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## Lost Capital—the Intelligentsia Current of Underground “Solidarity” in Free Poland\*

*Abstract:* This article discusses a study of the present vicissitudes of men and women who were active in the underground publishing movement in the nineteen-eighties. One of the elements of the underground “Solidarity” ideology was civic responsibility and social activity. The author wanted to know whether the one-time conspirators have carried these ideas into free Poland. He found that very few former underground activists now work in public institutions. They are disappointed with the outcomes of the transformation which, rather than giving them a sense of agency, are convincing them that former members of the democratic opposition have not been instrumental to the successful development of a new, democratic state. The one-time activists are also finding it difficult to come to terms with the social costs of the reforms which they feel they co-authored. Most of them have not ceased to be socially active, however, although they no longer speak the language of civic involvement. They feel that the values they lived by in the years of struggle with the communist regime cannot be applied in any way to the political reality of a free country.

*Keywords:* “Solidarity”, democratic opposition, independent publishing movement, antipolitics, participant democracy, Poland 1982–1989, post-1989 Poland, transformation, Polish intelligentsia, civil society

Compared with the inhabitants of other post-communist countries, the Poles can rightly feel that in their case liberation from Soviet colonisation in 1989 was not just the effect of a favourable international situation but was, to a large extent, the effect of their own active struggle. The Independent, Self-governing Trade Union “Solidarity” became the nexus of a social movement which attracted millions and it was in clear opposition to the communist regime. “Solidarity” created the symbols and slogans which united the entire opposition. Representatives of the democratic opposition continued to fly the “Solidarity” banner when the official authorities, no longer legitimised and incapable of initiating necessary economic reforms, decided to negotiate with the opposition and allow it to participate in the country’s governance.

It would seem that the legacy of “Solidarity” ought to give the Poles a great advantage over other countries which were also liberating themselves from communism. It would also seem that Poland’s experience of a powerful grassroots democracy in the form of 16 months of legal activity of the “Solidarity” trade union should be a good advance payment for the construction of democratic institutions when the

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time came to liberate the nation from communist dictatorship. Every Polish man and woman had the opportunity to see what democratic procedures were all about and what consequences they entailed. Democracy was also the movement's unquestioned, ultimate value (Touraine 1989; Kowalski 1990). Finally, the bottom-up, participant nature of "Solidarity" democracy was one of the reasons why it evoked such enormous enthusiasm in western Europe.

But memories of this experience were not the only social and political capital which the Poles had at their disposal. Although the official authorities banned "Solidarity" and its affiliated institutions when they introduced martial law in December 1981, they were unable to withhold the social mobilisation which the movement had triggered. True, the movement was weakened somewhat but it continued to operate until 1989. Some forms of this activity were legal. For example, the authorities tolerated its cultural initiatives, most of which found refuge in the Catholic church. Its most important activities were illegal, however, and were prosecuted by the police. The underground "Solidarity" movement operated according to the principle of non-violence and had two major currents: trade union and publishing. The authorities prosecuted them both and imprisoned those who were caught.

The first of the two currents was the direct continuation of the structures of the now prohibited "Solidarity." It operated in the work place and involved the upholding of trade-unionism. The second current harked back to the earlier experiences of the Polish anti-communist opposition of the seventies and focused on the publishing and dissemination of uncensored press and books. The former involved self-help and was predominant among workers. The latter was mostly based on the intelligentsia although, especially in smaller centres, it also sprouted around large factories. As far as permanence of the movement is concerned, however, the press and publications probably played the more important role. Trade union activists also focused to a considerable extent on the distribution of underground gazettes and leaflets. Publications were the material sign of the continuity of resistance of the authorities. They were also responsible for the survival of "Solidarity" symbols and the relative programmatic unity of the formation, persecuted as it was by the military and the police.

It is enough to analyse the readership of the publishing movement to understand how large the movement was. A survey conducted in 2005 showed that about 26% of the adult population had access to underground publications in the eighties and 11% of respondents declared that they were regular readers.<sup>1</sup> One must remember that at the time one could be persecuted for having even one or two copies of "Solidarity" publications. In other words, a large army of people (many thousands) pulled the strings which moved the publishing and disseminating of underground publications. For nearly eight years these men and women risked imprisonment and their careers to remain faithful to the values of "Solidarity."

