

Institute of National Remembrance

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COLLECTED CONTENT: Martial Law in Poland 1981—1983

13 December marks the anniversary of introduction of Martial Law in Poland. An authoritarian government, led by General Wojciech Jaruzelski and the Military Council of National Salvation (WRON), introduced severe political oppression in an attempt to crush political opposition in 1981.



ARTICLE by Karol Nawrocki, Ph.D: The Night of Martial Law

Forty-one years ago, the Communist junta brought tanks onto the streets of Poland. Today we are restoring dignity to the victims and sending a clear message to the criminals: you cannot sleep peacefully.

Martial Law at the behest of the Kremlin

One of the key meetings regarding the developments of 1981 took place near the border of the People's Republic of Poland. On 3 April, Stanisław Kania and Wojciech Jaruzelski met the Soviet leaders in Brest to discuss the situation.

“We are all very worried about the further developments in Poland,” said Leonid Brezhnev early in April. The Soviet dignitaries made it clear to the Polish communists that there were waiting for decisive action concerning the opposition and Solidarity.

[Read more: Martial Law at the behest of the Kremlin](#)

The world is watching. Foreign reactions to the pacification of the “Wujek” mine

During the pacification of the “Wujek” coal mine in Katowice, on

December 16, 1981, six miners died from the bullets shot by officers of the special ZOMO unit. Three more died from bullet wounds. It was the bloodiest episode of the Martial Law.

Pope John Paul II, during his homily after the Angelus on December 20, 1981, not only entrusted Poland to the protection of the Mother of God, but also asked for expressions of solidarity with the Polish nation - having the right to live in peace and respect for human rights - and called for a special prayer for the killed, wounded and arrested.

[Read more](#)

Polish Months, December 1981

On December 13, 1981 the Military Council of National Salvation, which is headed by General Wojciech Jaruzelski, imposed martial law in Poland. On this day, the hopes of millions of Poles were crushed, while the chance of introducing democratic changes was lost for many years. For thousands of people and their families, martial law brought great suffering - isolation in internment camps, imprisonment, loss of employment, and numerous other repressions; what is more, tens of innocent citizens lost their lives.

[Read more: Polish Months, December 1981](#)

The genesis of Martial Law

The signing of successive agreements between the striking workers and representatives of the authorities of the People's Republic of Poland in Szczecin, Gdańsk, and Jastrzębie led to an enormous eruption of enthusiasm and hope throughout Polish society. Within a few weeks, the spontaneously organized structures of NSZZ "Solidarity" accrued millions of members.

[Read more: The genesis of Martial Law](#)

“Solidarity” on hit lists

The Solidarity Union, from the beginning of its existence, caught the attention of the entire world. It quickly became the symbol of freedom, thus causing the introduction of martial law to be widely condemned.

[Read more](#)

[See also: Reactions of Poles abroad and the world to the imposition of martial law in Poland on December 13th, 1981](#)

[Educational campaign "Victims of Martial Law. Light the Light of Freedom" in 2022](#)

[Educational campaign "Victims of Martial Law. Light the Light of Freedom" in 2021](#)

[Educational campaign "Victims of Martial Law. Light the Light of Freedom" in 2020](#)

[Educational campaign "Victims of Martial Law. Light the Light of Freedom" in 2019](#)

[See video clip: Martial Law in Poland](#)

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