The Transnational Scope of Western Labour's Solidarity with Solidarność

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Western solidarity with Solidarność had a surprisingly limited transnational scope. It was mainly organized within particular nation states and coloured by domestic factors. If there was international collaboration, this was mainly bilateral with Poland, and not multilateral between different Western countries. International organizations involved in the solidarity campaign, such as the ICFTU, the WCL, and the ILO, could hardly break open borders within the Atlantic world. The limited transnational character of the solidarity with Solidarność is in contrast with the scope of other social movements focusing on an international issue. The anti-apartheid movement, for instance, has even been called a key factor in the development of present-day global politics. Two possible reasons for this contrast are explored. A first major difference is that anti-apartheid was a grassroots movement, while solidarity with Poland was coordinated by old social movements, such as Church organizations, and, especially, trade unions. The article argues, however, that this hardly accounts for the different transnational scope. A much more important explanation is the fact that anti-apartheid, focusing on the South, did not cause much controversy, while solidarity, focusing on the East, interfered with Western trade unions' programmes and contacts. As a consequence, the amount and nature of support for Solidarność differed between the different countries. The same applies other East–West movements, such as the peace movement.

I KEYWORDS

Introduction

The Swedish sociologist Håkan Thörn, a specialist on globalization and social movements, considers the anti-apartheid movement as an 'important historical case for the analysis of present-day global politics'. The movement, which was initiated in 1956 and which had intensified by the end of the 1970s following the Soweto Uprising in 1976 and the death of Steve Biko in 1977, created transnational networks, organizations, and collective action forms that were important not only for South Africa or

for the development of national social movements, but also for transnational political culture. Thörn perceives continuity between the three decades of protest against the apartheid regime, and the present protest against neoliberal globalization, climate change, and so on. Many of the current anti-globalization movement's features, such as transnational mobilization, the use of the media, and the mobility of activists, had been developed in the previous decades, the anti-apartheid movement being a key factor. Networks and organizations prevailed — at least partly — and took on a new guise to protest against other phenomena.¹

The anti-apartheid movement was not the only international protest group which emerged prior to the so-called era of globalization that arose after the Cold War. Solidarność also brought many people in the Western world onto the streets, both during the sixteen months of the independent Polish trade union's legal existence from the summer of 1980 onwards, and even more so after Jaruzelski proclaimed martial law on 13 December 1981, arresting thousands of Solidarność members and banning the free and independent trade union. Just as with the anti-apartheid movement, Solidarność remained an issue in Western social movements and politics for years. In 1984 it led to Poland's withdrawal from the International Labour Organization (ILO); in 1986, the still forbidden trade union joined the two non-communist international trade union federations, the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU) and the World Confederation of Labour (WCL); and in 1987, American Congress gave \$1,000,000 in support of Solidarność — the first of three generous donations which would, in all, total the sum of \$4,000,000.

However, the transnational scope of Western solidarity with Solidarność seems to differ from that of the anti-apartheid movement. Stefan Berger states that the reaction of Western European trade unions towards Solidarność was extremely varied (instead of being unanimous about the legitimacy of the case) and coloured by national factors (instead of being characterized by a transnational consciousness). Some countries and unions supported the independent Polish union explicitly and enthusiastically, while others were much more reluctant or, in some cases, even hostile towards it. 'These views depended on political, institutional, and cultural determinants, and had much to do with the national circumstances of particular unions and their representatives.'²

This difference in the transnational character of two of the most important social movements of the 1980s is striking. Western solidarity with Poland mainly came about through labour movements, Solidarność being a trade union itself. The labour movement had been developing transnational networks for decades and this had led to, among other things, good institutionalized international working relations (via international trade union confederations and the ILO). Still, reaction to the crisis in Poland was coloured much more by national elements than was the case with the anti-apartheid movement, although the latter was a much less institutionalized grass-roots movement. Indeed, the anti-apartheid movement can be considered a so-called new social movement, arising in the 1960s and 1970s, mobilizing groups such as students, women, and gays, and focusing on issues such as the environment, peace, and the Third World (contrary to old social movements, originating in the late nineteenth century and mobilizing workers (trade unions) and worshippers (Church organizations)).

How do we explain the paradox of institutional labour movements behaving in a less transnational fashion than a new social movement? This is the question that this article aims at answering. First, we will look at the reaction to *Solidarność* from the viewpoint of a number of Western countries, giving some common elements which determined particular attitudes. Afterwards, we will focus on the transnational character of the Western solidarity movement. The concept of transnationality is understood as being very close to internationality, but with a sense of movement, interpenetration, and development.³ We will further distinguish it, analyzing both bilateral contacts (i.e. between Polish unionists and a national union) and institutional transnationalism (i.e. within international organizations in the West). Finally, some elements that might explain the difference with the anti-apartheid movement will be examined.

In order to address these issues, a number of important primary sources are deployed; a comparative discussion of secondary literature is also offered. There is a particular focus on Polish sources, such as the correspondence of *Solidarność* representatives in exile to the Polish underground (confiscated by the secret police and declassified by the Institute of National Remembrance in Warsaw), their periodicals in Western countries, and a dozen interviews. They are very interesting since they comment on Western attitudes from a comparative perspective. Secondary literature, by contrast, focuses mostly on a particular country. Comparison or deeper analysis — such as on the transnational level — has not yet been done in a systematic way.