These people, and the capital of social involvement and ethos with which they influenced others (Szawiel 1982), may surely have been a potential on which Polish

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<sup>1</sup> The survey was conducted in October 2005 on a representative national sample (n = 1000) of over-fifteen-year-old by GfK Polonia. Interviewers interviewed 584 men and women who were over 38 (i.e., had been at least 15 in 1982).

democracy, unlike other democracies, could lean. Meanwhile, the formation called underground “Solidarity” meaning a social movement did not surface as a social or political agent after 1989. Although many former leaders of the opposition became members of the new, governing elite, the rank-and-file activists who had been their powerbase for so many years did not play any significant role. Shortly after the breakthrough they dispersed and failed to develop a new identity. The national movement which survived the years of persecution (reduced but still numerous) seemed to disintegrate once independence had been regained, leaving behind it a small elite of leaders.

### The Civic Imperative

Conspiratorial activity under conditions of police persecution may not, in itself, have any great value for inchoate democracy. Underground activity is naturally authoritarian and hardly conducive to open communication. However, the civic motives of members of the movement and their ideals seemed to contain significant values. The movement referred to democratic values and the symbols of “Solidarity.” Interpretation of “Solidarity” as the implementation of the ideal of republicanism and revival of the sense of belonging played an important role. Concepts such as “civil society” or “civil disobedience” were frequently invoked and the movement’s ideology clearly postulated the need to take civil responsibility for public welfare at a time when the elite was deprived of any means of influencing those who had power (Śpiewak 1987; Mielczarek, 1989; Świdorski 1996; Gawin 2002).

The idealistic Polish democratic opposition, and especially its intelligentsia current, referred to the concept of antipolitics, a concept which was popular in the entire dissident movement in Central-Eastern Europe at the time. The term was coined by a well-known Hungarian dissident, György Konrád, who used it in the title of his most important book. In Poland two other texts propagating similar ideas were more popular: Vaclav Havel’s *Power of the Powerless* (Havel, 1985) and Adam Michnik’s essays (Michnik 1984).<sup>2</sup>

Antipolitics was a theory of civic ethics and it delineated the norms of conduct of the individual vis-à-vis the surrounding evil and deceit of real socialism. Since the fall of communism seemed very unlikely, the opposition in countries which were under Soviet dominance could not rationally plan any political action strategies. Therefore, antipolitics was basically about rejecting the hypothesis that compromise with the regime was possible and striving instead to develop a field of existence parallel to official structures (Łabędź 1997).<sup>3</sup> This concept strongly accentuated individualism

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<sup>2</sup> Adam Michnik wrote programmatic texts for the democratic opposition in the seventies and in the years of martial law. “The New Evolutionism” written in 1978 and “On Resistance” written in 1982 (Michnik 1984) are two examples. Michnik did not use the term antipolitics, however, neither did he completely reject the possibility of political action once it was feasible. But this perspective was located in the fuzzy future.

<sup>3</sup> In the underground journalism of martial law we often find discussions of whether or not to come to terms with the authorities, similar to the agreement signed by the strikers and the government in 1980 which

and individual accountability. But accountability was also closely connected with the need to show one's solidarity with others who were equally oppressed by the omnipotent state. According to this theory, the individual had "the unlimited right to judge the existing political order before the high court of his conscience and reason" (Szacki 1994) but his revolt was more than just a sign of nonconformity, it was demonstrated, as it were, in the name of the tacit majority, other wronged individuals who had neither the strength nor the pluck to speak up.

Hence involvement and social activity were stimulated not by hope of victory and liberation but by moral rectitude. Even today the conspirers repeat these extremely typical reasons for their underground activity:

One fought on principle, I mean because one could not possibly surrender. (IDI 1)  
I can now stand before the mirror and shave [without being ashamed]. And I have something to tell my son when he asks me what I did in those days. (FGI 2)

"Antipolitical" discourse was not the only ideological justification for resistance against the authorities although it was certainly a very important one. It described the daily practices of the underground during martial law, the efforts to develop a "parallel society," an area of culture independent of the oppressive regime, very accurately. But more than anything else it was a moral motive oriented towards a goal which was formulated not so much in pragmatic terms as in terms of civic responsibility.

It is therefore worth considering what became of this ethical message after 1989. If "Solidarity" was largely an ethical movement and if civil ethics played so great a role in motivating the activists who eventually contributed so much to the fall of the regime, then how did the ethics evolve in the new, changed circumstances.

