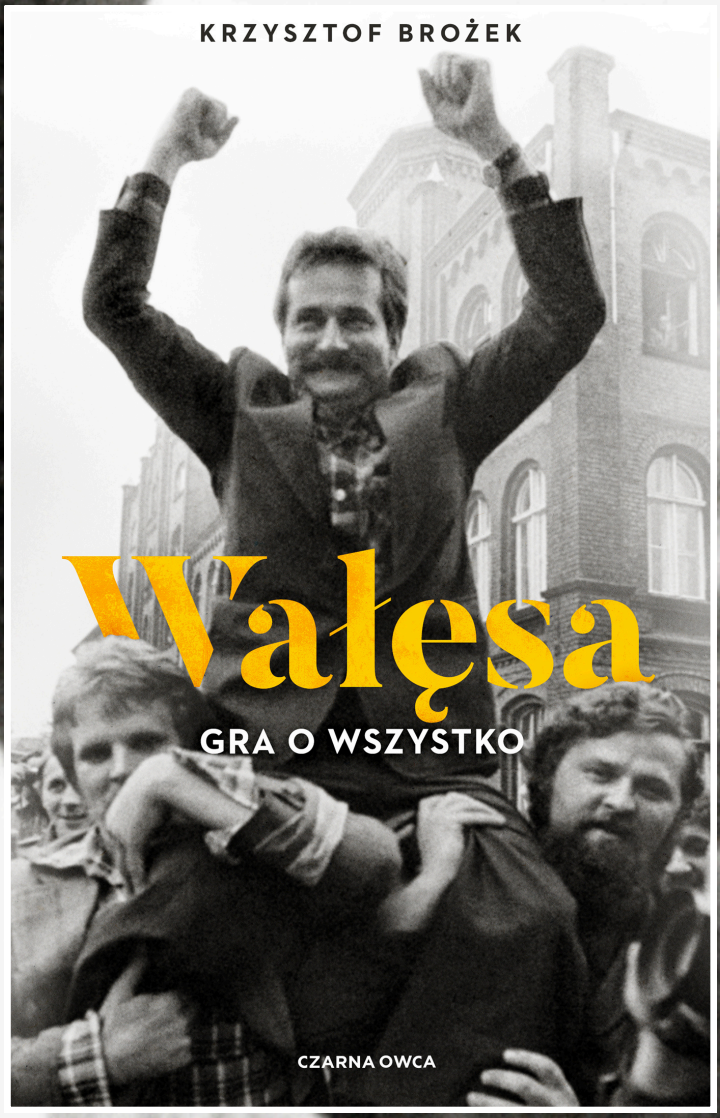


Krzysztof Brożek

Wałęsa. The Highest Stake

Synopsis, Bio & Excerpts

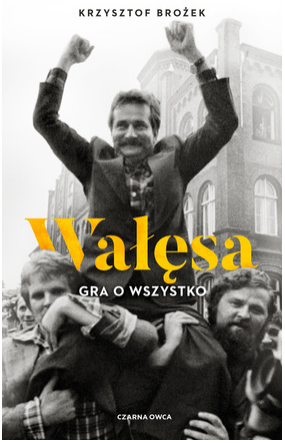
Krzysztof Brożek

About the author

Krzysztof Brożek is a historian, writer, screenwriter, and director. He has produced documentary films for Discovery History Channel, TVP, and TVN and co-authored several notable historical works, including *Nowa Huta. ENTER* and Solidarność Walcząca. Brożek is also the author of one of the most controversial journalistic investigations in recent years in Poland: Upadek. Historia prałata Henryka Jankowskiego.

Wałęsa The Highest Stake
Krzysztof Brożek

Biography



November 2022
856 pages

It is hard to imagine a more complex and nuanced biography of a modern politician.

Electrician from a peasant family, simple worker. Leader of Solidarity who defeated communism, Nobel Peace Prize laureate. Or, as others would have it, a megalomaniac and manipulator. A hero to some, while to others a usurper who rose to power on the backs of strikers and accepted no one beside him at the top. Surrounded by a large family, but in reality largely absent, both in his own home and in the lives of his loved ones. With his presidency came further questions: Was Lech Wałęsa a skilled statesman or a puppet in the hands of others?

There are many myths about him. In Krzysztof Brożek's biography, people who used to know Lech Wałęsa quite well reveal things about him they have never told anyone before. Which myths will prove to be true, which are lies, and which will forever remain unverifiable legends?

