



**Post-communist truth-revelation
procedures as a means of political
legitimation and de-legitimation: The
case of Lech Wałęsa in Poland**

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Sussex European Institute

SEI Working Paper No 143

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First published in July 2017

by the **Sussex European Institute**

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Abstract

Allegations that Lech Wałęsa was a paid informant of the communist security services surfaced on a number of occasions in post-communist Poland and appeared to be confirmed unequivocally following the discovery of the so-called Kiszczak files. Mr Wałęsa's supporters attempted to relativise his actions: locating them within a broader historical context and arguing that he compensated for them by his subsequent actions. Mr Wałęsa's critics argued that his collaboration lasted several years when he was an ardent informer rewarded financially for betraying fellow workers, that fear of being blackmailed explained his behaviour during the democratic transition and early post-communist period, and that he used his powers as head of state to cover up his involvement. The 'Bolek' affair was used to legitimate and de-legitimate the post-communist state's genesis and foundational myths, specific political actors and formations, and the transitional justice process itself. While the discovery of the Kiszczak files appeared to convince most Poles that Mr Wałęsa was indeed a communist security service collaborator, it did not change their broadly positive view of his contribution to the country's recent history.

Post-communist truth-revelation procedures as a means of political legitimation and de-legitimation: The case of Lech Wałęsa in Poland

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This paper examines the way that questions of how to deal with the legacy of the communist past, and specifically what might be termed ‘truth revelation procedures’, were used in post-communist Polish political debates to legitimate and de-legitimate the post-1989 state and the political narratives underpinning it, particular political actors, and the transitional justice process itself. Truth revelation procedures are a particular set of transitional justice measures¹ that, in the post-communist context, have largely involved two processes. Firstly, so-called ‘lustration’: vetting public officials and other prominent individuals for their links with the former communist regime’s security services as either secret police officers or informers, and possibly banning them from public office and positions of influence in society. Secondly, de-classifying and providing access to the extant secret archives and files of these former security services for public inspection.² The paper looks at the stormy, indeed often ferocious, national political debate and divisions within the political elites that emerged from the Solidarity independent trade union and mass anti-communist opposition movement over claims that its one-time legendary leader Lech Wałęsa collaborated with the communist secret services in the early 1970s as an informer codenamed ‘Bolek’, and the nature and significance of this apparent collaboration. The ‘Bolek’ affair illustrates how post-communist debates about truth revelation procedures became entwined with the process of defining particular individuals as historical heroes or villains to establish them as public authority

¹ See: Marek M. Kaminski and Monika Nalepa, ‘Judging Transitional Justice: A New Criterion for Evaluating Truth Revelation Procedures’, *The Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol 50, No 3, June 2006, pp383-408; and Monika Nalepa, ‘To Punish the Guilty and Protect the Innocent: Comparing Truth Revelation Procedures’, *Journal of Theoretical Politics*, Vol 2 No 2, April 2008, pp221-245.

² In other contexts truth revelation procedures also involved historical or ‘truth’ commissions: temporary bodies of formal inquiry appointed to re-examine the past and document the repressive activities of the previous regime, sometimes with the objective of achieving societal reconciliation. For more on lustration and transitional justice in post-communist Poland, see: Aleks Szczerbiak, ‘Dealing with the Communist Past or the Politics of the Present? Lustration in Post-Communist Poland’, *Europe-Asia Studies*, Vol 54 No 4, June 2002, pp553-572; Noel Calhoun, ‘The Ideological Dilemma of Lustration in Poland’, *East European Politics and Societies*, Vol 16 No 2, Spring 2002, pp494-520; Roman David, ‘Lustration Laws in Action: The Motives and Evaluation of Lustration Policy in the Czech Republic and Poland (1989-2001)’, *Law and Social Inquiry*, Vol 28 No 2, April 2003, 387-439; Piotr Grzelak, *Wojna o lustrację*, Warsaw: Trio, 2005; Cynthia Horne, ‘Late lustration programmes in Romania and Poland: supporting or undermining democratic transitions’, *Democratization*, Vol 16 No 2, April 2009, pp344-376; Lavinia Stan, ‘Poland’ in Lavinia Stan, ed, *Transitional Justice in Eastern Europe and the Former Soviet Union*, Routledge: London and New York, 2009, pp76-101; Roman David, *Lustration and Transitional Justice: Personnel Systems in the Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010; Matt Killingsworth, ‘Lustration after Totalitarianism: Poland’s Attempt to Reconcile with its Communist Past’, *Communist and Post-Communist Studies*, Vol 43 No 3, September 2010, pp275-284; Monika Nalepa, *Skeletons in the Closet: Transitional Justice in Post-Communist Europe*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010; Antoni Dudek, *Instytut: Osobista historia IPN*, Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Czerwona i Czarna, 2011; Aleks Szczerbiak, ‘Explaining Late Lustration Programs: Lessons from the Polish Case’, in Lavinia Stan and Natalya Nedelsky, eds, *Post-Communist Transitional Justice: Lessons from Twenty Five Years of Experience*, New York, NY, Cambridge University Press, 2015, pp51-70; and Aleks Szczerbiak, ‘Deepening democratisation? Exploring the declared motives for “late” lustration in Poland’, *East European Politics*, Vol 32 No 4, September 2016, pp426-445.

figures, and then to use them as authoritative sources to legitimate or de-legitimate the political system, particular political actors and formations, and policies.³

The paper begins by setting out the historical context of the ‘Bolek’ affair, describing how the allegations of Mr Wałęsa's alleged collaboration surfaced and re-surfaced on a number of occasions in post-communist Poland. It moves on to outline the arguments used by Mr Walesa's defenders and critics. The next section explains in detail how the ‘Bolek’ affair was used as a means of legitimation and de-legitimation at a number of levels: of the post-communist state, of particular political actors and formations, and of the truth revelation process itself. Finally, the paper examines public attitudes towards Mr Wałęsa's alleged collaboration. The main primary data sources are a qualitative analysis of news articles and opinion-editorial pieces published in: the centre-right ‘Rzeczpospolita’ daily, the main Polish newspaper of record; the key opinion-forming liberal-left ‘Gazeta Wyborcza’ daily and ‘Polityka’ weekly journal; the influential the right-wing ‘wSieci’ and ‘Do Rzeczy’ weekly journals, and ‘wPolityce’ news and commentary web portal. Most of the articles that I draw upon were published in the February-March 2016 period immediately after the publication of the Kiszczak files. The main data sources on Polish public opinion are polls conducted by the Centre for Public Opinion Research (Centrum Badania Opinii Społecznej: CBOS) polling agency together with the results of other opinion surveys published in the various news sources consulted, as described above.

The paper shows that Mr Wałęsa’s supporters attempted to relativise his actions and locate them within a broader historical context, posed various mitigating circumstances, and argued that he had compensated for the weaknesses of his youth by his subsequent actions. His critics argued that Mr Wałęsa’s collaboration was not just an ‘episode’ but lasted several years when he was an ardent informer rewarded financially for betraying his friends and fellow workers, and that fear of being blackmailed explained his behaviour during the transition to democracy and early years of post-communism, and raised questions about whether he had used his powers as head of state to cover up his involvement. Supporters of the post-1989 status quo argued that the Third Republic’s opponents were attempting to use the ‘Bolek affair’ to undermine the idea of the 1989 round table negotiations as an honourable compromise that paved the way for the transition to democratic rule. Its critics argued that the revelations of Mr Wałęsa’s collaboration revealed the mechanisms through which the communist security services deformed the Polish transformation by keeping in positions of power a group of individuals who were under their influence. The ‘Bolek’ affair also became a key issue dividing the main Polish political actors that emerged in the post-2005 period and was used to either argue that truth revelation process was vitally necessary or warn that it could become dangerously politicised. While the discovery of the Kiszczak files appeared to convince most Poles that Mr Wałęsa was indeed a communist security service collaborator, they also seemed prepared to interpret his actions charitably and did not change their broadly positive view of his contribution to the country’s recent history.

³ This was one of the tools of what might be termed ‘historical policy’ (polityka historyczna). In contemporary Polish political debate this concept developed increasingly ideological overtones and was linked to the idea of strengthening Poland’s national unity and cohesion by defending the country’s interpretation of history and trying to ensure that it was widely accepted in international circles in order for the country to achieve its wider political goals. See, for example: Dariusz Gawin et al, ‘Po co nam polityka historyczna?’, *wyborcza.pl*, 30 September 2005, <http://wyborcza.pl/1,76842,2945729.html> (accessed 17 February 2017).

What was the background to the 'Bolek' affair?

Allegations that Mr Wałęsa was a paid informant of the Polish communist Security Services (Służba Bezpieczeństwa: SB) in the early 1970s code named 'Bolek' first appeared in the public domain at the beginning of the 1990s and were to re-surface on a number of occasions. Agent 'Bolek's' activity began with the anti-communist protests on the Baltic coast at the end of 1970 and beginning of 1971 when Mr Wałęsa was a member of the strike committee in the Gdańsk shipyard. The alleged informer went on to provide information to Poland's communist-era secret police in the early 1970s on the views and actions of his colleagues in the shipyard. Mr Wałęsa, of course, became an icon of the struggle against Poland's communist regime leading the Solidarity trade union and anti-communist opposition movement from its formation in 1980 until he was elected President in Poland's first fully-free post-communist election at the end of 1990. Nonetheless, several of Mr Wałęsa's former colleagues from the Free Trade Unions of the Coast (Wolne Związki Zawodowe Wybrzeża: WZZ), an anti-communist opposition organisation operating in the coastal region in the late 1970s, backed the theory that he had been recruited as an agent. These included one-time leading Solidarity activists Andrzej and Joanna Gwiazda, Krzysztof Wyszowski and the late Anna Walentynowicz.⁴ However, Mr Wałęsa side-lined them within the union and their claims were generally dismissed as conspiracy theories by most politicians and the mainstream media.

The allegations received their first high profile airing in June 1992 when the by then President Wałęsa was included on the so-called 'Macierewicz list'. This was a secret list of 66 leading members of the Polish political elite holding important public offices in the government, parliament and other state bodies who had allegedly figured in the communist security service archives as secret informers. They were presented to parliament by Antoni Macierewicz, the then interior minister in the right-wing government led by Solidarity-linked lawyer Jan Olszewski.⁵ Mr Olszewski's administration came to office following the first fully free post-communist parliamentary election held in October 1991 as a self-proclaimed government of 'breakthrough' and, although it was always a weak and unstable minority coalition, had huge political ambitions promising a clean break with the communist past. Consequently, in May 1992 the Sejm, the more powerful lower house of the Polish parliament, passed a vote requiring Mr Macierewicz to publicly disclose the names of all current senior public officials occupying the rank of provincial governor upwards who had collaborated with the communist security services. A special investigation bureau was established within the interior ministry to compile such a list of collaborators based on the secret archives. However, Mr Macierewicz's lists were immediately leaked to the press after he presented them in parliament and the subsequent furore led to his loss of ministerial office the next day (June 5th) following the Olszewski government's dismissal, among hints from the prime minister that it had fallen victim to a dark conspiracy by political forces linked to the previous communist regime.⁶

⁴ According to some sources, Mr Wałęsa confessed his previous collaboration when he became active in the Free Trade Unions in 1977 and promised not to have any further contacts with the communist security services. See, for example: Marek Jan Chodakiewicz, 'Agent Bolek', *Intelligencer: Journal of US Intelligence Studies*, Vol 17 No 2, Fall 2009, pp108-110.

⁵ See: Y-Elita Pl, 'Lista Macierewicza', undated, <http://yelita.pl/artykuly/art/lista-macierewicza> (accessed December 16, 2013).

⁶ See, for example: Jacek Kurski and Piotr Semka. *Lewy Czerwcowy*. Warsaw: Editions Spotkania. 1993.

The issue re-surfaced in June 2008 when two historians working for the Institute of National Remembrance (Instytut Pamięci Narodowej: IPN), Sławomir Cenckiewicz and Piotr Gontarczyk, and with the blessing of the Institute's then president Janusz Kurtyka, published an academic monograph presenting what Mr Wałęsa's opponents said was strong, new circumstantial evidence suggesting that he had been recruited to co-operate with the communist security services as agent 'Bolek' while under arrest during the shipyard workers' strike in December 1970 and collaborated with them in the early 1970s.⁷ Although most documents concerning agent 'Bolek' were destroyed, the book contained evidence of his collaboration from the remaining materials including: papers from the communist security service archives, excerpts of memoirs from participants in the political events of the 1970s and 1980s, and files from the 1990s concerning vetting procedures for the State Security Office (Urząd Ochrony Państwa: UOP) and the public prosecutors' office. From these documents, the authors argued that agent 'Bolek' was an ordinary worker at the Gdańsk shipyard who was recruited by the communist security service apparatus during the December 1970 strikes and was a very effective and active agent between 1970-72 but was apparently removed from the operating files in 1976. Although not conclusive, given that some of the key documents went missing during Mr Wałęsa's 1990-95 presidency, the authors claimed that the evidence contained in the book, based on the sources that they had uncovered from the incomplete 'Bolek' file and supported by testimony from security service officers who were his handlers, exposed his role as an informer. The book also claimed that, in the wake of the publication of the 'Macierewicz list', Mr Walesa arranged for records of his communist security service collaboration to be removed and destroyed.⁸

The book received substantial coverage in both the Polish and international media sparking a heated national public and political debate on Mr Wałęsa's alleged collaboration.⁹ Moreover, the authors questioned the lustration court's August 2000 verdict, when Mr Walesa ran for President again that year, which declared that he had not lied when he stated that he never collaborated with the communist security services.¹⁰ The evidence contained in the book also questioned the Institute's November 2005 decision to officially designate Mr Wałęsa as being 'persecuted' by the communist regime.¹¹ In doing so, it also appeared to effectively clear him of collaboration, as this was a status not open to communist security service functionaries and informers, even if the latter had also been invigilated themselves. Interestingly, in September 2008, after the book was published, the Institute did not include Mr Wałęsa in a list of 2,000

⁷ See: Sławomir Cenckiewicz and Piotr Gontarczyk. *SB a Lech Wałęsa. Przyczynek do biografii*. IPN: Gdansk-Warsaw-Krakow. 2008. The Institute was established at the end of the 1990s and its primary function, in addition to investigating Nazi and communist crimes and informing and educating the Polish public about the country's recent past, was to act as the custodian of the communist security service files to which historians and researchers would be granted access.

