR activist, is murdered by police*

	June	<i>John Paul II visits Poland for the second time</i>
	July	<i>Martial Law is lifted; amnesty is declared for political crimes</i>
	October	<i>Lech Wałęsa is awarded the Nobel Prize for Peace</i>
1984	October	<i>Father Jerzy Popiełuszko, a Roman Catholic priest and opposition activist, is murdered by officers of the Security Service; the killers are arrested and imprisoned</i>
1985	March	<i>Mikhail Gorbachev is named as First Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union</i>
	July	<i>Price hikes lead to a strike declaration by Solidarity, but the strikes fail to receive much support</i>
1986	June	<i>Poland becomes a member of the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank</i>
	September	<i>A general amnesty is announced</i>
	December	<i>A report is released showing that 740,000 people had emigrated since 1980</i>
1987	June	<i>Pope John Paul II visits Poland for the third time</i>
	November	<i>The government holds a referendum on economic reform; the proposal fails to receive enough support to pass</i>
1988	April-May	<i>Wildcat strikes in several cities throughout Poland; some are broken up by police, others end without any resolution</i>
	August	<i>Meetings between Lech Wałęsa and the Minister of the Interior, General Czesław Kiszczak, begin the process of negotiation that will ultimately lead to the round table talks</i>
	September	<i>Mieczysław Rakowski becomes Premier</i>
	November	<i>Televised debate between Wałęsa and Alfred Miodowicz, leader of state-sponsored trade union group; widely seen as a major victory for Solidarity</i>
1989	February	<i>The Round Table negotiations begin</i>
	March	<i>Slobodan Milošević amends the Yugoslav constitution, rescinding autonomy for Kosovo; violent protests follow</i>
	April	<i>The Round Table Accords are signed; Solidarity is re-legalized, and elections are promised for June (with two-thirds of the seats reserved for the communists in the lower house, and all of the seats open for election in the upper house)</i>
	May	<i>Gazeta Wyborcza (The Electoral Gazette) is established as the first legal opposition newspaper in the Soviet bloc</i>

- June** *Elections are held; Solidarity candidates win all but one of the senate seats, and all of the parliamentary seats open for contestation*
On the same day elections are held in Poland, protesters are massacred in Tiananmen Square, China
The Hungarian round table talks begin
- July** *Wojciech Jaruzelski is elected President by the National Assembly*
Mikhail Gorbachev declares that the USSR will no longer interfere in the internal affairs of Eastern Europe
- August** *Tadeusz Mazowiecki, a prominent opposition intellectual, becomes the first non-communist premier in the Soviet bloc*
- September** *Hungary opens its border to the West*
- October** *Anticommunist protests begin in East Germany*
A new constitution proclaiming the virtues of democracy is adopted in Hungary
- November** *The Berlin Wall is opened*
Todor Zhivkov, the communist ruler of Bulgaria, is removed from power
Protests begin in Prague against communist rule
- December** *The overthrow of Nicolae Ceaușescu is accompanied by bloodshed*
Václav Havel is elected President of Czechoslovakia