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COMRADES AND CITIZENS:
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DEMOCRATIZATION IN COMMUNIST POLAND AND CORPORATE MEXICO

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THE EFFECT OF MILITANT LABOR ORGANIZATIONS UPON THE PROCESSES OF
DEMOCRATIZATION IN COMMUNIST POLAND AND CORPORATE MEXICO
by
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ABSTRACT

COMRADES AND CITIZENS; THE EFFECT OF MILITANT LABOR ORGANIZATIONS UPON THE PROCESSES OF DEMOCRATIZATION IN COMMUNIST POLAND AND CORPORATE MEXICO

Contemporary political transitions from authoritarianism to formal democracy are typically presented as the result of negotiation and bargaining both between and among elite actors in resolving political and social crises. Popular pressure from civil society, collective action from below, is generally given second place in analyses of regime change. And this despite the fact that a robust civil society is an essential element for a stable and enduring democratic order. Within the confines of dictatorships and authoritarian regimes, independent, militant labor organizations are invariably subversive elements of repressive government. They are compelled to demand at least *de facto* recognition of democratic rights, and cannot avoid encroaching upon the prerogatives of the authoritarian state, through strikes, popular demonstrations and other tactics of direct action, to advance their collective demands – activities that by their nature are a challenge to state power. Representing an organized constituency often occupying a strategic position within a national economy, the militant labor organization finds itself in the vanguard of rebellious and reformist elements of civil society, since of necessity it possesses an internal coherence and cohesion that may be lacking in other voluntary associations. This paper considers two contemporary movements of militant labor and their effect upon the democratization of their respective societies – *Solidarnosc*, the Polish Solidarity union, and the *Frente Autentico de Trabajo*, the Authentic Labor Front of Mexico. Solidarity confronted the breakdown of state Communism and neo-totalitarianism, while the FAT faces the neo-liberal reformation

of an import-substitution economy within the decay of an authoritarian, corporatist structure.

DEDICATION AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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CHAPTER I

DEMOCRACY, DEMOCRATIZATION AND LABOR MOVEMENTS

According to the theories of Lijphart (1984), Sorenson (1998), and Diamond (1999), among others, a democratic society may be defined as one characterized by the establishment of governmental institutions chosen by universal franchise in free and regular elections, answerable to the citizenry under the rule of law with an independent judiciary, with an attendant panoply of civil rights and civil liberties – including free speech and free association. The spread of democracy across the world in the last several decades, and the apparent triumph of the democratic ideal, at least rhetorically, has been described by some political theorists as the latest in a series of “waves” of democratization that, originating in the Western world at the beginning of the nineteenth century, have now affected the entire globe. Samuel Huntington has identified the latest of these as a ubiquitous “third wave” (1991).

Whether or not part of transnational waves of institutional realignment and reform, contemporary political transitions from authoritarianism and oligarchy to formal democracy are typically presented as mainly the result of negotiation both between and among elite actors in attempting to alleviate or resolve social and political crises (Linz and Stepan 1996: 91-111; Hunter 1998; Barylski 1999). Sorenson considers that “Democracy does not fall from heaven,” and observes that pragmatism on the part of political and economic ruling elites can override any doubts or hesitations regarding democracy (1998: 28). A democratic system can help to shore up and legitimize the prevailing socio-economic order. Providing at its most complete for the establishment of institutions of representative governance, democratization promises stability and regularity in political life and social intercourse. Nevertheless, to the extent that elite support for democracy is predicated upon narrow self-interest, such a system of

governance may remain for some time both “fragile and conditional” (Sorenson 1998: 29). If lacking what has been termed the “demand and power of formally excluded groups”, fledgling democratic institutions may exist as “mere formal trappings” and remain subject to domination by a political or economic elite (Rueschmeyer, Stephens and Stephens 1992: 46). Tilly points out that “current theories of democratization give little place to popular collective action, emphasizing instrumental maneuvers and bargains among elites”, and this despite the fact that “durable democratic institutions emerged out of repeated, long-term struggles in which workers, peasants, and other ordinary people were much involved Revolutions, rebellions and mass mobilizations made a significant difference to the extent of democracy in one country or another” (1997: 275). Taking note of the “long-standing tendency in the scholarly literature to emphasize the primary role of elites in leading ... democratic transitions”, Diamond further observes that “it is important to stress how crucial has been the role of ‘the public’ – organized and mobilized through civil society”, and that the latter acts as a catalyst in “deepening and consolidating democracy” once it has been established (1999: 233-234). This is particularly vital since “Democracy can deteriorate at any point in its development; its quality and stability can never be taken for granted” (273). Dahl as well emphasizes the “dynamic, organizationally pluralist society” as an essential element for a stable democracy (1989:314).

Thus civil society is considered essential to the long term success of the democratic transition and the perpetuation of a robust and enduring democratic order. Composed of a multiplicity of voluntary organizations, autonomous groups and associations, both formal and informal - independent of government - that permit citizens to pursue various public and private interests, projects and preferences, the institutions of civil society form integrative cohesive layers between individuals and the society at large. Participation in these organizations allows for

some degree of self-empowerment and autonomy and fosters social attachment and trust among members. And, although civic engagement is not necessarily an automatic process, such associative activity at best encourages democratic beliefs, values, attitudes and patterns of behaviour. In his observations on the political culture of the new American republic, Tocqueville praised what he termed “schools for democracy”, the “free institutions belonging to the inhabitants of the United States” which included not only “commercial and industrial associations ... but also a thousand other kinds, religious, moral, serious, futile, very general and very specialized, large and small” that provided “a thousand reminders to each citizen that he lives in society” (2003: 595-596). Indeed, the libertarian theorist Kropotkin went so far as to assert that all such “associations, societies, brotherhoods, alliances, institutes What are they but so many manifestations, under an infinite variety of aspects, of the same ever-living tendency of man towards mutual aid and support?” (1968: 282). Thus a strong, dense civil society, the indispensable fabric of social cohesion, must be considered as an essential counter-weight to state power if the democratic order is to actually function as more than a mere formal structure, a “hollow’ democracy.”

