

*Solidarity with Solidarity. Western European Trade Unions and the Polish Crisis, 1980–1982.* Ed. by Idesbald Goddeeris. Lexington Books, Lanham [etc.] 2010. xiv, 307 pp. \$80.00; doi:10.1017/S0020859011000332

August 2010 marked the thirtieth anniversary of the exciting events at the Lenin shipyard in Gdańsk that eventually led to the creation of the independent trade union *Solidarność*. At the end of the following year, on 13 December 1981, General Jaruzelski declared martial law. The extraordinary fifteen months in between have been amply described, as have official reactions by foreign governments. *Solidarność*, however, was a grassroots phenomenon which appealed to grassroots organizations across the world. Hitherto, the academic discourse has lacked a study that does justice to the transnational impact that *Solidarność* had on all sorts of movements around the globe. An initial impulse towards such a study has now been provided by *Solidarity with Solidarity*.

This volume studies the most obvious Western partners of *Solidarność*: the trade unions. It brings together one international and nine national cases. Although several more extensive national studies, mainly of the response of French, German, and US trade unions, have already appeared, this is the first book to bring so many of them together. Unfortunately, the structure of the volume, with chapters by authors from different countries, hinders any real transnational approach, though the first step towards such an analysis is to collate national cases, as this book does. Those individual cases can form the foundations of a later comparative study into the transnational geopolitical and ideological reasons for reticence or enthusiasm. In the introduction to this volume, its editor Idesbald Goddeeris makes an excellent start towards offering such a comparative study by providing links and comparisons generally lacking in the separate chapters.

Goddeeris identifies ideological affinity, domestic issues, pragmatism, instrumentality, and competition as motives for supporting *Solidarność* in the different national cases. He also recognizes how comparisons have characterized many of the studies and analyses of support for *Solidarność* which have appeared so far. With reference to Denmark (Bent Boel) Goddeeris argues that this comparative approach, which in itself often assumes a competitive element, ignores the fact that internationally insignificant support could mean a huge step forward nationally. Many authors seem unable to resist the competitive-comparative approach however. Boel (Denmark), Friedhelm Boll and Małgorzata Świder (West Germany), and even Goddeeris himself (Belgium) refer to the French Democratic Confederation of Labour (CFDT), the uncrowned champion of *Solidarność* support, to put their national cases into perspective. Comparison, when it takes the form of competition, is a dangerous activity for historians. In this case, however, one should not forget that competition played an important role in the 1980s itself, as support for *Solidarność* was one way to distinguish oneself from less active unions, as Kim Christiaens shows in his study of the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU) and the World Confederation of Labour (WCL).

That competition survived the 1980s and that the need to settle scores from that period is still being felt can be seen in the chapter by Boll and Świder on West Germany. In contemporary comparisons, and in later studies, the Confederation of German Trade Unions (DGB) has often been singled out unfavourably as the CFDT's reticent counterpart. Boll and Świder, however, do not see this as a reason to take Goddeeris's assertions of the irrelevance of comparison to heart, but try instead to counter the persistent assumptions. Although they argue convincingly that German support for Poland was far more extensive than most comparisons have thus far assumed, their chapter suffers from an aura of

self-justification. That is regrettable, because the chapter also identifies some of the most interesting aspects of solidarity with *Solidarność*, such as the difficulty of Germany's historical and geopolitical position regarding Poland and the reasons why the DGB failed to voice its solidarity as loudly as other unions did.

It is precisely that which is of the most interest to the historian. As meritorious as unequivocal support for *Solidarność* might be, the historian does not have to judge which union reacted most appropriately, but needs to explain the origins of such different approaches. The chapters about successful, large-scale support for *Solidarność*, such as those on France (Andrzej Chwalba and Frank Georgi), Italy (Sandra Cavalucci and Nino De Amicis), and Belgium – not coincidentally, as Goddeeris remarks in his introduction, three largely Catholic countries – are therefore not particularly interesting as success stories. More appealing are the explanations as to why these trade unions did more than others in their national context.

Countries with only one trade-union confederation, such as Denmark, Germany, Austria (Oliver Rathkolb), and Great Britain (Stefan Berger and Norman LaPorte), also faced different attitudes, inside the confederation and in the political landscape. Goddeeris concludes that lack of national competition and the need to preserve the support of the communist minority caused unitary confederations to be less vocally supportive of *Solidarność* than those wanting to distinguish themselves from national competitors – again the importance of competition. However, the close relationship with governing social democratic parties in the former three cases was probably a more convincing cause of the reticence seen. Goddeeris qualifies this argument slightly by stating that in none of the cases studied did the union confederation entirely follow the reticent stance taken by their governments. Indeed, the respective authors show that the unions were bolder than their political allies, which in Denmark led to the first open conflict between the two. However, the continued loyalty to the government probably still explains the fairly moderate response of these unitary trade-union confederations.

