



Charges against KOR Repudiated

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Letter, *The Times*, 2 March 1983, 13



TO THE EDITOR, THE TIMES

From Sir Isaiah Berlin OM FBA and others

24 February 1983

As from 138 Woodstock Road, Oxford

Sir, We have learned with alarm and dismay that Jacek Kuroń, Adam Michnik, Jan Józef Lipski, Jan Lityński and Henryk Wujec – all members of the now dissolved KOR [Komitet Obrony Robotników] – are to be tried in Warsaw under the grotesque charge of ‘preparing a violent overthrow of Poland’s sociopolitical system’. Under the Polish criminal code, those found guilty of this charge can be liable to a capital sentence. Zbigniew Romaszewski, also a KOR member, has been sentenced to four and a half years in prison for running Radio Solidarity.

CHARGES AGAINST KOR REPUDIATED

KOR (the Workers' Defence Committee, later renamed the Public Self-Defence Committee) was a human rights organisation set up in 1976 to provide material, moral, medical and legal help to workers persecuted after the summer strikes. It was a body of about thirty intellectuals whose ages ranged from the twenties to the nineties.

During the five years of its courageous activity (its members were repeatedly arrested, harassed and beaten up by police), KOR attracted a large number of collaborators and sympathisers, and it became not only the most active human rights organisation in the Soviet bloc, but also a real moral force among Polish workers, intellectuals and young people. It operated by entirely peaceful means, never encouraging, let alone using, violence. The only violence used was on the part of the government, both before the emergence of Solidarity and thereafter.

KOR decided to dissolve itself in September 1981, because it believed that various agencies of Solidarity would be better prepared to take up its tasks. Most of its members were interned after military dictatorship was imposed on 13 December 1981.

The release of the KOR members, and of all other political prisoners in Poland, is a matter of urgent concern to us. The continuing persecutions in Poland adversely affect international relationships and the cause of peace in Europe.

We refuse to give any credence whatever to the charges against the members of KOR.

Yours faithfully,

ISAIAH BERLIN

BRIGGS

HEDLEY BULL

DAVID CAUTE

RALF DAHRENDORF

ERNEST GELLNER

STUART HAMPSHIRE

MICHAEL HOWARD

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STEVEN LUKES

IRIS MURDOCH

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