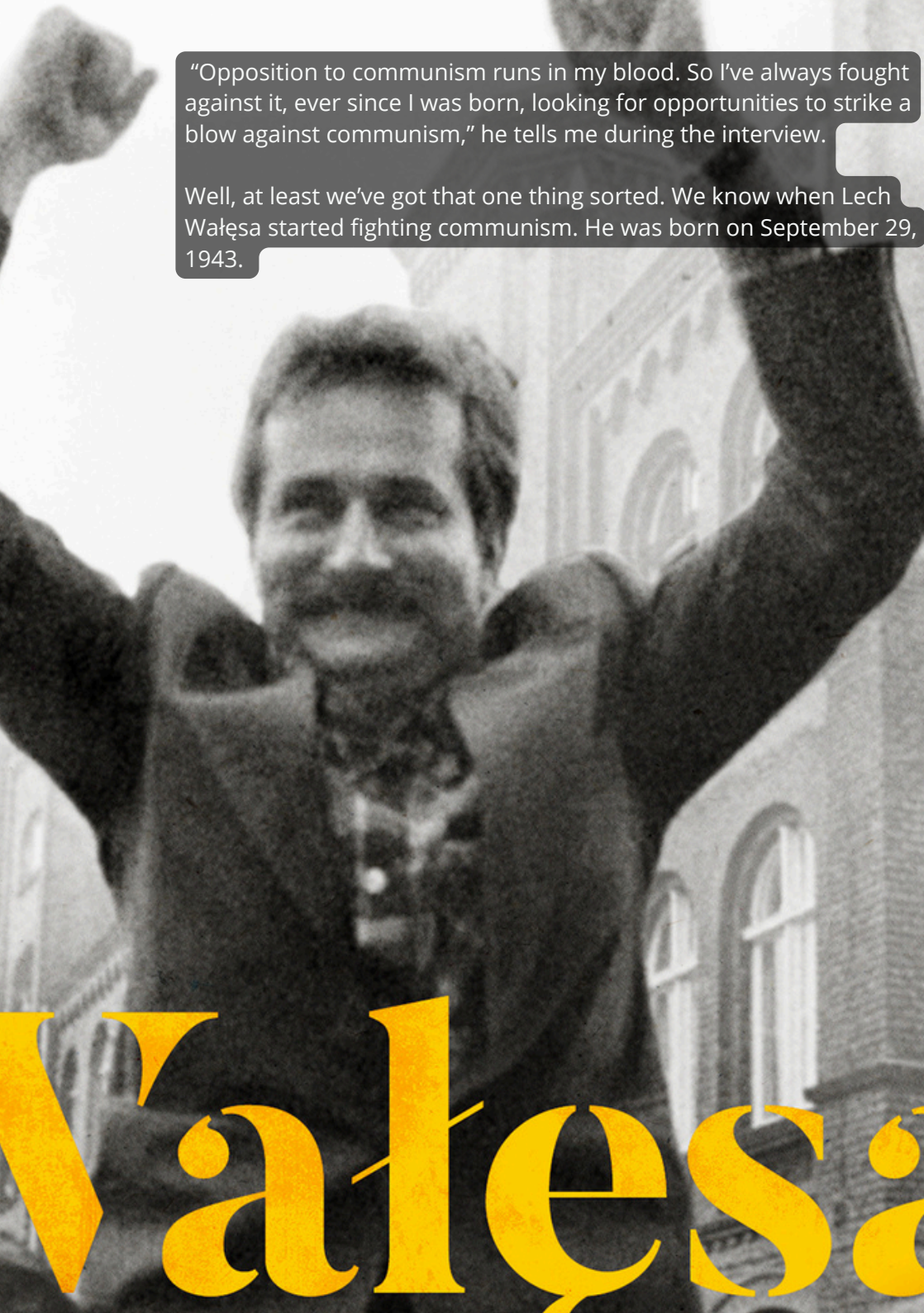
Ten years of research; over a hundred interviews; piles of archival documents and unpublished memoirs; numerous, mutually exclusive clues, all in order to understand someone who still eludes judgment.

The man, the politician, the legend. One and only: Lech Wałęsa

It was supposed to be a democracy, but now everyone blurts out whatever they want!
Lech Wałęsa

- The most comprehensive and complete biography of this complex figure.
- It juxtaposes the opposing views of Wałęsa—those of his supporters and his critics.
- It challenges most other books about Wałęsa: it is neither a hagiography nor a defamation, but reliable journalism based on ten years of research.