⁸ See: Sławomir Cenckiewicz and Piotr Gontarczyk, 'Gdzie są akta TW "Bolka"', *Rzeczpospolita*, 17 June 2008.

⁹ In 2009 another (controversial) publication by Paweł Zyzak, a former Institute of National Remembrance intern, also connected Mr Wałęsa to the communist security services. See: Paweł Zyzak. *Lech Wałęsa - idea i historia. Biografia polityczna legendarnego przywódcy „Solidarności” do 1988 roku*. Arcana: Krakow. 2009.

¹⁰ See: Sławomir Cenckiewicz and Piotr Gontarczyk, 'Jak lustrowano prezydenta Wałęsę', *Rzeczpospolita*, 18 June 2008. In 1997 the Polish parliament passed a lustration law which required approximately 20,000 officials to submit written declarations stating whether or not they consciously worked for or collaborated with the communist security services at any point between 1944-1990. Anyone who was found by the lustration court to have made a false statement was banned from public office for ten years. See: Sejm RP. 'Ustawa z dnia 11 kwietnia 1997 r. o ujawnieniu pracy lub służby w organach bezpieczeństwa państwa lub współpracy z nimi w latach 1944-1990 osób pełniących funkcje publiczne', *Dziennik Ustaw*, 1997 nr 70 poz. 443, <http://isap.sejm.gov.pl/Download.jsessionid=E3D8BFA1046DCE6E02F87BD035C0DEB8?id=WDU19970700443&type=2> (accessed 13 February 2015).

¹¹ See: Sławomir Cenckiewicz, 'Jak Wałęsa dostał status pokrzywdzonego', *Rzeczpospolita*, 15 April 2009.

people who were persecuted under communism saying that his case was ‘complicated’; although it included some of the former President’s main Solidarity adversaries who accused him of having been a communist security service agent, including Mr and Mrs Gwiazda, and Ms Walentynowicz.¹²

Then, in February 2016 the Institute released copies of original documents which apparently filled in the missing pages from the incomplete ‘Bolek’ file and showed unequivocally that Mr Wałęsa had collaborated with the communist security services in 1970s as a paid secret collaborator.¹³ The files were hidden illegally in the home of General Czesław Kiszczak, a one-time high-ranking security services officer and communist interior minister who died in November 2015. Together with the then communist leader General Wojciech Jaruzelski, General Kiszczak was responsible for imposing the December 1981 martial law crackdown which crushed the Solidarity movement. Both of them were also leading figures on the regime side during the February-April 1989 round table negotiations between the communist government and Solidarity opposition movement that led eventually to the collapse of the regime in Poland. About three months after General Kiszczak’s death his widow Maria, who claimed that her husband had hidden the documents to protect Mr Wałęsa’s status as a national hero,¹⁴ tried to sell them to the Institute for a cash payment of 90,000 zloties. However, acting upon a law that gave it the right to appropriate important historical documents, the Institute instructed the authorities to seize them immediately.

The dossier, which covered the period 1970-76, contained two folders. The first bundle was a ‘personal file’ that included a one-page handwritten agreement to co-operate with the communist security services as an informant signed by hand with the name ‘Lech Wałęsa’ and the codename ‘Bolek’ (the undercover moniker his handlers assigned him)¹⁵ and dated December 21st 1970, a time when he worked as an electrician and was under arrest as strike leader of the worker protests at the Gdańsk shipyard. The second batch was a ‘work file’ containing numerous reports by agent ‘Bolek’ on his co-workers in the shipyard and notes of his meetings with communist security service functionaries. The documents showed that agent ‘Bolek’ co-operated as a paid informant and was most active from the beginning of the December 1970 strikes until December 1972. At first he eagerly provided information about the situation at the shipyard which could potentially have harmed his friends and fellow workers: on their opinions and actions; preparations for strikes, lockouts and demonstrations; and the names of the instigators of unrest among the workforce and those leafleting the plant. The files also included confirmations of the receipt of regular payments of money for his

¹² See: Piotr Kubiak, ‘Lech Wałęsa: gryzą mnie po kostkach’, *Rzeczpospolita*, 26 August 2008; and Wojciech Czuchnowski, ‘IPN: Wałęsa do weryfikacji’, *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 26 August 2008.

¹³ See: Andrzej Gajca, ‘Akta uderzają w Wałęsę’, *Rzeczpospolita*, 22 February 2017; and Wojciech Czuchnowski, ‘Trzy teczki Kiszczaka o "Bolku". Co jest w dokumentach udostępnionych przez IPN’, 22 February 2017, *wyborcza.pl*, <http://wyborcza.pl/1,75398,19664441,trzy-teczki-kiszczaka-o-bolku-co-jest-w-dokumentach-udostepnionych.html> (accessed 22 February 2017).

¹⁴ The documents contained a note saying that they were not to be made available until five years after Mr Wałęsa’s death.

¹⁵ Gontarczyk and Cenckiewicz’s critics argued that their book was highly circumstantial and, although the authors analysed excerpts from agent ‘Bolek’’s denunciations stored in police files, they were not in possession of this most vital document, the very file found in Kiszczak’s house. For critical reviews of the Cenckiewicz-Gontarczyk book see, for example: Andrzej Friszke, ‘Zniszczyć Wałęsę’, *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 21-22 June 2008; and Paweł Machcewicz, ‘Wałęsa w krzywym zwierciadle’, *Rzeczpospolita*, 30 June 2008. For the authors’ responses see: Sławomir Cenckiewicz and Piotr Gontarczyk, ‘O recenzji pisanej na raty. W odpowiedzi prof Andrzejowi Friszkemu’, *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 26 June 2006; and Sławomir Cenckiewicz and Piotr Gontarczyk, ‘Książka w krzywym zwierciadle’, *Rzeczpospolita*, 8 July 2006.

denunciations signed by Mr Wałęsa, together with his discharge from collaboration. After a while agent 'Bolek's' enthusiasm diminished as he became disenchanted with the political situation, he tried to avoid meeting with security service officers, and, as the quality of his information declined, was no longer deemed a valuable asset and collaboration with him terminated formally in 1976.

Mr Wałęsa's own statements regarding the truthfulness of these allegations and his response to the documents that purported to prove them, was confusing and contradictory.¹⁶ At some points he came close to admitting that he had collaborated. In his 1987 autobiography 'A Way of Hope', for example, Mr Wałęsa acknowledged that, 'I did not emerge from these confrontations (with the communist security services following the December 1970 strikes) entirely clean. They gave me a condition: sign! And then I signed!'¹⁷ Then again in June 1992, in a statement to the Polish Press Agency on the day that the Macierewicz list was released, he said that 'in December 1970 I signed three or four documents' to escape from the security services;¹⁸ although he withdrew this statement later that day when it became clear that the Olszewski government would be removed. However, even then Mr Wałęsa implied that what he signed was not a collaboration agreement as such but simply a document expressing loyalty to the communist regime (what he termed a 'lojalka'), and denied that he ever acted upon it by informing on anyone or accepting any payments.¹⁹ Sometimes Mr Wałęsa claimed that he had fooled the system and outwitted his interrogators to 'familiarise himself with his enemy, strive for victory, minimalise losses, particularly to rescue clever and brave people...(and harm) provocateurs, drunks and trouble makers, pushing them into scuffles, losses and lost causes. If you can see any collaboration here, then in this concept the Security Service was collaborating with me!'²⁰

On other occasions, Mr Wałęsa denied vehemently that he had ever been an informant and dismissed the incriminating files as forgeries created by the communist security services to discredit him. Indeed, for a number of years he was involved in an ongoing lawsuit against fellow one-time Solidarity and Free Trade Unions of the Coast activist Krzysztof Wyszowski who alleged that Mr Wałęsa had been a collaborator. He also denied removing incriminating documents from the security service archives during his presidency. Indeed, until 2008 he claimed that he had never seen his secret police file and it was only after the publication of the Cenckiewicz-Gontarczyk book that he admitted borrowing it, although he also insisted that nothing had been removed. When the accusations against him re-surfaced with the discovery of the Kiszczak dossier in February 2016, Mr Wałęsa once again denounced the files as forgeries: 'It is believed that I allowed myself to be broken, that I did in fact in spite of everything slightly collaborate, inform and take money in the 1970s. NO. NO. NO.'²¹

¹⁶ See, for example: Jarosław Stróżyk, 'Lech Wałęsa: Kiedyś dokumenty same przemowią', *Rzeczpospolita*, 31 May-1 June 2008.

¹⁷ See: Lech Wałęsa. *Droga nadziei*. Kraków: Znak. 1990, p6.

¹⁸ See: *SB a Lech Wałęsa*, p436.

¹⁹ Cf: 'Wildstein o oświadczeniach Wałęsy: To jest kolejna wersja zdarzeń, kolejny świadek, którego nikt nie widział. On mówi od rzeczy', *wPolityce*, 19 February 2016, <http://wpolityce.pl/polityka/282318-wildstein-o-oswiadczeniach-walesy-to-jest-kolejna-wersja-zdarzen-kolejny-swiadek-ktorego-nikt-nie-widzial-on-mowi-od-rzeczy> (accessed 19 February 2016).

²⁰ See: Andrzej Stankiewicz, 'Lech Wałęsa bliżej "Bolka"', *Rzeczpospolita*, 3 March 2016. Some commentators argue that this was impossible and it was delusional of him to think that he could have manipulated the security services in this way. See, for example: Michał Płociński, 'Historyk: Wałęsa to nie Piłsudski', *Rzeczpospolita*, 12-13 March 2016.

²¹ See: Andrzej Stankiewicz, 'Lech Wałęsa, niewolnik "Bolka"', *Rzeczpospolita*, 22 February 2016.

What arguments were used by Mr Wałęsa's supporters?

Some of Mr Wałęsa's staunchest supporters, who included many of his erstwhile Solidarity colleagues, argued that the supposedly incriminating documents may have been fabricated; or at least questioned whether it was possible to make unambiguous judgements about the nature of his involvement on the basis of them. For example, commentators Wojciech Czuchnowski and Agnieszka Kublik argued that: 'the files...are incomplete and carry traces of numerous interferences in their contents' because 'the Security Services specialised in falsification, societal disinformation activities and breaking up the opposition...you cannot treat the Security Service materials as an oracle and the revealed truth. You have to approach them with suspicion.'²² Mr Wałęsa's defenders drew attention to the fact point to the fact that false documents relating to his collaboration were created at the beginning of the 1980s in order to discredit him with his fellow oppositionists and (as it turned out in the end, unsuccessfully) prevent him being awarded the Nobel Peace Prize.²³

However, especially after the release of the Kiszczak files, most commentators, even those sympathetic to Mr Wałęsa, accepted that it was difficult to question the authenticity of the documents and that he almost certainly did collaborate with the communist security services between 1971-76. They acknowledged that it would be impossible (and unnecessary) to fabricate such elaborate and detailed accounts of the situation in the Gdańsk shipyards as set out in Mr Wałęsa's files years after the actual events took place simply in order to discredit the former Solidarity leader. While the later reports were much rarer and more laconic, agent 'Bolek's' initial accounts were very detailed, describing not just the general sentiment in the shipyards but particular individuals at length. For example, even generally pro-Wałęsa historian Andrzej Friszke accepted that while 'we cannot rule that maybe some of these were falsified...(t)his would mainly affect receipts for money paid...(b)ut ...not...the sections containing information'. 'These testimonies', he argued, 'were not thought up by some security service functionary behind a desk in Warsaw or even in Gdańsk; there are too many details in them.'²⁴ On another occasion, Prof Friszke argued that: 'There is no possibility to reconstruct such an extensive, detailed account of the situation in the shipyards years later to...discredit Mr Wałęsa as leader of Solidarity. No one would be capable of doing this.'²⁵ Similarly, commentator Andrzej Stankiewicz pointed out that: 'It is very unlikely that the head of the security services (General Kiszczak) would have wasted space in his home safe on false papers - Kiszczak almost certainly collected solely authentic papers, because he wanted to have effective "hooks" (haki) on people who were important during the 1989 velvet revolution. Only such papers would represent an insurance policy.'²⁶ The Institute itself not only insisted that an expert archivist had certified that the Kiszczak files were

²² See: Wojciech Czuchnowski and Agnieszka Kublik, 'Misja IPN: zniszczyć Wałęsę, uratować Kamińskiego,' *wyborcza.pl*, 28 February 2016, <http://wyborcza.pl/1,76842,19692936,misja-ipn-zniszczyc-walesse-uratowac-kaminskiego.html> (accessed 28 February 2016).

²³ See, for example: Wojciech Czuchnowski, "'Bolek" story, czyli jak władze komunistyczne chciały skompromitować Wałęsę', *wyborcza.pl*, 18 February 2016, <http://wyborcza.pl/1,75398,19642883,bolek-story-czyli-jak-wladze-komunistyczne-chcialy-skompromitowac.html> (accessed 18 February 2016).

²⁴ See: Andrzej Friszke, 'Jak czytać te teczki', *Polityka*, 2-8 March 2016

²⁵ See: Adam Leszczyński, 'Prof Friszke: Teczki Wałęsy to nie są śmieci', *wyborcza.pl*, 23 February 2016, <http://wyborcza.pl/1,75398,19664506,prof-friszke-teczki-walesy-to-nie-sa-smieci.html> (accessed 23 February 2016).