Historians and political theorists most often identify the development of modern civil society and the origins of representative government with the rise of the middle classes, the European bourgeoisie. The requirements of the expansion of trade and increased commercial activity broke down the feudal order of the Middle Ages to make way for secular conceptions of man and society, the rationalization of law and legal procedures, and the rise of the nation state. Economic development in the general view is regarded as “conducive to democracy to the extent that it ... creates a large, educated, and articulate middle class of people who are accustomed to thinking for themselves.” (Inglehart and Welzel 2009: 42). But a new social stratum emerged with the

advent of the Industrial Revolution - the proletariat of wage workers. Many of those who labored in the workshops and factories of an industrializing Europe, if not as educated or perhaps quite as articulate as those in the higher economic and social orders, would however soon grow accustomed to thinking for themselves. Usually given only secondary consideration in the literature of political development and evolution, the working class would nevertheless provide the raw material for democratic development in Europe, a new dynamic in civil society often appearing as a major counter-cultural force within traditional and authoritarian societies.

Organizations of working people of various trades appeared by the middle of the eighteenth century in Europe in the form of “friendly societies”, associations of mutual aid devoted to the collection and maintenance of funds for their members to provide for periods of sickness and unemployment, to pay funeral expenses and the support of widows and orphans. Besides fostering a sub-culture of group solidarity, these societies were also outlets for social conviviality, and often concerned themselves with the education and reinforcement of moral and community values among their adherents. Egalitarian in form and function, and following the traditions of the medieval guilds, they provided a particularly nurturing social and cultural milieu for their working class participants. As these combinations evolved into trade unions, capable of making collective demands upon employers, and often the political order itself, they faced a rising tide of suspicion, hostility and repression on the part of the state authorities, factory owners and landlords (Kropotkin 1968: 262 – 271; Thompson 1963: 418 – 424; Lidtke 1985: 21 - 26). Although the bourgeoisie was eventually able to demand and obtain its share of political power and influence from the traditional oligarchy, it was seldom interested in the further extension of democratic rights to the subordinate classes of the nation state.

Throughout the nineteenth century in Europe, workers’ associations and unions had a major

impact upon the institutions of representative government and the expansion of popular democracy. Early in the century the mass movement of Charterists in England made explicit political demands for the extension of suffrage and thoroughgoing political reform (Thompson 1963: 807 – 832). The great critics of the capitalist system, Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, asserted that combinations of workers under democratic institutions with voting rights compelled “legislative recognition of (their) particular interests” (1959: 16), a major step on the road to the utopian social order that they envisaged. Democratic reform provided the basis for the immediate demands of the German Social Democratic Party and its working class constituency from its foundation in the second half of the nineteenth century. Heir to the democratic tradition of the German rebels of 1848, and allied to a socialist trade union, it would within a generation number some several million and become the largest party in the Reich, and by the early twentieth century, the largest political party on the globe (Miller and Pothoff 1986: 26 – 42). In France, the de facto alliance between bourgeoisie republicans and syndicalists acted to secure the institutions of the Third Republic from reactionary forces in the later decades of the century (Friedman 1998).

In the years between the turn of the century and the outbreak of the First World War, Europe saw a succession of general strikes and demonstrations by workers, not merely over economic issues but often for political demands – the extension of voting rights and democratic reform of government (Crook 1931; Goodstein 1984; Janos 1982: 160 – 161). The influence of autonomous workers associations upon democratic movements, although not always successful, may be more obviously and dramatically observed in societies in the throes of revolution or radical reform – the soviets in the Russian Revolutions of 1905 and 1917 (Anweiler 1974), the Transport and General Workers Union in the Irish struggle for independence

(Greaves 1982), the anarcho-syndicalist and socialist unions in the Spanish Civil War (Broue' and Temime 1970), the workers' councils in the Hungarian revolt of 1956 (Toke 1977; Lomax 1991). More recent years present the examples of labor organizations actively advancing the process of democratization in the political reforms of post-Franco Spain (Fishman 1990), in the role of the Iranian factory committees in the overthrow of the Shah (Comack 2004), the struggle against apartheid by the Congress of South African Trade Unions (MacShane, Plaut and Ward 1984; Seidman 1994; Wood 2000).

Labor organizations differ from the other elements of civil society in that they are, within the confines of an authoritarian society, invariably adversaries of the existing political and social order. They form themselves upon the basis of need, aiming at the material benefit of their members through collective organization and behavior, i.e. negotiation as an autonomous agency with employers over wages, hours and working conditions. In a situation of transition from authoritarianism to democracy in an industrial society, an independent labor movement is compelled to demand at least de facto recognition of democratic rights, and cannot avoid encroaching upon the prerogatives of the repressive state – particularly if the workers engage in strikes, popular demonstrations and other tactics of direct action which by their nature are a challenge to the established order. As has been noted, “those who have only to gain from democracy (i.e. the working class) will be its most reliable promoters and defenders” (Rueschemeyer, Stephens and Stephens 1992: 57).

Under an authoritarian regime such an independent entity must be a subversive element, the moreso as it represents an organized constituency often occupying a strategic position within the national economy. It finds itself aligned with other dissident elements of civil society in advancing the cause of democratic reform through popular pressure, and is thrust into the

vanguard of such a movement , since of necessity it possesses an internal coherence and cohesion that may be lacking in other voluntary associations. Indeed, in his study of workers' movements in the Southern Cone of Latin America over the last several decades, Drake asserts that in its opposition to dictatorship organized labor provided “the best-organized social sector, the element most capable of damaging the economy, the segment most experienced at resisting antithetical governments, and the most daring and durable class-based proponents of democratization” (1990: 2)

This paper will consider two contemporary movements of militant labor and their effect upon the democratization of their respective transitional societies - *Solidarnosc*, the Polish Solidarity union, and the *Frente Autentico de Trabajo*, the Authentic Labor Front of Mexico. Both Solidarity and the FAT are examples of independent labor organizations that began as vehicles of rank and file discontent over bread-and-butter issues of wages and living standards, initially both facing official repression. But they soon found themselves compelled to address much larger political and social concerns, as their societies moved into transitional modes – the one confronting the breakdown of state Communism and neo-totalitarianism, the other facing the reformation of an import-substitution economy within the decay of an authoritarian, corporate state structure.