- **The author is open to cutting or adapting parts of the text to make it suitable for foreign readers.**



"Opposition to communism runs in my blood. So I've always fought against it, ever since I was born, looking for opportunities to strike a blow against communism," he tells me during the interview.

Well, at least we've got that one thing sorted. We know when Lech Wałęsa started fighting communism. He was born on September 29, 1943.

Wałęsa

LECH WAŁĘSA. THE HIGHEST STAKE
Synopsis by Kaja Gucio

Mustachioed strike leader raising a hand in a victorious gesture, as the communist regime begins to crumble; president of a large European country, brushing shoulders with the powers that be; extravagantly dressed octogenarian in Bonoesque orange-tinted glasses, still energetic and sprite, traveling the world and charming audiences with his unique, earthy style. Trade union activist, entangled in a dangerous game with the communist secret service; would-be dictator almost blinded by power, ruthless and willing to sacrifice everything in the name of his own ambition; elderly gentleman unable to keep up with current affairs, yet desperately craving attention, unaware that hardly anyone listens to his ramblings... Which of these images is closest to the truth? All of them? None? Or perhaps they are all just puzzle pieces and only when put together do they form the portrait of a very complex man who, one way or another, shaped the world we live in today?

In his book *Wałęsa. The Highest Stake*, Krzysztof Brożek attempts to cut through the thick fog of legend and political disputes. The author spent a decade collecting material: he spoke to over a hundred people, searched archives, pored over diaries and previously unpublished testimonies. The result of all that work is a monumental biography, neither hagiographic nor condemnatory. Brożek does not attempt to build a new monument for Wałęsa nor tear down existing ones; rather, he shows a man full of paradoxes who cannot be summed up in simple formulas. It is precisely this tension between legend and reality, between the icon and the flesh-and-blood human being, that defines the narrative of his account.

The story begins with Wałęsa's early years: his childhood in a peasant family and youth in Gdańsk, where he worked as an electrician in a shipyard. Even then, as Brożek suggests, the traits that would later prove decisive were already apparent: ambition, stubbornness, a deep need to stand out and have an impact on those around him. When he joined the anti-communist opposition in the 1970s and later participated in organizing strikes, he became one of the leaders of the nascent Solidarity movement. This path culminated in August 1980, with Wałęsa leading the strike at the Gdańsk Shipyard and quickly becoming a symbol of rebellion against the communist authorities. Brożek recounts those events with journalistic accuracy, while also acknowledging that they instantly became the stuff of myth: stories about "jumping over the fence" and a charismatic worker who single-handedly overthrew the regime became the foundation of Wałęsa's legend, even though they were not always entirely truthful.

In the following chapters, Brożek guides the reader through the years of political transformation. Wałęsa is one of the main architects of change, participating in the Round Table talks, shaping the new political order, and finally becoming Polish president. The author shows both his triumphs, such as the unique ability to rally the public, his determination and courage, as well as failures, including the lack of political support, conflicts with former allies and chaotic leadership style. Once his tenure as president ended, Wałęsa may have lost actual power but he never disappeared from public life. On the contrary, he became media commentator, blogger, and, over time, a somewhat eccentric figure, balancing on the razor-thin edge between self-creation and self-parody.

Also explored in the book is Wałęsa's private life. Brożek demonstrates how Lech's political career and historical role impacted the whole family: his constant absence, emotional distance, the complicated relationship with his children and wife. In this respect, the biography takes on an almost tragic aspect – Wałęsa seems to have paid a heavy personal price indeed for his public achievements.

The most controversial issue in the book is Wałęsa's alleged collaboration with the communist secret police, which came to be known as the "Bolek affair." Brożek does not purport to settle this debate: he cites documents, graphological expert opinions, contradictory witness accounts and Wałęsa's own vehement denials. He demonstrates that the controversy surrounding "Bolek" has essentially become a battle over a symbol – an attempt to invalidate the myth or defend it. On a broader scale, the author suggests that many elements of Wałęsa's biography cannot be verified today because they have been obscured by propaganda narratives, political sentiment and media clamor.

Brożek paints a psychological portrait of the protagonist, a man full of contradictions. A charismatic leader on the one hand, capable of inspiring crowds, willing to take risks and fight for his ideas. On the other, often described as megalomaniacal, impulsive, prone to manipulation and obsessively focused on his own image. The author withholds his own judgment and instead demonstrates how the very same traits helped Wałęsa achieve enormous success while at the same time constantly embroiling him in conflict.

