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From the Private Secretary

5 November 1988

Dear Jgn.

PRIME MINISTER'S MEETING WITH SOLIDARITY LEADERS IN
GDANSK ON 4 NOVEMBER

The Prime Minister met leaders of the Solidarity movement in Gdansk on 4 November. The first part of the meeting was with Mr. Lech Walesa, Professor Geremek and Dr. Onyszkiewicz. The discussion subsequently continued over lunch with other senior Solidarity advisers as well as Father Jankowski and the Bishop of Gdansk.

The Prime Minister opened the discussion by saying she would like to hear Mr. Walesa's view of the situation in Poland. These matters were always more complicated than they seemed from outside. In her talks with the Polish Government, she had said that Solidarity was more than a trade union, it was an expression of opinion and opposition in a country where there was no other means of expressing political views. It was a great movement which could not be ignored or denied. Whether legal or not, it was a fact of life.

Mr. Walesa said that he was glad the Prime Minister understood Solidarity's struggle. Solidarity would prefer to be just an ordinary trade union. But in the Polish system it had to take up wider economic and political issues which could not be aired in any other way. Solidarity knew perfectly well that it could not fight the present Government or replace it. There were clear limits on how far it could go. Its most important demand was for equality before the law. Solidarity wanted to be a legal organisation which would be consulted as of right rather than being invited to take part in round table talks as some sort of favour. Such favours could always be withdrawn when it no longer suited the Government. Solidarity had been tricked by the Government too many times in the past. The only real solution was for the Government to give them the freedom which would enable them to start to work with will, conviction and commitment to rebuild Poland. He wanted to add that Poland was worth helping and should be helped. The main effort must come from the Polish people themselves but they needed the assistance of other governments as well.

The Prime Minister said that she understood that

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Solidarity wanted to talk to the Government but on the basis that it was a legal movement with a right to be consulted. She wondered how they intended to respond to the Government's recent invitation to round table discussions. Mr. Walesa said that the present system was rotten. It had made Poland bankrupt and this in turn was slowing down the economic progress of Europe. You could not have a society based on coercion. Solidarity's fight was for freedom in economic, social and political matters. This was the challenge of the era. Mr. Gorbachev could not be another Stalin even if he wished to be. The question was whether greater freedom came through evolution, as Solidarity wanted, or revolution. Revolution brought only painful losses and at the end of the day one still had to find solutions. The Communist system was finished. The only question was how to get out of it. Solidarity believed that economic reform was the best way forward. Solutions to other problems would emerge as a result of that. They knew that economic reform required difficult decisions including the closure of firms making a loss. But such decisions must be reached on the basis of genuine economic criteria. The closure of the Lenin shipyards could have been accepted in due course, but there was no justification for selecting it to be the first industrial enterprise to be closed. Even the management did not believe that closure was justified.

The Prime Minister said she understood Solidarity's desire for greater fairness. The crucial question was how to get from where they were now to where they wanted to be. All sides in Poland talked of reconciliation. There must be a way forward. When there were differences, it was best to get together to discuss them. If she understood correctly, Solidarity were prepared to talk if their legitimacy was recognised. Mr. Walesa said that they were not even that ambitious at the first stage. All they asked was that the agreed objective of talks should be pluralism, not socialist pluralism but just pluralism. Discussions could then concentrate on how to bring it about. Provided Solidarity knew that the goal was pluralism, other things could be decided later. But they would not be bought off. The Prime Minister said that Mr. Rakowski had spoken of power sharing. She had replied that it was more important to limit the powers of government and give them back to people.

The Prime Minister continued that she had tried to put herself in Mr. Walesa's position and asked how she would avoid being wrong-footed. What would people say if he refused the Government's invitation to talk? She could understand that he would want some assurances as a basis for talks, but it was important always to underline Solidarity's willingness to talk. Solidarity should also prepare a detailed agenda and supporting papers, so that there were concrete proposals on the table.