Solidarity developed from an illegal labor association to become the most powerful and most popular social force in Polish history with an active membership of millions. The Frente counted, and still counts, its adherents in the more modest tens of thousands, although, beyond its numbers, it is perhaps the leading and most influential institution among Mexico's independent labor groups. It still remains outnumbered by the semi-official labor organization which at least nominally accounts for several hundred thousand, and claims even more. Yet the similarities

between the two Polish and Mexican rank and file unions are striking – the history of bottom-up self-organization in the face of official hostility, the democratic structure, the ideals of individual and group empowerment, the influence of Christian social thought, the combination of idealism and realism in aims and tactics, the conviction that in organizing itself, labor must coalesce with other popular organizations as part of a social movement aimed at a more egalitarian social order. And further, both Solidarity and the FAT considered themselves inheritors, to a great degree, of historical legacies peculiar to their respective nations. As it grew in numbers and influence, many in Solidarity began to see the organization as the embodiment or representative of the ideals of the eternal Polish nation, oppressed for centuries under foreign domination. The Frente looks back to the original Mexican Revolution and regards itself as part of the vanguard of a movement aiming to fulfill and bring to completion its aims and principles.

CHAPTER II

POLAND: NATIONALISM AND DEMOCRACY

In its years as a major power on the continent of Europe, from the late fifteenth through the seventeenth centuries, Poland existed as what one historian has called a “Royal Republic” or what the Poles themselves called a “Republican Commonwealth” (Halecki 1992: 126, 143). Although a feudal society, Poland was quite unlike the other states of continental Europe in its rejection of absolutism. In Poland kings could not claim divine ordination, but rather were elected by the Polish nobility – the *szlachta*. In collective meeting this nobility constituted the Polish parliament or *Sejm*, an assembly composed of two houses- a Senate which included the great magnates and large landholders, and a Chamber of Deputies in which sat the lesser nobility and some members of the wealthy merchant classes (Castle and Taras 2002; 4). By the turn of the sixteenth century the principle had been established that any legislation could not be enacted by the monarch without the consent of both houses of the congress of nobles, and the power of the king was subject to further restriction in many other ways (Rohac 2008; Halecki 1992: 85, 136; Castle and Taras 2002: 6,10). Since aristocratic titles were rather widely distributed in Poland, the native nobility usually numbered some 50,000, nearly ten per cent of the total population, including many landless nobles and those with few resources. The *Sejm* therefore represented the largest enfranchised group in Europe at that time, probably exceeding England in this respect (Castle and Taras 2002: 4, 8).

The decentralization and diffusion of power between king and nobility lessened the power of the ecclesiastical orders in Catholic Poland, and provided for the de facto separation of church and state. Under the “Republican Commonwealth” Poland became a haven for Protestants and Jews (Halecki 1992: 123-124; Castle and Taras 2002: 5, 6 –7).

Poland's decline as a power on the European continent began with sectional rivalries among the *szlachta*, and the increasing inability of a weakened government to defend overextended boundaries. By the mid-eighteenth century powerful states had coalesced on Poland's east and western borders. Unable to effectively resist, Poland endured repeated partitions in the 1790s, which, save for the brief Napoleonic interregnum, removed Poland from the map of Europe. Poland was divided between the Russian and Germanic imperiums for some one hundred and twentyfive years, subjected to the suppression of the national culture, language and religion, until its reconstitution as an independent state in the peace settlements following the First World War. A series of unsuccessful revolts followed one after the other throughout the first half of the nineteenth century – six between 1793 and 1864 - initially inspired by the republican Tadeusz Kosciuszko, veteran of the American Revolution. Each fresh rebellion, according to one historian, “had a more democratic character than the preceding one” (Halecki 1992: 254). Enduring decades of harsh foreign rule, Russification and *Kulturkampf*, Poland could be characterized, in the imagery of the poet Adam Mickiewicz, as the Christ of Nations (Halecki 1992: 243).

The later nineteenth century saw a significant turn from revolutionary romanticism and the insurrectionary tradition on the part of Polish nationalists toward what would be termed by intellectuals as “Organic Work”. Influenced by the philosophy of positivism, this was the expression of a new national ethos of economic development and modernization, of the expansion of industry and commerce, of cultural renewal with a growing middle class and the creation of an urban proletariat (Halecki 1992: 254-255, 258-259; Castle and Taras 2002: 18). It was believed that the Polish nation would survive by maintaining and strengthening its own institutions and cultural forms, beyond the influence of alien governance. National

consciousness would flourish within a vital and prosperous civil society (Halecki 1992: 255-259; Castle and Taras 2002: 18). For the Polish, lacking an autonomous state of their own, “The idea of civil society thus provided the only ideological alternative to foreign domination” (Seligman 1992: 8).

With the growth of an industrial working class, by the 1880s socialist movements made their appearance in Poland . From the outset, Polish socialists differed over the question of national independence. Purist Marxists dismissed it as irrelevant in the context of a European-wide social revolution, while the nationalist wing of Polish socialism had less interest in proletarian internationalism than in leading a union of all classes in the overthrow of the despotic foreign regimes that had divided the nation between them (Dziewanowski 1976: 46-53; Watt 1979: 25-26). Although ideas of social democracy and socialism, in various forms, remained a strong current in Polish political life, persistent factionalism and division over a variety of issues would continue to characterize Polish leftists well into the twentieth century.

Poland’s industrial proletariat numbered some 300,000 by 1900, as clandestine labor associations and workers’ circles struggled under harsh repression, particularly in the Russian-occupied part of the country. Troops and police were used to break up strikes, even in situations where employers were inclined to arbitration (Dziewanowski 1976: 11, 18).

The cataclysm of the First World War saw the collapse of the German, Austro-Hungarian and Russian empires, events so long awaited by Polish patriots. The peace settlement of Versailles provided for an independent Poland, but the reconstituted state soon had to defend itself against its traditional enemies. In the west, the Poles fought to protect their border against the depredations of German *Freikorps* units – semi-official bands of war veterans who would later become the core of the Nazi movement. In the east, Poland faced a full-scale invasion by Soviet

Russian forces (Halecki 1992: 279-289; Watt 1979: 155-172). Though victorious by 1923, the Poles would find that this aggressive pattern on the part of their neighbors would be repeated with more devastating effect in less than a generation.

