

Agent Bolek

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Three important books have recently been published about Lech Wałęsa, world famous "Solidarity" leader and, later, President of Poland. Paweł Zyzak's impishly shocking *Lech Wałęsa - idea i historia. Biografia polityczna legendarnego przywódcy "Solidarności" do 1988 roku* [Lech Wałęsa: Ideology and history: A political biography of the legendary leader of „Solidarity” until 1988] (Cracow: Arcana, 2009) is an irreverent attempt to demolish the legend. The work is mammoth and laboriously annotated with a plethora of primary sources cited. However, its most iconoclastic parts, concerning Wałęsa's private life with the allegations of irreligiousness, rowdiness, and an illegitimate child, are based on oral interviews with sometimes anonymous sources who grew up with the future Nobel Peace Prize winner in a small village in Pomerania. Some of the anonymous sources have voluntarily revealed themselves since, thus lending more credibility to their allegations. Yet, equally controversial part of Zyzak's book, regarding the 1970s and 1980s, is heavily indebted to the research of two very serious scholars, Sławomir Cenckiewicz and Piotr Gontarczyk, who specialize in unmasking the secrets of the Communist secret police.

Cenckiewicz and Gontarczyk first published their magisterial *SB a Lech Wałęsa: Przyczynek do biografii* [The Security Service and Lech Wałęsa: A Contribution to His Biography] (Gdańsk, Warsaw, and Cracow: IPN, 2008). This tome contains about 300 pages of astute analysis and as many pages of declassified top secret documents. Soon after, Cenckiewicz abridged their work as *Sprawa Lecha Wałęsy* [The case of Lech Wałęsa] (Poznań: Zysk i ska, 2008). The former is an exhaustive scholarly monograph intended mainly for historians. The latter work is aimed at the popular reader. The reason why Cenckiewicz appears as its sole author has to do with the combusive controversy which erupted following the publication of the earlier work. Following hysterical attacks on the authors by mostly post-Communist and liberal apologists of Lech Wałęsa, Cenckiewicz demonstratively quit a top post at Poland's Institute of National Remembrance (IPN), the main depository of the former Communist secret police archives. Gontarczyk retained his job at the IPN but now keeps a low profile.

What's the uproar all about? The authors show unequivocally that between 1970 and 1976 Lech Wałęsa was registered by the Communist secret police as its Secret Collaborator (*tajny współpracownik* -- TW). His codename was "Bolek," a diminutive from Boleslaus. Most documents concerning "Bolek" were destroyed. However, the remaining materials strongly suggest that he was most active between December 1970 and December 1972. His activity coincided with the anti-Communist strikes and riots on the Baltic Sea board in general, and Gdańsk in particular, and their aftermath. Wałęsa had been on the strike committee in December 1970. Almost immediately he was recruited to denounce his anti-Communist friends. He accepted financial remuneration for his deeds. After a while, however, Wałęsa became disenchanted with both the political situation in the Polish People's Republic and collaboration with the secret police. He quit informing. The secret police de-registered him accordingly. From the empirical point of view this

process has been proven beyond any reasonable doubt in *The Security Service and Lech Wałęsa* and *The Case of Lech Wałęsa*.

The Security Service (*Służba Bezpieczeństwa* -- SB) attempted to recruit Wałęsa once again when he became active in the dissident Free Trade Unions (Wolne Związki Zawodowe – WZZ) in 1977. But he refused. Meanwhile, he also confessed about his previous unsavory activities to his friends of the WZZ. He promised them not to have any contacts with the secret police anymore. In fact, his dissident superiors explicitly forbade him to agree to talk. Yet, Wałęsa continued to meet with the SB men occasionally at their request, which created a precedent. He got used to his interrogators. He got used to a peculiar game. He would take advantage of it on a larger scale when, at the behest of the WZZ leader Bogdan Borusewicz, Wałęsa took over the leadership of the strike at the Gdańsk shipyard in August 1980. What resulted, of course, was a Polish national liberation movement masking as Independent, Self-Governed Trade Union “Solidarity”.

From its inception, Wałęsa was a moderate, centrist figure. He always played his cards coyly. He frequently deceived both his friends and enemies. And he was a superb self-promoter. In the power struggles that ensued within “Solidarity”, its leader crushed the weak and discarded the superfluous. His populism was unmatched. When necessary, he played the card of radicalism. And then he would promptly backtrack. Almost invariably his games would culminate in a compromise with the stronger party. For example, at the request of the Communist management, Wałęsa terminated the August strike prematurely, agreeing only to accept a pay raise, and abandoning the postulate of a free trade union. Only a determined surge by Anna Walentynowicz and Alina Pieńkowska saved the strike. The women bodily blocked the dockers from leaving, shamed them, and appealed to their sense of solidarity with the workers from other enterprises who had struck in support of their shipyard friends but now were being abandoned. The dockers listened and continued until they forced the Communists to allow them to establish “Solidarity.” Wałęsa became the head of the union.

For some, his centrism, moderation, and propensity to compromise were the signs of anti-radicalism, retarding the progress of the liberation movement, and, indeed, kow-towing to the Communists. Meanwhile, Wałęsa attempted to be everything for everyone. A rightist one evening, he supported the left the following morning. And then he would invariably stress his centrism. Many were confused by his pragmatism devoid of any ideas. But, according to him, it expedited the cause of “Solidarity.” Others took a less charitable view. They saw his actions as either a rotten compromise or dictatorial inclinations or even secret police covert work (*agentura*).