National reaction to *Solidarność*

Reaction to *Solidarność* differed across borders. Only a limited number of trade union confederations were really hostile towards *Solidarność*. The best examples are the Norwegian LO and the Austrian ÖGB. The LO was one of the last Western European trade union confederations to recognize *Solidarność* in the autumn of 1980, after which they still maintained contact with official Polish trade unions in 1981, met with Jaruzelski in the spring of 1982 (ignoring Poland's international isolation after the proclamation of martial law), and was the only trade union that voted against the entry of *Solidarność* to the ICFTU in 1986.⁴ The ÖGB was more positive in 1980, having been closely involved in earlier crises and in times of dissidence, such as 1956, 1968, and the Charter 77 movement. However, by 1981 the tone had become much more negative: the SPD government was afraid that the supply of coal from Poland would suffer, whilst the ÖGB feared that the immigration of Polish refugees would threaten the position of Austrian workers. The Austrian media even took on official Polish propaganda out of hostility towards *Solidarność*.⁵ Yet, this should not be generalized, both the Norwegian LO and the Austrian ÖGB being countered from within. LO secretary Liv Buck and Günther Engelmayer, the general secretary of the ÖGB's Christian Section, became actively involved in the workers' campaign in support of *Solidarność* at the International Labour Organization.⁶

Other countries supported *Solidarność* more clearly, although their enthusiasm and strategy differed. Among them, France is remembered as the most important. The demonstration on 14 December 1981 against the introduction of martial law was

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attended by between 50,000 to 100,000 people, and is remembered as one of the biggest demonstrations of post-war France. All trade union confederations backed Solidarność, with the exception of the communist CGT, which withdrew its initial support in December 1981. The CFDT in particular took the lead in the solidarity campaign. In this way, it was able to put its own features into the spotlight and distinguish itself from the Christian Democratic CFTC (from which it had split in 1964) and from the communist CGT (with which it had had a shared ideology until 1979). Solidarność was able to offer new concepts and political projects to the CFDT, such as *deuxième gauche* (Second Left) and *autogestion* (political independence of social action). However, more to the fact was that French society as a whole was ready for Solidarność. In the 1950s and 1960s, many intellectuals had sympathized with communism, however, by the time of the Prague Spring and the publication of Solzhenitsyn's *Gulag Archipelago* (1974), many French intellectuals had renounced it. In this process of de-communization, Solidarność served as a catharsis.⁷

The German attitude towards Solidarność, by contrast, is often represented as the antithesis of the French one.⁸ Western German society had been much more anti-communist following the partition of Germany, but this had changed into openness since Brandt's *Ostpolitik* and the international détente. Solidarność jeopardized this newfound cordiality and Germans were therefore much more reluctant. However, this view is only partially true. It is fact that German support differed from that expressed in other countries. This was not only caused by détente, but also by the difficult history between Germany and Poland, and the importance of anti-German and anti-fascist struggle in the discourse of the Polish (and other communist) authorities. Yet, this does not mean that German society — including the trade union confederation DGB — was more reluctant. On the contrary, according to a comparative study, 'the Federal Republic of Germany is the country with the highest revenue from collections for Poland'.⁹ In the GFR, more people were responsible for collecting more funds than in any other country, but this was done in such a discrete way so as to avoid the opposition being discredited by the Polish authorities for being pro-German.

Western European reaction to Solidarność could thus depend on several factors. Ideology had an impact, left-wing trade unions being more reluctant than the American trade union confederation AFL-CIO, as well as the Christian trade unions. The AFL-CIO was one of Solidarność's most evident supporters and one of their most generous sponsors. It had a long tradition of rabid anti-communism and involvement in Cold War issues (preventing communists attaining monopoly control over labour movements in numerous countries), but it also used Solidarność to criticize the US administration for its less than drastic measures towards the Polish People's Republic. In several Western European countries, Christian trade union confederations took the lead in the support for Solidarność: the ACV/CSC in Belgium, and the CISL in Italy. Indeed, they were able to connect Solidarność to their own ideology, reaffirming the reason for the existence of the Christian trade union movement.¹⁰

However, ideological differences cannot be generalized and these were anyhow overshadowed by national differences. Not all Christian trade union confederations were the champions of Solidarność. In Spain, the Church was perceived as an ally of Franco. As a result, it was not the right-wing anti-communists or Catholic organizations, but the USO, the most important underground trade union at the time

of Franco's dictatorship, who was in the forefront of defending Solidarność. It identified with the Polish opposition by means of the common experience of underground struggle and fighting military coups (Spain also being witness of a coup in 1981, the unsuccessful putsch by Tejero on 23 February). Similarly, not all communist trade unions condemned Solidarność. The French CGT had supported Solidarność during its legal existence (though a part of the national leadership and many local trade unionists continued to do so after December 1981); the Italian CGIL continued its support throughout the 1980s. Indeed, it used Solidarność as a way of dissociating itself from Moscow, a process which had started in the 1970s after the PCI had embraced Euro-communism and sought out a collaboration with socialist and Christian democratic parties (the *compromesso storico* or Historic Compromise).¹¹