Poland's nascent parliamentary democracy would soon give way to the more authoritarian rule of General Jozef Pilsudski, erstwhile chief of the Polish Socialist Party and hero of the resistance to the Soviets and Germans. Pilsudski was dismayed by the frequent changes of government, bureaucratic inefficiency, corruption, and the proliferation of sectarian political parties. He considered these to be unfortunate characteristics of Polish political life, an inheritance from the days of the *szlachta* and the nobles' resistance to the king and to strong central government (Watt 1979: 182-186; Halecki 1992: 265-266). Throughout his relatively benign rule the general maintained at least the outward form of democratic institutions like the national parliament, allowed oppositional political parties to function, including a semi-legal Communist Party, and insisted upon his devotion to democratic ideals (Dziewanowski 1976: 120-121; Watt 1979: 234-239, 265-268; 297-298; Halecki 1992: 298-300). Left-wing democrats formed a new Labor Party, with the support of the popular General Wladyslaw Sikorski (Paczkowski 2003: 30).

Pilsudski's democratic inclinations and populist brand of socialism were more obvious in the social policies initiated during his years in power. Great advances were made in public education (Watt 1979: 292 Halecki 1992: 294). A land reform program was instituted, aimed at the peasantry, the nearly two-thirds of the populace that followed agricultural pursuits. (Watt 1979: 196-201). Out of a national population of some 30 million, by the late 1920s economic development had placed around a million Poles in industrial employment - particularly textiles, metal working and mining, mainly concentrated in commercial centers like Warsaw and Lodz .

Unions were officially recognized, and new legislation, in advance of many other European states, provided for the eight hour day, government subsidy of sick pay, unemployment insurance and old-age pensions (Watt 1979:291; Halecki 1992: 293-294). Nevertheless, Polish workers remained among the most poorly paid in Europe, and the world-wide Depression of the 1930s struck the working class and the peasantry with particular severity. (Watt 1979: 291, 296-297). Strikes were common through the interwar period, in the year 1936 alone 675,000 workers struck in over 22,000 workplaces (Schopflin 1990: 86). And in their disputes with employers, the Polish workers pioneered the practice of the sit-in – the occupation of the factory by its employees, a tactic that was soon emulated by workers in France and the United States (Dziewanowski 1976: 102-103; Kenney 1997: 12- 13). With commerce in crisis, the government resorted to nationalization of much of Polish heavy industry, a phenomenon that would be repeated on a much more massive and deliberate scale after World War II (Watt 1979: 296-297; Kenney 1997: 14).

The Nazi-Soviet invasion in 1939 and the subsequent German absorption of the entire nation extinguished Polish independence, and the Nazis shortly thereafter began their systematic slaughter of Polish Jewry and the Polish intelligentsia. The extermination camps in which millions of Europeans, mainly Jews, went to their death were sited in Poland. But from the outset, resistance to occupation was massive and widespread. There was no equivalent of a Quisling or a Laval in Poland. The Polish underground was perhaps the most highly organized and most active of the European anti-Nazi movements, and included a number of political organizations and guerrilla groups spanning the ideological spectrum, with a great deal of local and spontaneous initiative (Paczkowski 2003: 63-68). An extensive parallel system of national governance was shortly established with a parliament, ministries, an educational system,

a military force - the Home Army of 300,000 - and regular courts of justice. A Civil Resistance Commission promulgated rules of behavior for the civilian population, decreeing a general passive resistance to the German , and direct action and sabotage wherever possible (Korbonski 1968: 28-31, 115-144, 166-177; Davies 2003: 170-201, Castle and Taras 2002: 27). Popular resistance would culminate in the rebellion of Warsaw's Jewish Ghetto in the spring of 1943, and the general citywide Warsaw Uprising in the summer of the following year – both ruthlessly suppressed, the failure of the latter due to the approaching Soviet Army's refusal of aid (Davies 2003: 201-204, 243 ff.).

Western areas of Poland were annexed by Nazi Germany and the rest of the nation ruled as a colony of the Third Reich. The Poles, being Slavs, were regarded as an inferior race by their conquerors who decreed compulsory labor for all between the ages of fourteen and sixty. Thus 1.3 million Poles were drafted for slave labor within the Reich or in the annexed territories, with pay and working conditions well below that of German workers (Seton-Watson 1962: 74-75; Paczkowski 2003: 54-55). For the Polish working class in general, the Nazi occupation was, as one historian has noted, “an excellent school of resistance” (Kenney 1997: 22). Unable to strike, and under the watchful eye of the Gestapo, Polish workers nevertheless engaged in a variety of illegal and clandestine activities. Encouraged by the underground, and often driven by sheer physical necessity, workers stole, engaged in sabotage and slowdowns, smuggled and traded on the black market despite the danger of execution or shipment to a concentration camp - a fate that was shared by many (Kenney 1997: 22; Paczkowski 2003: 59). It has been estimated that some half million citizens participated in organized resistance activity with an even larger number acting in opposition spontaneously on their own. Resistance also took cultural forms among the nation's intellectuals, with the operation of secret classrooms, the

underground production of plays and concerts, and the production of a variety of illegal publications and periodicals rallying patriots and refuting the propaganda of the occupying forces (Seton-Watson 1962: 111-112; Paczkowski 2003: 100-103).

Between the outbreak of the war in 1939, through its conclusion in 1945, some twenty per cent of Poland's prewar population, more than six million people, were killed - either outright or by disease or malnutrition, in the resistance, in concentration camps or slave labor barracks. Three million of them were Jews - the Nazi Holocaust succeeded in wiping out 90% of Polish Jewry. Proportionate to other states, and with the possible exception of the Soviet Union, this was the highest casualty rate of any other Allied belligerent in the Second World War (Castle and Taras 2002: 25).

The experiences of war and brutal occupation had only intensified national feeling, across all social strata. The Catholic Church, the most solidly based of all social entities to survive the war, virtually immune to cooptation by Nazi paganism or godless Communism, underwent something of a revival, and continued as in the past to provide a rallying point for Polish patriots, and, as it had in Ireland and Spain, endured as a symbol of the cultural autonomy of the eternal nation.

