



Fall 1998

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David S. Mason

Butler University, dmason@butler.edu

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Recommended Citation

Mason, David S., "Political Research in Martial Law Poland" *IREX Frontline* / (Fall 1998): 8-8.

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The original publication appeared at:
Mason, David S. "Political Research in Martial Law Poland," *IREX Frontline*, vol. 3, no. 3 (Fall 1998), p. 8.

DOI: not available

Political Research in Martial Law Poland

By David S. Mason
*Professor of Political Science,
Butler University, and
IREX Long-Term Research
fellow, 1982*

INDIANAPOLIS—In early 1981, at the height of the Solidarity revolution, I was accepted by IREX to spend the spring 1982 semester in Warsaw for my project on the development of the workers' movement and the formation of Solidarity. My family and I were to fly to Poland just after Christmas of 1981. But on December 13, martial law was declared, and the Polish borders were sealed. I had taken a leave of absence from Butler University, and we had already rented out our house, so we were stranded.

IREX responded with its usual support and flexibility, agreeing to support my research at the British Library in London while I waited for an opportunity to enter Poland. In London, I found a treasure trove of Solidarity publications, which promised to keep me busy. Even though my Polish visa application was on hold in

Washington, I also applied for one at the Polish Embassy in London, with little expectation of any results. But within two weeks, the visa arrived (the Polish bureaucratic right hand not knowing what the left hand was doing?) and in early February I took off for Warsaw on a British Air flight with only a few passengers and most of the passenger cabin filled with cargo. I was one of the first Americans allowed entry into Poland after the declaration of martial law.

Like most IREX first-timers, I had only a vague notion of how to navigate the research libraries and archives of Poland, and the situation was complicated by the political restrictions on the University and the Academy of Sciences. But through the helpfulness of my sponsor, a sociologist at the University of Warsaw, I gradually began to meet people, establish contacts, conduct interviews, and ask questions.

It turned out that during the Solidarity period, the sociological community had become ex-



Solidarity demonstrators in front of gates to University of Warsaw on May 3, 1982. Photo by David Mason.

tremely active in conducting public opinion surveys, through the universities, the Academy, Solidarity, and even the Communist Party (the Polish United Workers Party). Many of these surveys had been reported in limited circulation publications, or were unlikely to see the light of day at all in the new circumstances. Thus, many of the academics responsible for the surveys were anxious to share them, in hopes that they would be analyzed and reported by someone.

Having the opportunity to explore these data, sometimes in printed form, and sometimes even on computers, I quickly scrapped my original research agenda to concentrate on gathering as many of the surveys as I could. They provided a revealing picture of Poland in a period of heretofore unprecedented turmoil and openness, and I published the results in my first book, *Public Opinion and Political Change in Poland* (Cambridge University Press, 1985). This was one of the first studies of the Soli-

darity period to examine the public's responses to the dramatic events of that period, as opposed to the political battles on high between Solidarity and the regime.

This exposure to public opinion research also led me in a new direction, as I began to do further work on popular attitudes in Poland, then in other East European countries, and then western countries as well. Over the last 10 years, I have coordinated the International Social Justice Project, a collaborative effort studying and comparing popular beliefs and attitudes about social and political justice in 13 countries, including eight post-communist states. All of this evolved from that one crucial research experience in Poland, sponsored by IREX. ❖

David Mason's 1982 exchange grant was made possible by the US Department of State and the National Endowment for the Humanities.



Solidarity demonstrators being teargassed and water-hosed by motorized riot police (ZOMO) in Castle Square, Warsaw, Poland on May 3, 1982. Photo taken illegally by IREX scholar David Mason.