

## Summary: Poland

### Political and Economic Struggles

In the 1980s, an electrical worker named Lech Walesa led a trade union called Solidarity. Labor unions throughout Poland joined Solidarity. Solidarity began to push for more pay and better working conditions. Soon, Solidarity had even bigger goals. In 1981, its members wanted an end to Communist rule. They asked for free elections. At that time, Solidarity had about 10 million members. But the government stopped Solidarity and arrested thousands of its members. In the late 1980s, Poland's economy grew worse. The government needed help. It asked the leaders of Solidarity to help solve the country's economic problems. Elections were held, and the Communists lost power. Many Solidarity candidates were elected. Lech Walesa became president of Poland in 1990.

Today, Poland is a parliamentary republic. Its new constitution guarantees free speech. The constitution also helps balance power among the president, the prime minister, and parliament.

### A Changing Economy

Poland switched from a command economy to a free-market economy in a very short time. The government no longer controlled prices. More goods became available, but prices rose. Wages could not keep up with the cost of goods.

Many Polish companies went out of business. They could not compete with foreign goods. More and more people lost their jobs. Poland's standard of living fell. By 1999, inflation had dropped. New Polish businesses became successful. The result was more jobs.

The Communist government in Poland had controlled the media. It limited or stopped the flow of ideas and information, especially for those that spoke out against Communism. This censorship kept many writers from publishing their works. Some of them became dissidents. Today, the works of Polish writers are published in Poland. Books by Polish authors can be sold tax-free. Czeslaw Milosz won the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1980.

### Before You Read

Circle each vocabulary word.

**censorship** *noun*, the outlawing of materials that have certain information

**dissident** *noun*, a person who openly disagrees with a government's policies

### After You Read

**REVIEW** What led to free elections in Poland? Circle the events that led to free elections in Poland.

**REVIEW** Why did the Communist government control the media? Highlight the reason why the Communist government controlled the media.