CHAPTER III

COMMUNISM IN POLAND: THE SADDLE ON THE COW

Communism came to Poland on the bayonets of the Red Army with the consignment of Eastern Europe to Russia's sphere of influence by decision of the Big Three powers at the Yalta Conference. As in the other states "liberated" by the Soviets, the new regime had to be imposed upon an unwilling populace. Stalin is said to have remarked that installing Bolshevism in Poland was the equivalent of trying to adjust a horse's saddle on a cow. Nevertheless, active opposition from the exhausted population was eventually eliminated through a policy that combined force, cooptation and persuasion (Halecki 1992: 331-335; Ekiert 1997: 306-308). It was clear to non-Communist Polish political leaders that they could expect no real support from their wartime allies in the West (Seton-Watson 1962: 171-179; Dziewanowski 1976: 183-207; Halecki 1992: 328-334). A new Poland, a "People's Democracy" was to be created from the devastation of the war under the leadership of the Polish Communist Party (Dziewanoski 1976: 207).

The Polish Communist movement was characterized by factionalism and internal wrangling that persisted from the days of its original founding in 1918 through the Second World War and its years of power, right up until its final dissolution at the end of the century. There was always a division between those who identified closely with Moscow and others, no less dedicated to Marxist-Leninist ideology, who were however conscious of national distinctions and differences and advocated a particular Polish path to the achievement of socialism. Stalin was always distrustful of Communists who showed the least sign of hesitation in following the orders and directives of the Kremlin, indeed his suspicion did not spare even those whose loyalty had never been in question. The major purges of the Soviet party that he engineered in the late 1930s included the Polish comrades as well. As one chronicler has noted, "Practically

all Polish Communists who were in Soviet territory at that period were either physically liquidated or sent to various concentration camps” (Dziewanowski 1976: 149). Nevertheless, what was perceived in Moscow as a “nationalist deviation” would always remain as a constant and independent current within the Polish Party. The postwar imprisonment, rise to leadership and subsequent fall of Wladyslaw Gomulka, a partisan of Polish particularism, exemplifies the divisions innate in Polish Communism (Dziewanowski 1976: 208-214, 267-296, 303-311). These persistent disputes and debates at all levels of the Party also extended to the formation and implementation of policy, and were often played out in public view, sometimes offering a forum for the reform-minded and the unorthodox, and fostering dissent among students and intellectuals (Dziewanowski 1976: 75-79; Bielasiak 1983: 10-25; Kolakowski 1983: 58-67).

The Polish Communist Party, now renamed the *Polska Partia Robotnicza* or Polish Workers Party, by 1945 numbered only some twenty to thirty thousand members, its numbers having been thinned by Stalin’s purges, wartime resistance losses, and Gestapo repression. Upon assuming power, the PPR was obliged to rely upon personnel and administrators from the old regime, as well as opportunists – none of whom fully trusted by the new masters of the state (Dziewanoski 1976: 187-188). Communist tactics in Poland and the other nations of Eastern Europe relied upon forming rather one-sided coalitions and forced mergers with socialist and other populist parties – in the name of the “unity of the working class” - and then gradually and systematically excluding them from exercising any real power. The outward forms of democracy had to be maintained for a time to appease the Western allies who had insisted upon open elections in postwar Poland. Elections were indeed held, hardly free or open, but rather carefully controlled to assure Communist victory (Dziewanowski 1976: 194-196, 215-222; Paczkowski

1995: 140, 158-162, 166-168, 177-186).

Given their relatively small numbers, their distrust of their coalition partners and the general hostility of the population, the Polish Communists were obliged to initiate an extensive recruitment drive, aimed particularly at the industrial proletariat. With the incentives of better rations, housing and job choices, membership rapidly expanded. In 1946 the PPR could claim over 230,000, more than two-thirds of whom were blue collar workers. As membership continued to grow through the 1940s and '50s, the Party would nevertheless periodically engage in a series of purges and mass expulsions followed by renewed recruitment efforts all with the aim of winnowing out opportunists, the less ideologically committed, and not least those factions of the PPR at odds with Moscow, while at the same time retaining a working class base (Dziwanowski 1976: 253-254, 326-327; Halecki 1992:346; Paczkowski 1995: 206-207). From the beginning Party officials complained of the lack of interest and participation of rank and file members in attending meetings, rallies and classes in Marxist-Leninist ideology (Kenney 1997: 34; Paczkowski 1995: 224-225). Membership would increase in the early years of the 'fifties to some 1.3 million, close to 10% of the adult population. And by 1980 the PPR could claim over three million – but from the mid-1950s and after, blue collar membership dropped below 50%, less than half of all Party members were industrial workers (Paczkowski 1995: 224, 364).

From the immediate post-war period up until its decline and fall in the late 1980s, membership in the Polish Communist Party conferred considerable privileges on the elect, material advantages, often approaching the luxurious, that increased over time and particularly if a member ascended the hierarchy of Party and state offices and sinecures and joined the elite of the bureaucracy – the *nomenklatura*. Higher pay, greater opportunities for

jobs and promotions, extra rations, stores accessible only to Party members, the allocation of automobiles, special medical care, summer resorts, pensions for relatives, access to higher education, etc., the adherents of the PPR became what was called a “new *szlachta*” (Kenney 1997: 169; Smolar 1983: 44; Paczkowski 1995: 363-364). The Communist bureaucrats were de facto “not simply administrators but also owners” of the Polish state ((Dziewanowski 1976: 254). The dissident Yugoslav Communist Milovan Djilas characterized the bureaucrats of the East European dictatorships as a “new class”, noting that “membership in this bureaucracy or new owning class is predicated on the use of privileges inherent in ownership”. This, he maintained, “is the way it appears to the ordinary man who considers the Communist functionary as being very rich and as a man who does not have to work” (1962: 44-45). Particularly as time went on and the inequalities and corruptions of the system became more blatant and obvious, the gap between the Party elite and the masses of the Polish people continued to grow. A poll taken in the summer of 1980 by Polish sociologists noted an “acute sense of social injustice” by respondents – some 85% considered inequality in Polish society to be “great or very great” and income differentials to have become “flagrant” (Smolar 1983: 42). Another survey a few years later found that among industrial workers in the greater Warsaw area only 7% of respondents expressed confidence in the Party – a percentage that was probably less than the total number of Party members in the various plants and factories (Castle and Taras 2002: 44-45).