Mr. Walesa said that with hindsight, Solidarity had lost in 1980. The Communist system always needed a scapegoat. As long as Solidarity was fighting, it could be tolerated. But once it started putting forward a positive programme it began to be a real threat to the Communist

Party. The Government's approach to the round table discussions was to get Solidarity to turn out its pockets in advance. It also wanted to put limits on what could be discussed and who could represent Solidarity. Neither of these demands were acceptable. But solutions had to be found. His response to the Government would be to say that Solidarity wanted round table talks, but the Government should not do things in the way they announced the closure of the Lenin shipyard. He knew that difficult decisions had to be faced and they could be accepted if based on genuine economic criteria. The Prime Minister asked how Solidarity could get its points across to the Government. Mr. Walesa pointed to the ceiling and said that all its meetings were bugged so there was no problem.

The discussion continued over lunch when Mr. Walesa was joined by representatives of the Solidarity leadership and its senior advisers. Mr. Walesa said that Solidarity believed Poland should be ready to try all the various possible remedies for its economic problems which had already been proved in the West. But they wanted Poles to be treated on an equal footing with other European countries. They were not interested in receiving gifts.

Professor Geremek then invited Mr. Mazowiecki to comment on the philosophy of the round table discussions. Mr. Mazowiecki said that the round table proposal was a direct result of social pressure. During the last forty years, all change in Poland had arisen from social pressures. Solidarity did not wish to say no all the time. Their long term goal was a fully independent Poland, with a place in the European community of nations. But they were prepared to go slowly. The round table proposal had seemed at first a chance of escape from the stalemate of recent years. After Mr. Walesa's meeting on 16 September with General Kiszczak, Solidarity had received the impression that for the first time the authorities recognised that appearances would not do. However, since then, there had been an unbroken attack on Solidarity in the press and the media. Solidarity thought somebody had been trying to undermine the talks. Then had come the provocative decision on the Lenin Shipyard in Gdansk. This was taken on political grounds and undermined the credibility of the authorities' declared readiness for further reforms. Now was a very difficult moment. But Solidarity knew it must not respond in a confrontational way. They were ready to talk about most things, but not the future of Solidarity itself.

The Prime Minister asked if Solidarity's view was that the round table was only a ploy. She wondered what people in Poland would think if Mr. Walesa accepted the latest offer to attend the round table, or conversely declined it. Mr. Walesa said that Solidarity's experience was discouraging. Talks with the authorities on the Church Agricultural Foundation had lasted over five years and produced no real result. The authorities wanted talks with no concluding point. Solidarity recognised the need for compromise. But the terms had to be right and they could

not ignore possible reactions among their supporters. The Prime Minister asked what the alternative to talks would be. Mr. Walesa replied that Solidarity did not wish to humiliate the Government, and were ready to offer face-saving formulations. There must be compromise, otherwise society would "switch on the afterburners". They did not want anarchy. Indeed, if the Government reached the point of collapse, he would even join the Communist Party himself to shore it up! He admitted that in some areas the authorities had recently begun to move in the right direction. But they only moved under pressure. Solidarity could not wait for two hundred years.

The Prime Minister said that she understood Solidarity's desire for pluralism. She came from a pluralist society. But Solidarity could not achieve this in the short term. However, Solidarity could not be ignored or rejected. They had done so much. Her anxiety was that Solidarity should never put themselves in the wrong and so damage their reputation. The next step needed very careful thought. That response to the Polish Government should be very skilfully drafted. Mr. Walesa said that the lunch in which the Prime Minister was participating was in itself a great help. When the Prime Minister had left, he would write to General Kieszczyk confirming Solidarity's readiness to begin talks in a climate of hope and goodwill. Solidarity wanted the round table and wanted to create a climate of goodwill and hope. He added that he would not accept interference by the authorities in Solidarity's delegation. He had yet to discuss with his colleagues the terms of his reply, but he believed his voice would carry some weight in their discussions. Solidarity would get the Government to the table. The only question was when. The Prime Minister commented that Solidarity had a very strong hand to play. They had the conviction and knew in which direction they wished to go. It was worthwhile taking small steps.