All in all, it is clear that reaction to Solidarność was primarily national. The amount and nature of support differed between different countries, and Solidarność was interpreted and represented in different ways, such as a third way in trade unionism, as a Catholic trade union, or as a new step in the workers' struggle against capitalism. Attitudes were determined by various factors, not just by ideology. In countries with united labour movements, trade union leaders tended to show caution in order not to offend any particular section of their movements; in countries with several trade union confederations, some of them adopted a higher profile in order to highlight their own identity. Equally, the reaction of political leaders played a role, trade unions often deliberately opposing them. In France, the massive support was partly caused by Foreign Minister Cheysson's initial reaction that France would not intervene;¹² in the United Kingdom, Thatcher's enthusiasm was a reason for the TUC to leave Solidarność from the top of the agenda. Another important role was played by Polish immigrants. Some exiles initiated a solidarity campaign, though elsewhere, especially in Germany and Austria, high numbers of Polish workers made indigenous workers perceive them as a threat to their own jobs and working conditions.¹³

Bilateral transnationalism

The fact that solidarity with Solidarność was organized within a national framework does not mean that it did not exceed the borders of the nation-state. On the contrary, the solidarity had an explicit international focus. Yet, this seemed to be limited to a bilateral level and/or an institutionalized collaboration.

The most important transnational contacts endured on a bilateral level. All trade unions and solidarity organizations had connections with Poland, but these were formed independently from one another and overshadowed internal, that is, Western, collaboration. From the very beginning, Western trade unionists paid a visit to the shipyards at the Baltic Sea coast, declaring their support for the Polish strikers and unionists, and delivering the first material aid. However, what is striking is the fact that there is no record of mutual contact between all of these unionists. On the contrary, the Swede Charles Kassman, the Frenchman Claude Sardais, and the Polish exile Jan Kułakowski, all claim to have been the first Westerner to have visited Solidarność's place of birth, ignoring their colleagues from other Western countries.¹⁴

All of these visits led to more permanent contact between Solidarność and Western trade unionists (and other sympathizers). In 1981, several Solidarność leaders

travelled abroad to attend trade union conferences and discuss further collaboration. According to the Polish authorities' statistics, some 182 Solidarność members had travelled to the West in the first year of Solidarność's existence (thus until August 1981) in thirty-two official delegations and fifteen tourist trips.¹⁵ Among these were Solidarność's highest-ranking representatives, such as Lech Wałęsa (who visited Italy, Geneva, Japan, and France), Bogdan Lis (the UK) and Zbigniew Bujak (the GFR).¹⁶ On some occasions, these Polish militants combined a number of conferences and countries within one trip, but this was the result of Polish organization rather than from any Western European collaboration. On the contrary, there was sometimes competition to host the most important Polish guests, not only between countries, but even between national trade union federations. When Lech Wałęsa visited Paris in October 1981, the CFDT made every effort to present this as a visit solely to themselves, rather than one which also took in the five other French trade unions that also supported Solidarność.¹⁷

Conversely, Western trade unionists travelled to Poland, especially for Solidarność's First (and only) National Congress, which took place in two phases in September and October 1981, and attracted a great deal of interest among Western sympathizers. The Polish authorities counted more than 500 foreign participants — not only unionists, but also journalists and diplomatic representatives.¹⁸ This confirmed the international character of the Polish trade union but did not lead to a transnational consciousness among Western visitors. On the contrary, there was again a great deal of competitiveness, with foreign participants vying for floor-space and Western-published sources paying attention only to 'their own' national representatives rather than other 'foreigners' who should also have shared the credit.¹⁹

After the proclamation of martial law in December 1981, exiles took on the role of representing Solidarność abroad. In many cities and countries, members of both the old Polonia (who had immigrated years or decades before or, in some cases, belonged to a second generation of Polish immigrants) and Solidarność members who had been forced to remain abroad by martial law, founded dozens of committees in support of the banned Polish trade union. They developed many activities and strategies, among them the organization of relief, and the broadcasting of news concerning the Polish underground. Some of them did this in close collaboration with trade unions, others worked more independently or within a broader social framework.

It is striking that a large majority of these committees were formed within national borders. Many of them even had a local base, uniting activists and sympathizers of one particular city or province. Sometimes there was division, for instance caused by a difference in ideologies. Both in France and in the United Kingdom, there was a more leftist pro-Solidarność organization (Solidarité avec Solidarité and Polish Solidarity Campaign were both founded by former communist and Trotskyist activists), and a more moderate or neutral one (Solidarité France-Pologne and Solidarity with Solidarity). However, ideological allies did not cross borders to collaborate with each other.²⁰ Also, the bulletins and other periodicals of all these committees covered only two kinds of news: communication from the Polish underground and reports of activities in the host country. Only very exceptionally, for instance, did a solidarity committee write about similar activities in France or Germany, as happened in the case of Sweden in January 1982.²¹ This, of course, was more a blow than a boost

to the rise of an Atlantic or intra-Western European transnational community of Solidarność's supporters.