CHAPTER IV

POLISH LABOR AND THE COMMUNIST STATE

As the Wehrmacht retreated west, pressed by the Russian Red Army, the workers of Poland in the absence of regular government themselves began to occupy, rebuild and maintain the nation's factories and workshops formerly under direct or indirect Nazi control. Although sometimes encouraged by radicals and Communists, this was a spontaneous popular movement of workers that also occurred in other areas of liberated Europe (Luethy 1960: 101–103; Comack 2008: 3-4). In the immediate post-war period most factories had been *de facto* nationalized, in the sense of having been taken over by their employees, well in advance of the official nationalization decree of January 1946. Indeed, the idea of the nationalization or some type of socialization of Polish industry and manufacture was now advocated across the spectrum of Polish political opinion (Ost 1990: 36-37; Kenney 1997: 19-20, 27, 29-30).

However these workers committees and councils were soon superseded by officially recognized bodies. Although at least initially elected, these new councils were designed to be organs of the state with their principal purpose the “improvement of production in the workplace” (Kenney 1997: 63). But after just a few months, by May of 1945, the councils were effectively stripped of any real influence in the factories by a decree aimed at the suppression of what the new government called “syndicalism” in industry (Kenney 1997: 63).

Although the regime constantly proclaimed that class distinctions were no more, and that the proletariat now ruled in the new Poland, those on the factory floor found that little had changed. Workers resented the imposition of management personnel without their consent or consultation, and the unilateral implementation of pay scales and working conditions by the Communist authorities – basically the same authoritarianism that had prevailed in pre-war Poland

and during the Occupation, if less overtly brutal (Kenney 1997: 30-31). Under the hardships engendered by the renovation of the economy and the policies of an accelerated development of heavy industry, rank and file dissatisfaction and resistance to “socialist labor discipline” would prove to be long-lasting and endemic. Despite official claims to the contrary, real wages and the standard of living through the 1940s never attained prewar levels (Dziewanowski 1976: 210). Opposition culminated in a wave of strikes, including sit-downs, in early 1947, just before the last remnants of legal opposition to Stalinist rule were suppressed, and the dictatorship firmly established (Laba 1991: 102; Paczkowski 2003: 190, 193).

Upon taking up the reins of power, the new regime set about the construction of a totalitarian system complete with an elaborate repressive apparatus, with the aim of the complete domination of Polish social life. The PPR proceeded with grandiose plans - not merely for the economic recovery of the nation from the ruins and dislocations of the war -but for the transformation of Poland from a largely agricultural society to an industrialized state. Poland’s national boundaries were shifted several hundred miles to the west – as compensation for territories annexed by Russia on Poland’s eastern borders – which had the effect of replacing agricultural lands with more economically developed areas (Seton-Watson 1962: 243; Halecki 1992: 330-331). Such support as the dictatorship was to enjoy – at least initially- was due to the opportunities provided by industrial employment and to the extensive land reform and grants of individual proprietorship to the peasantry undertaken in the post-war period, however deviant from strict Marxist-Leninist doctrine (Dziewanowski 1976 : 197-198, 206; Paczkowski 1995: 191, 213). The problems of rural overpopulation and underemployment (despite the ravages of war) were solved by the newly instituted industrial policies of the one-party state. Hundreds of thousands, eventually millions of workers would be needed for what was termed “the construction

of the foundations of socialism”. These recruits for the new industrial army would be mostly young men drawn from the countryside, now to be subjected to the disciplines of factory life. For very many the move from rural areas to the cities and towns would be a step up in social advancement. Thus some three and a half million workers were employed in industrial pursuits by 1948. This development, according to a Communist official, assured “an absolute and relative growth of the proletariat and strengthens the position of the working class – the leading and most progressive part of the nation” (Paczkowski 1995: 215; Dziewanowski 1976: 201).

The new Communist rulers initiated widespread nationalizations – by 1948 only some six per cent of Polish enterprises remained under private ownership – heavily taxed (Seton-Watson 1962: 110; Dziewanowski 1976: 199-200). Following traditional Bolshevik guidelines, the Polish Communists would move as quickly as possible to the large-scale development of heavy industry through the strategy of “primitive accumulation”. According to this conception, rapid industrialization, as in the USSR, would be made possible by directing all surplus profits back into enterprise. By this method, what had taken the capitalist West two centuries to achieve could presumably be duplicated in Eastern Europe in mere decades. The rapid economic advancement of the Soviet Union was held up as the standard that the new satellite states were expected to faithfully emulate.

Primitive accumulation and breakneck industrial development required that such considerations as wages, working conditions and living standards took second place in the production plans of the state. The working class would have to sacrifice in the present to ensure the abundance of the socialist future (Paczkowski 2003: 217-219). And since Poland had now been transformed into a “workers state”, trade unions which in pre-war days were independent advocates for their members were now reduced to organs of the new regime. Following Leninist

principles, labor organizations were merely to function as “transmission belts” whose primary task it was to aid the authorities in implementing directives handed down the chain of command from the Minister of Industry - to above all maintain and increase production . The PPR moved quickly to decree both mandatory membership in trade unions and to ensure Party/state control over them (Anweiler 1974: 239-242; Paczkowski 1995: 226-227). The new Labor Code was quite specific in legally defining the duties of the trade unions. They were to enforce labor law, i.e .work discipline in the factories and shops with the aim of increasing worker productivity. Union officials typically ignored violations of the Labor Code by managerial personnel (Ozdowski 1980: 67-68; Pravda 1983: 77). And state administrators constantly complained of indiscipline and absenteeism among a work force who toiled for six days out of seven (Kenney 1997:94-95, 176-177; Kolankiewicz 1981:145).

The very size of many industrial plants ensured that a managerial caste beholden to an authoritarian regime would employ autocratic methods in supervising and controlling huge workforces. The postwar industrialization followed the Stalinist model of constructing massive industrial enterprises - finally resulting in some two-thirds of the Polish working class laboring in factories of more than 1,000 operatives. Several of the new industrial plants employed 15,000 or more (Pravda 1983: 80). As Poland’s industrialization proceeded apace, tensions developed within enterprises between managers who owed their positions to Party politics and the less ideological technocrats who were given supervisory duties due to training and expertise, blurring the lines of authority and policy and often affecting efficiency and production and resulting in mismanagement of resources (Paczkowski 2003: 213; Woodall: 1982: 145, 150; Kowalewski 1988; 4). This situation was further exacerbated by the Bolshevik principle of “one man management” in industry which, according to one Western critic, made “for an uneven spread of

responsibility. Decision-making by one person was obviously an impossibility in industrial management.” And thus, “many technical and specialist staff had broad decision-making powers while they could not in practice be held to be formally accountable. The conduciveness of such Marxist-Leninist orthodoxy to management efficiency was not officially questioned” (Woodall 1982: 133). Along with this went the practice of frequent intervention by outside Party officials in management decisions, often provoking conflict between the Party organization and enterprise directors (Paczkowski 2003:225).