²⁶ See: Andrzej Stankiewicz, 'Archiwum Kiszczaka: Upadki i wzloty Lecha Wałęsy', *Rzeczpospolita*, 19 February 2016.

authentic papers produced by the communist security services at the time,²⁷ but commissioned a forensic handwriting experts report which, in a January 2017 report, also confirmed their authenticity.²⁸

Consequently rather than dismissing the allegations outright, most of Mr Wałęsa's supporters' tended to focus not on the authenticity and contents of the files but on how deeply he was implicated, and the interpretations of his actions, particularly the notion that they were difficult to evaluate from a post-communist perspective. As commentator Jarosław Kurski put it, '(the files contained) the truth about Wałęsa ...but only the partial truth.'²⁹ Firstly, Mr Wałęsa's supporters tried to relativise his involvement and actions by positing various mitigating circumstances. They argued that when he was coerced by the security services into signing a co-operation agreement Mr Wałęsa was a young, isolated worker in a brutal political system with no broader support network, fearing persecution and harsh reprisals against him and his large family. They said that the only reason that he was interrogated in December 1970 was because he had been active in worker protests as one of the leaders of the shipyard strike, while those who never stood up to the regime did not have to deal with the state's coercive apparatus in the same way. As commentator Piotr Moszyński put it: '(This is the) story of a worker with a large family, squeezed effectively by the then all-powerful security services literally the day after the massacre of workers on the coast, when it was obvious to everyone that the threat was not theoretical, because the authorities were prepared to kill if they felt that this was appropriate.'³⁰ Similarly, veteran opposition activist Karol Modzelewski argued that: 'Wałęsa in 1970 was an ordinary (worker)...without any experience. When they arrested him in December 1970 for five days, he did not have a clue that he even had any rights. He had every reason to be afraid. Shortly before then his colleagues had been beaten up and buried in nylon body bags in anonymous graves. He did not know if he would also be killed. He signed because they told him to sign. He did not have a clue whether he could not sign. It didn't enter into his head.'³¹ Bogdan Lis, a veteran of the August 1980 Gdańsk shipyard strike that led to Solidarity's formation, said that: 'The 1970 period is a very difficult one to evaluate. I myself spent time in prison and know how hopeless a person is when confronting the security apparatus. You don't have anyone to appeal to, there was no opposition.'³² Historian Andrzej Friszke also argued that: '(In 1970) when he was being interrogated, the corpses of the victims were still not buried. Three days earlier he saw how people were killed... You can't hold the first interrogation against Wałęsa. He was arrested not long after there had been shooting on the streets.'³³

²⁷ See: Marek Kozubal, 'Udostępnią akta z domu Kiszczaka', *Rzeczpospolita*, 22 February 2016.

²⁸ See: Marek Kozubal, 'Wałęsa jednak podpisał', *Rzeczpospolita*, 1 February 2017; and Wojciech Czuchnowski, 'Kim jest TW "Bolek"? Oskarżyciele Wałęsy triumfują', *wyborcza.pl*, 31 January 2017, <http://wyborcza.pl/7,75398,21315268,kim-jest-tw-bolek-oskarzyciele-walesy-triumfuja-podsumowanie.html> (accessed 31 January 2017).

²⁹ See: Jarosław Kurski, 'Operacja "Bolek": Czego nie było w szufladzie Kiszczaka', *wyborcza.pl*, 19 February 2016, <http://wyborcza.pl/1,75968,19648199,operacja-bolek-czego-nie-bylo-w-szufladzie-kiszczaka.html> (accessed 19 February 2016).

³⁰ See: Piotr Moszyński, 'Dzięki, Lechu. A co, jeśli się okaże, że to nie fałszywki?' *wyborcza.pl*, 22 February 2016, <http://wyborcza.pl/1,75968,19663857,dzieki-lechu-a-co-jesli-okaze-sie-ze-to-nie-falszywki.html> (accessed 22 February 2016).

³¹ See: Maciej Stasiński, 'Bez Wałęsy nie byłoby podziemia', *wyborcza.pl*, 22 February 2016, <http://wyborcza.pl/1,75398,19659449,bez-walesy-nie-byloby-podziemia.html> (accessed 22 February 2016).

³² See: Wojciech Czuchnowski, 'Ścieżki agenta "Bolka". Co zapisali esbecy w latach 70?' *wyborcza.pl*, 24 February 2016, <http://wyborcza.pl/1,75398,19669361,sciezki-agenta-bolka-co-zapisali-esbecy-w-latach-70.html> (accessed 24 February 2017).

³³ See: 'Jak czytać te teczki'.

They also tried to locate his actions within a broader historical context, arguing that they were difficult to evaluate from a post-communist perspective and that only those who found themselves in similar circumstances could judge him on the moral choices that he made at the time. For example, Bogdan Lis argued that only those who ‘went through the “paths of health”³⁴ in 1970, (and who) were among the workers who were run over by tanks’ could evaluate Mr Wałęsa’s decisions.³⁵ Similarly, another veteran Solidarity leader Władysław Frasyniuk argued that ‘making a great sensation out of the “Bolek” affair without knowing the context of the times in which he was supposed to have allowed himself to be broken is the behaviour of a son-of-a-bitch...In the police stations they were executing people, and there was no Workers’ Defence Committee,³⁶ no lawyers, underground press, contacts with the West. And someone today wants to make a judgement that someone else wanted to avoid being crippled?! That they wanted to protect their family?!’³⁷

Secondly, they tried to minimise Mr Wałęsa’s period of collaboration with the security services arguing that he should be judged according to the whole of his life’s achievements and not just the (understandable, they argued) weaknesses of his youth. They said that it was only an ‘episode’ that lasted for a short period from which he soon found the strength to extricate himself. The final document in his file was dated 1976 and there was, they argued, no hard evidence that Mr Wałęsa’s collaboration continued beyond then when he was engaged in anti-regime opposition activity. For example, Karol Modzelewski argued that, ‘it is false to say that if someone once signed something, then you can write them off for their whole life...It has happened that well-known oppositionists started to collaborate with the Security Service and then spent time incarcerated and became respected oppositionists.’³⁸ Arguing that ‘(e)ven if Bolek was Wałęsa, Wałęsa is not Bolek...he is a hundred times greater than him’, commentator Adam Szostkiewicz said that while Mr Wałęsa ‘made mistakes, took bad decisions and did stupid things...the same Wałęsa (also) did great things’.³⁹ Another commentator Wojciech Maziarski argued that: ‘This is the story of a young worker who, in the deep darkness of communism, decided to collaborate with secret police but later, through his own strength, lifted himself up from the fall and bravely broke off those links.’⁴⁰ Similarly, commentators Wojciech Czuchnowski and Agnieszka Kublik said that, ‘the agent “Bolek” files...only give extracts from (a fragmentary picture of) Lech Wałęsa’s activities’,⁴¹

³⁴ ‘Paths of health’ (‘ścieżka zdrowia’) was an ironic euphemism for a form of torture carried out by the communist security services on opposition activists which involved beating those arrested with clubs as they ran between two lines of functionaries.

³⁵ See: Adam Leszczyński, ‘Telewizyjny spektakl, który miał pogrzebać Wałęsę. Broniący legendy “S” znokautował jego tropiciela’, *wyborcza.pl*, 18 February 2016, <http://wyborcza.pl/1,75968,19648109,telewizyjny-spektakl-ktory-mial-pogrzebac-walesse-broniacy.html> (accessed 18 February 2016).

³⁶ The Workers’ Defence Committee (Komitet Obrony Robotników: KOR) was one of the first major anti-communist opposition groups in Poland set up to provide aid to persecuted worker leaders and their families after the government crackdown that followed the June 1976 anti-regime protests.

³⁷ See: Jacek Harłukowicz, ‘Władysław Frasyniuk. Kto rzuca w Lecha Wałęsę kamieniem’, *wyborcza.pl*, 20 February 2016, <http://wyborcza.pl/magazyn/1,124059,19652285,wladyslaw-frasyniuk-kto-rzuca-w-lecha-walesse-kamieniem.html> (accessed 20 February 2016).

³⁸ See: ‘Bez Wałęsy nie byłoby podzemia’.

³⁹ See: Adam Szostkiewicz, ‘Nasz Lech, wasz Bolek’, *Polityka*, 24 February-1 March 2016.

⁴⁰ See: Wojciech Maziarski, ‘Przejścia Lecha na jasną stronę mocy’, *wyborcza.pl*, 25 February 2016, <http://wyborcza.pl/1,75968,19674969,przejscia-lecha-na-jasna-strone-mocy.html> (accessed 25 February 2016).

⁴¹ See: ‘Misja IPN’.

while historian Andrzej Friszke argued that Mr Wałęsa's communist security service file 'cannot be regarded as the key to understanding (his) whole (life) history.'⁴²

Thirdly, Mr Wałęsa's supporters also argued that his earlier period of collaboration was just a part of the story that should be viewed within the context of, and did not detract from, his later historical achievements. In other words, they claimed that ultimately his behaviour in the 1970s was irrelevant because Mr Wałęsa compensated for his earlier transgressions. Through his remarkable negotiating skills, charisma and stubborn bravery under house arrest during martial law, Mr Wałęsa, they said, played a pivotal role in helping to bring about the collapse of communism and democratisation in Poland. For example, Bogdan Lis argued that, 'it is thanks to Lech Wałęsa that Poland is free today' and 'no one will tear (this) down, no file and no accusation about collaboration.'⁴³ Similarly, commentator Jarosław Kurski said that: 'A scandal from forty six years ago when in the tragic December of 1970 a young worker undertakes an unclean game with the communist security services cannot change the positive balance of his achievements.'⁴⁴ Historian Jan Skórzyński also argued that: 'An episode of possible collaboration with the Security Services will not have a great impact on the overall assessment of Lech Wałęsa's achievements as one of the fathers of the third Polish independence'.⁴⁵ Indeed, some of Mr Wałęsa's supporters even claimed that his earlier collaboration helped him to understand how the system worked from the inside - and, therefore, how to fight it more effectively - which made him an even greater threat to the communist regime. As commentator Piotr Moszyński put it: '(F)rom the coolly practical point of view of our common interest, this whole dramatic turn of events shaped a person who knew the system and the threats that were contained within it from the inside, and who was then able to take advantage of this knowledge in his (later) activities'.⁴⁶

Nor, his supporters argued, was there any solid evidence that his earlier collaboration with the communist security services meant that he remained under their control, nor that they had any influence on him, subsequently during his later periods of opposition activity in the 1980s when he was leader of the Solidarity movement. Indeed, they said that Mr Wałęsa was both a genuine, authentic and heroic leader who acted independently against the regime's wishes and a legendary figure of international standing who embodied and symbolised Poland's courageous struggle for freedom and democracy and eventual victory over communism. For example, in an open letter titled 'The Institute (of National Remembrance) is harming Poland' which came out a month before the publication of the Cenckiewicz-Gontarczyk book, a number of signatories drawn from the Third Republic political and cultural elites and linked to the liberal wing of the Solidarity movement argued that: 'The role of Solidarity and its historical leader Lech Wałęsa in the fight for a free Poland and returning European unity is Poland's moral capital ...the archives of the communist security services are to become an instrument for wiping out the image and authority of the worker leader of Solidarity, Nobel Peace Prize winner and the first President of the newly independent Poland'. The signatories - which included Solidarity intellectual Tadeusz Mazowiecki, who in August 1989 became Poland's first post-war non-communist prime minister, and former veteran anti-communist

⁴² See: 'Prof Friszke za, a nawet przeciw ws. TW Bolka? Teczka nie może być traktowana jako klucz do zrozumienia całej historii Lecha Wałęsy', *wpolityce.pl*, 16 March 2016, <http://wpolityce.pl/polityka/285288-prof-friszke-za-a-nawet-przeciw-ws-tw-bolka-teczka-nie-moze-byc-traktowana-jako-klucz-do-zrozumienia-calej-historii-lecha-walesy> (accessed 16 March 2016).

⁴³ See: 'Telewizyny spektakl, który miał pogrzebać Wałęsę.'

⁴⁴ See: 'Operacja "Bolek".'

⁴⁵ See: Jan Skórzyński, 'Oskarżony: Lech Wałęsa', *Polityka*, 24 February-1 March 2016.

⁴⁶ See: 'Dziękuję, Lechu'.

opposition activist, theoretician and, in post-communist Poland, editor of the ‘Gazeta Wyborcza’ newspaper Adam Michnik - appealed for Poles to counter ‘(this) campaign of hatred and slander being directed at Lech Wałęsa which is damaging Poland’s national memory.’⁴⁷ Similarly, following the publication of the Kiszczak files, commentator Jarosław Kurski described Mr Wałęsa as ‘the victor over communism, our greatest contemporary historical symbol’.⁴⁸ Józef Pinior, a one-time Solidarity leader, argued that: ‘Wałęsa is a symbol of our road from dictatorship to freedom and democracy. An important figure for both the history of Poland and - alongside Nelson Mandela, perhaps - also the history of the whole world.’ ‘People like him are not’, he argued, ‘judged by people but by history.’⁴⁹ Commentator Aleksander Hall said that ‘regardless of what materials are found in files stored by Czesław Kiszczak... Lech Wałęsa is one of the most distinguished and honoured Poles of the twentieth century.’⁵⁰ Another commentator Wojciech Maziarski described Mr Wałęsa as ‘not just Poland’s national capital but also a living embodiment of the passage from the dark to the bright side.’⁵¹ Sociologist Ireneusz Krzemiński also described him as ‘a representative and symbol of the Polish transformation and Polish victory over the previous regime... a symbol of the victory of freedom and democracy, integrating Poland and Poles into the West.’⁵²

What arguments were used by Mr Wałęsa’s critics?

