

World Monitor, November 1989: pp. 44-54.

LECH'S LABORS LOST?

Solidarity is not as solid as the West Thinks. An inside report from a writer who was strip-searched and tear-gassed along with friends from Poland's freedom movement in the bad old days – and now sees cracks to mend if it is to survive in the wake of victory.

The West's euphoria over this year's news from Poland—the electoral triumph of Solidarity and its takeover of the prime ministership - is in many ways understandable. But it is evidence of a misperception about what Solidarity is and what it is likely to achieve. Factionalism, divisions, and authoritarian leadership within Solidarity are not what Americans, for example, want to hear about now. But it is important that the problems be recognized, because the prospects for democracy in Poland are real, though more remote than many Americans imagine.

My information comes from visiting Poland seven times over 13 years—and spending about half the 1980s there—as an anthropologist studying the country. I was there under martial law working on my Ph.D. thesis. Like the Poles, I experienced the knock on the door at 5 in the morning, the strip searches, the tear gas in my apartment during demonstrations, the camaraderie, the arrests of close friends.

I got to know many Solidarity leaders, some of whom were fugitives or in jail, and some of whom are now elected members of the national legislature. Although I didn't know it at the time, Wojciech Arkuszewski, who was in hiding in a flat next to mine, is a close friend and adviser to the new prime minister, Tadeusz Mazowiecki.

A year ago I went back to Poland to do more research, and returned to the United States after the elections in June. Let me address Western misperceptions of Poland by first spelling out what has *not* been misperceived. The failure of the Communist government to serve the needs of Poland since World War II and the intense, and almost universal, resentment of this among Poles as reflected in their recent landslide vote against the Communists—these are real.

I traveled with candidates during campaigning for the June 4 election and heard one phrase again and again: "We don't want to be ruled by Communists." Even Communist Party candidates tried to position themselves as anti-Communist and avoided any rhetoric that might identify them with the traditional policies of their own party.

I sat for hours after the election with humiliated party apparatchiks as they lamented the sudden turn in their life's work. The party is bankrupt ideologically and has offered no credible new programs. The strongest campaign slogan it could

muster in the recent election was "*Our Faults Are Known.*" A political system that appeals to its people on such a platform has lowered its expectations virtually to ground level. Few new members, young or old, are joining the party. Many members use the term "disintegration" to describe the state of the party.

On the day after the election I dropped by the Communist Party club in the city of Krakow and found a demoralized lot. As party member and journalist Zbigniew Regucki told me, regretfully and humbly, recovery will be difficult and not only because party members are disheartened by the results. "My children don't even want to *hear* about the party," he admitted.

My doubt is not about who lost the election. My doubt is about who-or what-won.

SOLIDARITY DIVIDED BY THREE

Americans envision Solidarity as two things: a labor union and a political party with nearly total public support. But the roles of a labor union and a political party are, at times, downright incompatible. Furthermore, in its early years Solidarity filled yet another role, perhaps the most important of all: a mass social movement, the source of national pride and unity for Poles.

As long as the Communists dominated the country and Solidarity's only task was opposing them, the natural inconsistency of these three roles wasn't evident. As the Communists weakened, Solidarity's innate problems rose to the surface.

Solidarity, in fact, had gone into marked decline when the Communists reinvigorated it last winter while looking for a way out of a political crisis. The economy was in shambles. Between 1980 and 1987, the purchasing power of most Polish working families, not great to begin with, fell by nearly 17%, according to the government's own statistics. And yet Poland, like other debtor nations, was under pressure from Western financial institutions to impose austerity measures to pay its debts. This would further tighten the belt on workers who believed they were backbone-against-bellybutton already.

The government saw only one way to impose further austerity without touching off massive strikes and possible civil violence. That was to seek the collaboration of Solidarity, which, ironically, was already in rather close agreement on the key issue of austerity economic planning.

Many other Poles, however, certainly many intellectual leaders, wanted to move more rapidly away from central economic planning. Many Solidarity activists, having emerged jobless from martial-law prisons, started businesses or other private organizations. They redirected their efforts from explicitly political to economic activity and preached a new philosophy: Form a club or lobby to do what needs doing and finance it yourself in the marketplace.