The transnational links that are lacking between the chapters are provided not only by Goddeeris's introductory comparisons, but also by Christiaens's chapter on the ICFTU and the WCL. Christiaens concludes that despite the wide variety of national approaches of member unions, the two international confederations developed a similar pattern of action in rather fierce competition with one another. This points to a hiatus that unfortunately the introduction does not fill: the relationship between the national unions and their respective confederations. That relationship was particularly important since many unions generally delegated international affairs to the confederation, or even saw this as a substitute for taking initiatives of their own (Boel). Nonetheless, only Klaus Misgeld's chapter about Sweden devotes a passage to the strains in relations between the ICFTU and the national union federation. A close reader of the volume will note, however, that the membership of the ICFTU, the confederation that strongly supported *Solidarność* and considered itself its international representative, included some of the most cautious unions, including Germany's DGB, the British Trades Union Congress (TUC), and Austria's Trade Union Federation (ÖGB). The slightly more cautious World Confederation of Labour, however, included among its members the Italian Confederation of Workers' Unions (CISL) and the Confederation of Christian Trade Unions of Belgium (ACV/CSC), both of which were fiercely supportive of *Solidarność*. One wonders how both the confederation and the unions dealt with this ambivalence. Also, the transnational ties of the *Solidarność* Coordination Office in Brussels are mentioned only in the international chapter by Christiaens and in the Belgian context described by Goddeeris. Other authors merely consider Polish emigrants in

their respective national contexts. Does this reflect the lack of importance of the Brussels Solidarność office or is it the result of the strict national approach taken by the studies? These issues would certainly merit greater consideration in a follow-up study.

The national approach taken by the current volume also has important advantages, however, such as the opportunity to zoom in on smaller national initiatives and particularities that might otherwise easily be ignored. Some authors inevitably have to start with a lengthy introduction to national trade-union history, and unfortunately this sometimes causes the reader to get lost in a jungle of abbreviations (always a danger with volumes of this kind). On the other hand, this provides the space to explain the importance of domestic circumstances in assessing Solidarność. It was not only general fears of endangering détente that played a role, so too did very national factors such as comparisons with the national experience (as in Spain (José Faraldo)) or fears of large waves of refugees in Sweden and Austria. The national approach prevents sweeping statements and leaves the recognition of generalizations and particularities largely to the reader, guided, of course, by the useful directions provided by Goddeeris.

This introduction and the strict parameters of the volume – the reactions of west European trade unions to Solidarność between 1980 and 1982 – make *Solidarity with Solidarity* remarkably coherent. The chapter on Austria is the odd one out in that respect. Rathkolb points to the role of domestic issues and détente considerations in determining support for Solidarność, but in his eagerness to discuss the political landscape that influenced the decision-making process he seems almost to forget the trade unions.

*Solidarity with Solidarity* is an excellent international inventory of current national research on Western trade union support for Solidarność, providing scholars with a clear overview while at the same time qualifying a number of entrenched myths. Above all, it leaves us with more inspiring questions to answer and connections to analyse.

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WARD, CHRISTOPHER J. Brezhnev's Folly. The Building of BAM and Late Soviet Socialism. [Pitt Series in Russian and East European Studies.] University of Pittsburgh Press, Pittsburgh 2009. x, 218 pp. Maps. \$50. (Paper: \$ 24.95.); doi:10.1017/S002085901100037x

Christopher Ward's book about the construction of the Baikal–Amur Mainline (BAM) was a long-anticipated study for those interested in the social aspects of the Brezhnev era in Soviet history. The construction of the railway, stretching several thousand kilometres across eastern Siberia and the Far East, went down in Soviet history as the last grandiose project of socialism. Although construction began in the 1930s, BAM attained genuine fame in 1974–1984, when it became a symbol of late socialism.

Ward's book consists of seven parts. The introduction tells the back story of the railway construction, and describes the intentions of the authorities and the importance that was attached to the project in the 1970s and 1980s. In this part the author briefly describes the main features of the project, stressing BAM's importance to the Soviet leadership. The second chapter focuses on the environment, particularly the birth of an environmental movement on BAM in the period of late socialism. The author discusses the policies of the Soviet leadership and local authorities in regard to the natural resources of Siberia and the Far East, particularly emphasizing the movement to protect Lake Baikal. The third chapter