Mr Wałęsa’s critics, on the other hand, argued that his actions in the early 1970s mattered even if they were only part of the story of his public life. They pointed out that his collaboration as a communist security service informant was not simply an ‘episode’ but lasted for several years. The documents showed, they argued, that at first Mr Wałęsa was an ardent informer who eagerly and shamelessly betrayed and provided information about the opinions and actions of his friends and fellow workers at the Gdańsk shipyard. This served as the basis of repression and persecution against them and his victims deserved an apology. Mr Wałęsa was also remunerated financially for the information that he provided, accepting 13,300 zloties in total for his services during his six years of collaboration (the average wage at the time was around 2,000 zloties per month).⁵³ For example, commentator Bronisław Wildstein argued that, ‘(although) he probably was able to disentangle himself from it later... the fact is that he informed on his colleagues and behaved badly’,⁵⁴ noting that from the documents revealed in the Kiszczak files ‘it emerges that Wałęsa was driven by material motives and also that he did not hold back from anything in his denunciations.’⁵⁵ Similarly, historian Sławomir Cenckiewicz said that: ‘(Wałęsa’s) collaboration was neither a “few

⁴⁷ See: Sławomir Cenckiewicz, ‘Ikona system kłamstw’, *Do Rzeczy*, 22-28 February 2016.

⁴⁸ See: ‘Operacja “Bolek”’.

⁴⁹ See: Jacek Harłukowicz, ‘Pinior: Chcą zastąpić Wałęsę Lechem Kaczyńskim’, *wyborcza.pl*, 19 February 2016, <http://wroclaw.wyborcza.pl/wroclaw/1,35771,19650606,pinior-chca-zastapic-walese-lechem-kaczynskim.html> (accessed 19 February 2016).

⁵⁰ See: Aleksander Hall, ‘Aleksander Hall o rewolucji nihilizmu’, *wyborcza.pl*, 22 February 2016, <http://wyborcza.pl/1,75968,19659367,aleksander-hall-o-rewolucji-nihilizmu.html> (accessed 22 February 2016).

⁵¹ See: ‘Przejścia Lecha na jasną stronę mocy’.

⁵² See: Ireneusz Krzemiński, ‘Obalenie bohatera’, *wyborcza.pl*, 29 February 2016, <http://wyborcza.pl/1,75968,19693207,obalenie-bohatera.html> (accessed 29 February 2016).

⁵³ See: Wojciech Czuchnowski and Adam Leszczyński, ‘Wałęsa w cieniu teczek. Pośmiertna zemsta komunistyczne Służby Bezpieczeństwa’, *wyborcza.pl*, 23 February 2016, <http://wyborcza.pl/1,75398,19664435,walesa-w-cieniu-teczek-posmiertna-zemsta-komunistycznej-sluzby.html> (accessed 23 February 2016).

⁵⁴ See: Bronisław Wildstein, ‘Wałęsa to typ wiejskiego cwaniaczka’, 26 March 2016, *fakt.pl*, <http://www.fakt.pl/wydarzenia/polityka/bronislaw-wildstein-dla-faktu/t1lmsg6> (accessed 27 March 2016).

⁵⁵ See: Bronisław Wildstein, ‘“Solidarność” to nie Wałęsa’, *wSieci*, 29 February-6 March 2016.

months long incident” in his biography nor did his “real collaboration” only “probably last until 1972”...but (it) lasted several years, was directed at specific people (around thirty) and he was financially rewarded for it.’⁵⁶ Commentator Rafał Ziemkiewicz argued that: ‘Talking about a “moment of weakness” and “signing a scrap of paper” is simply grotesque when we have more than 250 hand-written denunciations in the space of six years and receipts for a considerable amount of money for that time, particularly compared with a worker’s income.’⁵⁷ Marcin Fijołek, another commentator, also argued that: ‘You cannot just dismiss the fate of those people whose lives were broken (or at least fractured) as a result of the information that Secret Collaborator Bolek sold to the security services.’⁵⁸

They also argued that - although Mr Wałęsa stopped collaborating by the second half of the 1970s, several years before he became Solidarity leader - fear that his earlier period of communist security service collaboration would be revealed raised questions about whether this could have been used to influence his later political decisions. Most commentators, including most (although not all) of his critics, appeared to accept that Mr Wałęsa was probably acting independently when he was Solidarity leader in the 1980s; or, at least, that there was no hard evidence that he was under the control of the security services.⁵⁹ However, his critics claimed that fear of being blackmailed by representatives of the outgoing regime explained Mr Wałęsa’s seemingly erratic behaviour during the transition to democracy and early years of post-communist Poland, particularly as its first freely elected President in 1990-95 when, they argued, he made a series of questionable personnel and policy choices. Having earlier quarrelled with Solidarity liberals and leftists, Mr Wałęsa jettisoned his temporary right-wing allies as soon he was elected and some of the people that he then chose to collaborate and surrounded himself with as advisers, and eventually grew to accept and befriend, were, his critics argued, highly dubious officials and individuals linked to the former communist military intelligence and security services. They also pointed to some of the policy decisions that he made as President which, his critics argued, appeared to betray Solidarity’s ideals. These included: moves that left Poland within Moscow’s sphere of influence such as his proposal to establish joint Polish-Russian stock companies on the territory of former Soviet military bases in Poland and develop a second class NATO membership category for Poland, termed ‘NATO-mark two’ (‘NATO-bis’); his rather ambiguous reaction to the August 1991 anti-Gorbachev coup by hard line Soviet communists; together with his role in helping to precipitate and facilitate the downfall of the radical anti-communist Olszewski government in 1992.⁶⁰

⁵⁶ See: ‘Oświadczenie Sławomira Cenckiewicza, Wałęsa był współpracownikiem SB o ps. “Bolek”’, *wPolityce*, 17 February 2016, <http://wpolityce.pl/polityka/281950-oswiadczenie-slawomira-cenckiewicza-walesa-byl-wspolpracownikiem-sb-o-ps-bolek> (accessed 17 February 2016).

⁵⁷ See: Rafał Ziemkiewicz, ‘Solidarni z “Bolkem”’, *Do Rzeczy*, 22-28 February 2016.

⁵⁸ See: Marcin Fijołek, ‘Legendzie Lecha Wałęsy najbardziej szkodzą nie “hnwejbini i lustratorzy”, ale on sam i front jego obrońców zamykających oczy na rzeczywistość’, *wPolityce*, 24 February 2016, <http://wpolityce.pl/polityka/282841-legendzie-lecha-walesy-najbardziej-szkodza-nie-hunwejbini-i-lustratorzy-ale-on-sam-i-front-jego-obroncow-zamykajacych-oczy-na-rzeczywistosc> (accessed 24 February 2016).

⁵⁹ For an attempt to present evidence linking Mr Wałęsa’s later actions as Solidarity leader to his earlier communist security service collaboration see, for example: ‘Sławomir Cenckiewicz obala 14 mitów Wałęsy’, *niezalezna.pl*, 2 February 2017, <http://niezalezna.pl/93236-tylko-u-nas-slawomir-cenckiewicz-obala-14-mitow-walesy> (accessed 3 February 2017). Prof Cenckiewicz’s arguments are set out at greater length in: Sławomir Cenckiewicz, *Wałęsa: Człowiek z teczki*, Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Zysk i S-ka, 2013. Cf Andrzej Friszke, ‘Friszke rozbija w OKO.press 14 mitów Cenckiewicza o Wałęsie: to oszczerstwa, insynuacje i manipulacje’, *wyborcza.pl*, 8 February 2017, <http://wyborcza.pl/7,75968,21346393,friszke-rozbija-w-oko-press-14-mitow-cenckiewicza-o-walesie.html> (accessed 9 February 2017).

⁶⁰ See, for example: Piotr Semka, ‘Czego jeszcze nie wiemy o Lechu’, *Do Rzeczy*, 29 February-6 March 2016; and “Solidarność” to nie Wałęsa’.

For example, commentator Piotr Zaremba argued that although ‘Mr Wałęsa...was not a puppet (and) had his own aims and interests...he (also) had to deal with a formidable partner (General Kiszczak) who had a box of papers on him under his bed. And it is then that the most horrendous things started to happen. After he secured the presidency in 1990.’⁶¹ This included: ‘His abandonment, immediately after the 1990 presidential election, of his programme of anti-communist acceleration. His removal of independent right-wing politicians from his chancellery and their replacement with figures who were often registered as (communist security service) secret collaborators. Keeping Mieczysław Wachowski,⁶² a secretive and dark figure, at his side...Forcing joint Polish-Russian companies which would be a path to (Moscow’s) penetration of Poland. Nurturing communist networks in the army and security services. Promoting the idea of “NATO-mark two” aimed at halting Poland’s pro-Western path.’⁶³ Similarly, sociologist Mateusz Fałkowski argued that: ‘Lech Wałęsa’s personnel choices during the period of his presidency, his role in relation to the army, ideas of “NATO-mark two” or his reaction to Genady Yanayev’s (anti-Gorbachev) coup, his activity relating to lustration and de-communisation themselves - all of this can be evaluated afresh, knowing now not just Wałęsa’s open interests and views but also the documents revealed (in the Kiszczak files).’⁶⁴ Michał Karnowski, another commentator, argued that ‘questions about the possibility of Wałęsa’s activity as an agent, about the possibility that he was blackmailed’ emerged ‘after 1990 (when) he betrayed the whole Solidarity movement in favour of an agreement with the communist torturers. Questions about his unusual advisers, about his support for the ex-communists, about him aligning himself with the fiercest opponents of the anti-communist camp.’⁶⁵

His critics also raised questions about whether during his presidency Mr Wałęsa - or, more likely, former communist security service and military intelligence officers acting on his behalf - illegally removed, and then attempted to destroy, the incriminating classified records of his collaboration contained in the ‘Bolek’ file; returning incomplete files to the State Security Office several months later.⁶⁶ The public prosecutor’s office initially launched an inquiry into this incident and pressed charges against Mr Wałęsa’s interior minister Andrzej Milczanowski and Office of State Security heads Jerzy Konieczny and Gromosław Czempiński, accusing them of losing classified files. However, the investigation was discontinued in 1999; formally on the grounds that no offence had been committed but, according to Mr Wałęsa’s critics, more likely for political reasons. All of this, they argued, deserved condemnation, even if the culprit was a national hero or an internationally recognised public figure. For example, historian Sławomir Cenckiewicz argued that: ‘One of the facts confirming the level of Wałęsa’s collaboration, and the consequences of this for free Poland, was the organised annexation and robbery of the “Bolek” documents by high level

⁶¹ See: Piotr Zaremba, ‘To Wałęsa się uwikłał, nie Solidarność. To było uwikłanie częściowe, ale zabójcze dla jego roli po 1989’, *wPolityce*, 18 February 2016, <http://wpolityce.pl/polityka/282210-to-walesa-sie-uwiklal-nie-solidarnosc-to-bylo-uwiklanie-czesciowe-ale-zabojcze-dla-jego-roli-po-1989-roku> (accessed 18 February 2016).

⁶² Mieczysław Wachowski - a close friend and aide (and at one time chauffeur) of Mr Wałęsa who became head of his presidential chancellery - was rumoured to have been a communist security service officer. See, for example: Piotr Semka, ‘Niewyjaśniona tajemnica Lecha Wałęsy’, *Do Rzeczy*, 14-21 April 2014.

⁶³ See: Piotr Zaremba, ‘Pod dyktando teczek SB’, *wSieci*, 22-28 February 2016.

⁶⁴ See: Mateusz Fałkowski, ‘Akta “Bolka” i dobre rządzenie’, *Rzeczpospolita*, 22 February 2016.

⁶⁵ See: Michał Karnowski, ‘Szafa Kiszczaka to prawdziwa konstytucja III RP, fundament państwa zbudowanego na krzywdzie ofiar i bogactwie oprawców’, *wPolityce*, 18 February 2016, <http://wpolityce.pl/spoleczenstwo/282121-szafa-kiszczaka-to-prawdziwa-konstytucja-iii-rp-fundament-panstwa-zbudowanego-na-krzywdzie-ofiar-i-bogactwie-oprawcow> (accessed 18 February 2016).

⁶⁶ See, for example: ‘Gdzie są akta TW „Bolka”’.

state functionaries from the interior affairs ministry, the Office of State Security and the presidential chancellery in the years 1992-95.⁶⁷ Similarly, historian Mikołaj Mirowski said that Mr Wałęsa ‘removed documents from the Agent Bolek file, (and) in doing so form(ed) an informal alliance with people of a security service-army provenance.’⁶⁸ Commentator Bronisław Wildstein also claimed that ‘(d)uring the course of his presidency...Wałęsa destroyed documents held on him to which he had access, and so committed an actual crime. The activities of Lech Walesa, from the moment that he won the presidency, were dedicated to one objective: hiding the truth about a shameful episode in his life.’⁶⁹

How was the ‘Bolek’ affair used as a means of legitimation and de-legitimation?

Both sides of the political debate over the nature and meaning of Mr Wałęsa’s collaboration accused the other of instrumentalising the ‘Bolek affair’ and trying to develop an image of the former Solidarity leader that was politically advantageous to them. There were three main, inter-linked arenas in which this could be seen:

The (true?) nature of the post-communist Third Republic

Firstly, the ‘Bolek affair’ went to the heart of one of the most divisive questions in Polish politics and was used to both legitimate and de-legitimate the post-communist Third Republic state’s genesis and foundational myths. It was a key element of the debates about the nature of the Polish transition from communism to democracy and meaning of the events of 1989, especially the role of the so-called ‘round table’ negotiations between the communist government and anti-communist opposition. Many observers felt that the role played by Lech Wałęsa, who was a key figure in these negotiations and processes, explained many of the choices and decisions taken during this transition period. Without understanding these, and Mr Wałęsa’s role in them, it was not possible to make sense of the broader process of post-communist transformation and the main issues and lines of division that went on to dominate contemporary Polish politics and society.

