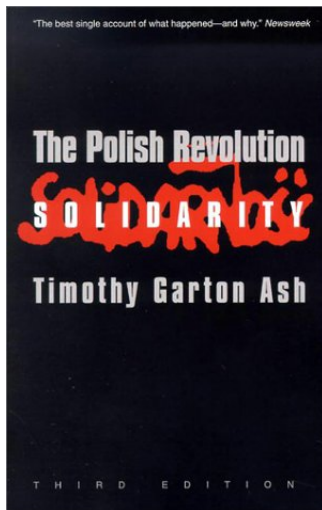

***The Polish Revolution: Solidarity* by Timothy Garton Ash (2002), 439 pages.**



This third edition of the book requires some explanation - the first edition appeared over 20 years ago and covered the period ending with martial law in Poland, declared shortly before Christmas of 1981, the second edition contains seventy additional pages that lead up to the momentous time of the round-table negotiations which brought down the communist regime in 1989, and the current – third - edition offers an updated record of Solidarity's era. The author is a professor at Oxford, England. Not only his academic credentials are impeccable, but it is also evident how much effort he invested in the subject.

To many of us the story is quite familiar, and to a few the national drama *The Wedding* by Wyspiański bears certain similarity except for the fact that the sequence of events is different: Solidarity was born during the years of deep discord, miserable economic conditions, and constantly broken political promises. It was the period of dashed hopes for a better future while the society watched how Western countries were thriving and prosperous. Almost suddenly, and to the amazement of the world, the entire Polish society took a hint from serious clashes in the city of Gdańsk, and within a short time the country became engulfed in a fierce struggle against communist authorities. It was almost like a response to Wyspiański's appeal to listen to the „golden horn”. Indeed, it was the beginning of the “Polish Revolution” of the 1980s.

The miracle is not easily explained but there it was: the explosive situation caused by the martial law of 1981 and during the following years was actually controlled by the opposing camps. To be sure, they were diametrically opposed, with one side rapidly losing the remnants of authority and the other side winning strength almost daily. However, there were no calls to arms, and everyone shared a desperate hope that no blood will be shed. It seemed that the society was horrified at the prospect of a fruitless struggle, of a brutal fratricide, while at the very same time there was an obvious need for radical change. This change took place in 1989.

The author shares the view of many, that if anyone had suggested in the late 1970s that within one generation Poland would leave the Warsaw Pact and join NATO, he would be considered a lunatic. Revolutionary changes did take place, but what of the latest chapter? Here the current edition is of particular interest. For all practical purposes Solidarity as a political Party ceased to exist. Could it be that Poles don't really know how to govern themselves? Do they understand the function of the Parliament which cannot have 70 competing parties? Why did no outstanding political personalities come to the forefront after the astonishing victory in 1989 ? It is impossible to give answers to these questions, and we don't know what the future will bring. But as one observes the country, a definite progress is noted in many areas - an evident prosperity is visible in various fields, there is a political peace, and the frontiers are tranquil. One is encouraged by these post-Solidarity developments and readers can be grateful to the author for this excellent book.

George E. Suboczewski