

Vote Solidarity

The Election Art of 1989

Polish poster art was renowned during the Communist period for its subtle (and not so subtle) political messages. As Frank Fox, a professor of Eastern European history wrote, “Polish poster artists have always been adept at the use of symbols. Indeed, this has been one of the most important weapons of an artist in a society where words have been suspect....” When Solidarity became a mass movement in 1980, these artists enthusiastically produced moving images that openly defied the government, such as the Solidarity heartbeat shown throughout these articles (and shown in full on page 8). Following the roundtable negotiations after which the government lifted the ban on Solidarity and permitted partially-



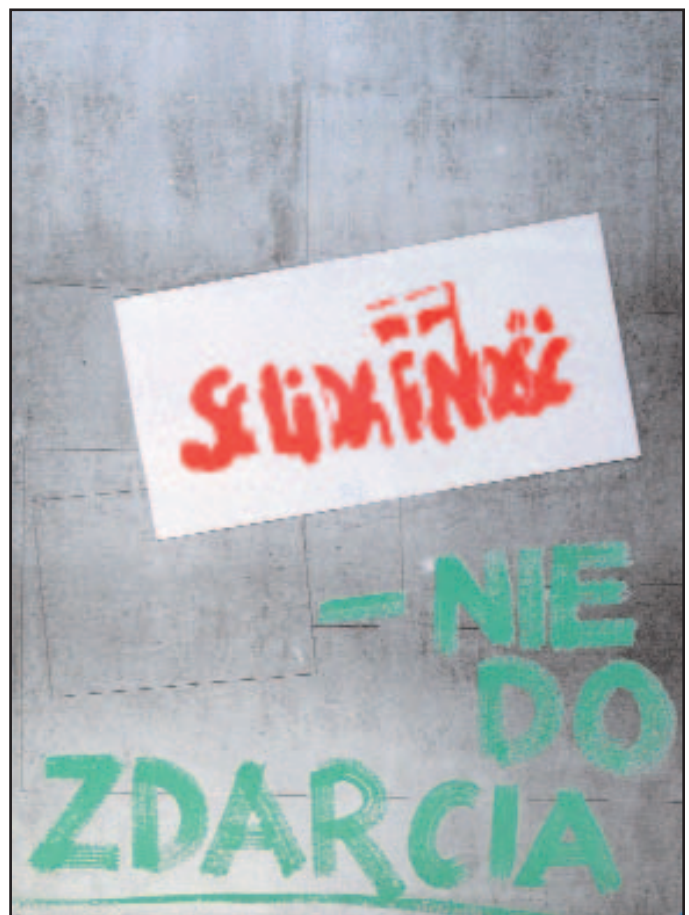
free elections to be held on June 4, 1989, Polish poster artists covered the cities in pro-Solidarity colors, themes, and messages as part of a coordinated campaign aimed at voter turnout and demanding greater political gains. When the elections were held, the landslide victory for Solidarity—its candidates won all but one contested seat by mostly huge margins—stunned the Communist authorities. Ultimately, Solidarity’s election victory led to the government’s collapse and the formation of the first non-Communist government in post-war Polish history. These events in Poland led to the end of Communist government throughout Europe and the Soviet Union.

—EDITORS



Children supporting elections were frequent themes, as in the poster (top left) that reads, “So That Tomorrow the Future Will Be Proud of Us. Vote June 4!” and the one below it in which children

hang a poster that reads, “Vote for Solidarity.” The poster (above right) with the darker imagery reads, “Solidarity Cannot Be Erased.” The most famous and widely used election poster, though, had an

