



1999 Freedom Award
International Recipient
Lech Walesa



PRE-VISIT ACTIVITY

Biography

Lech Walesa was a union organizer in Soviet controlled, communist Poland during the 1970s and 1980s. In 1980 he led a strike at the shipyard where he worked as an electrician; the strike gave rise to a wave of strikes across the country demanding workers' rights. The authorities were forced to negotiate with Walesa, granting workers the right to strike and to organize their own unions. When some 10 million Polish workers and farmers in semiautonomous unions formed a national federation of unions under the name Solidarity, Walesa became the chairman. He was elected President of the Republic of Poland in 1990 and served until 1995.

What is Walesa's profession? (circle your answer or answers)

- A. Politician
- B. Humanitarian
- C. Musician
- D. Electrician





Answers:
A & D – Mr. Walesa worked as both an electrician and a politician.

Vocabulary

Humanitarian: One who promotes human welfare.
Union: An organization of workers formed to advance common interests in respect to wages, benefits, and working conditions.

Do we have labor unions and strikes in the United States? Why are these useful?

Can you name someone besides Mr. Walesa who fights for workers' rights?

1. 2. 3. 4.

Can you identify the images above?

1. _____ 3. _____

2. _____ 4. _____

Answers:
1. World Map 2. Europe 3. Poland 4. Polish Flag



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POST-VISIT ACTIVITY

During the Cold War, a nearly forty-five year period of tensions between the United States and the communist Soviet Union, much of Eastern Europe was under the political sway and control of the communist bloc. The Soviet policy of military intervention in Central and Eastern Europe to preserve communist control, a policy



known as the “Brezhnev Doctrine” after a former Soviet leader, ended in 1985 under the leadership of Soviet reformer Mikhail Gorbachev. This paved the way for reform in the region; during the 1980s and early 1990s much of the Eastern and Central Europe underwent a series of “velvet revolutions,” widespread political changes that earned the name because they involved no bloodshed. Instead of armed conflict,

ideas of free trade, individual liberty, and the democratic process slowly penetrated the communist states of Czechoslovakia, Poland, East Germany, Hungary and others. Poland, under the influence of the newly recognized trade unions, was the first to allow free elections that led to the end of communist control. These revolutions in the Soviet satellite countries marked the beginning of the fall of communism.

Can you find some of the former Soviet satellite countries on the map above? How close are they to Russia?

New Vocabulary

- Bloc:** A group of nations forming a unit with a common interest or purpose
- Satellite:** A country politically and economically dominated by a more powerful country

Describe the American Revolution begun in 1776. How is this different than the velvet revolutions in Central and Eastern Europe?