The emphasis on capital goods production increased in the early 1950s with the intensification of the Cold War, at the expense of popular consumption (Woodall 1982: 29-30). The regime was given a shock when worker resentment boiled over into full scale insurrection in the industrial center of Poznan in June 1956. A long simmering dispute over wages drove the blue collar operatives of the of the huge ZISPO metallurgical complex into a public march and demonstration that quickly became a violent city-wide general strike. Workers seized arms from police stations, besieged state buildings and battled security forces for several days, resulting in hundreds of casualties. Significantly, the slogans and chants of the rebels had shifted from the economic to the political, with demands for free elections along with denunciations of the Soviet Union (Karpinski 1982: 49-53; Paczkowski 2003: 273-274).

Although the official media insisted that the revolt was the work of foreign agents, Prime Minister Cyrankiewicz was moved to admit of the “undeniably real difficulties and discontent in some factories.” A government shakeup soon followed, and Wladyslaw Gomulka, advocate of a particular “Polish road to socialism” and a slight liberalization or “thaw” in public policy, assumed national leadership. In the autumn of that year, Hungarian workers and students, encouraged by Stalin’s recent demise, and Khrushchev’s revelation of his crimes at a Soviet Party congress,

launched a national revolution that was suppressed only after several months of hard fighting by Russian troops (Toke 1977; Lomax 1980). The Kremlin's tacit endorsement of Gomulka was made in the hope that his relative popularity would serve to at least maintain stability in Poland (Karpinski 1982: 50; Halecki 1992: 353; Paczkowski 2003: 275-278).

One result of the events of '56 was the revival of the idea of elected workers councils, as part of a post-Stalinist reform movement. But as in the past, the result was more rhetorical and palliative than real, and by early 1958 whatever influence on factory management the committees had been able to exert was removed as they were absorbed back into the state-controlled trade unions (Rupnik 1979: 69; Halecki 1992: 360). The pace of industrial development continued to quicken in the late 1950s, with some small improvement in wage levels, but accompanied by a rise in food prices and without an equivalent increase in consumer goods. Although the government attempted to augment living standards by the subsidization of health, education, rents and the like, resources always fell short of demand, with much of the subsidy being directed to the members of the ever-expanding state/Party bureaucracy – a further source of popular discontent (Woodall 1982: 34; Paczkowski 2003: 288-291).

Nevertheless, the events of 1956 – the workers revolt, de-Stalinization and the relative “thaw” in official policies - encouraged a growing subculture of collective protest and resistance in workplaces, universities and professional organizations. The attempts to collectivize agriculture were abandoned, the Catholic Church was allowed a grudging toleration, and a certain cultural pluralism began to flourish under the baleful eye of the regime (Dziewanowski 1976: 284-285; Cviic 1983: 96-97; Ekiert 1997: 315-316). Indeed, according to one analyst, the outcomes of the crisis of '56, “produced ... distinctive institutional, political, and cultural legacies” that “made Poland's regime more vulnerable to various forms of popular mobilization and protest.” Thus the

“crisis of 1956 played the most important role in shaping Poland’s political trajectory” (Ekiert 1997: 336).

CHAPTER V

THE POST-STALIN ERA: DISSENT AND CONFLICT

Since the rise of Gomulka and the apparent abandonment of the more severe policies of Stalinist socialism, intellectual circles in Poland felt emboldened to test the boundaries of official reform policies. In 1965, two young Communist academics went even further, Jacek Kuron and Karol Modzelewski produced an open letter to Party members in which they asserted that if “there is no workers’ democracy in the factory, there can be still less in the state,” and advocated a multi-party system including freedom of speech, press, and assembly in which (in a somewhat ambiguous formulation) political power would be shared by a national parliament and a federation of workers councils. This real democracy, they insisted, could only be brought about by through the overthrow of the Communist bureaucratic dictatorship by a proletarian revolution (Rupnik 1982: 48-53). Both were arrested and sentenced to several years in prison (Rupnik 1979: 64-65).

Their provocative manifesto, however, proved to be only the tip of the iceberg. In the late winter of 1968, against the background of the Soviet intervention in neighboring Czechoslovakia, some ten thousand student demonstrators, protesting censorship and lack of intellectual freedom and demanding basic civil liberties, clashed with police for several days in Poland’s major cities. The immediate result was wholesale arrests and a purge of the educational system – a purge aimed particularly at students and academics with Jewish surnames. Although with the apparent support of Polish intellectuals, this largely spontaneous movement of students lacked any connection with dissident workers, and official sources assured the general public that the demands for liberalization were the work of “anti-Polish” elements, West German fascists and “Zionists” (Rupnik 1979: 66-67; Paczkowski 2003: 325-331).

The events of 1968 seem to have marked a watershed in the relations between Polish

intellectuals and the state, undermining whatever faith they may have retained in the official Marxist ideology of the regime. By now, fewer and fewer Poles had joined the Party for any ideological reasons, but rather primarily for personal advancement. One Party membership study complained that some of the membership included “people not having much in common with the party’s ideology” (Paczkowski 2003: 364; Laba 1991: 125). The riots, and the subsequent trials and jailings of the protesters merely provoked the academic and professional classes and engendered hostility and disaffection toward the government. In many ways, the mid-sixties can be considered a period of apprenticeship in dissent for Poland’s intelligentsia, and for many of them, the beginning of a movement from the mere advocacy of reform to more active opposition to the regime itself (Giedroyc 1970: 86-87; Kolakowski 1983: 62; Wankel 1992: 15-18).