There were, however, attempts to unite national Solidarność committees, and one proved very successful: after meetings in Zurich (December 1981) and Brussels (January 1981), a Coordinating Office Abroad of NSZZ Solidarność (Biuro Koordynacyjne NSZZ Solidarność za granicą) was founded in Oslo in July 1982. It did not base its legitimacy on recognition by other exile groups (in 1984, only four Solidarność offices — in Paris, London, Stockholm, and Toronto — still collaborated with this Coordinating Office and, in the following years, those three last ones broke up for several reasons), but on a mandate from the Polish underground. In April 1982, the TTK (Temporary Coordinating Commission) had ordered their compatriots abroad to make a single representation in the West and appointed Jerzy Milewski to lead the Coordinating Office.

Milewski had a great deal of contact with Western trade unions and served as a bridge between the West and Poland, but again this took place on a bilateral level only. He participated in many meetings of Western unionists and was often given the floor at national trade union conferences, passing words of gratitude from the Polish underground for the support and material aid. He also organized visits to and from Poland. The first Polish militant to pay a visit (not a permanent move) to the West was Andrzej Słowik, the leader of the Łódź region branch of Solidarność. In 1985, he stayed for more than three months in Western Europe and in the US in absolute secrecy.²² Travel in the other direction started much earlier. It was not only lorry drivers, but also trade union leaders, who went to Poland and who tried to meet underground leaders. For a while, it also became hugely popular to be photographed with various masked Polish unionists.

Milewski was involved in the visit of national trade union secretaries and presidents, but these exchanges took place on a lower level too. Especially after 1983, regional unions concluded cooperation treaties with similar organizations in Poland. The CFDT of Paris entered into such an agreement with the Mazovian branch of Solidarność, the FO of Paris with Gdańsk, and by the end of 1985 there were already more than ten such *jumelages*.²³ Similarly, there was collaboration between professional unions (of miners, metal workers, etc.). This followed the policy of decentralizing the Solidarność leadership, where regions obtained more and more autonomy.²⁴

All this was very important for the internationalization of these local and national trade unions. These contacts often served as the first foreign experience for many Western workers, certainly with the Eastern Bloc. However, they took place only on a bilateral level. French, German, Italian, British, and other unionists collaborated with Polish colleagues, but they did not create spontaneous connections with one another and, consequently, did not stimulate the rise of a transnational consciousness. This is in contrast with what happened with the South African social movement.

Institutional transnationalism

This does not mean that there was no multilateral transnational collaboration. On the contrary, next to these solidarity campaigns within national borders, international labour organizations also acted in favour of Poland, and national and even

local workers' associations were involved in this. Yet, it seems that this happened mostly in a much more institutionalized way. The two non-communist international trade union federations (ICFTU and WCL) and the ILO especially proved ideal forums to lobby for the Polish case.

The social democratic ICFTU and the Christian-rooted but secularized WCL had already expressed their support for the Polish strikers in August 1980, before *Solidarność* was founded. In the 500 days of legal existence, these two organizations regularly sent aid to Poland and, after the proclamation of martial law, they continued this support. The WCL provided the accommodation for the Coordinating Office, while the ICFTU awarded more than \$100,000 to *Solidarność* on an annual basis, being its second major sponsor (after the AFL-CIO). Almost all congresses of both confederations were attended by a representative of the Coordinating Office and ended with resolutions on Poland and declarations of sympathy. The two international trade unions even worked together in their policy towards *Solidarność*, which was exceptional for the 1980s. For instance, they set up a joint commission to audit the books of the Coordinating Office (in order to create transparency and to reply to the accusations of the communist authorities that the office was financed by Western intelligence services). The culmination of this collaboration was the double affiliation of *Solidarność* into both the WCL and the ICFTU in November 1986.

This support was not surprising. The two international trade union confederations were moved by the sincere sympathy that *Solidarność* roused in the West, and traditionally defended persecuted trade unions abroad. Moreover, they had particular reasons to take an explicit anti-communist stance. The ICFTU had been more tolerant towards the Eastern Bloc in the 1960s and 1970s, a position which had hastened the departure of the US trade union federation AFL-CIO from the ICFTU in 1969, but had changed this stance by the end of the 1970s. *Solidarność* helped in confirming this. For the WCL, the Polish trade union was an ideal instrument to weather some fundamental crises. It had found difficulty in finding compromises concerning questions of its Christian character, and relations with free trade unions. Association with *Solidarność* reinforced some ideological accents, such as humanism, personalism, and Christianity, and consequently stressed the need for a third way in trade unionism, next to social democracy and communism. It showed that, in spite of its leftist turn, the WCL had clearly remained anti-communist. And it also raised the position of the WCL on the international scene, where it had lost ground since the 1960s.²⁵

Another, albeit less important, element is the Polish origin of several international trade union leaders. WCL general secretary Jan Kulakowski was born in Warsaw in 1930 and had moved to the West after the Second World War. He obviously had not forgotten his homeland and had regular contact with Polish dissidents, Tadeusz Mazowiecki being his close friend since the 1960s.²⁶ Similar paths had been followed by Stefan Nędzyński (a former deputy general secretary of the ICFTU and the then general secretary of the Postal, Telegraph, and Telephone International) and Anna Nitosławska (from the Organización Regional Interamericana de Trabajadores, the American regional organization of the ICFTU). All these Poles had integrated into Western international structures but came to the fore concerning *Solidarność*. Still, their Polish origin was not crucial, non-Polish trade unionists also being very active.

