Lech Walesa, aged 38, former electrician, who led the August 1980 strike in the Lenin Shipyards in Gdansk. Today heads the 9.5 million-strong trade union Solidarity, on whose behalf he has conducted negotiations with Rakowski. Associated with the moderate wing of Solidarity.

Two days ago I spent two and a half hours with Vice-Premier Rakowski and he expressed very strong views about Solidarity. Now we are anxious to hear your side of the story.

What did he say? What did he say?

He doesn't believe you when you say you don't want to take power. He considers that this is a tactical position that you are taking up in order to cover up longer term aims. Would you like to comment on this?

We are not aiming to take over power, unless he means that we want to see a power that would serve us. We don't want to take over power directly, but we would like the authorities to serve society. And if Rakowski meant by taking over power this kind of power, OK, I agree. But we don't want to take over power personally. If power is subordinated, and the authorities are subordinated to the nation, in fact this is a kind of taking over power because that power would serve the interests of the nation. Previously the authorities were uncontrolled, but now they are in a different position.

Is Solidarity content in the longer term to leave power in the hands of the Party?

Solidarity is not organised everywhere in Poland. There is no Solidarity in the army or the police, for instance. There must be someone who will steer the country as a whole. So we acknowledge the leading role of the Party in the state — but not in the union (Solidarity). Our great union is self-governing and independent and will not join any alliances. Of course, the union will introduce corrections in the policies of the country, but it will not be selfish and blind. It will take other forces into account. There can't be two states in one state — on this there is agreement between us. But we'll always say what we want as regards a better economy, better living standards and freedom of speech.

Yes, but don't you think that your conceptions of self-management and of local self-government would lead to a situation in which a kind of dual power in society would become a reality?

Even now the enterprises have been working on their own, but badly of course, so we've ended up with debts, shortages, trouble. We want to use our influence to control the enterprises so that they will produce and market their products more efficiently. At the same time we know that control will be exercised through bank rates, loan schemes, bank accounts.

Would you like to see changes in the political system? What kind of socialism would you like to see in Poland?

I am not a good politician. I am first of all a consumer and I want something to consume. So I want to tell the truth. I want to have more than you have in your country. I want to be happier than you are. I want to adjust everything as to reach these aims. But at the same time I don't want power.

How far do you want Solidarity to concern itself with political questions? Since you now describe it as a social movement and not a purely trade union movement, does that not involve you in taking up political questions?

There isn't a catalogue which lists what's political and what's not. I was taken to court for laughing politically, walking politically, so you can't divide things into political and non-political so easily. It depends on your personal viewpoint. We think we are not a political group because we don't want to take over power.

At a recent Solidarity press conference in Gdansk you said that the concept of self-management offers the main hope for coming out of the crisis, but this concept also means that local self-government has to be developed. Do you
We are not aiming to take over power . . . but we would like the authorities to serve society.

think it necessary in the local elections at the turn of the year to have independent candidates, perhaps sponsored by Solidarity, and not only the candidates of the National Unity Front.²

This is not precise yet. I look at it in a different way. You can't arrange everything on a territorial basis. For example, a car, a Fiat. A Warsaw plant produces the final product, but engines are made here in Gdansk, and they make the metal in Cracow. So self-management should be interested in the total production, regardless of the location of particular products. Industry must be run on a consortium basis and on this basis there must be self-management. If we think about self-management, for instance, in the communications system within a city, then you have to think of part of this self-management as territorial. So there are different kinds of solution, different links within the overall system. I have my own solutions but I can't develop them now. At present it is important to attain self-management in the workplace, and then in the wider consortium. What applies to industrial self-management in particular plants, applies to the functioning of cities. We shall be able to solve the terrible problems only after we are able to control the situation in the enterprises. These wider issues will evolve only after looking at the problems at plant level. The basic resolutions or acts of parliament should be passed now, but later on we should be conscious that we shall have to introduce some amendments and corrections. The basic problems need solving first and then the amendments will evolve from the experience of life. So the enterprises should be given the opportunity to run their economy on a separate basis. They should be given bank accounts, foreign currency accounts. They should be able to trade with firms abroad. And life will introduce other elements necessary for proper functioning. Of course everything has to be watched carefully, but I think that common sense and social demand will introduce corrections.

In June you said that Solidarity needed to concentrate on being a trade union and should shed activities of a non-trade union type. Why has your present position moved from that? How do you see the role of Solidarity now?