At the level of public discourse, the "antipolitical" ethical message was very quickly discarded. The compromise of the Round Table (the political agreement between the party leaders and the leaders of the democratic opposition), not the myth of "Solidarity" and its "antipolitical," uncompromising struggle with communism became the founding myth of the Third Republic. The governing elite, and above all the influential circles of the former democratic opposition steadfastly refused to refer to the anticommunist, "Solidarity" tradition, particularly its radical, "antipolitical," version. From now on, Polish democracy was to be built on the experience of western democracies rather than one's own traditions, including the "Solidarity" tradition (Krasnodębski 2003).

### Study Location and Sample Selection

It still remains to be established, however, how the ethical discourse discussed above evolved at the level of social practice of the former activists who were, after all, the

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enabled the establishment of "Solidarity." It was assumed that such an agreement would have to be based largely on concessions to the opposition and would have to create space for organizations independent of the state. For a long time, however, this prospect was completely unrealistic because the authorities did not wish to pursue it. The first serious discussion of the issue did not take place until the round table project began to be considered, i.e., in 1988.

social powerbase of the transformation. How do the ex-members of the underground, who can surely be viewed as the depositaries of “antipolitical” ethics, describe their activity and their place in society? In order to answer this question, the present author initiated and conducted a study of the present activity of the former activists. He managed to interview the rank-and-file participants of the “Solidarity” conspiracy in the martial law years and to enquire about their later careers after 1989. He paid particular attention to their social and political activity and the ethical justifications of their work. In other words, the purpose of the investigation was to identify the respondents’ present public attitudes, now that Poland is a free country, how they now understand the tradition to which they once belonged, and how they reinterpret it and pass it on.

The study was conducted in autumn 2005 and included 16 individual interviews, 6 focus group interviews and a questionnaire survey of 148 former distributors of independent publications who operated in Warsaw in 1982–1989.<sup>4</sup> It was the researchers’ intention to contact rank-and-file activists, men and women whose involvement was completely anonymous and who were the authors of the social practice of oppositional activity at the most basic level. This is why distributors of underground publications were selected—people who had performed very mundane functions yet ones which could hardly be performed by the senior members of the organisation for fear of exposure.

It was not easy to reach the respondents and it was certainly impossible to track down a representative sample of the entire population of former activists. It was also necessary to accept that since no national register of underground activists had been compiled directly after freedom was regained, the existing lists must carry the risk that they only contain some of the activists’ names and only cover some circles (the ones it was possible to track down).

Who were the distributors we did manage to identify? Seventy-six percent of them now have higher education. As many as 34 percent were employed at various academic institutions in the ‘eighties, 8% were teachers or librarians and 9% were pupils or students. Even those who declared that they worked for enterprises (about 40%) were usually clerks rather than manual labourers (about 10% of the total sample).

We did not originally intend to target so highly educated a sample (part of which was simply academic). When recruiting the distributors for our study we hoped to achieve a wide social cross-section of the former underground. Meanwhile, what

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<sup>4</sup> The present author was the author of the idea, the assessment instruments and all the analysis for this study. He also co-ordinated the entire project and conducted most of the qualitative research. Aleksandra Domańska who co-operated substantively on this project conducted part of the investigation. The study was conducted in September and October 2005 with the exception of one individual interview which was conducted in May 2005. Standardized formats (separate for the individual and group interviews) were used. The individual interview lasted about 1.5 hours and the group interview lasted about 2 hours. The respondents of the qualitative investigations were both rank-and-file distributors and (rarely) more senior activists (managers of underground firms, activity organisers). The survey of 148 independent press distributors from 1982–1989 was conducted by 4 interviewers, trained and supervised by the project manager. The questionnaire covered 127 variables. For a detailed discussion of the project and its outcomes see Mielczarek, 2006. The study was sponsored by Warsaw City; the firms GfK Polonia, SPSS Polska and the Centre for Local Studies; Maciej Radziwiłł and several anonymous sponsors.

we got was the part represented by the intelligentsia. This outcome is also one of our research findings, however. First of all, we discovered that in Warsaw, the city in which we conducted our investigations, the underground intelligentsia centred around the universities and other higher educational establishments (other work places were probably more highly represented in smaller centres). Second, although the underground publishing movement cooperated with the underground trade union in the 'eighties and the two phenomena were felt to be independent of one another, today the two communities have drifted very far apart. They no longer cooperate or keep in touch with each other. We found that it would be very difficult to contact the workers' "Solidarity" through our "intelligentsia" contacts.