This international trade union federations' involvement in activities which were supportive of *Solidarność* sheds further light on the transnational character of the solidarity campaigns. They were not only determined by national factors and did not only assume a bilateral character; they also crossed borders within the Western world. International labour as a whole supported *Solidarność*.

Yet, this support, wide-ranging though it was, should not be exaggerated since it is unclear to what extent workers participated in the provision of international support and indeed if they were even aware of it. Most of the international trade union confederations' activities exceeded the workers' grassroots sphere, taking place within general secretaries' offices and at experts' meetings, resulting mainly in congress resolutions or intervention against the Polish government, Western authorities, or international organizations. Although the ICFTU stated that it had 'repeatedly called on the attention of international public opinion',²⁷ we can legitimately question the extent to which this succeeded or, if *Solidarność* did receive the headlines, how far were international trade union confederations responsible for this.

In a general, a national paradigm persisted even within the sphere of trade union internationalism. The international confederations regularly called upon their member unions to organize simultaneous demonstrations across Europe on particular days, such as anniversaries.²⁸ The thirtieth of January 1982 was settled as an international day of action, and on 10 November 1982, the second anniversary of *Solidarność*'s legal recognition, the International Federation of Transport Workers called for a boycott of transport with Poland, whilst the Postal, Telegraph, and Telephone International Service aimed at obstructing communication with Poland.²⁹ Still, resonance differed. The German DGB was even reproached for not having involved its local associations on 30 January 1982, and the Norwegian LO's president spoke not of Martial Law on that day, but criticized US policy instead.³⁰

What is more, several national trade union federations used the ICFTU's and WCL's involvement as an excuse to remain in the background where the Polish crisis was concerned. Some Scandinavian unions especially, such as the Danish and the Norwegian LO, had a tradition of focusing on internal labour issues and for leaving politics and international affairs to the ICFTU.³¹ From this perspective, the international trade union structure hampered the rise of transnational labour solidarity at the lower level.

All in all, the transnational character of the ICFTU and WCL was different from the anti-apartheid movement: it was much more structured and institutionalized, and it lacked the latter's grassroots character. This is also visible on another forum where Western workers showed that they defended the Polish cause: the International Labour Organization. The ILO had already showed interest in the Polish situation earlier, but came into the spotlight when two individual workers' delegates (Marc Blondel of the French FO and Liv Buck of the Norwegian LO) made an official complaint against Poland on its sixty-eighth annual and plenary session in June 1982. They accused the Polish authorities of violating two conventions: the right to organize (No. 87) and the right to organize and collective bargaining (No. 97). They were not able to convince the ILO to issue a resolution (which needed a 2/3 majority) but did, upon submitting an improved complaint, finally succeed in setting up the highest procedure that was envisaged in the ILO constitution on the observance of

norms and conventions: the establishing of a commission of inquiry. In September 1983, the commission began its inquiry and, from January 1984 on, it heard the testimonies of twenty witnesses. Among them were the general secretaries of the international trade unions (John Vanderveken and Jan Kułakowski) and Western trade unionists that had been in Poland during martial law (Günther Engelmayer of the ÖGB, Jacques Mairé of the FO). The ILO presented its conclusions on 26 June 1984. The report described the banning of Solidarność as 'a step of exceptional gravity' and stated that the commission had collected evidence contradicting the Polish government's assertion that Solidarność aimed to seize power and overthrow the communist regime. The Solidarność Coordinating Office called this report 'the most comprehensive and serious document on the trade union situation in Poland ever prepared outside of Poland by an international organization'.³² It gave legal justification to Solidarność's struggle for free trade unionism, and undermined Jaruzelski's claim of normalization. The Polish authorities, for their part, did not obviously recognize the conclusions. They repudiated the formation of the commission, refused to reply to any of its communications, and remained absent at the hearings. Finally, on 17 November 1984, the day after the ILO Governing Body had decided to pay heed to the report on Poland, the Polish government officially notified its withdrawal from the ILO. Although this step would not actually take place and Poland would withdraw its notice of withdrawal in 1987, this was of huge symbolic significance.³³

At first sight, the workers' lobbying of the ILO seems to have stimulated the transnational scope of Western solidarity with Solidarność. It put European workers in contact with an international organization, and gave a face to its possibilities and principles. It was also broadly covered in newspapers and so stimulated the development of a transnational community of Solidarność sympathizers. The ILO's action equally brought together individual trade unionists from different countries — perhaps it was not a coincidence that the action involved those from very reluctant, even anti-solidarity countries such as Austria and Norway: in this way, individuals could bypass their trade unions and/or the trade unions were able to guide attention away from their own passivity.

