Aleksander Krystosiak: The nomenklatura understood what was going on; they felt that from the bottom up there was a huge tidal wave coming to sweep them into the abyss. They realised that there was no way we could coexist peacefully.

Józef Pinior: People accused the authorities of causing the shortages; they were sure that food was stored in army warehouses. I remember street gatherings from 1981 when people were so hot that if we had told them to go and take food from the warehouses, they would have done it. We told them to be calm. This is the drama of Solidarity: the situation pushed us toward revolution, but the Solidarity leadership did not want it.

Virtually everyone in the opposition with whom I spoke separated the period of legal Solidarity into two parts: before and after Bydgoszcz. Before Bydgoszcz, the threat of a general strike, together with the élan they had discovered, had enabled the union to set the agenda. Now, its members no longer had that weapon. Before Bydgoszcz, Solidarity had been on the offence; after, it was on the defence. Just as Solidarity had a significant influence on the Polish United Workers’ Party’s internal life, so too had Solidarity become increasingly beset with factional struggles as the government now carried out a propaganda barrage:
Zbigniew Bogacz: They blamed whatever was wrong on Solidarity. Hungry people who have nothing to put into their pots for dinner look for someone to blame.

Andrzej Wróblewski: This is how it was presented: People do not respect their managers; there are strikes everywhere; in village X or Y, people who were desperate for bread took over the bakery. Fear was cultivated among pensioners that, due to this ‘anarchy’, there would be no money to pay pensions, no milk for babies. The atmosphere built by the Party-controlled media was that our entire country might disintegrate.

Zygmunt Cieślicki: The propaganda made up unbelievable stories about Solidarity leaders: that they had been married many times, that they supposedly owned many houses and got much money from the West. Unfortunately, some people thought that there could be truth to these stories.

This approach was by no means ad hoc; it was purposeful. The Party’s impact on Solidarity was not that it had infiltrated the organisation. Rather, the Party was able to widen the rifts that had emerged within the union during the Bydgoszcz events by the pressure it was able to bring to bear on the Polish people. The union’s position was made all the more difficult by the inflation that was now surging through the economy, threatening pensioners’ standard of living. The country’s foreign debt necessitated selling domestically produced food abroad. Shortages, especially of food, were becoming too much a feature of normal life.1 People spent more and more of their time in long lines, simply trying to get the basics. Rationing was introduced in April and its promise of more equitable distribution won the support of most Poles.2 But as Onyszkie-wicz noted: ‘They wanted to cut the rations quite drastically, without consultation, and you often couldn’t even buy your ration’.

These grinding pressures constricted everyone’s choices and possibilities day after day – becoming weeks and months. Zbigniew Bogacz recalled:

People felt that ‘because of your strikes, we get nothing’. In June, there were food shortages in Silesia – the region that never had shortages – while they wanted the mines to produce more. A miner had a sandwich with only margarine or lettuce in it. We felt it was a provocation.

In late July, the situation was made even worse when large price-increases for consumer goods, on the order of two hundred to three hundred percent, were announced.3 Solidarity leaders feared that strikes would turn people against the

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