By consulting our "Independent for Culture"<sup>5</sup> database (unanimously rated the best existing source of data on rank-and-file underground activists albeit created by the oppositional intelligentsia), we managed to contact mainly representatives of the intelligentsia. The most adequate way to qualify the population we studied would be to say that it represented the conspiring Warsaw intelligentsia. I believe that our sample was quite representative of this group.<sup>6</sup>

Because of this particular sample composition we largely interviewed members of social groups which had benefited most from the transformation due to their superior education and residence in Poland's largest and richest city. These social groups were also the ones which remained in touch with the most opinion-forming circles of the Polish intellectual elite because, Poland being a centralised country, the Warsaw elite dominates the rest of the country. The vast majority of the Warsaw elite supported the underground or even participated in its activities. This localisation of our study is justified to the extent that it allows us to monitor the vicissitudes of former underground activists where they could be most influential and most effective. In smaller centres, the impact of local activists on the transformation and their chances of transmitting their own tradition to the wider public were surely more limited.

Our focus on the places where the former underground activists had the greatest potential impact is also justified by the specific nature of the Polish transformation. Although the Polish "Solidarity" movement, including underground "Solidarity," was unquestionably a key social actor who brought about the democratic breakthrough in Poland in 1989 (and indirectly in all the remaining Central-Eastern European countries under Soviet dominance), it had precious little effect on the later changes in its own country. The political elite which emerged from the "Solidarity" movement (and this basically applies to every government in 1989–1993, i.e., until the return of the post-communists to power) ceased very soon to seek social support in the social movement. On the contrary, it understood its mission as the need to extinguish social activity and to introduce difficult economic reforms top-down fashion, in an

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<sup>5</sup> Jan Strękowski is responsible for the database. At first it was compiled by the "Karta" Centre but is now in the care of the Freedom of Speech Association. Unfortunately it only contains information concerning the underground publishing movement and contains no socio-demographic information.

<sup>6</sup> The sample may also be criticised on many other grounds. For example, individuals with a very long term in the opposition and individuals from KOR (the Committee for Workers' Defence) circles are overrepresented. However, since nobody has conducted similar investigations so far, there are no alternative sources from which to glean information on the probable structure of the studied population.

atmosphere of social rest (Kolarska 2007). This elite also explicitly rejected the idea (endorsed by the underground “Solidarity”) that memory of people’s merits and wrongdoings under communist dictatorship should be cultivated (the daily newspaper *Gazeta Wyborcza*, originally the organ of the “Solidarity” movement, played a key role here) and it even did its best to block the exchange of staffs in state institutions.

This study wanted to find out how this particular shape of the Polish transformation affected the continuity of “Solidarity” tradition at the level of its rank-and-file depositaries. The former activists probably expected that once communism was overthrown they would join the new governing elite and play an important role in the development of Polish democratic institutions. They also had a right to expect that the patterns of conduct cultivated in the underground would contribute to the development of patterns of civil behaviour in free Poland. Even if “Solidarity” failed to gain political influence, it was to be expected that it would be a major source of social capital and an actor in various grassroots initiatives. Our empirical data suggest, however, that this influence was weak and the ability to continue the former ethos was limited.

### **Absence in State Institutions**

As I just mentioned, the conspiring Warsaw intelligentsia hardly fed the public institutions. 39% of the respondents helped to organise the pivotal elections in June 1989. Most of them had auxiliary functions, usually (57% of those involved) as returning officers whom the “Solidarity” Citizens’ Committees delegated to keep an eye on the voting procedure and make sure that everything was correct. This demonstrates perfectly that the former distributors were willing to assume subsidiary and administrative roles in free Poland, similar to the part they played in the underground).

This was the final chord in their political involvement, however. In 1990 only 3% of the respondents held public offices. All in all, throughout the 16 transformative years (until autumn 2005, when the study was conducted) only 11% of the former Warsaw distributors had worked, if only for a short time, in a public institution. This is a summary value. The proportions for separate years never exceeded 7%. The average term of work in public institutions was also very brief—about 10 months. This means that there was never any mass influx of former underground activists into the state institutions and those who did work there (at junior, not senior positions) usually landed their by accident. One has to remember that the years of economic transformation were years of very intense occupational mobility due to the changing economic structure.