Still, the activities of the ICFTU, WCL, and ILO cannot detract from the fact that solidarity with Poland was much less transnational than the anti-apartheid movement. It is true that, following Håkan Thörn, if we make a distinction between 'globalization from above' and 'globalization from below', then the international workers' organizations' activities in support of Solidarność could be seen as examples of 'transnationalization from above'. However, they are far less numerous than the protest acts against apartheid: Thörn mentions, for instance, the European Parliament, the Organization of African Unity, the Commonwealth, and the United Nations — all organizations that were much less relevant in the solidarity with Solidarność. Moreover, there are even fewer examples of Solidarność functioning as a trigger in 'transnationalization from below'. Whereas Thörn considers media, networks, boycotts, and so on, as important tools for transnational mobilization and the 'consciousness raising' of large numbers of people, these strategies developed in another way concerning Solidarność. Reaction was different in particular countries, depending on national phenomena, and contact was much more bilateral than multilateral.

Explanations of the transnational limits of solidarity with Poland

This difference of transnational scope between the anti-apartheid movement and the support of *Solidarność* might be explained by reference to several factors. Two of them in particular seem important and we will now focus on those, namely the extent to which it was caused by the character of the social movement, and the role played by its orientation.

The fact solidarity with *Solidarność* was predominately allocated within labour movements seems a plausible explanation. Unlike with the anti-apartheid movement, campaigns promoting solidarity with Poland were dominated by trade unions. This broke the spontaneous development of a grassroots movement for Poland. Thus solidarity was channelled in old structures and coloured by its existing networks and ideology. This might have had consequences for the degree of solidarity — some trade unions and countries showed more solidarity (or did so more explicitly) than other ones — but also for the transnational character, which was much more arranged from above than the grassroots anti-apartheid movement. If this hypothesis is correct, this implies that those solidarity campaigns which were not coordinated by trade unions, were more transnational.

Solidarity was indeed not only organized by trade unions. In the Federal Republic of Germany, where the government and authorities were in no hurry to express their support for *Solidarność*, a ‘*Volksbewegung*’ or ‘*Zivilgesellschaft*’ arose, with the purpose of aiding the Poles. It developed on several fields, but a key area was the ‘*Paketaktion*’: the sending of packets of food, drugs, and clothes to Poland. This had already started in 1980, was intensified in 1981 (more than two million packets were sent that year), and exploded during martial law (in the first half of 1982, more than 4,300,000 packages were sent to Poland). All together, Polish society was supplied with about 14,400,000 German parcels between 1981 and 1984. These packets were sent to several organizations in Poland, such as the Red Cross, the Society of Children’s Friends, particular schools or clubs in Poland with whom partnerships had been made, and also Church organizations (Caritas, the charity association of the Polish episcopacy). This grassroots solidarity was thus also embedded in old structures. As a footnote, the German trade union federation the DGB supported this, collecting 1.7 million DM that was handed over to the Polish Church.³⁴

Additionally, there were even more spontaneous organizations that were not at all connected with existing social movements in the host country. *Solidarité France-Pologne* had an explicitly apolitical profile and collaborated only with institutions such as *Les Amis de la Terre* (Friends of the Earth) and *Médecins Sans Frontières* (Doctors Without Borders). Having been founded in January 1982 by Piotr Ślonimski (a Polish biologist and publicist in exile), it would expand into an organization consisting of thirty-two divisions by the end of that year, a number that would finally exceed fifty later on. The organization developed several activities, such as lobbying local authorities, organizing debates and exhibitions, selling badges and posters, transporting food and drugs to Poland (in 1982, 425 tons of products were sent to Poland), and the special campaign of *parrainage* — a kind of sponsorship in which French families were put in contact with Polish ones in order to give very concrete and direct support.³⁵

However, the transnational scope of all these activities — the German as well as the French ones — did not differ from that of the trade unions. It was primarily bilateral, being oriented towards Poland, and did not collaborate with similar organizations in other Western countries. The difference between an 'old' and a 'new' social movement's transnationalism was thus not that fundamental.

A second explanation of the solidarity campaign's lower levels of transnationalism seems much more plausible: the geopolitical and ideological differences between the struggle against apartheid and the one against communism. Apartheid did not cause a great deal of division in the West. South Africa was far away, the regime had been an international pariah since the 1960s, and its racist ideology and policy did not attract a lot of social support. The Polish crisis, by contrast, took place on the borders of Northern and Western Europe, and was a typical Cold War conflict. Several trade union federations were reluctant to give full and explicit support. Solidarność was associated with clericalism and conservatism, which many unionists were rather hostile to. It was also associated with Cold War warriors such as Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher, both of whom fought trade unions at home. It jeopardized the results of détente and Ostpolitik: the contacts with communist unionists that had been built up in the 1970s. Moreover, Poland's vicinity (together with its tradition of emigration) had caused a much larger presence of Polish immigrants and exiles in Western Europe. There were also South African exiles in the Atlantic world, but they were much less numerous than Polish ones and therefore only complemented the grassroots mobilization. The large amount of Poles in the West, conversely, dominated the mobilization (certainly the one outside of trade unions) and in this way hampered the non-institutionalized transnational collaboration among Western supporters of Solidarność.

It was thus Poland's closeness and embodiment within the Cold War that lay at the base of the limited transnational solidarity. Many trade unions (and other Western European organizations, mostly on the political spectrum's left side) were hesitant to fight on the barricades for Solidarność, and this greater division of opinion obstructed solidarity across Western borders. This seems a much better explanation than the alleged difference between old and new social movements, certainly because this limited transnational character is also visible within another social movement — even more so, a new social movement — that was hugely popular in the 1980s and was preoccupied with East–West issues: the peace movement.

