



Tuesday, October 23, 2001

Former president of Poland to speak at OU

Oakland University's Student Life Lecture Board is hosting former president of Poland and Nobel Peace Prize laureate Lech Walesa, who will deliver his lecture "Democracy: The Never-Ending Battle" on Friday, Oct. 26, at 3 p.m. in **Meadow Brook Theatre**.

Walesa, 58, is credited as one of the key figures in the collapse of the communist system in Central and Eastern Europe. Born to a farm family in rural Poland, Walesa only finished vocational school and worked as a car mechanic and electrician. In 1970, 1976 and 1980 he helped organize workers at the Lenin Shipyard in Gdansk to strike against rising prices and poor economic conditions. These strikes led to the formation in 1980 of the Solidarity Union, a free trade union led by Walesa, which asserted the rights of workers against communist ideology. The ranks of solidarity eventually reached 10 million in a country of 38 million people.

Walesa was arrested in 1981 after the Polish government declared martial law. He was released within a year and resumed his job as an electrician, though police continued to follow his movements. In 1983, his stature increased with the award of the Nobel Peace Prize. By 1987, voters rejected a government-backed reform program, and another wave of strikes the following year led the Polish government to call on Walesa for help. He helped establish a roundtable involving the government, Solidarity and the Catholic Church. In June 1989, Solidarity overwhelmingly won parliamentary elections and the first non-communist government in Eastern Europe took office in September 1989. In 1990, Walesa ran for and won the presidency of his country, winning more than 74 percent of the votes cast.

Though, notwithstanding criticism, Walesa and Solidarity allies can be credited with helping Poland take its first steps toward democracy and a free market system. He now heads the Lech Walesa Institute whose aim is to advance the ideals of democracy and free market reform throughout the world.

Tickets for the lecture are required and available at the **Center for Student Activities Service Window**, 49 Oakland Center, (248) 370-4400. Tickets are free for OU students, faculty and staff. They cost \$5 for Alumni Association members and \$15 for the general public.

To learn more about Walesa, read the **Paul Kubicek, assistant professor of political science, article**.

SUMMARY

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Created by CareTech Administrator (webservices@caretechsolutions.com) on Tuesday, October 23, 2001
Modified by CareTech Administrator (webservices@caretechsolutions.com) on Tuesday, October 23, 2001
Article Start Date: Wednesday, June 9, 2004