Supporters of the Third Republic status quo viewed the post-communist period as one of success marked by economic growth, democracy and Poland’s successful integration into Euro-Atlantic political, economic and military international structures.⁷⁰ For the post-1989 political, business and cultural elites that emerged from the transition process, the round table process embodied the peaceful transfer of power from the previous to the new regime.⁷¹ They argued that, by accusing Mr Wałęsa of being a communist security service informer, the opponents of the Third Republic status quo were attempting to undermine, de-legitimise and ultimately destroy his legend as one of the fundamentals of the post-1989 state and replace him with a new hierarchy of moral authority figures and pantheon of anti-communist heroes who were more sympathetic to their analysis of the shortcomings of the Polish post-

⁶⁷ See: ‘Oświadczenie Sławomira Cenckiewiczza’.

⁶⁸ See: Mikołaj Mirowski, ‘Męstwo Lecha Wałęsy,’ *Rzeczpospolita*, 27-28 February 2016.

⁶⁹ See: “‘Solidarność’ to nie Wałęsa’.

⁷⁰ See, for example: ‘Pełny tekst przemówienia Bronisława Komorowskiego wygłoszonego w 25. rocznicę wyborów z 4 czerwca 1989’, 4 June 2014, *gazeta.prawna.pl*, <http://www.gazetaprawna.pl/artykuly/801396,pełny-tekst-przemowienia-bronislawa-komorowskiego-wygloszonego-w-25-rocznicze-wyborow-z-4-czerwca-1989.html> (accessed 5 June 2014); and ‘Poland’s second golden age’, *Economist*, 26 June 2004.

⁷¹ See, for example: Adam Michnik, ‘Wykorzystaliśmy szansę daną przez historię’, *wyborcza.pl*, 6 February 2014, http://wyborcza.pl/1,75968,15406245,Wykorzystalismy_szanse_dana_przez_historie.html (accessed 6 February 2014).

communist transformation. By arguing that the transition process was conducted under the direction of the communist security services, and those potentially beholden to them such as Mr Wałęsa, the Third Republic's critics were, it was argued, trying to promote their own, alternative vision of post-communist transformation by proving that the state established in 1989 was not an authentic creation and was rotten from the outset.

For example, the signatories of the open letter 'The Institute is harming Poland' signed by figures from the Third Republic's political and cultural elites (see above) argued that: 'Solidarity is Poland's moral capital and its historical leader Lech Wałęsa in the fight for a free Poland and returning European unity...the archives of the communist security services are to become an instrument for wiping out the image and authority of the worker leader of Solidarity, Nobel Peace Prize winner and the first President of the newly independent Poland'. They appealed for Poles to counter '(this) campaign of hatred and slander being directed at Lech Wałęsa which is damaging Poland's national memory.'⁷² Similarly, after the revelation of the Kiszczak files commentator Jarosław Kurski argued that '(b)y attacking (Mr Wałęsa as) the symbol (and foundational myth of the Third Republic his critics) want to question the success of the last 26 years...This is about laying a bomb under the foundations of the Third Republic, about establishing a new hierarchy and new authority figures. About writing Polish contemporary history anew.'⁷³ Another commentator Marek Beylin argued that, for Mr Wałęsa's opponents, the Kiszczak files 'represent a good pretext to re-heat hypotheses such as Jarosław Kaczyński's'⁷⁴ (formulated at the beginning of the 1990s) that a network emerging from the former communist (security) services was continuously controlling both Wałęsa and the Third Republic.' This 'melange of revenge and devious, conspiratorial imaginings' represented the 'founding myth for this milieu' of enemies of Wałęsa and those who felt that they were marginalised by the Third Republic.'⁷⁵

Former Solidarity activist Józef Piniór argued that the 'Bolek' affair was 'nothing less than trying to colonise Polish history by the milieu associated with Jarosław Kaczyński',⁷⁶ while Bogdan Lis, another one-time leading union activist, argued that Mr Wałęsa's opponents were 'trying to cancel out the Polish road to independence, cancel out Wałęsa's role within it, depreciate him, ruin the symbol, who cannot be rubbed out from Polish history.'⁷⁷ Referring to Mr Wałęsa as Poland's 'symbolic Moses' on the country's 'road to freedom', commentator Adam Szostkiewicz claimed that 'by destroying Lech Wałęsa's legend (Law and Justice and other critics hoped) to negate the whole of the Third Republic and create new heroes of independence...to discredit him in order to strike down the foundational myth of the Third Republic.' The defence of Lech Wałęsa thus became 'a defence of our common road to freedom...we cannot agree to removing Wałęsa from it...(with writing our) contemporary

⁷² See: 'Ikona system kłamstw'.

⁷³ See: 'Operacja "Bolek".'

⁷⁴ Jarosław Kaczyński was the founder and leader of the right-wing Law and Justice (Prawo i Sprawiedliwość: PiS) party. He was once a key aide to Lech Wałęsa, and his earlier Centre Agreement (Porozumienie Centrum: PC) party provided the organisational backbone for the Solidarity leader's successful 1990 presidential election campaign. However, Mr Kaczyński broke with and denounced Mr Wałęsa, resigning as the head of his presidential chancellery in 1991. In 2001 he formed Law and Justice to capitalise on the popularity of his twin brother, Lech, who was briefly justice minister in 2000-1.

⁷⁵ See: Marek Beylin, 'Melanz zemsty i spiskowej wyobraźni', *wyborcza.pl*, 19 February 2016, <http://wyborcza.pl/1,75968,19649304,melanz-zemsty-i-spiskowej-wyobrazni.html> (accessed 19 February 2016).

⁷⁶ See: 'Piniór: Chcą zastąpić Wałęsę Lechem Kaczyńskim'.

⁷⁷ See: 'Ścieżki agenta "Bolka".'

history anew with the help of Kiszczak's documents.⁷⁸ Sociologist Ireneusz Krzemiński also argued that: '(D)evaluating Lech Wałęsa as a hero and symbol has the objective of devaluing the act that he symbolised. This is about re-writing national history and introducing new figures on the scene of national symbols.'⁷⁹

To the critics of the Third Republic status quo the 'Bolek affair', exemplified the way that the military and security services clustered around Generals Jaruzelski and Kiszczak agreed an unequal political pact that entrenched former elites and co-opted a number of their opponents, some of whom, they said, were security service collaborators masquerading as oppositionists and operating under their influence. Former (but still influential) communist-era security service functionaries had, they argued, entrenched themselves and remained active in Polish public life controlling the economy and society from behind-the-scenes so that those with links to the previous regime maintained their wealth, influence and a dominant position among the post-communist business, cultural and political elites.⁸⁰ For example, sociologist Mateusz Falkowski argued that 'if it was not for (the contents) "Kiszczak's safe", (then) reforms of state institutions would possibly be much more advanced and the functioning of the state itself much more transparent.'⁸¹ Similarly, commentator Piotr Semka argued that the discovery of the 'Bolek' files in General Kiszczak's home 'throws a light on the system of secret control of many social and political processes in the Third Republic by the communist Polish People's Republic's elites. (These were) (p)henomena which many Poles felt instinctively but were deafened by the mockery and attacks from critics of the "round table order".'⁸²

Many of Mr Wałęsa's critics also raised questions about the conduct of the 1989 round table negotiations themselves, pointing out that these did not just involve public discussions but also informal, private meetings of the so-called 'Magdalenka' group which included the communist state elites and the leadership of the Solidarity opposition (notably Mr Wałęsa) with senior Catholic Church officials as observers. These meetings were little noticed at the time but subsequently, especially in more radical versions of this account of the transition, become the source of accusations of underhand dealings, with some observers coming to see them as playing a decisive role in the transfer of power.⁸³ Mr Wałęsa, they argued, was the key to understanding this process. As historian Sławomir Cenckiewicz put it: 'Lech Wałęsa's collaboration as an agent of the Security Service had a significant subsequent meaning...(and) influence on the shape of the systemic reforms after 1989.'⁸⁴ He had already

⁷⁸ See: 'Nasz Lech, wasz Bolek'.

⁷⁹ See: 'Obalenie bohatera'.

⁸⁰ See, for example: Andrzej Zybertowicz, *W uścisku tajnych służb: Upadek komunizmu i układ postnomenklatury*, Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Antyk Marcin Dybowski, 1993; Maria W. Łoś and Andrzej Zybertowicz, *Privatising the Police State: The Case of Poland*. Basingstoke: Macmillan. 2000; and Andrzej Zybertowicz, *III RP: Kulisy system*, Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Słowo i Myśli, 2013.

⁸¹ See: 'Akta "Bolka" i dobre rządzenie'.

⁸² See: Piotr Semka, "'Hakoteki" esbeków', *Do Rzeczy*, 22-28 February 2016

⁸³ For a good analysis of the different right-wing discourses on the meaning of the events of 1989, including 'rejectionist' ones that viewed the round table and Magdalenka meetings themselves as playing a critical role in determining the future, flawed path of post-communism transformation, see: Artur Lipiński, 'Mitologizacja czy dyskursywna reprezentacja? Okrągły stół, Magdalenka i "gruba kreska" jako kategorie dyskursu prawicy', in Bohdan Szklarski, ed. *Mity, symbole i rytuały we współczesnej polityce. Szkice z antropologii polityki*. Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Scholar. 2008, pp277-291; and Artur Lipiński, 'Meanings of 1989: right-wing discourses in post-communist Poland', in Kevin McDermott and Matthew Stibbe, eds. *The 1989 Revolutions in Central and Eastern Europe: From Communism to Pluralism*, Manchester: Manchester University Press. 2013, pp235-249.

⁸⁴ See: 'Oświadczenie Sławomira Cenckiewicza'.

compromised with the communist regime to side-line Solidarity ‘radicals’ such as the Gwiazdas and Anna Walentynowicz before the round table talks began and, over time, grew to accept and befriend his former enemies. As commentator Konrad Kołodziejski put it: ‘It is difficult to escape from the impression that those who always regarded the round table as the original sin of the new independent Poland are today right...it was above all about protecting communist influence both formal (control over the “power” ministries, the semi-free elections, the economy) as well as informal, whose contents we can work out by observing the later hysteria of many post-Solidarity milieu in response to the slogans of lustration and de-communisation’. ‘The communists themselves’, he argued, ‘chose their interlocutors from the Solidarity side, obviously not just former agents, but it is possible to assume that these represented the most welcomed and influential group...Their interest was obviously: not to permit the revelation of the truth. Communists - as the holders of secret information - appeared to be the one guarantee of this implicit agreement. The files hidden in Kiszczak’s house only confirm this hypothesis.’⁸⁵

For Mr Wałęsa critics, therefore, the ‘Bolek’ affair revealed how the entire post-1989 political order was a sham with the former Solidarity leader portrayed, as commentator Jan Rokita put it, as the ‘icon of a system of lies’. This was, according to Mr Rokita, part of ‘a radical alternative historiography’ developed by Law and Justice’s supporting media and intellectuals which ‘attempt(ed) to turn the fact that Mr Wałęsa’s denunciations of workers in the shipyards at the beginning of the 1970s was a fact, into a key piece of evidence about the necessity of completely redefining the heroic history of Solidarity and the first twenty five years of independence.’⁸⁶ According to its critics, therefore, the Third Republic was the ‘bastard child’ of the communist security services⁸⁷ and this was used to justify their calls for a far-reaching re-structuring of Polish state institutions. For example, writing about the Cenckiewicz-Gontarczyk book, sociologist Andrzej Zybertowicz talked of ‘a system of lies built in the Third Republic’ and ‘the mechanisms of manipulation and lies operating in the 1990s and 2000s.’⁸⁸ Similarly, according to commentator Michał Karnowski, the Kiszczak files contained ‘the truth about how the Third Republic was built...(and was) the essence of the foundations of this construct. This...(was)...the real constitution of the Third Republic.’⁸⁹ Commentator Bronisław Wildstein argued that the Bolek files revealed ‘how we were lied to for twenty five years’ and ‘the mechanism, through which former security service functionaries held people in their grip’.⁹⁰ The Kiszczak files, he said on another occasion, unveiled ‘the whole truth about the Third Republic’ and proved it ‘was built on silencing, lies and behind-the-scenes intrigues...(and) that the, constantly mocked, conspiracy theories on this subject were deeply justified.’⁹¹ Historian Sławomir Cenckiewicz argued that the defenders of the Third Republic ‘knew that the system is built on a network of (communist) agents and lies...that Wałęsa was a figurehead for them, behind whom were hidden the dark interests of the beneficiaries of post-communism.’⁹² Commentator Łukasz Adamski also

⁸⁵ See: Konrad Kołodziejski, ‘Gdyby Wałęsa ujawnił współpracy z SB’, *Rzeczpospolita*, 26-27 February 2016.

⁸⁶ See: Jan Rokita, ‘Nowa pedagogika wstydu’, w *Sieci*, 14-20 March 2016.

⁸⁷ See: ‘Archiwum Kiszczaka’.

⁸⁸ See: Andrzej Zybertowicz, ‘Lustracja w świecie hypokryzji’, *Rzeczpospolita*, 15 May 2008.

⁸⁹ See: ‘Szafa Kiszczaka to prawdziwa konstytucja III RP, fundament państwa zbudowanego na krzywdzie ofiar i bogactwie oprawców’.

⁹⁰ See: ‘Wildstein o oświadczeniach Wałęsy’.

⁹¹ See: ‘”Solidarność” to nie Wałęsa’.