At first sight, the peace movement seems to have had a very transnational profile. Peace movements from different countries were brought together by common political goals, cultural symbols, synchronization of mobilization waves, patterns of protest, and antipathy against certain key actors (such as the US during the Vietnam War and the 1980s missile crisis). The global movement for nuclear disarmament, the popular protest songs that were sung all over the world, and so on, all of these elements seem to have stimulated the awareness of being part of a transnational, even global movement. Yet, in spite of this, peace historian Benjamin Ziemann states that, even amidst this growing web of transnational interconnections and orientations, the nation-state retained its importance as the primary 'identity space' for peace movements. Indeed, many movements combined transnational links between protesters with a focus on their respective nation-state as both the primary context and the key

aim of their engagement. 'Peace movements during the Cold War were aiming for a vision of world peace. But all too often, they were preoccupied with problems of national identity.'³⁶

What is even more convincing in support of the theory that it was the division over issues between the East–West and North–South at the base of a limited transnational focus, rather than the division between trade unions and new social movements, is the involvement of international labour organizations in the anti-apartheid struggle. On the one hand, Håkan Thörn admits that they 'played an extremely important role in the transnational anti-apartheid struggle' and that the latter was not just simply a new social movement. On the other hand, he also states that, just as within the solidarity movement with Poland, their involvement was coloured by the Cold War and their hard stance towards communism:

[the international labour movement] also brought into the [anti-apartheid] movement its historical legacy of factional divisions, which had gained new meaning and significance in the context of the Cold War. In particular, the reluctance among many Western labour Unions to support the ANC and its call for sanctions against South Africa must be related to Cold War divisions between Soviet communism and Western socialist reformism. Especially during the 1970s, the strong anti-communist feeling within the Western ICFTU, caused suspicion against the ANC, since its main ally at this time was the SACTU (South African Confederation of Trade Unions), that was affiliated to the communist-dominated WFTU (World Federation of Trade Unions).³⁷

This brings us to a final important question: to what extent was the anti-apartheid movement so much more transnational? Comparison with the anti-apartheid movement has not been made by means of primary sources. It is based on the interpretation of others, which may be different. Indeed, when analyzing Thörn's arguments for transnationalism, it is sometimes not completely clear as to what extent transnational contact and networks were that multilateral, that is, to what extent did numerous countries (outside South Africa) become involved in it. Moreover, it seems that Thörn has based his conclusions mainly on the Commonwealth. This obviously sheds another light on his view, certainly as South Africa was part of the Commonwealth and this may have led to a higher involvement of countries that were formerly part of the British Empire. Finally, it should be stressed that Thörn's interpretation is not unanimously approved of. Other scholars, such as Sydney Tarrow, Donatella Della Porta, and Hanspeter Kriesi, emphasize that it is not transnational identities, but nation states who continue to be the most important context for social movements, old as well as new ones.³⁸

Conclusion

Western solidarity with Solidarność seems to have been less transnational than other social movements focusing on a foreign country or issue, such as the anti-apartheid movement. It was organized within the borders of particular Western nation-states, which only to a very limited extent collaborated with each other. Their transnational scope was reduced to bilateral contact with Polish dissidents. This was not so much caused by the fact that solidarity with Poland was coordinated by old social

movements, such as Church organizations and particularly trade unions. A more plausible explanation is the fact that the solidarity campaign was an East–West issue, while other international social movements, such as anti-apartheid, were oriented to the South.

The article also revealed that more research is needed and that social movements and labour should be compared more thoroughly. So far, research has always focused on one social movement only, sometimes in different countries. However, it is also necessary to compare different social movements — in one country, or in several. This will teach us a lot, not only about networks and shifting ideology, but also about the character and the development of transnational contact and identity. However, it is already clear that the juxtaposition between old and new social movements, between trade unions and spontaneously grown organizations, between labour and grassroots society, is not as absolute — at least concerning their transnational scope — as research about Solidarność and anti-apartheid might have suggested.

Abbreviations

ACV	Algemeen Christelijk Vakverbond (General Christian Trade Union) [Flanders, Belgium]
AFL-CIO	American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations
CFDT	Confédération française démocratique du travail (French Democratic Labour Confederation)
CFTC	Confédération française des travailleurs chrétiens (French Confederation of Christian Workers)
CGIL	Confederazione generale italiana del lavoro (Italian General Labour Confederation)
CGT	Confédération générale du travail (French General Labour Confederation)
CISL	Confederazione italiana sindacati dei lavoratori (Italian Confederation of Workers' Trade Unions)
CSC	Confédération des Syndicats Chrétiens (General Christian Trade Union) [Wallonia, Belgium]
DGB	Deutsche Gewerkschaftsbund (German Trade Unions Confederation)
FO	Force ouvrière (Workers' Force) [France]
ICFTU	International Confederation of Free Trade Unions
ILO	International Labour Organization
LO	Landsorganisasjonen i Norge (Norwegian Trade Union Confederation)
NSZZ	Niezależny Samorządny Związek Zawodowy (Independent Self-governing Trade Union) [Poland]
ÖGB	Österreichischer Gewerkschaftsbund (Austrian Trade Union Confederation)
PCI	Partito Comunista Italiano (Italian Communist Party)
TUC	Trades Union Congress [United Kingdom]
USO	Unión Sindical Obrera (Workers' Trade Union) [Spain]
WCL	World Confederation of Labour