Most significantly, however, if the former underground activists did land in a public institution it was usually in the central administration and of the 17 of the respondents who had worked in state offices 6 were ministers or department directors. This shows that recruitment to public institutions almost completely involved leaders, individuals meant to hold the highest offices, and that these men and women did not take the mass activists who could have acted as their executive apparatus with them.

### Former Members of the Opposition in the World of Politics

Former activists can therefore be divided into two groups—those who are politically active today and those who are not. Interestingly enough, political activity before 1989 is something respondents are proud of whereas political inactivity after 1989 is viewed as something natural. Today in particular, over a dozen years since the fall of communism, the former underground activists do not feel that it is their mission to be politically involved and heal the country. On the contrary, rather like they did in the communist days, they feel that to be politically involved is to agree to participate in a system of shady and corrupt connections.

This was not always so, however. The respondents describe the early years of the transformation in terms of the struggle between people of the old regime and people of the new regime, connected with the democratic opposition. People of the old regime are perceived as the mainstay of corruption, people of the new regime are perceived as those who want to introduce new standards of conduct to public institutions. The respondents feel that the healing of public institutions has not been successful, however. The state is still thought to be deeply corrupted and inefficient. The respondents are generally affirmative of the democratic revolution. They notice, however, that even democratically elected authorities are inept.

What we learned from the respondents generally suggests that they do not feel responsible for the way the changes were introduced. They often try to argue that the real actors of the transformation were not the underground activists but people who joined the movement all of a sudden when it came to power.

All of a sudden a heap of new people sprouted who were prepared for it. (IDI 5)

On the other hand, they must admit that those “Solidarity” members who took the offices have changed and are no longer trustworthy.

This is not a question of left and right. The [post-communist] left was very determined, of course, and well organised for various affairs. Many of our people, meanwhile, were not immune to things which began to go on nearby. (IDI 2)

I think that many people just wanted to change places. They used to be the secretaries and now we will come and rule. (FGI 3)

According to the former conspirators, the mechanisms underlying the functioning of public structures have not changed substantially despite the major systemic changes (which the respondents recognise and appreciate). Here, however, we have a controversy analogous to the discussion which is continuing on the public forum: what is causing the limited success of the transformation (the corruption and the ineffective administration)—errors committed at the time of its introduction or unavoidable, natural mechanisms of power and bureaucracy?

What the former underground activists criticise most as they discuss the mechanisms of transformation is the insufficient exchange of cadres and the indecision which accompanied the reforms.

The problem is that ours were accepted but the other ones were not dismissed. (FGI 3)



[The underground people] did not take root [in the state structures]. There weren't enough of them. [...] It was a mistake to try to fit this minority into existing structures, they couldn't cope and dropped out one by one. (IDI 4)

The respondents who hold this opinion seem to continue to believe, at least to a certain extent, that if only they had the chance, idealistic and decent people (not only former underground activists) would have managed the transformation better.

But those who are willing to defend the achievements of the transformation do not maintain that the reforms are satisfactory. All they are saying is that nothing better could have been done. What they are trying to argue is that corruption and ineptitude are a natural feature of politics and the state administration. They feel that the political mechanism of transformation in Poland was correct but they do not claim that the functioning of state institutions has radically improved.

The group which had the opportunity to participate in political institutions after 1989 can be divided into two parts, however. One consists of individuals who joined the political institutions and then backed out, the other consists of people who continue to work in these institutions. The former recall their experiences bitterly. And I am not only speaking about the situation where former activists of the democratic opposition were in the minority. We find similar stories in the accounts of self-government councillors who were elected in 1990 and were in the vast majority. They too say that many members of the democratic opposition very quickly discarded the ethos of work for the common good and purely self-interested people soon began to set the tone.

I backed out because I was disgusted, because I cannot function on the principle that I am to earn money for myself and scheme with the others. I resigned as soon as I saw how self-serving they were. (FGI 3)

The reports are largely tails of disillusionment and powerlessness. The decision to quit was usually triggered by the feeling that they have no real influence on the functioning of their institutions. This does not always mean that those who left had lost their former sense of mission, their sense of great civic obligation. It usually meant that they felt they could not meet this obligation.

It seems to me that the people who were active in the eighties were moral people. But politics are immoral and therefore we are not cut out for them. If you have principles, you very soon drop out and that's it. (FGI 3)

On the other hand, some of the former underground activists were and still are active politicians. Part of them are of the opinion that they had succeeded and, despite the aberrations they observed, had been able to have a positive impact in their respective fields.