For Poles, "entrepreneurship" and private "organizing" have rapidly become tickets to influence in public life. Leaders in the Communist Party and Solidarity alike have been jumping on these bandwagons.

I recently talked with Mieczyslaw Wilczek, successful businessman and minister of industry until the Communist government collapsed, and Aleksander Paszynski, who resigned his position as editor in chief of the influential official weekly *Polityka* in protest against martial law. Communist and oppositionist echoed each other's positions: Both avidly supported the liquidation of state ownership and each formed an organization that lobbied the government to ease restrictions on private enterprise. (In September Paszynski was named minister of housing in the new Solidarity government and now presumably will be lobbied himself.)

Last spring, after much stalling and secret negotiation, the Communists decided to re-legalize Solidarity and to invite its leadership into talks the so-called Round Table discussions. The Communists hoped that, with a united front, the two groups could implement the austerity program both supported. Clearly, the Communists got a lot more than they bargained for.

AND THE COLLECTIVE KNEE JERKED

Solidarity insisted on open elections. The Communists acceded, believing they had rigged the rules so as to ensure their own continued domination of government. Solidarity would be allowed official minority representation, which would help legitimize the austerity program. Since even partially free elections were a novelty in Poland, hardly anyone-not even Solidarity's veteran leader, Lech Wałęsa - expected that, with the first opportunity ever to kick at the Communists, the country's collective knee would jerk forward so forcefully.

The country kicked. And that is what led to this summer's dizzying leadership changes. But to believe that all this means a revolutionary change in Polish life is to confuse Solidarity now with Solidarity in 1981 and to ignore the bureaucratic infrastructure that the Communists built during nearly 45 years in power.

Following the Round Table, Solidarity rejuvenated itself in an organizational surge, creating local chapters, election bureaus, and campaigns almost overnight. According to one estimate, 49 committees sprang up in the course of 12 days. The campaign renewed enthusiasm among full-time activists and politicians, who had been starved of public forums during the previous eight years. But Solidarity failed to reawaken its former level of support.

Like the communism it came into being to resist, Solidarity faces an identity and generational crisis, and its backing over the long term is not

clear. Both Solidarity and the Communist Party are undergoing extraordinary change in their constituencies and identities. The degree to which they are inspired, organized, and controlled from central supreme leadership also is coming into question.

Organizational efforts are weaker than in Solidarity's heyday, and far fewer people are joining as full, steadily involved members.

- Three weeks after Solidarity's legalization in 1980, the organization had 3 million members.

- More than two months after its second legalization in 1989, Solidarity press spokesman Janusz Onyszkiewicz reported having half that membership.

- In the region of Rzeszów, two months after legalization the union had barely 10% of the members it attracted during the corresponding period of 1980.

- In the mining region of Katowice, once a Solidarity stronghold, only 10% of the workers in one large mine had signed up, compared with 70% eight years before.

- Wałęsa's chief of staff, Leszek Kaczynski, predicts that 4 million Poles will sign up by year's end; 9 million did in 1981.

Many of those whose lives were so altered by Solidarity in 1980-81 are today cautious and weary. An elementary school teacher remembered how nine years ago almost all of her colleagues rallied to set up a chapter in her school the moment Solidarity arose. But now only 5 of 45 had joined by June.

THE KITCHEN OF MARIA KRZYWONOS

What has made the difference? The most common answer from organizers is that, having seen the promises of earlier days dissolve, having lived through a decade of frustration and decline, people are skeptical about whether anything will effect meaningful improvements.

"People have distanced themselves-they simply don't believe," the teacher noted.

A decade ago, before it was broken apart by the martial-law government, Solidarity was a broad based, populist movement, creating unprecedented ties among intellectuals, workers, and farmers that shattered the traditional barriers within Poland's class-bound society. The surge of revivalism that transformed these interpersonal relationships awakened an idealism and euphoria difficult to convey to those who did not experience it.