Notes

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- ² Stefan Berger, 'Solidarność, Western Solidarity and Détente: A Transnational Approach', *European Review*, 16 (2008), 75–84 (p. 75). See also, from the perspective of Polish exiles but with similar conclusions, Idesbald Goddeeris, 'Western Trade Unions and Solidarność. A Comparison from a Polish Perspective', *The Polish Review*, 52 (2007), 305–29.
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- ¹⁰ Karen Salaets, 'Solidariteit of profijt? De Belgische vakbonden en Solidarnosc, 1980–1989' (unpublished Master's thesis, Katholieke Universiteit Leuven, 2006).
- ¹¹ Jacques Lévesque, 'The Messianic Character of 'New Thinking': Why and What For?', in *The Last Decade of the Cold War. From Conflict Escalation to Conflict Transformation*, ed. by Olav Njølstad (London and New York: Frank Cass, 2004), p. 169.
- ¹² Bégin, p. 317; K. Gebert, *Magia słów. Polityka francuska wobec Polski po 13 grudnia 1981 r.* (Londyn: Aneks, 1991); Sjursen, pp. 119–25.
- ¹³ *Pogląd. Dwutygodnik Komitetu Obrony Solidarności*, 82, 12 May 1985, 14.
- ¹⁴ Arbetarrörelsens arkiv och bibliotek (Labour Movement Archives and Library, Stockholm), LO FO9A:3 ('Rapport från resa till Polen 27.10.–2.11.1981'; with thanks to Klaus Misgeld); Chwalba, p. 33, and *Głos Katolicki* [Brussels], 26 November 2000.
- ¹⁵ Instytut Pamięci Narodowej (IPN, Warsaw), Ministry of Internal Affairs (IPN BU MSW II 3536): NSZZ 'Solidarność' — zagraniczne kontakty przedstawicieli m.in. z polską emigracją polityczną. Informacja s.d. [September 1981]. According to these data, 42 had gone to Italy, 26 to France, 26 to Sweden, 15 to the US, 12 to Denmark, 10 to Japan, 9 to Belgium, 8 to the Federal Republic of Germany, 6 to the UK, 5 to the Netherlands, 4 to India, etc.
- ¹⁶ *Opozycja w PRL: słownik biograficzny 1956–1989*, ed. by Jan Skórzyński e.a., tom 1 (Warszawa: Ośrodek Karta, 2000), p. 365; Giles Hart, *For our freedom and yours. Za naszą i waszą wolność. A History of The Polish Solidarity Campaign of Great Britain 1980–1994* (London: Polish Solidarity Campaign, 1995), p. 19; *Frankfurter Allgemeinen Zeitung*, 28 October 1981 (thanks to Friedhelm Boll and Małgorzata Swider).
- ¹⁷ Chwalba, *Czasy 'Solidarności'*, pp. 62–78.
- ¹⁸ IPN 01305/717 (Biblioteka b. MSW, Biuro 'C'): 'Akredytacje zagraniczne przy I Krajowym Zjeździe delegatów NSZZ Solidarność — Gdańsk — IX–X 1981'; MSW, 1983.
- ¹⁹ This is confirmed by several scholars who consulted periodicals such as the Danish *LO-Bladet* (Bent Boel), the Spanish *Unión Sindical and Gaceta Sindical* (José Faraldo), the Swedish *Tiden* (Klaus Misgeld), and the Belgian *De Volksmacht*.
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- ²¹ *Biuletyn Informacyjny. Biuro Informacyjne Solidarności w Szwecji*, 2, 22 January 1982, 20–25, and 3, 25 January 1982, 14.
- ²² Interview with J. Pilarska (Warsaw, 16 January 2006); Ryszarda Socha, 'Urzędnik Rzeczypospolitej,' *Kultura*, 613 (October 1998), 130, and *Opozycja w PRL*, p. 319.

- ²³ Interview with P. Chruszczyński in *Kultura*, 481 (October 1987), pp. 111–12; Chwalba, pp. 125–43, especially p. 132.
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- ²⁵ Idesbald Goddeeris, 'Western Trade Unions and Solidarność. A Comparison from a Polish Perspective', *The Polish Review*, 52 (2007), pp. 305–29 (pp. 316–20); Rebecca Gumbrell-McCormick, 'Facing New Challenges: The International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (1972–1990s)', *The International Confederation of Free Trade Unions*, ed. by Marcel van der Linden (Bern et al.: Peter Lang, 2000), pp. 341–517 (pp. 496–99).
- ²⁶ Interview with Jan Kułakowski (Brussels, 19 December 2005).
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- ²⁹ IPN BU MSW II 3883 ('Meldunek. Dotyczy przygotowania Zachodu do obchodów drugiej rocznicy rejestracji NSZZ Solidarność w dniu 10 listopada br.').
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