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# Solidarity's Quandary: Now It's Responsible

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FOR the first time in 40 years, Poland's government will be formed by noncommunists. While many in the West see this as a long overdue triumph for Solidarity, the organization itself has reacted with cautious restraint. Very soon after the victory champagne stopped flowing, the rugged reality of Solidarity's new role began to sink in. "We did too well," said one leader.

Up to this point, Solidarity's legitimacy and success largely depended on the Communists' being permanently in power and permanently embarrassed. Now the movement is faced with sharing both the power and the embarrassment. The political stress and accelerating economic decay that forced the June election have worsened. Solidarity is in danger of being blamed for the country's next disasters without having had time to prevent them.

Can an organization that is essentially reactive assume power without losing some of its integrity, unity, and constituency? Can it initiate reforms that will in the medium term drastically reduce workers' standard of living?

As it enters the corrupt, bureaucratically inert world of communist politics and attempts to deal with the country's nearly insurmountable economic and political problems, Solidarity is caught in a quandary. The movement's legitimacy in the eyes of many of its supporters, not to mention its positive world image, largely depend on its ability to exercise a responsible role in the new government. Yet its reputation as an uncompromising moral force inevitably will become tarnished.

The campaign heightened expectations that the people could have a say in how they are governed.Traveling around Poland, I listened to the expectations that many Poles have of their new legislators. In one campaign meeting, candidates limited their comments to general statements that the system needed to change. But voters at the meeting wanted to know what blueprints the candidates had in mind: Should Poland's economy be restructured after that of the Netherlands or Japan?

Although many in Poland and in the West expect the new coalition government to be more democratic, voices within Solidarity question whether its leaders are experienced in the real workings of democracy. Solidarity, the mass social movement born in 1980, and the preceding 15 years of opposition movements have excelled in rhetoric, conspiracy, and symbolic protest, not in democratic processes like accommodation, consensus, and compromise. As Solidarity activist Magda Nagorska put it: "We haven't learned the culture of parliamentary democracy."

To a society schooled in conspiracy, democratic tendencies do not come easily. As an illegal opposition group, Solidarity had to operate clandestinely, even though it enjoyed popular support. Those active in the opposition that preceded Solidarity felt even more isolated. Simply bringing together like-minded people was risky because organizing

of any kind was illegal.

Talking was the early opposition's main activity. The few public activities it engaged in were designed to make a symbolic statement rather than to exert direct political influence. Participants observed historically significant holidays and collected signatures for protest letters.

In 1976, Poles began joining the opposition to defend striking and rio ting workers following the introduction of meat-price increases. Activists operated a legal and material assistance bureau that helped people sentenced to prison or thrown out of work. As participation in the opposition grew, it turned to printing forbidden books and papers. Typical of that activity was the organization of Nowa, Poland's first underground publishing house. Launched in 1977, Nowa has become the largest independent publishing house in Poland with more than a thousand books published to date.

The creation of production and distribution systems for underground materials played a key role in the organization of the opposition. Printers were paid for the great risks they took - apartment searches, imprisonment, and loss of state jobs. It soon became fashionable for young intellectuals to work as printers, and a new opposition elite was formed.

Opposition became not only a life choice but a lifestyle. Being an oppositionist was a 24-hour-a-day occupation with many cultlike aspects: One spent hours with people who shared the same world view. Contacts outside the group were eventually cut off, and within these circles guru-type leaders arose who were revered and obeyed. Loyalty to the group was enforced with vigor. The inner circle provided a family-like "normal" environment for people who felt lonely in Poland's atomized society. For disloyalty one risked losing friends, as well as the economic support provided by the group's access to informal markets in an economy rife with shortage.

Relative material privilege, common social background, and elitism combined to make oppositionists an exclusive group. Most came from intellectual families who had lived in Warsaw for generations. Many had parents who went to school or fought in the resistance together.

Those who became opposition leaders tended to be privileged enough not to have to worry about material needs. They could devote full time to their opposition activities. Influential oppositionists Jacek Kuron and Adam Michnik almost always were unemployed. Of course, the fact that many activists seldom held jobs was due both to their own choice and to problems they would have encountered because of their status as opposition members.

The birth of Solidarity as a legalized organization created a structure of formal relations and groups within the movement, which thousands of new people joined. Many oppositionists assumed leadership positions in Solidarity. But the separation of political functions from social milieu lasted only a short time. Long-standing informal contacts and cliques still played a major role in deciding who got what and who could influence whom.

With the imposition of martial law and the outlawing of Solidarity in 1981, these long-established social structures enabled Solidarity to survive through seven years of underground operation. And, with the relegalization of Solidarity, some of these alliances have surfaced to carry out political activities openly. Many of the old allegiances still predominate.

In 1980-81, Solidarity's first free period, Poles publicly called for accountability, openness, and democratic process. Yet throughout the recent campaign, election, and aftermath, Lech Walesa and his inner circle operated from the old-style allegiances.

Without the sacrifices, persistence, authority, and vision of people like Jacek Kuron and Adam Michnik, Solidarity's birth and the election would not have been possible. Yet today, the common concern by those within the ranks of Solidarity and many on the outside is, "We must learn democracy."

Dissent from within the ranks stems from allegations that Mr. Walesa and those closest to him did not act democratically because of the narrow choice presented to voters: They could choose only between a slate put forward

by the ruling communist coalition and another advanced by a noninstitutional, but tightly knit inner circle of about 10 seasoned oppositionists formed around Walesa.

I spent many hours in Solidarity headquarters and interviewing leaders close to the inner circle. I observed how people I had known for years conducted themselves while campaigning. They behaved more like a handful of the chosen calling upon the nation to follow them than like the leaders of a broad-based de facto political party. This was, at least in part, a conscious strategy: The inner circle's objective was to fill all possible seats and to maintain a central authority in choosing candidates.

Some candidates promoted by Walesa's group were enthusiastically endorsed in their assigned regions. In other regions, local groups with their own candidates argued sharply with Solidarity powers in Warsaw. Disputes invariably were resolved in favor of Walesa's group. Those outside the innermost circle harshly debated the "democracy" of these procedures.

The election was primarily one enormous rejection of the communist order - a vote against the past. Thus, many candidates avoided discussing programs for the future. In demeanor, dress, and straightforward style of talking, opposition members appeared to be trying to reassure voters that, "We may be running for office, but we're not becoming like them."

Solidarity's recent conciliatory gestures represent a step into new territory. Like the Communist Party, Solidarity has had very little experience that would prepare it to build consensus within its own organization, to encourage broad-based grass-roots participation, or to negotiate with other political groups. Many professional oppositionists, including the new prime minister, Tadeusz Mazowiecki, earned their status by devoting their lives to conspiracy and suffering the consequences dealt out by communist authorities.

Schooled in an underworld of hole-and-corner gatherings and covert coffers, Solidarity legislators feel uncomfortable in their new garb of legitimized opposition. Said Solidarity organizer Danuta Skorenko: "I feel very comfortable with conspiracy but ill at ease and unable to carry out activities above ground."

By voting down the Communists, Poles have called for a period of renewal. The challenge for the new coalition government is to keep that renewal from igniting into a full-fledged rebellion with possibly anarchic consequences. While the new coalition government strives to maintain stability, it also will have to become more open and accountable as the Communist Party, Solidarity, and the Polish people learn democracy.

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**GRAPHIC:** PHOTO: SOLIDARITY RALLY: Can an organization that is essentially reactive assume power without losing some of its integrity, unity, and constituency? Can it initiate the necessary economic reforms?, NEAL MENSCHEL - STAFF

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