This time, in contrast with 1980-81, Solidarity is more successful in farming regions than in the cities, and many villages are more systematically organized than before. Maria Krzywonos, adviser to Rural Solidarity leader Józef Slisz, now a senator, is one reason. The mother of seven children, she nursed her youngest baby as we talked in her farmhouse kitchen. Krzywonos helped to bring villagers together for informal political teach-ins

during martial law. Before such efforts, she explained, the countryside did not present a unified opposition. Now the objective of many country folk is simple-to get rid of government controls and bureaucracy, goals easily expressed in terms of "us" against "them."

In most of Poland, a once indivisible Solidarity is no longer united. It is divided within workplaces and between generations. A young generation of radicals-most of whom were barely in junior high school when Solidarity was born-won't have anything to do with Wałęsa's group. The still-underground "Fighting Solidarity," a small but burningly intense youthful faction, regards agreements with the authorities as corrupt bargains and refused to participate in the Round Table. Members of "Fighting Solidarity" often talk of "our lack of life prospects"-a quite moderate assessment of the average 15-year wait for an apartment, the unstable and rapidly declining living standards and morale.

There were other small, radical factions that boycotted the elections. A spokesman for one group not represented at the Round Table complained bitterly to me as he chain-smoked in his one-room apartment, which he shares with his mother. "We gained nothing from the Round Table," he said. "Solidarity has become a new establishment."

For many activists who lived and breathed Solidarity before and after it was forced underground in 1981 the name no longer speaks of hope and truth. Magda Nagorska's experience is typical of many. At the dawning of Solidarity, Nagorska, a journalist, felt she finally could pursue her profession with integrity, first for legal Solidarity publications and later underground. After nine years of secret, anonymous sacrifice without credit from any but her most trusted colleagues, she no longer devotes a majority of her time to the cause. Her disillusionment stems from years of intimate collaboration with a leadership that came to exploit the organization for patronage, self-promotion, and honor.

"Then Solidarity meant moral togetherness - mutual ethics and honor and sacrifice," said Nagorska. "Now it is only political business."

WHY THEY BOOED WAŁĘSA

What groups legal Solidarity will draw on for its mass membership is an open question. Most members now are blue-collar veterans of 1981 Solidarity. In contrast with the formative years, young people and managers, engineers and professionals in industry are conspicuously absent.

Solidarity has always been more than a trade union, but even as a trade union it seems to be losing momentum. Like the Communist regime, it has its main support in large, outmoded, unproductive factories that the government is closing one by one. Even at enterprises that

remain open, Solidarity- as a trade union called on to defend workers' rights-finds itself at odds with the most dynamic new doctrine that has swept through the educated Polish community in recent years: economic reform through free-market libertarianism. Solidarity has not caught up with the economic reformers among its former supporters, who advocate closing unproductive enterprises even if this creates unemployment. Although such libertarian ideas find avid individual supporters within both Solidarity and the Communist Party, they challenge the purpose, indeed the *raison d'être*, of both organizations.

Poland's standard of living seems likely to sink further, and many expect this to trigger wildcat strikes not called by Solidarity. Under such circumstances, at both local and national levels Solidarity will face with the uneasy choice to back or not to back the strikes. Solidarity members joined many of last year's walkouts, although Solidarity had not organized them. If its local units initiate or support such strikes, the center might try to face down the locals-but it cannot count on maintaining discipline and control.

Last fall, Wałęsa himself was called in to conciliate a strike in the Katowice mines but had to leave after being booed by striking miners and threatened with being chucked out in a wheelbarrow. Local Solidarity organizer Danuta Skorenko, who witnessed the event, could scarcely contain her apprehension about the coming months. As we talked in a dingy restaurant, she trembled.

"A mounting wave of strikes that cannot necessarily be controlled by Solidarity awaits us," she confided. "As a trade union, we have to defend workers. We'll have to join spontaneous strikes or risk being considered Reds. I think Solidarity as a trade union will fall apart. A third force is coming into play-the younger generation. They don't believe much in Solidarity, and they're more rigid and uncompromising."