When I was there the councillors did not dare to squeak that they wanted an apartment, a shop or a restaurant. As soon as I left, affairs immediately broke out and masses of people arranged all sorts of business. I had simply been in their way. (FGI 3)

More often than not, however, we heard that the one-time members of the opposition tended to adopt a realistic strategy: one of a long march during which one

had to accept many improprieties so as to liquidate them in the long run, in the long process of gradual transformation. Respondents who endorsed this opinion also said that the institutions in which they worked operated correctly. They were simply greater optimists than those who decided to withdraw. They were convinced that Polish institutions would slowly improve under their influence.

One cannot simply build a responsible democratic society in 5, 6 or 10 years, we just have to go through all the phases and slowly something will grow, something better we hope. [...] Politics aren't villainous. Although it's true that we had to go through a period when the scoundrels were on top. But I think that certain instruments have now been put into motion which are beginning to rectify the situation. (FGI 3)

But whatever the stance of the different former conspirators, one has to admit that they have the feeling that the mission to radically heal the state and politics has failed. Contrary to their earlier visions, neither has democracy as a system proven to be a perfect solution to the problems of good governance, nor have the "Solidarity" elites been fully effective in their attempts to do away with institutional inertia and corruption. However they wish to interpret the reasons for this state of affairs, the former members of the opposition have been unable to reform the state institutions successfully.

### **Troublesome Economic Reforms**

The second major problem which former activists have with the Polish transformation are the results of the economic transformation. On the one hand the respondents recognise that the reforms were necessary but on the other hand they admit that they did not know that the consequences would be so painful.

Although they accept the need of economic reform, most respondents feel that they share responsibility for its social costs. And once again, they are not satisfied with the results. But if, as far as the quality of state institutions is concerned, they can point to a number of external causes for dissatisfaction (the sluggish reforms, the imperfections of human nature), then when evaluating the economic reforms they have to admit that they themselves are directly responsible for introducing market economy and the consequences it entails. Respondents with technical education, working in production and more closely connected with the trade union movement, are acutely aware that although the communist economy did not function properly, it did ensure greater social security. They also point out that workers' dignity is being trampled just as badly in the new economic system as it was before.

The former underground activists, especially those who felt the dramatic social consequences of the economic transformation themselves, often observe that in a way communism solved many of the problems with which capitalist society is struggling. They have no doubt that the communist system was inefficient and unfair but they also remember that it guaranteed a certain level of security which the present system does not guarantee.

There is this rather common longing for this comfortable time, because it was quite comfortable, not much [good] happened then, but [...] children did not go hungry. [...] The state made sure that everybody had

this standard [of living], very humble though it was. The select few were secretly [better off than the rest] [...] but people in general did not die of hunger. (FGI 1)

The respondents have great difficulty criticising economic reality, however. They are faced with the following dilemma: are they to be loyal to the direction which the changes, which they feel they have co-authored, have taken or to their observations of reality which they often find it hard to accept. Most of them are helpless. Current problems are more than they can deal with.

I tried to return to the people I worked with in the days of “Solidarity” and [...] the firm had been liquidated [...]. These people were left to their own devices. I felt an obligation towards them but there was nothing I could do [...]. I feel rather helpless. I feel that the sacrifice was necessary but the outcome is a bit drastic. [...] [However] I believe that this is a cost which had to be paid. (FGI 4)

However, in those areas where the new system can be criticised for coping less well, or at least not better, than the old system, loyalty towards the new system wins in the former activists of the democratic opposition. It is not that the new economic system is faulty, it is that the challenges the new system is facing are more difficult than the ones with which the previous system had to struggle.

Reality has changed so dramatically that if it was possible to fight the commune, there is no-one who can fight with this curse of globalism. There is no specific enemy. (FGI 4)

So, although the present situation is replete with obstacles, the respondents categorically refuse to compare the old and new regimes. It is quite clear that, ideologically speaking, they identify with the new reality and would certainly not want to be associated with old regime. So they fall into the trap which was once constructed when the public relations of the economic transformation were being developed: every critique was willingly refuted on the grounds that it was a form of defence of the “old regime.”

The ideological certainty that contemporary Poland is very different from the Polish People’s Republic is preventing the former conspirers from seeing any analogies in the functioning of the two systems, including their pathologies. Free Poland, they believe, cannot be measured with the same measure as a country subordinated to Soviet dictatorship. This axiom has led to the belief, however, that the modes of thinking and behaviour which characterised the previous regime are no longer applicable. This also applies to civil activity and civil disobedience, categories which were typical for “antipolitical” ideology. The respondents feel that it would now be an anachronism to refer to such concepts. They also feel that today, ethical responsibility for social justice is an obligation which they used to have but which is now obsolete and unnecessary.