Here both the insufficient number of documents and a strange stonewalling by the leader of “Solidarity” allow for a number of interpretations. The brief for the prosecution is that Wałęsa was possibly an agent. The brief for the defense is that he was not at all. An impartial judge, basing himself on available documents, can conclude that, in the 1980s, Wałęsa skirted dangerously close to treason but that was just a tactical game to stay politically relevant and support “Solidarity.”

For example, after the Communist imposed marital law and arrested him in December 1981, Wałęsa, talking in his customary disjointed manner (and a transcript is extant), bragged to his secret police goxies that he had gotten rid of the “extremists” in the “Solidarity” leadership. Tactically, he ascribed to himself those characteristics and attitudes that the Communists wanted to see in him at the time. He negotiated with

General Wojciech Jaruzelski as an underling. He even signed his public plea to the general as "Lance corporal Wałęsa." He says now that he was playing a game. This is obvious.

The problem is that the Communists dictated the rules. To remain on the political scene, Wałęsa had to continuously make himself valuable to them. But he had to stop short of selling himself out. If he had, he would have been rejected by "Solidarity" supporters and his utility for the regime would have disappeared. The objective was to avoid becoming superfluous. So Wałęsa talked with the secret police; he stayed in the game. He accepted the Communist false wooing and broken promises; but he kept dating them without giving in. Until 1989, however, the leader of "Solidarity" refrained from fully consuming the union.

The aforementioned mechanisms are laid bare in both *The Security Service and Lech Wałęsa* and *The Case of Lech Wałęsa*. Therefore one should resolutely reject the charge that he was a secret police agent after 1976. So-called Communist support for Wałęsa against his rivals in the leadership of „Solidarity” served mostly the interests of the Warsaw regime. The Communists plainly viewed him as less dangerous than some of his "Solidarity" peers. Thus, the secret police undercut them in clandestine operations.

Of course, if the utility of Wałęsa had ended, the Communists would have either retired or disappeared him. But because he stayed in the game as a centrist, he was a lesser evil to them. Still, the SB considered him an enemy throughout because he did not sell out "Solidarity" and did not join the official, Communist-controlled unions. Instead, in 1989, Wałęsa made an unequal political deal with them. He resolved to become their junior partner in a Communist-led regime which emerged from openly falsified elections, where only 35% of the seats were open for democratic contest and the rest guaranteed to the Communists. Widely touted as a "free election", in a long run, the vote was a victory for the Moscow-backed regime which, thus, was able to transition to post-Communism.

If that sounds complicated, Wałęsa's affairs became positively Byzantine after 1989. Having quarreled with „Solidarity" leftists and liberals, Wałęsa feigned a right-wing shift to be elected the President of Poland. Once in office, he jettisoned the right and banked on the post-Communists, members of the Security Service and military intelligence in particular. Among some of the more astounding aberrations, as the documents discovered by Cenckiewicz and Gontarczyk prove, is the caper where the Communist secret police officers, who had persecuted Wałęsa as his case handlers in the 1980s, weaseled their way into the President's good graces to become his personal bodyguards. Later, the same officers purged the secret police archives from the documents regarding Wałęsa's stint as a snitch in the early 1970s to cover up his past. The operation was halted by the civilian post-Communists who appointed new Poland's rightist secret servicemen to protect the archives from Wałęsa's ex-SB minions. Perhaps it would be best to characterize the new secret servicemen as law-abiding professionals who happened to be conservative in distinction to the cynical old hands trained by the KGB.

In any event, after 1989, as far as the case of "Bolek," law was routinely violated, documents falsified, materials destroyed, and opponents persecuted. Further, in 1992, a nefarious kabala under Wałęsa's tutelage overthrew a center-right government who, in legally fulfilling an act of the parliament, revealed the names of the former Communist

secret police agents still in power at that time, including “Bolek”. The presidential coup was probably the moral nadir of post-Communist Poland.

The Security Service and Lech Wałęsa and *The Case of Lech Wałęsa* amply document the history of deception, theft, and destruction of the documents of treason. The perpetrators aimed at preserving the angelic myth of the first leader of “Solidarity” and the first democratically elected President of post-Communist Poland. This is a disservice to freedom and democracy which are predicated on openness and transparency. Wałęsa’s great contributions to the nation’s independence are beyond any doubt. An apology for the sins of his youth would have solved the case a long time ago and silenced his detractors. The coverup has been foolish and served mostly the interests of the post-Communists who are vitally interested in hiding their own past. They have been shrewdly hiding behind Wałęsa. However, soon scholars like Gontarczyk and Cenckiewicz will put the spotlight on them. Poland is in the process of coming to grips with its totalitarian past and nothing can reverse the tide.

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Piotr Gontarczyk and Sławomir Cenckiewicz, *SB a Lech Wałęsa: Przyczynek do biografii* (Gdańsk, Warszawa i Kraków: IPN, 2008).

Sławomir Cenckiewicz, *Sprawa Lecha Wałęsy* (Poznań: Zysk i ska, 2008)

Paweł Zyzak, *Lech Wałęsa - idea i historia. Biografia polityczna legendarnego przywódcy "Solidarności" do 1988 roku* (Cracow: Arcana, 2009).