The present contribution is an attempt at a presentation and preliminary analysis of the major proposals contained in the Solidarity program. The rise of Solidarity (the union) called into question the very cornerstones of the communists' ideology: Lenin's concepts of the dictatorship of the proletariat and the Communist Party as the vanguard of the working class. Thus, those in power lost their doctrinal legitimacy. It is not surprising that the ultimate goal of Solidarity was to change the communist system into a democratic one. The union wanted to carry out the transformation by peaceful means, aware of the complexity of both the internal and external situation. This caused some Solidarity proposals to become obscure and inconsistent. Nevertheless, two proposals were of great significance and differ from any other democratic concepts: self-government both in the management of enterprises and in the Seym (the Polish Parliament). These were far-reaching proposals envisaging changes leading to essential constitutional consequences. Though the imposition of the “state of war” on 13 December 1981 disrupted the process of their completion, they comprise a bold offer, not only limited to the second party of the social agreement signed on 31 August 1980.

1. The Gdańsk, Szczecin and Jastrzebie Agreements.¹

In August 1980, all previously disparate conflicts were distilled into a central one involving the majority of the Polish people represented by the Inter-Plant Strike Committees on one side and those exercising power on the other. Such a dramatic polarization of positions could lead to a shift of forces through:  
1) the revolutionary takeover of power by society and the forming of a new political structure; or  
2) the establishment of a social contract binding both the government and society.
The agreements signed in Poland in August 1980 followed the pattern of a classic social contract. The revolutionary takeover of power provides a case clear enough when viewed in legal and constitutional terms. The case of a social contract which involves a certain compromise is more complex. Under Polish conditions the shape of this compromise proved fairly ambiguous from the outset.

The very signing of the agreements itself reflected a shift of forces. This, as John Rex maintained, might conceivably lead to a full revolution, though more probably to compromise and reform. If the latter took place, new institutions, not involved in the conflict but recognized as legitimate by both parties, might emerge. Under advantageous circumstances such a truce might give rise to a new social order. However, any such turn of events would be intrinsically unstable.

The Gdański Agreement confirmed the legal establishment of free trade unions independent of the Communist Party and employers. Thus, even a superficial analysis of the agreement shows that the communist monopoly of power in the state was weakened and that the emergence of independent trade unions gave rise to social pluralism. The unions, however, bound themselves to comply with the Polish Constitution. Specifically they would accept the "guiding role" of the Polish United Workers' Party (PUWP) in the process of "building socialism" in Poland; they would accept socialized ownership of the means of production as the basis of the system in force in Poland and they would not destabilize Polish international alliances. Additionally, the trade unions would not play the role of a political party.

All other terms of the agreement were general, not specifying the various scopes of institutional authority in their actual application. Moreover, the Gdańsk Agreement to some extent directly contradicted most executive provisions that related to some of the previously mentioned points, thereby providing its own interpretation of them. For instance, in its twelfth item, the agreement confirmed the implementation of the principle of the selection of managing staffs by their qualifications rather than by their Party affiliation. In partially doing away with the Nomenklatura, this formula limited to some degree the ability of the Party to maintain its "guiding role".

Thus, from the outset, the agreement involved a constitutional fissure with far-reaching consequences. The social contract reflected in the agreement was a kind of compromise brought about by the general political situation and an awareness of hardly to be envisaged difficulties if the agreement was not signed. Hence the signers resorted to statements which were almost totally lacking in an institutional and legal vision of the state. They only stated that the government would be the side assigned the task of