Another interesting aspect is Wałęsa's image in popular culture. Brożek notes that over the years, the former president has made the transition from a heroic historical figure to a globally recognizable personality - no longer as a political leader, however, but rather as an eccentric celebrity, a "relic" of a bygone era. His extravagant outfits are now iconic, especially when paired with the picture of Virgin Mary pinned to his lapel at all times, "Constitution" t-shirts or dark glasses. A peculiar aesthetic of "pop culture Wałęsa" emerged – at once heroic and ironic, historical and viral, most likely a product of contemporary culture transforming former heroes into figures of nostalgia and pastiche.

Indeed, Wałęsa has long ceased to be just a man and became a battleground for memory. For some, he remains the symbol of courage and independence, while for others, he embodies the disenchantment with the transformation. The dispute over Wałęsa is, in essence, a dispute over Polish history, the meaning of the political reforms and over whether 1989 was a victory or a bitter compromise. Thus, Wałęsa. The Highest Stake not only reconstructs the life of an individual, but also exposes the mechanisms in which history blends with mythology, and mythology with pop culture. In Brożek's interpretation, Wałęsa is neither a hero nor an anti-hero, but rather a mirror in which Polish collective memory is reflected: fickle, emotional, prone to simplification.

Over time, the flesh-and-blood man has given way to a symbol that everyone can interpret as they wish – and who, as his ironic half-smile seems to suggest, is quite aware of his complex, yet lasting legacy. Not unlike legendary Rocky, this old fighter, though battered and tired, is not ready to leave the ring quite yet.

Kaja Gucio is a written and conference translator, as well as the author of scholarly articles and reviews. She has translated several monographs into English, including works on the Łódź and Warsaw ghettos, along with numerous studies in history, sociology, art history, and literary studies. Her translations into Polish focus on fiction, poetry, and non-fiction, including works by Ernest Hemingway, Percival Everett, and Barbara Kingsolver. She hopes to one day master Finnish.

Krzysztof Brożek
WAŁĘSA. THE HIGHEST STAKE

Samples translated by Kaja Gucio

I am a simple worker, I've never read a book in my life.
Lech Wałęsa to Oriana Fallaci

I liked what the Chinese said: the color of the cat is not important, what matters is how effective the cat is.
Lech Wałęsa

Who will win the fight? The chess grandmaster or the boxing champion?
Lech Wałęsa

Teenage Izabela emerges from her family's cottage in Popowo. She is holding the hand of the eldest of three barefoot boys trotting behind her, all several years her junior – Edward, Stanisław, and Lech. The walls of the cottage are wattle and daub, whitewashed with lime, chickens and ducks huddle together on the sprawling grassy front yard. The girl heads on, urging her brothers to follow. They hurry several dozen yards through the tall grass, across a small grove, then deeper into the forest, away from the house.
(...)

Seventy years later, January 2020. Lech Wałęsa sits in his spacious office behind a large desk. He is wearing a gray T-shirt with the word "Constitution" printed on it and a black leather gilet that looks like a fishing vest, to which he has pinned a badge with the Virgin Mary. His eyes are hidden behind dark sunglasses, similar to those Bono usually wears.

"Opposition to communism runs in my blood. (...) So I've always fought against it, ever since I was born, looking for opportunities to strike a blow against communism," he tells me during the interview.

Well, at least we've got that one thing sorted. We know when Lech Wałęsa started fighting communism. He was born on September 29, 1943. (...)

"Have you always been this religious?"

“Oh, yes. Always. (...) The only time I strayed from my faith was between the ages of seventeen and eighteen. For a short while I started living life to the fullest. Parties, girls, alcohol. Then something happened. One day, I was freezing, tired, and looking for a place to sit down. And since in the area there was only a church, I went inside. I sat down in a pew, surrounded by warmth, and immediately felt so good that from that moment on I stopped being a slacker.”

(...)

This is how Lech Wałęsa would later describe that period of his life:

“I was ashamed to look my mother in the eye. It was as if she expected something from me, something I was supposed to achieve. Years went by, and I hadn’t achieved anything significant. I was stalling, stuck in a rut, for far too long. Until I turned twenty-four.

(...)