### **Civil Responsibility**

By referring to the ethical message of civil responsibility the interviewers tried to encourage the respondents to declare their position vis-à-vis the various anomalies of current, everyday reality in Poland nevertheless. One of the problems they mentioned

was employers' violation of employee rights. Meanwhile, with respect to both general issues and specific abnormal situations, the former activists were unable to generate any ideas as far as civil action was concerned.

One of the topics of the focus group discussions was the case of violation of the work code in the "Ladybird" supermarket chain, a rather publicised issue at the time. Meanwhile, the majority of respondents had not even heard of the case, giving rather peculiar proof of these former trade unionists' disinterest in social welfare. Even when the researcher explained the problem to them the respondents had no personal opinion on the matter and saw no need for any civil activity. The state should solve problems like these, they explained, not directly involved citizens. In democratic Poland, they continued, the state and its agendas were the agent which should be responsible for ensuring proper social relations, not civil group pressure. They were equally immune to the argument that the Polish state is not in fact meeting this obligation.

The company owner's responsibility is not to ensure subsistence level. It is to provide jobs. The state should look after the weakest people. (FGI 1)

I think that these "Ladybirds" should be supervised somehow. There is such a thing as labour inspection and it should be responsible for the discomfort people experience in the "Ladybird." Meanwhile, as far as the market is concerned, the "Ladybird" is just another actor, like everybody else. (FGI 3)

As it turned out, the former members of the underground structures were generally rather reluctant to apply the methods of civil involvement to the problems they saw. This may mean that, despite their reservations, they trusted the state institutions in free Poland and accepted the new system. But on the other hand, one of the constitutive elements of the ethic of the former democratic opposition, a sense of civic responsibility, was now lacking. As we can see from the following excerpt of one of the group discussions, the former conspirators now believe that a well-functioning state and society should rest on well-functioning institutions, not civic pressure.

It is necessary [...] to develop an organisation which [...] will remind these organs out loud [how they are supposed to operate]. [...]

An organisation? What for? We are talking of a properly organised state, are we not?

It should be spontaneous. [...] We are building a normal state according to models of mature democratic structures which have been in existence for hundreds of years. You have executive authority, the judicature, the legislative authority and the media. That should do, you don't need any other organisation. (FGI 1)

None of the Warsaw activists of the underground publishing movement endorse the idea of active citizenship any more. And the ethical radicalism of the "antipolitical" days has given way to a completely opposite stance: that of great loyalty towards the new order. If faulty mechanisms are to be rectified, it is not our respondents who are going to do it but the state and its institutions which ought to be reformed, not so much under citizen pressure as due to the rationality of the government and the rules of formal democratic mechanisms.

This approach is definitely consistent with the message which the first "Solidarity" governments sent to their powerbase at the very beginning of the economic transformation: support for the changes was to be manifested not in civic activity but in

patience and abstaining from protest. In trusting that the democratic government, unlike the Soviet government, would now act in the interest of each and every citizen. And it must be allowed to do its job even if this may cause social discomfort at first.

### The Third Sector

The former Warsaw conspiring intelligentsia did not feed the state administration after 1989 and was hardly visible on the public forum. This does not mean, however, that it ceased to be active. In the new reality the former underground activists did not join the political bandwagon, they went to the third sector. If we compare the declared activity of the former Warsaw conspirators in NGOs with the results which CBOS [Public Opinion Research Centre] obtained in a survey of a representative national sample, we shall see that the former conspirators' engage in such activities twice as frequently as the average Pole (the proportions of respondents declaring work for nongovernmental organisations in the sample of former underground activists and the national sample are 59.5% and 23% respectively). Participation in associations is also much greater among the activists than among the managers and the intelligentsia (45%), the group most prone to such activity according to the CBOS report (Wciórka 2006).<sup>7</sup>

The former underground activists are often more than just rank-and-file members of their organisations. Twenty-nine percent of them admit to active NGO participation in 2005 and 42% report that they had been third-sector activists within the sixteen years that had elapsed since Poland regained her freedom.