I would like Solidarity to be a trade union movement. But life introduces corrections. If suddenly the problem of political prisoners appears, or food queues get longer and longer, and people are dissatisfied, I can't stay in an enterprise, limit myself to the enterprise and forget about these problems. I can't wait for the state to provide protective gloves, or reduce the pollution levels in the enterprise. As a union I can wait, but as a Pole I would die. So life has introduced several changes and I have had to solve the problems of self-

¹ Differing proposals have been made by the government and by Solidarity for self-management in industry and for territorial self-government. Solidarity has called for immediate changes to be made without waiting for the parliamentary legislation being prepared. These include the election by employees of directors of enterprises and changes in local government bodies.

² Walesa was prosecuted in the 1970s for allegedly holding the state system up to ridicule by such behaviour.

³ Alliance of parties and organisations led by the Polish United Workers' Party. Candidates in elections have to stand under its auspices.
management, for instance, and help deal with the political prisoners. I don’t know if this is being a pure trade union. But, of course, I should like to be a trade union, it would be more convenient for us. Yes, and I think, well, a self-management scheme is a disadvantage to a trade union because sooner or later we’ll have to fight with the self-management bodies. But as a Pole I have to get support to promote self-management because this is the only solution to get the country on its feet. So as a citizen I have to deal with the problem out of sheer necessity even if I didn’t want to.

It is suggested that Solidarity’s interest in these questions is liable to lead Solidarity either to become a political party or, alternatively, to favour the setting up of a separate political party, a labour party. Would you like to comment on this?

It’s really happening like that. If our members see that there is Solidarity but the queues are getting longer, that we signed a lot of agreements which are not carried out, society looks for other solutions, for other organisations in order to change the existing situation. There is a trend to set up political parties because the state is trying to defend itself. But if we are able to tackle the other problems, we won’t have to deal with these ones.

What do you think about the suggestion that there is a danger of Soviet intervention if such a great change in the political system were to take place?

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I want us to win, but I want to pay the least price for it.

There won’t be any political changes if we get access to the mass media, if I get the chance to explain everything to the people. People know the things but they aren’t explained on a broad basis.

Hasn’t the government in fact already shown some readiness to compromise by granting television time, as for instance with the recent programme on which you appeared and the information programme on the Solidarity congress which preceded it? Aren’t there concessions which Solidarity could make to meet the government halfway on this issue?

That’s all true but it’s all been forced on the government. If I had regular access to television I should be able to plan my activities and explain everything at the right time.

You said recently that if you had access to the media you wouldn’t attack government and Party leaders. But at the same press conference your colleague Mr. Jurczyk attacked Rakowski and said he should be removed from the government. How do you reconcile this?

I don’t agree with Jurczyk. You have to know a lot of things if you want to speak badly or well about the government. If he had heard how Rakowski has been attacked by other people, he wouldn’t say that. But this is caused by the fact that we don’t know a lot of things. I don’t speak about people unless I know all the facts. That’s why I talked to him about this later. He moves too fast. I use the principle, judge not and be not judged. I have different views about Rakowski. I wouldn’t have criticised him so much. I know that he is pushed from the other side as well. So Rakowski hasn’t deserved this despite my objections to him.

On television, Mr Waliszewski, from Silesia, who appeared with you said that the greatest success of Solidarity was that it had existed for a year under a totalitarian system. Can Poland today really be described as a totalitarian system when, for instance, such statements can be made with impunity on TV?

These are young men with ardent minds and hearts. At the same time we can’t feed ourselves with slogans. We have to do more and speak less. This Poland is quite different from that before August (1980), as everybody has seen.

But is there not a danger that such young men and others, the ‘radical’ element in Solidarity, will in fact block the perspective of co-operation with the government and substitute a policy of confrontation? For instance there were ten votes on your National Council against its Appeal*. Doesn’t this represent a significant force in Solidarity which disagrees with this perspective?

There are misunderstandings. I shall have to fight for the authorities to grant me access for frequent appearances on TV. I can understand the problems, all the different variants of a situation, and I could explain them on television. I am a radical man, but I can see reason. I want us to win, but I want to pay the least price for it. I can take part in an open struggle, but in a reasoned and thoughtful way.

4 Adopted in August and calling for workers’ control over production and distribution, and participation in voluntary Saturday working in the mines. Cathy Townsend typed the transcript and Ela Piotrowska checked the translations.