While many in the West see Solidarity's entrance into the government as a long overdue triumph for the movement, Solidarity itself has reacted with cautious restraint. "We did too well," Wojciech Arkuszewski, a close aide to now-Prime Minister Mazowiecki, told me when he stopped by for dinner a few days after the election.

Prior to the election, Solidarity's legitimacy and success largely depended on the Communists' being permanently in power and permanently embarrassed. Now the movement has to share both the power and the embarrassment. Solidarity is in danger of being blamed for the country's next disasters without having had time to prevent them.

Even after Solidarity's June landslide, the movement's leaders resisted taking power, although the Communists repeatedly invited them into the government. But the country confronts such colossal problems that Solidarity's leaders have joined a coalition with

their former jailers, not because they're fond of them but simply to prevent widespread anarchy. If Solidarity flees from responsibility at a time of such national crisis, it risks being discredited both at home and abroad. Thus, reluctantly-out of a sense of self-preservation, not achievement-Solidarity, moral watchdog and voice of protest, suddenly entered the political arena.

REBELS WITH OLD SCHOOL TIES

Like the Communist Party, Solidarity has had very little experience that would prepare it to build consensus democratically within its own organization, to encourage broad-based grassroots political participation, or to negotiate with other political groups. Many professional oppositionists, including the new prime minister, earned their status by devoting their lives to conspiracy and suffering the consequences dealt out by Communist authorities.

Solidarity and the preceding 15 years of opposition movements excelled in conspiracy, rhetoric, and symbolic protest, not in democratic processes like accommodation, consensus, and compromise. As one activist put it, "We haven't learned the culture of parliamentary democracy."

Being an oppositionist was a 24-hour-a-day occupation with many cult-like aspects: One spent hours every day with people who shared the same world view. Contacts outside the group became less important and eventually were cut off, and within these circles guru-type leaders arose who were revered and obeyed. The inner circle provided a family-like "normal" environment for people who felt lonely in Poland's atomized society. Loyalty to the group, of utmost significance, was enforced with vigor. For disloyalty, one risked losing friends as well as the economic support provided by the group's access to well-supplied informal markets in an economy beset with shortages of goods.

This was a very exclusive group. Most oppositionists came from intellectual families who had lived in Warsaw for generations. Many had parents who went to school together or fought in the wartime resistance together. Those who became leaders tended to be privileged enough not to have to worry about material needs. Well-known oppositionists Jacek Kuron and Adam Michnik were unemployed most of their lives and thus could devote full time to their opposition activities.

There were people who resented the elitist nature of the opposition milieu. Veteran oppositionist Arkuszewski once confided to me exactly why he resisted leadership positions:

"People were imprisoned in the opposition circle because there was no life for them outside of it. They could not live any other life, and that is why they easily surrendered to the strong discipline and authorities of the opposition."

Arkuszewski noted that the hierarchy in opposi-

tion circles was more clearly defined than it was in other Polish settings:

"Everyone knew who was most important, whose opinion counted most, who was less important, and who didn't count at all."

In 1980-81, Solidarity's first free period, Poles publicly called for accountability, openness, and democratic process. 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.

But the old cliques still influenced who got what and who could sway whom. With the imposition of martial law and the outlawing of Solidarity in 1981, these long-established allegiances enabled Solidarity to survive through eight years of underground operation. And, with the re-legalization of Solidarity, some of these alliances have surfaced to carry out political activities openly. Throughout the recent campaign, election, and aftermath, Lech Wałęsa and his inner circle continued to operate from the old-style allegiances.

A HANDFUL OF THE CHOSEN

Dissent from within the ranks stems from allegations that Wałęsa and those closest to him did not act democratically because of the highly structured choice presented to voters in the recent election:

They could choose only between a slate put forward by the ruling Communists and another advanced by a non-institutional but very tightly knit inner circle of about ten seasoned oppositionists formed around Wałęsa.

I spent many hours in private apartments interviewing leaders close to the inner circle and hanging out at Solidarity headquarters. 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 (noncommunist groups are not officially recognized as political parties in Poland). 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.