⁹² See: ‘Ikona system kłamstw’.

argued that the Bolek affair affected ‘the essence of the Third Republic... (a) country built on a stinking compromise with communists and lies.’⁹³

A key issue dividing the main post-2005 political actors

Secondly, although politicians often tended to let commentators and supporting intellectuals lead the charge for their side, the ‘Bolek’ affair was also used to legitimate and de-legitimate specific political actors and formations particularly after the 2005 parliamentary and presidential elections. With the collapse of the communist successor left, these elections re-aligned the political scene around two post-Solidarity parties that were to dominate Polish electoral politics for the next decade: Law and Justice⁹⁴ and Civic Platform (Platforma Obywatelska: PO),⁹⁵ originally a liberal-conservative party but later to evolve into an ideologically eclectic centrist grouping. For sure, Mr Wałęsa’s political significance declined following his defeat in the 1995 presidential election; he secured a humiliating 1% of the vote when he stood again five years later. However, in the 2000s Mr Wałęsa was drawn increasingly into the battle over lustration and other challenges to the Third Republic status quo. Attitudes towards the ‘Bolek’ affair emerged as an important issue dividing Law and Justice and Civic Platform, both their leaders and (as we shall see) supporters. Although both parties contested the 2005 elections on the basis of a sharp critique of the Third Republic status quo (albeit having a somewhat different emphasis in terms of the issues that they highlighted) and were originally seen as natural coalition partners, they became bitter rivals after the election when the Law and Justice formed a minority and then coalition government with two smaller radical, anti-establishment parties.

Law and Justice blamed post-communist Poland’s political, economic and societal shortcomings upon, the country’s apparently flawed post-1989 transition to democracy. They were also among the prime advocates of the notion that the ‘Bolek’ affair, exemplified the way that the communist military and security services had agreed an unequal political pact that entrenched the former ruling elites and co-opted some of their opponents. For example, speaking shortly after the release of the Cenckiewicz-Gontarczyk book, Law and Justice leader Jarosław Kaczyński argued that the Third Republic’s social hierarchy was ‘based on lies, you can say radical lies, which rejected both the reality of the real situation that existed before 1989 and the post-1989 reality. (T)his book is a blow to this picture which serves the

⁹³ See: Łukasz Adamski, ‘Zmiana tonu w ocenie TW “Bolka” przez takich ludzi jak Friszke nie jest istotna. Adam Michnik będzie trwał w obronie Wałęsy. To obrona państwa, które stworzył’, *wPolityce*, 25 February 2016, <http://wpolityce.pl/polityka/282964-zmiana-tonu-w-ocenie-tw-bolka-przez-takich-ludzi-jak-friszke-nie-jest-istotna-adam-michnik-bedzie-trwal-w-obronie-walesy-to-obrona-panstwa-ktore-stworzyl> (accessed 25 February 2016).

⁹⁴ Law and Justice won the parliamentary election and its candidate Lech Kaczyński was also elected President in 2005. Jarosław Kaczyński was prime minister from 2006 until the party lost an early parliamentary election in 2007. Lech Kaczyński’s term of office ended abruptly in April 2010 when he died in a plane crash in Smolensk in western Russia. From 2007 Law and Justice was the main opposition party until 2015 when it became the first political grouping in post-1989 Poland to win an outright parliamentary majority and its candidate Andrzej Duda was elected President. Although he was still party leader, Jarosław Kaczyński did not occupy any formal state offices.

⁹⁵ Civic Platform was formed in 2001 and in 2005 narrowly lost the parliamentary election while its leader Donald Tusk was defeated in the presidential poll. However, it won the 2007 parliamentary election with Mr Tusk becoming prime minister, and in 2011 he became the first incumbent in post-1989 Poland to secure re-election. The party’s candidate Bronisław Komorowski was elected President in the 2010 election. Both the party and Mr Komorowski lost parliamentary and presidential elections respectively in 2015 and Civic Platform became the main parliamentary opposition grouping.

establishment and hence its hysterical defen(sive reaction to it).⁹⁶ Similarly, Law and Justice parliamentary caucus leader Ryszard Terlecki claimed that ‘(former communist security service) spies remained in public life, in the justice system and in educational establishments’,⁹⁷ while the party’s foreign minister Witold Waszczykowski said the Kiszczak files ‘cast a shadow over the creation of an independent Poland and its political elites’, raising the possibility that the communists had guided Poland’s transition to democracy and that, as President, ‘Mr Wałęsa could have been a controlled puppet’.⁹⁸ Antoni Macierewicz, who became Law and Justice defence minister in 2015, claimed that: ‘The Lech Wałęsa affair shows in miniature what the Third Republic system was based on...it was based on the fact that people were blackmailed with the help of the (communist security service) files. And a whole group of people was transformed into a slow operating tool of the communist apparatus, which constructed its later power and influence (based) on these people.’⁹⁹ Law and Justice parliamentary deputy Jacek Sasin also argued that Poles had a right to ask if the activities of those governing them in the 1990s ‘were not caused by the fact that Lech Wałęsa, and maybe other persons who represented the post-1989 elites, feared that certain decisions could lead to the revelation of materials that were compromising to them.’ A lack of lustration and a failure to undertake a reckoning with the communist past, he said, raised questions ‘about what were the real causes of the decisions that were undertaken at its (the Third Republic’s) foundation and the omissions that took place then’ which involved ‘turning a blind eye to the communist nomenklatura appropriating national assets’ that ‘belonged to all of us but became the way that the few who had access to these assets were able to enrich themselves.’¹⁰⁰

At the same time, although while in opposition Civic Platform had supported moves to extend lustration and file access, after 2005 it evolved increasingly into a party representing the Third Republic status quo and, its critics argued, as part of this, ‘took him (Mr Wałęsa) out of the historical showcase...dusted him off’ as a ‘*deus ex machina* to rescue the Third Republic’¹⁰¹ and ‘hid(ing) behind his false legend’,¹⁰² thereby trying to use Mr Wałęsa’s moral authority to legitimate themselves and de-legitimise their Law and Justice opponents. As part of this, Civic Platform leaders were in the vanguard of those politicians and commentators who defended Mr Wałęsa in 2008 over the allegations contained in Cenckiewicz-Gontarczyk (and later in the 2009 Zyzak book) and again in 2016 following the publication of the Kiszczak files,¹⁰³ arguing that as a result of its conduct during these events, the Institute of National Remembrance was being used as a political tool by the pro-lustration

⁹⁶ See: Janina Paradowska, ‘Wymazać Wałęsę’, *Polityka*, 28 June 2008.

⁹⁷ See: Wiktor Ferfecki, ‘Polityczny spór o “Bolka”’, *Rzeczpospolita*, 18 February 2016.

⁹⁸ See: ‘Waszczykowski o Wałęsie: Mógł być marionetką sterowaną’, *rzeczpospolita.pl*, 19 February 2016, <http://www.rp.pl/Archiwum-Kiszczaka/160219187-Waszczykowski-o-Walesie-Mogl-byc-marionetka-sterowana.html#ap-1> (accessed 19 February 2016).

⁹⁹ See: Agnieszka Kublik, ‘Magdalenka, czyli stare sensacje redaktora Gmyza’, *wyborcza.pl*, 24 February 2016, <http://wyborcza.pl/1,76842,19675153,magdalenka-czyli-stare-sensacje-redaktora-gmyza.html> (accessed 24 February 2016).

¹⁰⁰ See: ‘PiS i Kukiz ’15: prawda o Wałęsie należy się Polakom. PSL i N krtykują pośpiech IPN.’ *rzeczpospolita.pl*, 22 February 2016, <http://rp.pl> (accessed 22 February 2016).

¹⁰¹ See: ‘”Solidarność” to nie Wałęsa’.

¹⁰² See: Piotr Zaremba, ‘To Wałęsa się uwikłał, nie Solidarność. To było uwikłanie częściowe, ale zabójcze dla jego roli po 1989’, *wPolityce*, 16 February 2016, <http://wpolityce.pl/polityka/282210-to-walesa-sie-uwiklal-nie-solidarnosc-to-bylo-uwiklanie-czesciowe-ale-zabojcze-dla-jego-rol-i-po-1989-roku> (accessed 18 February 2016).

¹⁰³ See, for example: Paweł Śpiewak, ‘Wałęsa - ofiara własnych obrońców’, *Rzeczpospolita*, 28 August 2008; and Piotr Semka, ‘Lech Wałęsa, czyli udana transakcja’, *Do Rzeczy*, 8-14 February 2016.

right.¹⁰⁴ For example, commenting on the Cenckiewicz-Gontarczyk book the then Civic Platform leader and prime minister Donald Tusk said that he would ‘do everything to defend the good name of Lech Wałęsa and the ideas of August (1980)’ because it was ‘a great duty for people like me...to defend the myth, because every nation needs positive myths...to defend the historical fact of Lech Wałęsa's pivotal role in some of the most important events in Polish history.’¹⁰⁵ Subsequently, following the publication of the Kiszczak files, Civic Platform leader Grzegorz Schetyna described Lech Wałęsa a ‘symbol of Polish history, a symbol of Polish victory’,¹⁰⁶ and argued that his opponents hoped to use the ‘Bolek affair’ to ‘kill(ing) his (Mr Wałęsa’s) legend’ and ‘show(ing) that the foundations of the Third Republic were something evil.’¹⁰⁷ Indeed, at the party’s October 2016 programmatic convention, at which Mr Wałęsa was a keynote speaker, Mr Schetyna went so far as to pledge that Civic Platform would abolish the Institute if the party was returned to office.¹⁰⁸

The post-communist truth revelation process

Thirdly, the ‘Bolek affair’ was used to legitimate and de-legitimate the truth revelation process itself as either vitally necessary or dangerously politicised. On the one hand, opponents of truth revelation argued that the Institute of National Remembrance’s conduct both during the publication of the Cenckiewicz-Gontarczyk book and subsequently when the contents of the Kiszczak files were revealed showed how the file access process had been politicised. They accused the Institute of allowing itself to be used as a tool in a vengeful political war being waged by right-wing politicians against Mr Wałęsa.¹⁰⁹ For example, commentators Wojciech Czuchnowski and Agnieszka Kublik argued that ‘the activities of the Institute of National Remembrance in the Lech Wałęsa affair are characterised by political dislike towards him and lead to falsifying the role that he played in contemporary Polish history. The materials on Lech Wałęsa are being released uncritically and the Institute, which is an organ of the Polish state, is leading public opinion into error.’¹¹⁰ Moreover, according to some supporters of lustration and file access the ‘Bolek affair’ also gave opponents of truth revelation an opportunity to relativise collaboration with the communist security services by arguing that if such a heroic historical figure as Mr Wałęsa was an informer then it was an activity that potentially anyone could have succumbed to. As commentator Bronisław Wildstein put it: ‘When it turned out that Wałęsa had problems with his past he became even more useful (to opponents of truth revelation). His example could be used to discredit

¹⁰⁴ See, for example: Cezary Gmyz, ‘Koalicja: IPN trzeba zmienić’, *Rzeczpospolita*, 24 June 2008; Bogdan Borsewicz, ‘IPN nie może podsycać złych emocji’, *Rzeczpospolita*, 19 September 2008; and Cezary Gmyz, ‘Donald Tusk grozi IPN’, *Rzeczpospolita*, 31 March 2009.

¹⁰⁵ See: Jarosław Kurski, ‘Tusk: Bronimy Sierpnia’, *wyborcza.pl*, 19 June 2008, http://wyborcza.pl/1,75248,5326837,Tusk__Bronimy_Sierpnia.html (accessed 19 June 2008).

¹⁰⁶ See: ‘Histeria na ulicach Warszawy! KOD broni Wałęsy. Kijowski: "Chcemy pokazać naszą solidarność z Lechem Wałęsą, symbolem zwycięskiej walki o wolność i demokrację". A w tle Schetyna, Petru i Nowacka...’, *wPolityce*, 27 February 2016, <http://wpolityce.pl/polityka/283263-histeria-na-ulicach-warszawy-kod-broni-walesy-kijowski-chcemy-pokazac-nasza-solidarnosc-z-lechem-walesa-symbolem-zwycieskiej-walki-o-wolnosc-i-demokracje-a-w-tle-schetyna-petru-i-nowacka> (accessed 27 February 2016).

¹⁰⁷ See: ‘PiS i Kukiz ’15’.

¹⁰⁸ See: Michał Wachnicki, ‘Schetyna: Zlikwidujemy IPN, CBA. Powołamy zespół ds. badania manipulacji katastrofą smoleńską’, *wyborcza.pl*, 2 October 2016, <http://wyborcza.pl/7,75398,20777413,schetyna-zlikwidujemy-ipn-cba-powolamy-zespol-ds-badania.html> (accessed 2 October 2016).

¹⁰⁹ See, for example: Janina Paradowska, ‘Twierdza IPN’, *Polityka*, 5 July 2008; and Andrzej Friszke, ‘Jak hartował się radykalizm Kurtyki’, *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 8 April 2009.

¹¹⁰ See: ‘Misja IPN’.

lustration and present it as damaging those who gave us freedom and an instrument of resentment, in other words envy of heroes.’¹¹¹

Supporters of truth revelation, on the other hand, argued that the ‘Bolek affair’ both exemplified and explained the lack of willingness to deal with the communist past given that those who were collaborators with, or had links to, the former security services had remained active and entrenched themselves in public life after 1989. As noted above, according to Mr Wałęsa’s critics, the outgoing Polish communist leadership could have used his security service collaboration to blackmail him into negotiating a transition that was favourable to the outgoing elites, paving the way for them to co-opt a section of the Solidarity opposition and retain their power and influence after 1989. Then, rather than prosecuting and excluding what many saw as traitors and criminals from public life, the first post-communist government led by Solidarity intellectual Tadeusz Mazowiecki adopted the communist-forgiving ‘thick line’ policy¹¹² as a result of which, it was argued, the former ruling elites were able to dodge responsibility for their crimes and misdeeds. Moreover, in spite of his promises to ‘accelerate’ post-communist transformation, when elected President Mr Wałęsa did nothing to move forward the de-communisation and truth revelation processes. Indeed, as noted above, he both allied himself with officials and individuals linked to the former communist military intelligence and security services and actively blocked one such attempt at introducing lustration by the Olszewski government. For example, commentator Konrad Kołodziejwski argued that Mr Wałęsa and many important Solidarity opposition figures’ fear of lustration and truth revelation ‘was one of the causes of the conflicts and pathologies that affect today’s Poland.’ Lustration ‘was really about the shape of Poland. Whose vision it would comply with: (Adam) Michnik’s or (Jarosław) Kaczyński’s. The person who tilted the scales in favour of “Michnik’s vision” was Lech Wałęsa. He did this - everything indicates - as a result of his file. And this is what today’s argument is about.’¹¹³ Bronisław Wildstein also said that: ‘The battle over Wałęsa became a battle with lustration and a war to maintain the Third Republic status quo.’¹¹⁴

The discovery of the Kiszczak files also raised the question of: how many other former communist security service functionaries kept personal archives in their homes which they could have used to blackmail politicians, businessmen, lawyers, academics and other persons in position of power and influence?¹¹⁵ For such critics, the contents of the Kiszczak files were the missing link for their narrative on the nature of Poland’s flawed transition. Indeed, the very fact that they had remained in the hands of a former communist interior minister for more than a quarter-of-a-century was as important as the actual content of the written denunciations themselves. Many right-wing politicians and commentators believed that the rest of the secret archives were also hidden somewhere and contained an immeasurable wealth of leverage which post-communist communist elites were using to control politics, the economy and society from the behind-the-scenes. For example, commentator Bronisław

¹¹¹ See: ‘”Solidarność” to nie Wałęsa’.