“That first time I walked into the shipyard in 1967, I felt terribly confused. (...) When they took me to the ship for the first time, when I got lost on the multi-tiered makeshift scaffold in the holds and couldn’t find the exit, I felt that I was just one of many thousands in there. It was upsetting, but I couldn’t turn back, I hate turning back.”

(...)

In his biography *The Road to Hope*, Wałęsa reflects on the moment he met his future wife: “Behind the flower kiosk counter I saw a clever face, hazel eyes and a long braid. I remembered that delicately teasing, girlish look for a long time.”

(...)

Lech Wałęsa’s life changes in a single, albeit very important, detail. He is in love. In 1984, Danuta told the interviewer: „You could say that in those early days, we existed only for each other. He was a very serious man, always pensive, always composed. It was difficult to get him to reveal his thoughts. (...) He was my first love and has remained so ever since.”

(...)

Sometimes three days are enough for a whole decade, and one day can determine the rest of your life.

[In 1970] Lech Wałęsa is twenty-seven and has been working at the Lenin Shipyard for three years.

(...)

The strike at the shipyard began on December 14 [1970].

(...)

Two shipyard workers are killed and eleven are wounded. (...) Other casualties on the Polish Coast during those days are very similar. Gunshots to the head, chest, and back.

(...)

Immediately after the shooting, shipyard workers carry the bodies of their colleagues away from the gate. Soldiers do not respond. Polish national flags appear on the gate and shipyard buildings.

(...)

Danuta Wałęsa:

"We were a young married couple and had no savings. A week before Christmas, when our baby was just two months old, my husband was taken away to an unknown location. We didn't know for how long they were taking him, or when he would be released. I was left on my own, with no support whatsoever!"

(...)

On that day, December 19, 1970, a new chapter opens in [Wałęsa's life]. New people appear around him. They are dangerous, they know what they want, and once they have you in their grasp, they won't let go easily. They are going to demand your hand, your heart, and your mind.

(...)

Recording made [by the communist government's secret police officer] during of the demonstration on December 18, 1979, includes Lech Wałęsa's speech:

(...)

"I am Lech Wałęsa, (...)... In December 1970, I was a member of the first and second strike committees at the Gdańsk Shipyard, (...). As such, I feel morally responsible for those who were killed, as well as for those who survived and trusted me."

(...)

At this point, someone standing very close to the microphone speaks clearly but calmly, as if addressing the secret police officer next to him: “I am proud of these people!”

(...)

Lech Wałęsa visits various departments and urges the workers to gather in a large room, probably the cafeteria. Out of a workforce of nearly 800, no more than 200 people listened to him.

(...)

Lech Wałęsa recalls that day in *The Road to Hope*: „We are going on strike. It was my first strike in some time. We announce it, I go to the management, I hand the director our notice. Everything is legal. And what happens? The management announces that due to some energy difficulties, everyone can go home, the cars are already waiting. And they took the entire workforce away. Everyone went home. They put an end to our strike.”

(...)

The spring of 1980 is a grueling time for the Wałęsas, and the events of those months teach Lech a valuable lesson. After his December speech, he becomes a recognizable figure in the community, but then more blows rain down on him. However, he has already proven himself to be a fast learner, drawing conclusions even from his failures.

One day, he would be known for what martial arts adepts are taught: when a strong blow comes, dodge it, get out of the way; but when you sense the right moment, pick up speed and strike back. Don’t look back at others while doing so. If some people don’t want you, go somewhere else, or better yet, create your own circle. Keep moving forward. Things would get better in the summer.

(...)

“Out of the blue, Leszek Wałęsa walks up behind the director. ‘Do you recognize me? I ‘ve spent ten years working at the shipyard and still consider myself a shipyard man (...) We’re going on a sit-in strike!’”

“Hooray!!!” Wałęsa shouts to the crowd.

And for Lech Wałęsa, this is the real beginning of the strike. August 14, 1980, 10:30 a.m. Not everyone knows him, but everyone joins in his resounding “Hurrah!!!”.

This is also the beginning of his astonishing career, the beginning of Lech Wałęsa as we know him today.

(...)

Against the red curtain hangs the Polish national emblem, the white eagle, along with sheets of paper bearing the words “Solidarity” and “21 times YES.” In the right-hand corner stands a large bust of Lenin, though the shipyard workers turned it slightly , so that its face is now turned toward the side wall. Legend has it that Lenin turned away by himself, to avoid watching the unfolding events.

(...)