Many candidates promoted by Wałęsa's group were enthusiastically endorsed in their assigned regions. But in several regions, local groups with their own candidates argued sharply with the powers in Warsaw. Disputes invariably were resolved in favor of Wałęsa's group.

Some activists outside the innermost circle-and even some inside it--denounced the lack of democracy in these procedures. They alleged, for example, that many of the movement's diverse elements were passed over-especially the more hot-headed, and several people who had been hand-picked by Cardinal Józef Glemp, primate of the Roman Catholic Church in Poland.

Some of those associated with the inner circle were open in acknowledging the validity of such allegations. During his Senate campaign, Józef Ślisz was stridently challenged on the nomination procedures at a campaign meeting I attended in a town parish. "From the beginning it wasn't democratic," he replied. "You can create democracy if you aren't up against a system that has all the power. We have to be realists."

THE WRONG COMMUNISTS WON

The spring campaign heightened expectations that the people actually could have a say in how they are governed. It was the first experience many Poles had with the idea that someone in legislative office could represent them. But people did not vote *for* reform programs or platforms, nor did they reflect on the differences in the merits or political positions of candidates.

Many candidates deliberately avoided discussing programs for the future. Thus, the election was not the culmination of a process designed to develop policies for the future but a vote against the past.

In the main election, Solidarity carried nearly half the seats in the Sejm (lower house) and newly formed Senate combined. The Communist coalition hung on to barely half the total seats it had occupied without challenge just weeks before. But the biggest blow-for both sides-was suffered when only two of those on the "national list," a bloc of 35 seats in the Sejm for which only Communists could present themselves, survived the initial election.

A successful grass-roots movement, *not* endorsed by Solidarity's leaders, had urged voters to "cross off the Communists" on the national ballot. Struck down were members of the Communist establishment-including heads of the three Communist alliance coalition parties, the premier, and the speaker of the Sejm-who were the very reformers who had made the election possible.

This forced a run-off in which the guaranteed Communist seats were won by more uncompromising candidates whom the party had substituted for the moderates. Many gained office with the support of only 2% to 3% of the votes cast. And this, in turn, led to a parliamentary standoff, the defection of two parties in the Communist coalition (the Peasants Party and the Democratic Party), and the stunning selection of a Solidarity man as prime minister.

Very different but almost equally powerful obstacles make it impossible for anyone political force to govern Poland alone or with full authority. The three main political players-the Communists, Solidarity, and the Catholic Church-are cooperating with one another out of sheer desperation. N one of the players is proposing a complete overhaul of the bureaucratic and economic system,

and none has the resources to implement such change.

Solidarity is attempting to maintain stability, not foment revolution. This is why Wałęsa conceded on his own initiative that the Communists should retain their absolute authority over the army and the police.

Solidarity's ability to govern Poland is shackled: The Communist Party maintains a grip on executive and management positions in nearly all spheres of government and administration. Under this system of privilege, known as *nomenklatura*, a tangle of loyalties and favoritisms precludes broader political and social participation by noncommunist Poles. Moreover, the entire economy is without resources and without much likelihood of being bailed out by the West. For the time being, the impoverished, incompetent bureaucratic and economic system will remain in place; Solidarity doesn't have the wealth or the apparatus skills to replace it.

The country's almost insurmountable economic problems and this obstacle to real power are the main reasons that, until recently, Solidarity persistently refused to enter into a coalition with the Communists. Shortly after the election Solidarity press secretary Onyszkiewicz explained why. No Solidarity minister, he said, would be able to work efficiently with a *nomenklatura* staff selected during the past 40 years for loyalty to the party.

Although the Communists are not yet out the door, many Poles believe that, in the future, their bread will more likely be buttered by Solidarity than by the Communists. The Communist coalition, rock-solid for 40 years, has crumbled.

And we are also witnessing a true identity crisis in Solidarity. As it enters the corrupt world of Communist politics and attempts to deal with the country's entrenched 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 depends on its ability to exercise a responsible role in the Polish government. Yet its reputation as an untainted and uncompromising moral force seems sure to become tarnished. The organization can expect factionalism, blame, and loss of its old integrity as it struggles with the tough choices of political office.