¹¹² In August 1989, in his inaugural policy speech as prime minister Mr Mazowiecki announced that a ‘thick line’ would be drawn between the past and present. See: Tadeusz Mazowiecki, ‘Przeszłość odkreślamy grubą linią: Przemówienie Tadeusza Mazowieckiego w Sejmie’, *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 25 August 1989. Although he was actually seeking to distance his government from the damage done to the national economy by the previous regime, the ‘thick line’ was often cited as a metaphor epitomising the lenient approach to the communist regime adopted by his administration.

¹¹³ See: ‘Gdyby Wałęsa ujawnił współpracy z SB’.

¹¹⁴ See: ‘”Solidarność” to nie Wałęsa’.

¹¹⁵ See, for example: Michał Szuldrzyński, ‘Ujawnienie archiwum Kiszczaka w sprawie Wałęsy’, *Rzeczpospolita*, 19 February 2016

Wildstein argued that communist leaders kept “hooks” (haki) on their former opponents, then (their) partners in the round table...for the possibility of blackmail, and...behind-the-scenes pressure on public figures. In this way they could realise both their political and material objectives.¹¹⁶ Similarly, another commentator Piotr Zaremba noted how General Kiszczak ‘a former head of the communist police almost slept on (security service) documents that were held on the founder of the new state’ which revealed ‘a truth about the political mechanisms governing the Third Republic’ and raised questions as to whether this was ‘a mechanism that could have occurred in many other areas of public life. How many other “private” archives dictated political decisions?’¹¹⁷

The ‘Bolek’ affair thereby demonstrated the necessity of both clarifying Mr Wałęsa’s role in relation to the communist security services in particular and the truth revelation process more generally in helping Poles to understand the nature of the post-communist transformation. For example, commentator Paweł Lisicki claimed that ‘the history of the revelation of the (Bolek) files is a specific indictment against the (post-1989 state’s) whole culture of silencing, brushing under the carpet and hiding the past.’ For communist functionaries ‘these files were a kind of insurance policy, a method of keeping post-Solidarity positions in check, a permanent form of blackmail. Their revelation is the first step towards the fall of the Third Republic system.’¹¹⁸ Similarly, sociologist Mateusz Fałkowski said that the existence of secret archives containing documents such as those discovered in the Kiszczak files seriously complicated the ‘reform of state institutions...the functioning of the state...good governance...the legitimation of the state, transparency and effectiveness.’¹¹⁹ Bronisław Wildstein also argued that ‘(l)ustration, unveiling the truth would have blown this (possibility of blackmail and behind-the-scenes pressure on public figures) apart. That is why the old-new establishment fought it so bitterly, the more its position was undermined’. The communist security service entanglements of Mr Wałęsa, who became the Third Republic establishment’s ‘ideal ally...against the revelation of the truth’, proved ‘how fatally the lack of a reckoning with the (communist) past, which would have negated all of these (communist security service) entanglements, has burdened our history.’¹²⁰

What were public attitudes towards the ‘Bolek’ affair?

The publication of Cenckiewicz and Gontarczyk’s 2008 book did not appear to change public attitudes towards Mr Wałęsa’s alleged collaboration with the communist security services fundamentally. For example, a July 2008 CBOS survey found that although 88% of respondents said that they had heard of the allegations against him, only 34% said that they were interested in them (the same number who said that they would consider reading the book), while 54% said that they were not (60% were not interested in reading it).¹²¹ Only 8% said that the book had led them to hold a more negative view of Mr Wałęsa, while 76% said that its publication had had no impact on their opinion of him and 3% even felt that it led them to evaluate him more positively; 13% did not know.¹²² 37% of respondents said that they believed Mr Wałęsa’s claim that most of the documents cited in the Cenckiewicz-Gontarczyk book had been fabricated by the communist security services while only 20%

¹¹⁶ See: ‘“Solidarność” to nie Wałęsa’.

¹¹⁷ See: ‘Pod dyktando teczek SB’.

¹¹⁸ See: Paweł Lisicki, ‘Coup de grace’, *Do Rzeczy*, 22-28 February 2016.

¹¹⁹ See: ‘Akta “Bolka” i dobre rządzenie’.

¹²⁰ See: ‘“Solidarność” to nie Wałęsa’.

¹²¹ See: CBOS. *Polacy o Lechu Wałęsie i jego przeszłości*. CBOS: Warsaw. July 2008, pp3-5.

¹²² See: *Ibid.*, pp1-2.

believed the authors that the documents on which they based their analysis were authentic; although the largest number (43%) did not know.¹²³ Similarly, a July 2008 TNS OBOP survey found that 71% of respondents felt that discussions on Mr Wałęsa's alleged communist security service collaboration surrounding the publication of the Cenckiewicz-Gontarczyk book were elements of the day-to-day political struggle, while 66% felt that it was not worth engaging in heated political debates over these issues. Only 44% said that they were interested in the allegations (56% were not) while 24% felt that Mr Wałęsa's links with the security services was a subject worth discussing at all.¹²⁴ A 2008 SMG/KRC poll also found that 45% felt that the authors' intentions were, above all, to discredit Mr Wałęsa and gain publicity, with only 22% saying that they were interested in revealing the truth; 31% did not know.¹²⁵

The same survey found that only 26% of Poles believed that Mr Wałęsa had collaborated with the security services compared with 43% who did not; 31% did not know or were unsure.¹²⁶ Similarly, a July 2008 PBS survey for 'Gazeta Wyborcza' that found that only 27% of respondents believed that Mr Wałęsa was agent 'Bolek', 41% felt he was not; 32% did not know.¹²⁷ A July 2008 CBOS survey found that only 28% of respondents felt that Mr Wałęsa had, at some point, been a communist security service informer compared with 31% who said he had not; although the largest number (41%) did not know. A plurality of respondents (34% to 27%) felt that even if he had agreed to collaborate with the security services he did so in order to understand their methods better so that he could defeat communism; although, again, 39% did not know.¹²⁸ A July 2008 PBS survey for 'Gazeta Wyborcza' found that only 34% of respondents felt that his communist security service contacts in the 1970s had influenced his actions as President while 42% felt that they had not; 24% did not know. Only 25% believed that Mr Wałęsa had destroyed documents proving his collaboration during his presidency while 40% did not; 35% did not know.¹²⁹

A July 2008 CBOS survey found that even among those respondents who felt that Mr Wałęsa had been a communist security service collaborator in the 1970s, 40% agreed with the proposition that he had compensated for this unfortunate episode through his later actions and services to Poland (49% disagreed); as did 61% of those who felt that he was acting out of fear in a moment of weakness (26% disagreed).¹³⁰ Similarly, a July 2008 PBS survey for 'Gazeta Wyborcza' found that 53% of respondents felt that even if Mr Wałęsa had collaborated at the beginning of the 1970s this did not diminish his services to Poland, compared with only 34% who felt that it did; 13% did not know.¹³¹ It also found that respondents had a charitable interpretation of the reasons why Mr Wałęsa was interrogated by

¹²³ See: *Ibid.*, p5.

¹²⁴ See: 'Kogo obchodzi Bolek?' 22 July 2008, [www.wyborcza.pl](http://wyborcza.pl/2029020,75478,5478,5477928.html), <http://wyborcza.pl/2029020,75478,5478,5477928.html> (accessed 24 July 2008).

¹²⁵ See: 'Row Over Walesa's Past', *Warsaw Voice*, 9 July 2008, <http://www.warsawvoice.pl/WVpage/pages/article.php/18283/article> (accessed 10 July 2008).

¹²⁶ See: *Ibid.*

¹²⁷ See: Wojciech Szacki, 'Lech wielki, nawet jeśli..' 10 July 2008, [wyborcza.pl](http://wyborcza.pl/gazetawyborcza/2029020,75478,5441225.html), <http://wyborcza.pl/gazetawyborcza/2029020,75478,5441225.html> (accessed 12 July 2008).

¹²⁸ See: *Polacy o Lechu Wałęsie i jego przeszłości*, pp9-10.

¹²⁹ See: 'Lech wielki, nawet jeśli...' However, a 2008 SMG/KRC agency poll found opinions on whether or not Mr Wałęsa had erased traces of his past when he was President to be more evenly divided: 38% of respondents felt he had and the same number that he had not; 24% did not know or were unsure. See: 'Row Over Walesa's Past'.

¹³⁰ See: *Polacy o Lechu Wałęsie i jego przeszłości*, p10.

¹³¹ See: 'Lech wielki, nawet jeśli..'.

the communist security services in the 1970s with the most common answers being: that he was fighting for workers interests (33%), fear (29%), because people did as the authorities told them in those days (25%), and he was trying to outsmart them (15%). Only 14% said that he was motivated by wanting money and a flat or to betray and 6% that he wanted to harm his colleagues. Similarly, most respondents felt that discussions about Mr Wałęsa's communist security services links were: unnecessary scraping around in the distant past (34%), a 'shooting party' against a man who was a symbol of the struggle for independence (21%), and a political campaign aimed at helping Law and Justice return to office (18%). Only 17% felt that it was about determining a historical truth that was difficult to accept and 11% because someone finally had the courage to tell the truth about the Third Republic's authority figures.

The publication of the Cenckiewicz-Gontarczyk book also led to a fall in public support for the Institute for National Remembrance. Since its formation, the Institute was the object of constant criticism from the liberal-left cultural and media establishment that had been hostile to lustration and truth revelation from the outset. As noted above, from 2008 onwards the Institute also came under intense criticism from the Civic Platform-led government. Consequently, a July 2008 CBOS survey showed a 15% drop in those who evaluated it positively from 49% (11% very positively) in February 2005 to only 34% (6% very positively) three years later and a 10% increase in those who evaluated it negatively from only 10% (3% very negatively) to 20% (7% very negatively) over the same period. The number who held a neutral opinion also increased by 7% from 26% to 33%.¹³² However, interestingly, in spite of this, other than a brief period in at the beginning of 2009 coinciding with the publication of Piotr Zyzak's critical biography of Mr Wałęsa,¹³³ the Institute's approval rating remained consistently fairly high in the CBOS tracking poll: between June 2006 and September 2016 those who approved of its activities ranged between 38-53% and those who disapproved 11-30% (don't know, 28-45%), with the exception of April 2009 when only 29% of respondents approved and 44% disapproved (28% did not know).¹³⁴

However, the discovery of the Kiszczak files made Poles much less convinced by Mr Wałęsa's declarations of innocence. For example, a March 2016 CBOS survey found that 34% of respondents now felt that the documents found in Mr Kiszczak's house indicating that Mr Wałęsa was a communist security service informer were authentic while 26% felt they were not; although most respondents (40%) did not know.¹³⁵ Their publication also led to a substantial increase in the numbers who felt that Mr Wałęsa had at some point been a communist security service informer from only 28% of respondents in July 2008 to 46% in March 2016, while those who rejected the idea fell from 31% to 18% over the same period; although the number of don't know remained highly at 36% (down from 41%).¹³⁶ The same survey found that the number of respondents who believed that Mr Wałęsa had an episode of

¹³² See: *Polacy o Lechu Wałęsie i jego przeszłości*, pp8-9.

¹³³ A later November 2009 Gemius survey for the 'Newsweek Polska' magazine also found that 48% of respondents felt that the Institute's leadership was partisan and that its activities supported one political grouping (17% agreed strongly with this), while only 20% felt that it was not (5% felt this strongly); 32% did not know. See: 'E-lustracja', *Newsweek*, 22 November 2009.

¹³⁴ See: CBOS. *Opinie o działalności instytucji publicznych*. CBOS: Warsaw. February 2007; CBOS. *Oceny instytucji publicznych*. CBOS: Warsaw. March 2009; Wojciech Szacki, 'Oceny prezydenta w dół. IPN-u też w dół', *wyborcza.pl*, 16 April 2009, <http://www.wyborcza.pl/2029020,75478,6503130.html> (accessed 16 April 2009); and CBOS. *Oceny instytucji publicznych*. CBOS: Warsaw. September 2014; CBOS. *Oceny instytucji publicznych*. CBOS: Warsaw. September 2016.

¹³⁵ See: CBOS. *Opinie o Lechu Wałęsie, jego przeszłości i historycznej roli*. CBOS: Warsaw. March 2016, p3.