Mr. Walesa said that Solidarity could not and would not try to change the Government. But they had to force the authorities to take them seriously and start talks. Mr. Merkel said that Solidarity's number one problem was obtaining legalisation as a trade union. The Prime Minister said that, legal or not, they had been asked to go to the round table. This was a paradox. It was also paradoxical that the authorities had provided transport and security for her meeting with Mr. Walesa. Dr. Onyszkiewicz said this was true, but Solidarity required legalisation because only when they were a legally existing union could they be sure of the right to talk to the Government, so obliging the authorities to take account of their views for the longer term. Solidarity's current invitation to the round table was made to look like a privilege. The Prime Minister said that the invitation to the round table was more than that. It acknowledged that Solidarity was a force which could not be ignored. Mr. Walesa commented that the authorities were prepared to talk to Solidarity but at the same time wished to reduce their power and their credibility.

Professor Geremek said that Solidarity had put four points to the round table: legalisation of Solidarity, the reduction of the nomenklatura system in the economy, a new law on freedom of association, and a genuinely independent judiciary. The Prime Minister, noting these, asked whether an independent judiciary could not naturally evolve through the courage of individual judges, prepared to stand up for the rule of law. Mr. Mazowiecki explained the difficulty in Poland where judges who did not toe the line were removed or did not receive sensitive cases to handle. Mr. Walesa said that the longer the system lasted the more corrupt it became. Higher civilisations should develop more freedom. Poland was being offered materialism, but there was nothing of any material worth on offer. The problem was how to escape from this situation in a peaceful way. The major task was to achieve pluralism.

The Prime Minister then asked Mr. Walesa what he would like her to say to General Jaruzelski when she saw him later that day, and to the press. She suggested that she should say she had a most interesting meeting with the Solidarity leadership, and been impressed by the enormous crowds of people who had gathered. Solidarity was a great power in the land and could not be ignored. They had a good deal of sympathy with the democratic political system from which she came and which provided an outlet for an opposition to make its views known. She would say that Solidarity felt deeply that their position was not properly recognised. They knew the direction in which they wanted to go, by clear, steady steps in an evolutionary way, but steps which acknowledged their importance. It was for Solidarity to decide how to reply to the invitation to enter the round table talks. But it was clear that Solidarity needed an assurance that any talks would take place in good faith and would be genuine.

Professor Geremek said that the Prime Minister's summary was excellent. But he asked her to add legalisation of Solidarity as an essential requirement. De facto recognition was not enough. Legalisation opened up the possibility of further evolution and gave a guarantee that they would not be cheated again. The Prime Minister noted this. She would also say publicly that when she had agreed to visit Poland she had explained to the Polish authorities that there were certain things she had wished to do. The fact that she had been allowed to do them all was a step forward.

Dr. Kurakowska said that the strength of Solidarity was partly because it had played a major role in changing the way Polish people thought. Before Solidarity, there was no real attempt to think independently. But now people were thinking more and more independently. She hoped that the fight for the right to free association would be won.

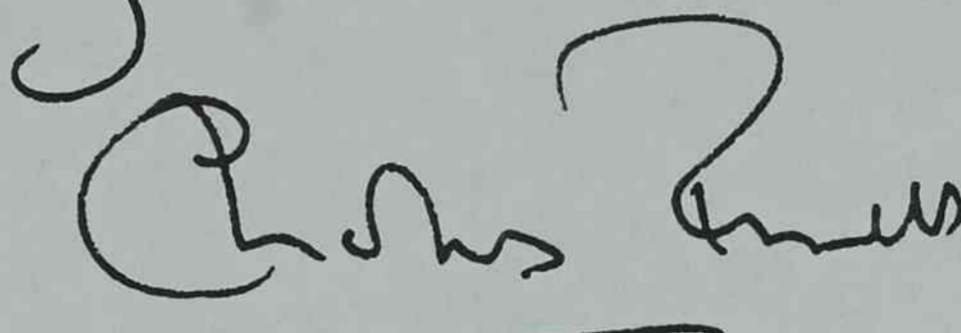
At this point Mr. Walesa made a short speech of thanks to the Prime Minister, to which the Prime Minister replied. Mr. Walesa, Father Jankowski and others then presented the

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Prime Minister with gifts and the party left to visit St. Brygida's Church before leaving Gdansk.

I am copying this letter to Alex Allan (H.M. Treasury), Neil Thornton (Department of Trade and Industry), Brian Hawtin (Ministry of Defence) and to Trevor Woolley (Cabinet Office).

Yours sincerely,


CHARLES POWELL

Lyn Parker, Esq.,
Foreign and Commonwealth Office.