DESPERATE TO SHARE THE BLAME

The latent drag of many Communist institutions that will survive even under a Solidarity government and the lack of a really democratic decision-making process within Solidarity itself will sorely inhibit the Solidarity administration's ability to make progress.

The economic crisis is what induced the Communists to invite Solidarity to dinner in the first place. Now the continuing crisis could work against the Solidarity administration and capsize it

in a single dramatic moment. Things haven't been improving.

Steep inflation, 7% to 9% monthly, raised prices by 50% in the first six months of 1989. Food costs were increasing almost daily even before price controls on some goods were lifted, causing prices to jump as much as fourfold overnight. Sources in the Ministry of Finance say money is being printed day and night. Poles are on shaky ground when they budget their own currency.

Publisher Lech Stefanski debated how to handle a tripling of his publication costs in two months' time. He paid 180,000 zlotys to produce his independent magazine in June, compared to 58,000 zlotys two months before and 30,000 zlotys a year before that.

Both the Communists and Solidarity say that such unpopular austerities as wage freezes must be implemented. As a former Communist Party apparatchik told me after the rushed election schedule was announced: "The authorities are in such a hurry to hold elections not out of eagerness to share power with Solidarity, but because they are absolutely desperate to share the blame."

Ridiculous as this looked to some Westerners, that is exactly why Wałęsa and his group fidgeted for weeks, even summoning their former nemesis, Gen. Wojciech Jaruzelski, to be head of state, before finally offering up one of their own as prime minister.

HANGING ONTO THE WELFARE STATE

Even under a Solidarity-led government, the potential for volatility is considerable. Wildcat strikes and protests might lead to police intervention and the suspension of trade unions. Newly chosen Sen. Krzysztof Kozłowski, deputy head of an influential Catholic weekly, cautioned shortly after the election celebrations had worn off:

"People are impatient because of the worsening economy. There are forces such as spontaneous strikes that can't be controlled by the Opposition, Solidarity, Church or Party ... We want very fast changes, but they may turn out to be too slow, given the state of people's nerves and their stamina."

And while Wałęsa and his team of advisers from the labor union core of Solidarity agree on an austerity program-only a quibble or two away from the Communist program-many who were part of the pro-Solidarity consensus at the polls disagree. Among Solidarity's strongest supporters are a burgeoning intellectual army of what are known in Poland as "liberals," for their 19th-century forebears, although the term might confuse some Americans. Their ultimate goal may

be a free-market/government mix not unlike that favored by American liberals. But, given Poland's communist history, these activists are now fully bent on pushing capitalism.

The liberals are vocal and stir public discussion but have less chance to implement their policies than their outspoken proponents assert. Liberal spokesman Janusz Korwin-Mikke says that unemployment is not a problem and that the only concern of an enterprise should be profit. But as strong as is the reaction against communism, public opinion surveys show that meat-and-potatoes socialist values are widely endorsed by the population. Guaranteed jobs, housing, medical care, and social security benefits are generally favored.

Even Poles who choose lucrative private employment feel they should be entitled to the same social welfare benefits as state workers. Eighty percent surveyed in a 1989 University of Krakow study expected paid vacations, free health care, and nurseries at the workplace, and they viewed employment in the private sector as temporary and essentially insecure.

With everyone facing the same crises, the we/they divisions of the past are crumbling. New trends and interests cut across the three major organizations, dissolving divisions and creating new alliances. The Communist Party, Solidarity; and the Catholic Church all speak of economic and political reform, democracy, and pluralism. Powerful elements in both the party and Solidarity advocate socialist values. But almost everyone, including party officials, is anti-communist.

Solidarity's entrance into the government is the beginning of the end, but Poland cannot be transformed overnight. The forces of change may have generated political effects that astounded all participants, but the forces of continuity run deep. None of the leaders and very few of the followers want to press matters to an irresolvable extreme. The directions of Polish political and economic life-the redefining of communism, the evolution toward a competitive party system, and the struggle to displace an entrenched bureaucracy-make for an ambitious agenda and depend on the continued indulgence of the Soviet leaders.

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