Applause rings out most often whenever Andrzej Gwiazda and Alina Pienkowska speak, but chants of “Le-szek! Le-szek! Le-szek!” are growing in volume.

Wałęsa has become the face of this strike

(...)

After leaving the BHP (Health and Safety) Hall, Lech Wałęsa rushes to a small room to change his clothes, and now has a plaid shirt under his jacket. Immediately afterwards, two welders, Ryszard and Waldemar, grab him and carry him on their shoulders to gate number two. Arms raised high, huge smile on his face.

This is the day of his triumph.

He is thirty-seven. Thirteen years earlier, he arrived in Gdańsk penniless, looking for work. Ten years have passed since the tragic events of December of 1970, which brought such dramatic ramifications for him. Four years ago, he was expelled from the shipyard.

About two weeks ago, he came late to the strike that others had started.

Then he was jeered for ending the strike too hastily.

But now eighteen long days, like eighteen long rounds of a boxing match, are behind him. Was he stalling for time in this confrontation? Yes, he was. Not knowing what to do next, he raised his guard, retreated to the ropes, and waited for his opponent to tire out.

Did he cheat, landing banned punches below the belt? He did, and then quickly leapt back so that the referee wouldn’t notice.

But he also took the punches, including the banned ones, fell to the canvas and waited, afraid that he would be counted out and sent back to the corner.

Seven years earlier, he had already written a summary of his life: “My only and overriding goal is to raise my children properly and without conflict, I myself no longer matter – I have already lost my life in part.”

But then he got up again, shuffled across the deck and waited patiently, only to suddenly deliver one hook, followed by another. And then another, and another.

(...)

“We won the first round, but the second one will be tougher. Oh, much tougher, I’m actually quite scared of it. There are bound to be setbacks, someone is sure to try to lead us astray. But we won’t give in. Because we all take responsibility. Not me alone, but all of us together – that’s STRENGTH! That’s POWER! And we’ll do it!”

He pulls a few sheets of paper out of his pocket, raises them and shouts:

“I have it here in writing, all prisoners are going free. I would never sell people out! Oh ho-ho!

He is met with applause and chants of “Thank you! Thank you!”

And an ocean of upraised hands forming a V sign.

This is his day. And tomorrow remains unknown.

(...)

Years later, former communist leader Jaruzelski was keen to emphasize that he had imposed martial law [on December 13, 1981] to protect Poland from Russian intervention. However, historians have conflicting opinions on this matter.

(...)

[December 1981]

Police officers in helmets and with crowbars in their hands appear in the stairwell of the apartment building. They are about to break down the door; resistance is futile. (...) Lech is getting dressed, Danuta is packing the things he will need while in detention. She has already

become quite skilled at this, as noted even in the Kremlin reports. Wałęsa "had been arrested several times before, and his wife Danuta was used to packing his bag with the essentials he would need in prison."

(...)

There are thousands of internees, and the majority are sent to several dozen centers across the country. (...) That way, the government not only isolates the youngest, most capable, though less well-known activists, but also artificially reduces the total number of detainees. Only Lech Wałęsa is separated from the rest, kept in isolation. One could say that he is at the same time privileged and additionally oppressed. Cut off from the others, he has no idea what is happening in the country.

He becomes the subject codenamed 333.

(...)

The authorities announce Wałęsa's release from internment on a symbolic date – November 11, Polish Independence Day, banned under the communist regime. What motivated that decision? Was it meant as a nod to the public on the forbidden holiday? Or perhaps Jaruzelski waited to wait with the announcement until the death of Leonid Brezhnev, whom he "cherished and deeply respected" and whose anger he feared so much?

(...)

If the Round Table had a somewhat secret prehistory, even if it was actually instigated by Moscow, Washington, or the Vatican, it did nevertheless set off an avalanche of changes in Central Europe. While some of those changes were more peaceful than others, and some preserved communist influence to a greater or lesser extent, in the geopolitical sense, the countries of the former Soviet Bloc emerged, month by month, as democratic, capitalist, and multi-party states. With no political prisoners, no centrally controlled economy, and no censorship. Following Poland, other regimes fell like dominoes.

(...)