Interestingly, however, despite their extensive NGO activity, the former conspirators seldom view their involvement as a continuation of their civic work in the underground. In their opinion, neither their own participation in the third sector nor the sector as such focus on the same goals as the ones realised by the former democratic opposition and the independent publishing movement. Although many of the interviewees were prominent third-sector activists, they all but one presented their present work as something which simply conformed with their personal passions, some of them discovered by chance, rather than the continuation of their former mission. The interviewees accentuated the substance of their activities rather than an ideologically-based attachment to this or that concept of grassroots civil society. Although they usually realise important public goals, they do not describe these goals in terms of political community. They either refer to universal human values or to their own private interests.

I felt I was one of the organisers of a civic movement which succeeded in doing what it set out to do. And what really interested me in the movement was education. So I carried on so as to devote myself to educational issues. I still do what I can. (IDI 6)

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<sup>7</sup> Respondents were asked the following question: "Do you spend your free time on activity in an organisation, association, movement, club or foundation? We are asking you whether you do something for the organization rather than simply being a member" and were prompted with a list of 29 suggested fields of activity. We asked the same question as CBOS did in a survey called "Current problems and events" (188), 6–9 January 2006, conducted on a random sample of adult Poles (N = 1007) (Wciórka 2006).

Their accounts of their activities are private and have nothing to do with any civic mission.

### **Severed Tradition**

The research findings presented above show how the form which the Polish transformation took contributed to the way in which the great civic movement which the underground "Solidarity" had still been in 1989 lost its impetus. The former ethos of the democratic opposition did not become an ideological instrument of the new political reforms. And the part which the carriers of this ethos played in the reforms was too limited to have a more general impact. Neither in politics nor in the way economic reforms were implemented, did the political authorities make any attempt to refer to the old ideas which had provided the theoretical justification for the activities of the former democratic opposition. Similarly, no attempts were made to appeal to civic activity which was now viewed as a threat to the transformation rather than a form of support. No reinterpretations of old values were proposed and no attempts were made to utilise the civic potential personified by the former activists.

The civic movement in the form of underground "Solidarity," or at least the part of it represented by the intelligentsia and the one we managed to interview, died out for much the same reasons as it gained strength in the days of communist oppression. Once the movement had won, its participants showed great trust in the new leaders and ideologists (too great perhaps) and submitted to them in a very disciplined way. When power switched hands, the latter were unable to utilise the civil appeal of the former opposition to lay the foundations for a new democracy.

Excessive subordination to the authorities and political leaders was certainly at least partly determined by the experiences of conspiracy. In times of police repression people had to adhere to the principles of obedience and division of labour among the opposition's political representation and its technical base and to listen to orders. But the subordination was also the result of ideological weakness. As attested to by the interviews, underground "Solidarity" did not expect freedom would be achieved and had no well-conceived program for the times after the fall of communism. The underground activists never had the chance to think seriously what free Poland should look like and against what standards it should be measured. That is why they had no idea how to reconcile their previous ideas with the new reality.

In the nineteen-seventies and eighties the democratic opposition attracted an elite which was civically active and capable of organising activity. As we can see, this predisposition to civic activity has not died out: these people are still active and willing to take initiative. But they are no longer the carriers of a shared ethical message and a vision of civil responsibility. As they emerged from the underground, the activists needed a new program which would help them to reinterpret their former focus on critique and destruction of the old regime in new terms, ones which would be applicable in times of freedom. Meanwhile, they were told to trust the new authorities and withhold their protest. It is evident from the interviews that they accepted this

mission. To do so, however, they had to discard the civic and republican ethos which had been “Solidarity’s” signature almost completely.

Although they had not lost their previous predispositions to civic activity, their access to such activity after 1989 was no longer coordinated and ideologically legitimated. The leaders and ideologists of the former opposition believed that their old experiences were a ballast rather than a capital in the effort to build a new future. Former rank-and-file conspirators, meanwhile, transferred their individual activity to the NGO sector but were unable to oppose their former authorities. They believed that the old values were useless in the new reality and therefore they made no attempt to carry their old ideological message into the new circumstances. In line with liberal ideals which were in vogue in the nineties, they tended to interpret their involvement in terms of their own individual goals and fascinations. And although they did not renounce their activity completely, they ceased to be a model group with an ethos of its own. They deeply accepted the post-1989 revolution and internalised the belief that the political changes were so profound that their former experience and values were useless in the new reality. Instead of drawing from the tradition of which they were the most important repositories, they have once again listened to their former leaders and learned to belittle that tradition.

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