¹³⁶ See: *Ibid.*, pp4-5.

collaboration when he succumbed to a moment of weakness and allowed himself to be frightened by the communist security services but regretted it subsequently increased from 38% to 51% over the same period, while the number who disagreed with this statement fell from 27% to 19%; 29% did not know (down from 35%).¹³⁷ A February 2016 IBRiS survey also found that 38% of respondents agreed that Mr Wałęsa had collaborated with the communist security services compared with only 28% who felt that he had not; 34% did not know.¹³⁸

Nonetheless, most Poles still appeared to feel that his collaboration was not a very significant nor meaningful episode in his life and was forced upon him by circumstances rather than being a fully conscious long-term entanglement that harmed his colleagues and friends. For example, a March 2016 CBOS survey found that only 23% of respondents believed that Mr Wałęsa was a long-term communist security service collaborator working consciously to undertake activities that harmed his former colleagues and friends, although this was an increase from only 9% (and just 3% who felt this strongly) in 2008, while 45% rejected this idea (although, again, down from 53% in 2008); 32% did not know (38% in 2008).¹³⁹ A February 2016 IBRiS survey also found that only 34% of respondents thought that the publication of the Kiszczak files was an important matter compared with 59% who did not. 63% said that it did not affect their opinion of Mr Wałęsa, compared with only 20% who said that it had had a negative impact; and 9% said that it had actually improved their opinion of him.¹⁴⁰

Moreover, even though subsequent revelations made his collaboration with the communist security services appear more credible, most Poles still felt Mr Wałęsa had played a positive role in the country's recent history and that the scale of his subsequent achievements lessened or overshadowed his past mistakes. For example, a March 2016 CBOS survey found that 66% of respondents still felt that, all things considered, Mr Wałęsa had played an important role in contemporary Polish history by helping to facilitate the downfall of the communist regime and transition to democracy (albeit down from 73% in 2008), compared with only 21% who felt he played a negative role (15% in 2008); 13% did not know (12% in 2008).¹⁴¹ Similarly, by a margin of 49% to 29% (compared to 45% to 22% in 2008), they felt that even if Mr Wałęsa had at one time agreed to collaborate, then all of his later activity and services to Poland negated this episode; 22% did not know (33% in 2008).¹⁴² His role as leader of Solidarity was evaluated positively by 78% of respondents and negatively by only 12% (10% did not know), and as co-organiser of the round table and leader of the opposition in 1989 by 65% to 17% (18% did know). Even 56% of respondents evaluated his very controversial 1990-95 presidency positively compared with 28% who viewed it negatively (28% did not know).¹⁴³ A February 2016 IBRiS survey also found that for 64% of respondents (including 49% of Law and Justice voters) the 'Bolek' affair had not changed the fact that Mr Wałęsa

¹³⁷ See: *Ibid.*, pp4-5.

¹³⁸ See; 'Sondaż IBRiS: Polacy wierzą w agenturalną przeszłość Wałęsy', w*Polityce*, 19 February 2016, <http://wpolityce.pl/polityka/282331-sondaz-ibris-polacy-wierza-w-agenturalna-przeszosc-walesy> (accessed 19 February 2016).

¹³⁹ See: *Opinie o Lechu Wałęsie, jego przeszłości i historycznej roli*, pp4-5.

¹⁴⁰ See: Andrzej Stankiewicz, 'Wałęsa wciąż bohaterem', *Rzeczpospolita*, 29 February 2016.

¹⁴¹ See: *Opinie o Lechu Wałęsie, jego przeszłości i historycznej roli*, p7.

¹⁴² See: *Ibid.*, p6.

¹⁴³ See: *Ibid.*, p8.

remained a national hero and legendary Solidarity leader of Solidarity; only 26% did not regard him as such.¹⁴⁴

However, interestingly in spite of this one of the impacts of the revelation of the Kiszczak files appeared to be to make Poles feel somewhat less protective towards historical ‘authority figures’ such as Mr Wałęsa. For example, a March 2009 GfK Polonia survey for ‘Rzeczpospolita’ had found that 58% of respondents felt that the biographies of well-known, public authority figures like Mr Wałęsa should be subject to special protection compared with 40% who felt that they should not; 2% did not know.¹⁴⁵ This compared with a March 2016 CBOS poll which found that 59% of respondents felt that it was more important to establish the truth about Mr Wałęsa, even if this meant revising previously held beliefs, while only 39% gave priority to making sure that his legend was not damaged as this harmed Poland’s image abroad (7% did not know).¹⁴⁶

Not surprisingly, given that the issue emerged as an important line of division between Law and Justice and Civic Platform after 2005, party political orientations were also of key importance in determining public attitudes towards Mr Wałęsa’s alleged communist security service collaboration. For example, a July 2008 CBOS survey found that 94% of Civic Platform voters felt that Mr Wałęsa had played a positive role in Polish contemporary history by helping to facilitate the collapse of communism and introduction of a democratic regime compared with 70% of Law and Justice voters who felt this way; the average among all respondents was 73%. Only 2% of Civic Platform voters evaluated Mr Wałęsa negatively compared with 25% of Law and Justice voters; the average was 15%. Similarly, only 2% of Civic Platform voters said that the publication of the Cenckiewicz-Gontarczyk book led them to hold a more negative view of Mr Wałęsa compared with 21% of Law and Justice voters; the average was 8%. 88% of Civic Platform voters said that the book had had no impact on their view of the former Solidarity leader compared to 65% of Law and Justice voters who felt this way; the average was 76%. 58% of Civic Platform voters also said that they believed Mr Wałęsa’s claim that most of the documents cited in the Cenckiewicz-Gontarczyk book had been fabricated by the communist security services compared with only 21% of Law and Justice voters who agreed with this statement; the average was 37%. Only 8% of Civic Platform voters believed that the documents were authentic compared with 46% of Law and Justice voters who said that they were; the average was 20%.¹⁴⁷

Similarly, a March 2016 CBOS survey found that 71% of Law and Justice voters supported the Institute of National Remembrance’s decision to release the contents of the Kiszczak files to journalists and historians (18% were opposed) compared with only 20% of Civic Platform voters (72% were opposed) and an average of 45% among all voters (43% were opposed). 59% of Law and Justice voters agreed that these materials were credible and authentic (7% disagreed, 34% did not know) compared with only 8% of Civic Platform voters (55% disagreed, 37% did not know) and an average of 34% among all respondents (28% disagreed, 40% did not know). 47% of Law and Justice voters agreed that Mr Wałęsa had been a long-standing and conscious communist security service collaborator working to harm his friends and colleagues (28% disagreed, 25% did not know) compared with only 7% of Civic

¹⁴⁴ See: ‘Wałęsa wciąż bohaterem’.

¹⁴⁵ See: Eliza Olczyk and Jarosław Stróżyk, ‘Dlaczego PO walczy o Wałęsę’, *Rzeczpospolita*, 1 April 2009.

¹⁴⁶ See: *Opinie o Lechu Wałęsie, jego przeszłości i historycznej roli*, p10.

¹⁴⁷ See: *Polacy o Lechu Wałęsie i jego przeszłości*.

Platform voters (78% disagreed, 7% did not know) and an average of 23% among all respondents (45% disagreed, 32% did not know).¹⁴⁸

Only 42% of Law and Justice voters agreed that even if Mr Wałęsa had at one time agreed to collaborate then his later activity and services to Poland negated this episode in his life (40% disagreed, 18% did not know) compared with 76% Civic Platform voters (20% disagreed); and an average of 49% among all respondents agreed (29% disagreed, 22% don't know). 51% of Law and Justice voters also agreed that, all things considered, he played a positive role in Polish history (40% disagreed), compared with 89% of Civic Platform voters; the average among all respondents was 66% among all respondents (21% disagreed). By a margin of 76% to 18%, Law and Justice supporters also felt that it was more important to establish the truth than avoid damaging Mr Wałęsa's legend, while Civic Platform voters felt the opposite by a margin of 72% to 24%; the average among all respondents was 59% for establishing the truth and 39% for keeping his legend intact.¹⁴⁹

However, although public attitudes towards Mr Wałęsa's alleged collaboration appeared to have crystallised somewhat since the mid-2000s, even by the time of the revelation of the Kiszczak files there was still a huge amount of uncertainty. For example, a March 2016 CBOS survey found that: 41% of respondents did not know if he had had an 'episode' of collaboration; 40% if the documents found in Mr Kiszczak's safe were authentic; 36% whether he had ever been a communist security service collaborator (albeit down from 41% in 2008); 29% whether he had been frightened by the security services and had a moment of weakness from which he then retracted (down from 35% in 2008); 32% whether or not he was a long-standing and conscious security service collaborator working to harm his friends and colleagues (down from 38% in 2008); and 22% if he had at one time agreed to collaborate but then negated this episode through his later activity and services to Poland (down from 33% in 2008).¹⁵⁰

Conclusions

Allegations that Lech Wałęsa was a paid communist security service informant codenamed 'Bolek' in the early 1970s surfaced and re-surfaced on a number of occasions in post-communist Poland. They appeared to be confirmed unequivocally in February 2016 when the Institute for National Remembrance released copies of files hidden illegally in former communist interior minister General Kiszczak's home. Mr Wałęsa's own statements regarding the authenticity of these allegations were confusing and contradictory: at some points coming close to admitting that he had collaborated, on other occasions denying it vehemently and dismissing the incriminating documents as forgeries.

Some of Mr Wałęsa's staunchest supporters also questioned the authenticity of the evidence that he was an informer but, especially, after the release of the Kiszczak files, even most of those commentators who were sympathetic to him accepted that he almost certainly did collaborate between 1971-76. Instead, rather than dismissing the allegations outright, they attempted to relativise Mr Wałęsa's actions and locate them within a broader historical context. They posed various mitigating circumstances, minimised Mr Wałęsa's involvement, and argued that he had compensated for the weaknesses of his youth by his subsequent

¹⁴⁸ See: *Opinie o Lechu Wałęsie, jego przeszłości i historycznej roli*. CBOS: Warsaw. March 2016.

¹⁴⁹ See: *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁰ See: *Ibid.*

actions as a legendary figure of international standing who embodied Poland's struggle for freedom and democracy. Mr Wałęsa's critics, on the other hand, argued that his collaboration was not just an 'episode' but lasted several years when he was an ardent informer rewarded financially for betraying his friends and fellow workers. They said that fear of being blackmailed by representatives of the outgoing regime explained his erratic behaviour during the democratic transition and early years of post-communism, particularly his questionable presidential personnel and policy choices. They also raised questions about whether Mr Wałęsa used his powers as head of state to cover up his communist secret service involvement.

Both sides of the political conflict in post-1989 Poland accused each other of trying to develop an image of Mr Wałęsa that was politically advantageous to them and being instrumental in their attitudes towards his collaboration. A cynical observer might argue that the attitudes of many Polish politicians and commentators towards his security service collaboration depended primarily on whether or not it was in their interests at any given time to use the issue against Mr Wałęsa or to defend him. The 'Bolek' affair was used to legitimate and de-legitimate specific political actors and formations, particularly after the 2005 elections when party competition became structured around Law and Justice and Civic Platform. Not surprisingly, given that attitudes towards Mr Wałęsa's alleged collaboration emerged as an important issue dividing these two post-Solidarity groupings, party political orientations became of key importance in determining public attitudes towards the former Solidarity leader. Similarly, the 'Bolek' affair was used to legitimate and de-legitimate the transitional justice and truth revelation process as themselves either vitally necessary or dangerously politicised.

More broadly it was used to both legitimate and de-legitimate the post-communist Third Republic state's genesis, highlighting, entrenching and deepening the lines of division among Poles which manifested themselves in a number of fundamental disputes about the communist past and post-communist transformation. Supporters of the post-1989 Third Republic status quo argued that Mr Wałęsa's critics were attempting to use the 'Bolek affair' to undermine the idea of the 1989 round table negotiations as an honourable compromise that paved the way for the successful transition to democratic rule, and thereby de-legitimise one of the Third Republic's key foundational myths. Critics of the Third Republic status quo, on the other hand, argued that the handling of the 'Bolek' affair explained post-communist elites' lack of willingness to deal with the communist past, re-inforcing their belief that the transition was engineered by the representatives of previous regime. Thus, during the post-communist period the country's political, economic and cultural establishment were manipulated behind-the-scenes by former (but still influential) communist-era security service functionaries so that those ex-ruling elites could maintain their wealth and influence in the new Poland. Mr Wałęsa, these critics argued, symbolised the Third Republic but not in the way that his supporters claimed but rather through how his past communist security service links explained the betrayal of Solidarity's ideals. For them, the 'Bolek' affair revealed fundamental truths about the nature of the Third Republic and demonstrated the mechanisms through which: the outgoing regime was able to transition so smoothly to post-communism, and the communist security services deformed the Polish transformation by keeping a group of individuals who were under their influence in positions of power.

While the publication of the Cenckiewicz-Gontarczyk book did not appear to change public attitudes towards Mr Wałęsa fundamentally, the discovery of the Kiszczak files made Poles much less convinced of his innocence. However, even most of those who did not entirely

believe Mr Wałęsa claims were prepared to interpret his actions in a very charitable way. It was possibly for this reason, together with the fact that they were inclined to evaluate Mr Wałęsa through the prism of his whole life's activities and not just his collaboration, that the Kiszczak files did not change the broadly positive view that most Poles still had of his broader contribution to the country's contemporary history. However, although public attitudes towards Mr Wałęsa's alleged collaboration appeared to crystallise somewhat following the release of these documents, they were still characterised by high levels of uncertainty.

Can more general lessons be drawn about truth-revelation procedures as a means of political legitimisation and de-legitimisation or is the Polish case of Lech Wałęsa's alleged communist security service collaboration unique? It certainly shows how a particular episode or high profile action of truth revelation can raise questions about the legitimacy of a post-transition state, of particular actors within it, and of how the transitional justice process should be conducted and which particular procedures adopted. However, as shown above, Mr Wałęsa played a very particular - indeed, arguably unique - role in Poland's (highly contested) transition, which makes it difficult to see whether the findings in this particular case really are transferable to other, very different post-transition contexts.

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