In Poland, the months of March, April, and May 1989 were marked by a tremendous surge in public enthusiasm. It was as if the nation had suddenly awakened from a long hibernation. Throughout April, regional citizens' committees began to spring up from the Citizens' Committee established in March in Gdańsk , attracting vast numbers

of people from various backgrounds. In addition to the workers' and farmers' Solidarity, these included Catholic Intellectual Clubs, church groups, and communities centered around legal and underground magazines. The upcoming election divided the more radical opposition: while Fighting Solidarity, the Polish Socialist Party (PPS) and the Freedom and Solidarity Movement (FMW) refused to participate, some members of the Independent Students' Association (NZS) and almost the entire Confederation of Independent Poland (KPN) decided to run.

(...)

Both posters, featuring Gary Cooper and Lech Wałęsa, will forever remain icons of our recent history, especially in such "visually-oriented" times as these. Both are testament to the power of myth and concise communication. Because in the collective consciousness, June 4 marks the end of one era and the beginning of another. This is also true for Wałęsa himself. Soon after June 4, the Sejm and Senate would be swarming with politicians with their own, ever-growing ambitions, but for the moment, in May, the entire election campaign rests solely on him, Lech Wałęsa. He is the opposition in Poland, and he is also Poland of 1989 to people in other countries.

(...)

June 4, 1989. There was one thing that neither the reformers from the Polish United Workers' Party (PZPR) nor their partners at the Round Table anticipated: that voters would not respect the negotiated 65-35 percent parity. At rallies, people were urged not only to vote for their own candidates, but also to cross out all those from the ruling party. That is why, on the morning of June 5, it turned out that Solidarity's victory was as enormous as the ruling party's defeat. Out of the 161 seats up for grabs in the Sejm, 160 went to opposition candidates, as did 99 out of the 100 available senatorial positions.

(...)

Lech Wałęsa launched his presidential campaign in a manner that was not particularly spectacular, but rather symbolic. He started in his hometown. When I meet with Ms. Regina, Wałęsa's cousin from the Popowo area, she tells me that at the very beginning of the campaign, he stopped by her yard. But he did not come into the house.

(...)

The presidential campaign is very intense. Wałęsa is often passive, he complains about various aches and pains, claims that he can't leave the house. But once he gets going, there is no stopping him.

(...)

Poles, unaccustomed to democracy, follow the campaign with great interest. It stirs up extreme emotions and creates a rift that is the root cause of many subsequent divisions in the Third Republic of Poland.

Meanwhile, Wałęsa makes a masterful move in the very end of the campaign, taking it to a level beyond the reach of his rivals. He leaves for the US.

(...)

In the middle of his campaign, Lech Wałęsa heads to the United States for two whole weeks. Numerous meetings, including rallies among the Polish diaspora, would be eclipsed by Wałęsa's address to the US Congress. The speech that would electrify the world.

(...)

On November 15, 1990, in a Congress chamber packed with Republicans and Democrats, Lech Wałęsa stood not as head of state, but as a symbol of change in Poland and throughout the whole of Central Europe. Before him, the only person to have spoken there while not holding any state office was Winston Churchill. Churchill, however, was a former prime minister, and he addressed the audience in the glory of a defender of England and Europe against Nazism.

(...)

When Lech Wałęsa began with the famous quote from the US Constitution, **"We, the people...,"** many of those present profoundly moved. With that single phrase, he brought together nations that had only recently been liberated from the yoke of communism, with the two-hundred-year history of American democracy.

He then went on to say, among other things:

"These are the words with which I want to begin my address. I do not need to remind anyone in this room where they come from. And I do not need to explain that I, an electrician from Gdańsk, also have the right to invoke them."

(...)

On December 22, 1990, he takes the oath of office in the Sejm. Standing next to him is his wife Danuta, dressed in a black suit, wearing a black hat with a veil on her head.

"I was so anxious for my husband not to make a mistake. After all, it was crucial that he recite the oath without stuttering or error, so that he could begin his term well. And it did go well. I was relieved."

(...)

In the spring of 1991 (...) [Lieutenant] Bollin is researching materials related to the December massacre. In the course of his query, he also comes across reports from secret collaborators who aided the communist secret police in cracking down on those involved in the events. He is particularly struck by the activity of secret collaborator (TW) "Bolek" (...). Based on the logbook and memos from a conversation with a young worker, Lech Wałęsa (dated December 19, 1970), he is able to decode the identity of the mysterious "Bolek." This comes as a real shock to the lieutenant.

He searches for other reports by TW "Bolek" and finds a total of fifteen in the eleven files of the case.

(...)

The documents are sent to Warsaw. There are three days left until the vote of no confidence in Prime Minister Olszewski's government. The race against time continues.