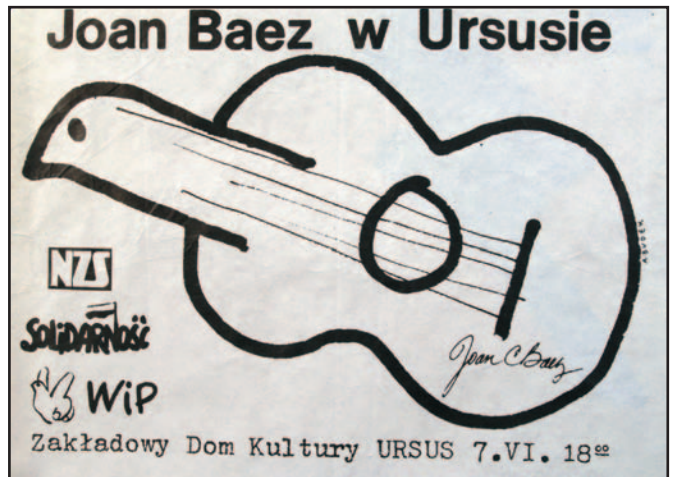
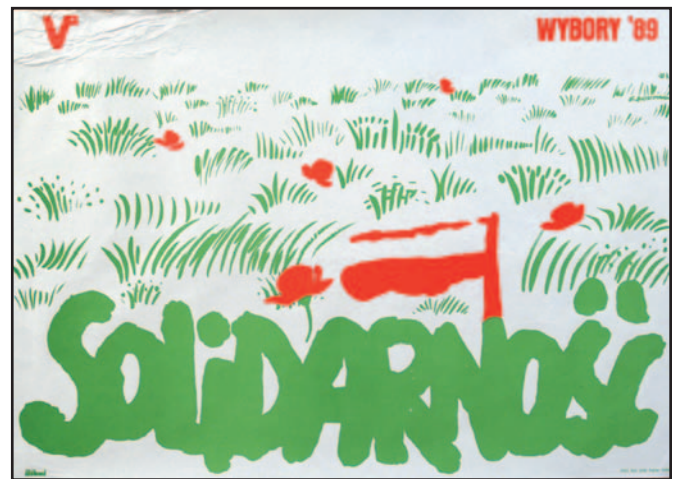
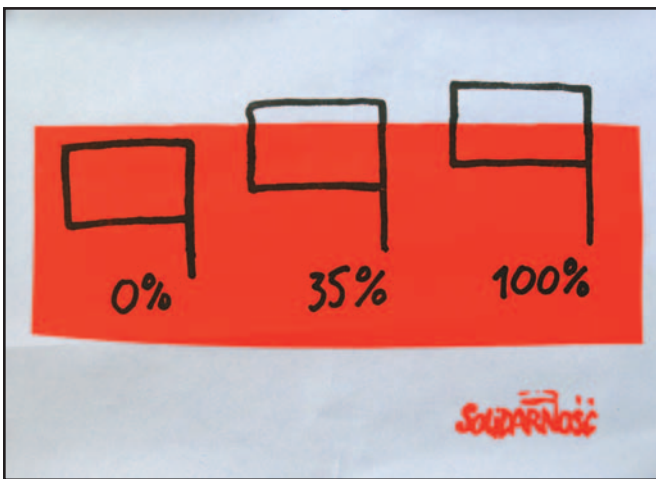


American theme. Featuring the image of Gary Cooper as the sheriff in *High Noon* carrying a ballot instead of a gun (right), the poster reads: “It’s high noon, June 4, 1989.”

Solidarność

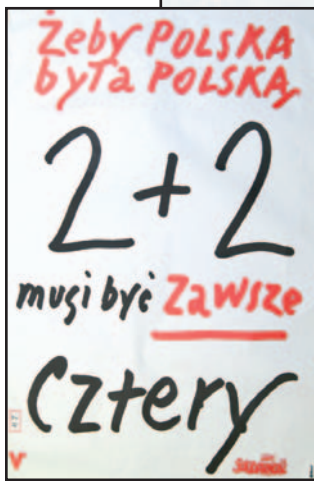


**W SAMO POŁUDNIE
4 CZERWCA 1989**



Once the ban on Solidarity was lifted, the most immediate task for the union was to organize for the partially-free elections to be held on June 4. The agreement in 1989 allowed for 35 percent of the seats in Parliament and all 100 seats of a newly created Senate to be contested. The poster of three flags with percentages (top left) shows the agreed upon progression from zero representation in the current Parliament, to 35 percent representation in the post-election Parliament, and to 100 percent representation in the new Senate. Only the 100 percent flag accurately portrays the white and

red Polish flag. Posters using flowers as symbols of rebirth were common. One (above center) simply shows a field of flowers with the V for Victory symbol and "Elections '89." Above it, the window with an emerging sun and flower bed poster reads "Elect a Free Poland: Vote for Jan Jozef Lipski"; Lipski was one of the principal founders of the Workers Defense Committee in 1976. The poster shown on the opposite page (inset top) reads, "Let Poland Be Poland" and then "2 + 2 must always equal four." This became a common election theme because of the famous joke in which a teacher asks,



“What is 2+2?” and the children’s correct answer is, “Whatever the Communist party says it is.” The poster with the mass of people (far left, bottom) says “Vote with Us.” In the spring and summer of 1989, many international artists visited Poland to support the democratic changes, among them Joan Baez, who sang at the Ursus Tractor Factory on June 7, 1989 (opposite, lower right). The most common poster was a standard individual candidate poster (above, bottom inset), which always included basic autobiographical information. Wiktor Kulerski, a former teacher, was an underground

Solidarity leader who escaped arrest during the entire period of martial law and headed the underground’s education, culture, and science committee. One of the most dramatic (above) shows the re-emergence of Solidarity from the permafrost of martial law’s winter.

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