Lech Wałęsa has only these three days to stop the course of events. This is no longer a matter of some political scheming or arranging a cushy job for someone. This is about a place in history, which is why Lech Wałęsa must fight this battle on his own. For him, this is yet another showdown where everything is at stake.

(...)

Exactly three years have passed since the memorable election of June 4, when posters inspired by the movie *High Noon* appeared on the streets of Warsaw. Also at high noon, only this time in 1992, Lech Wałęsa seems to have laid down his arms. On that day, he issues a statement that reaches the Polish Press Agency.

Scarcely anyone remembers it today, including those who argue that if Wałęsa had at some point admitted his collaboration, people would have understood and so forth; that he would have been able to

put it behind him and rebuild his tarnished image. However, the general perception is that he never did so.

But that is not true. On June 4, 1992, around midday, someone forwarded a statement to the Polish Press Agency (PAP) on his behalf and signed by him. (...) Drawing on many sources, I have attempted to reconstruct the full text, which reads as follows:

After the failed strike at the shipyard in December 1970, I swore to God and to myself that I would continue to fight until communism was defeated. I served as the strike leader, and tried various approaches and methods of resistance. I was arrested many times. The first time, in December 1970, I signed three or four documents. I would probably have signed anything except agreeing to betray God and my homeland in order to get out and be able to keep fighting. They did not break me, and I never betrayed my ideals or my colleagues.

I fulfilled my oath and led us to victory. It is my wish that all materials, all interrogation reports, including the famous conversation with my brother, be published. I am sure that they will demonstrate the courageous struggle and methods that led to the victory over communism.

I have been putting it off until later because there are many more important and pressing issues to be resolved in our Homeland. But since the subject has been raised now, here you go. I am convinced that the story of my life and my path to victory could be instructive in every sense of the word. There is one more thing that needs to be addressed here: even the communists and the Security Service did not blackmail me with fabricated materials that are being circulated, because they knew then and still know now that it is simply not true. By choosing the path of collaboration, I would not have reached victory – defeating the Security Service and communism.

Signature

(...)

Voting. Jan Olszewski's government is dissolved by the deputies, however, no one is appointed as prime minister, let alone ministers.

(...)

Lech Wałęsa is seated between Mieczysław Wachowski and Andrzej Drzycimski. All three men burst out laughing.

They are roaring with laughter. They are practically cackling. It looks almost vulgar, yet somehow understandable. Suddenly, all the tension building up since it became clear that this would be a fight to the death has evaporated. (...) Now they are immensely relieved, Lech has won once again, even though downfall seemed so imminent.

In my opinion, this was Lech Wałęsa's final spectacular victory, albeit a Pyrrhic one. News of his name on the list [of secret collaborators of the Security Service] spread around the world and would come back to haunt him with increased force, or rather, it would keep coming back time and time again.

(...)

"The longer he was president, the more nervous and impulsive he became. (...) halfway through his term, he began to get irritated," writes Danuta. "My husband gradually lost touch with ordinary people. The same was true of his family. (...) I spoke to him about it and tried to make him see that he needed to go out to the people, talk to them, and listen to them. But he stopped listening, he stopped observing."

Lech Wałęsa lost his ability to communicate with the crowd. He had the kind of charisma that you can't just learn. It was a gift from fate. Did he lose it also by fate, or was it his own fault?

(...)

In the first round [of the 1995 presidential election], Lech Wałęsa lost to Aleksander Kwaśniewski by a margin of 33 to 35 percent. (...) Lech Wałęsa is not down for the count, but in boxing, the referee would look him in the eye to see if he can go on. Maybe he can, after all, he is a seasoned fighter. In the second round, on November 19, 1995, there was again only a three-point difference, forty-eight to just under fifty-two.

The winner is...

For the first time since 1980, in over fifteen years, Lech Wałęsa does not win.

As his wife concluded: "At the end of his term, my husband felt that he did not have enough support, that he might lose the election. And he did."

He had already lost some battles, but thus far won each war. Now he lost two battles and the war.

He returns to Gdańsk.

(…)

Lech Wałęsa's wife Danuta accurately predicted both his victory in 1990 and his defeat in 1995: "If you win the election, you will be president. If you lose, you won't."

(…)

Pride comes before a fall, as King Solomon supposedly said. Lech Wałęsa's campaign motto was:

There are many candidates, but there is only one Lech Wałęsa.

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