By the late sixties the Polish economy was facing growing difficulties. The centralization of economic decision-making had not been altered or reformed, despite rhetoric to the contrary. Indeed, economic reform and restructuring were regarded as a threat by elements of the bureaucracy, the *nomenklatura*, in the Party/state (Dziwanowski 1976: 305; Laba 1991: 16). Productivity continued to fall, and a technological gap between Poland and the rest of the industrialized world was growing. The economic growth rate that had averaged 18% in the nineteenfifties now had fallen to about 8%, much of it in useless stocks (Laba 1991: 15). By 1970 real wages were in general decline, while the Gomulka regime hiked production norms in some enterprises, including ship fitting, with broad hints that the latter industry might eventually be shut down . Wage determinations were revised to avoid paying for overtime work and included the elimination of bonuses, important sources of income for most of the labor force. The public was told that the nation was “living beyond its means”. And just weeks before Christmas, the

government announced new price increases of some 30% on basic foodstuffs in an economy where almost half of a worker's income already went to purchases of food (ICO 1977: 9; Halecki 1992: 371-372; Laba 1991: 18).

Reaction was swift among the shipyard workers of the Baltic coast. General strikes, workplace occupations and demonstrations in Gdansk, Gdynia and Szczecin quickly turned into pitched battles between rioters and security forces with Party headquarters burned, scores dead and several thousand injured or beaten after arrest (ICO 1977: 50). This outbreak was far more serious for the regime than the Poznan revolt of fourteen years before, which, however violent, had been contained locally. Now work stoppages and demonstrations spread to some one hundred factories across the country despite official news blackouts. And there was obvious disaffection among some of the army and security forces sent to quell the disturbances (ICO 1977 26, 35-38, 68; Laba 1991: 34-35, 69-70, 81-82). Gomulka was removed by the Polish Politburo and replaced by Edward Gierek. He had risen to power in the wake of one worker rebellion and now was undone by another (Paczkowski 2003: 346-350).

In a national television and radio address the new Party First Secretary took a most conciliatory tone, alluding to the hardships faced by the working population. "Comrades and citizens... These problems concern everyone in the nation, both those inside and outside the Party ... and there is a place for every citizen to resolve these problems" (Karpinski 1982: 163).

The workers of Gdansk and the other sea coast cities had themselves already taken direct action to attempt to remedy the problems alluded to by the new First Secretary. Driven from the streets by the riot police, the workers nevertheless remained in occupation of their workplaces and prepared to defend them. One worker in Gdansk compared the situation to the Warsaw Uprising "Every second worker in the shipyard had been in the army and knew what to do. Even if the time

had come to die” (ICO 1977: 23, 46; Laba 1991: 67, 70).

Throughout the shipyards and workshops of the Baltic, enterprise-wide strike committees were democratically elected, consisting of delegates from the various shops and sections, in some cases Party activists were chosen to represent the workers interests (ICO 1977: 42). Contact was established with the other yards and factories, and an Interfactory Strike Committee was formed (ICO 1977: 80-81; Laba 1991: 66-68). The strikers series of demands included not only the immediate lowering of food prices to their original level, wage increases and amnesty for strikers, but also the democratic election of trade union officers and local PZPR officials, and the lifting of state censorship - “We demand the immediate and legal election of union authorities and workers’ councils; and ... democratic elections to the party and youth organizations at the shipyard level” (Karpinski 1982: 164). The strikers also demanded an end to special privileges accorded to Party members , and some equalization of wage levels between rank and file factory workers and Party apparatchicks (ICO 1977: 42, 91, 92).

Nothing in the workers’ articulated demands were particularly radical. Even the advocacy of elections to union and council positions and to workplace Party organizations was aimed at gaining some popular representation and achieving some measure of control over local authorities. Unlike the Poznan rebellion, the national regime itself was not explicitly challenged. This may have been at least partially due to the participation of Party members in the demonstrations and strikes (Laba 1991: 66, 76). However dissident these rank and filers of the PZPR may have been, they still believed, like the anti-Gomulka faction at the higher levels of the Party, that the crisis was the result of mistaken and incompetent policies, not the system itself (Dziewanowski 1976: 307-310; Pravda 1979: 233-234; Paczkowski 2003: 343).

Party Secretary Gierek met with the strike committees in Szczecin and Gdansk in January, for

what proved to be prolonged and frank exchanges of opinion between the two sides. Gierek made vague promises of a renewed economic system and the dismissal of local Party officials, but added a retroactive wage increase affecting some 4 million Polish workers (ICO 1977: 83-94). The raise in food prices, the immediate cause of the pre-Christmas strike wave, was not addressed by the government until the following month. Gierek went inland to Lodz to deal with a sudden wildcat strike among thousands of women textile workers. A raucous nightlong meeting with this constituency convinced him to rescind the December price increases (Laba 1991: 81-82). Given the intensity of feeling on the issue, it was feared that yet another wave of strikes might be ignited across the nation (ICO 1977: 97-100; Karpinski 1982: 165-166). Also, Gierek was at pains to demonstrate the rationality and competency of the new ruling clique, as opposed to the inflexibility and dogmatism of their predecessors (Dziewanowski 1976: 318-321; Ekiert 1997: 323-324).).

If the demands and slogans of the strikers of 1970-71 had lacked an explicit rejection of the regime and its ideology of Marxism–Leninism, they were nevertheless driven, aside from physical necessity, by deeply felt egalitarian concepts of social justice and popular representation. Like the Poznan rebels, they at first entered into violent, unequal street battles with the security forces. But unlike the outcome at Poznan, the workers did not simply quit the fighting in the streets and disband. Instead they retreated to their shipyards and workplaces, occupying and securing them against outside attack. Aside from the severe political and social consequences that would have followed an armed invasion of the yards, such a clash would have laid waste state property in an industry that was considered vital by the Soviet Union. Russia's maritime establishment accounted for most of the production orders in Poland's Baltic yards – some 90% alone in Gdansk (ICO 1977: 9; Laba 1991: 71-72.). By resorting to active sit-down tactics the workers succeeded

in forcing the Communist regime into face to face negotiation, with government officials at the very highest level bargaining with the strikers' representatives and promising reform. Factory occupations organized through rank and file committees carried out the first successful mass strike in postwar Eastern Europe – a turning point not merely in the relationship between workers and the state in Communist Poland, but in the relations between government and the governed. Through their collective action the workers had been able to exploit the factionalism within the ruling group, and established a de facto veto power over public policy. In doing so they opened up wider possibilities for civil society at large – for intellectuals, the Church, Poland's uncollectivized independent farmers. As a Polish journalist observed at the time, “In a capitalist economy ... strikes defend group interests. In the centralized economy of a socialist state, they are construed as a political activity that undermines the monopoly of power - the cornerstone of a totalitarian system” (Sreniowski 1983: 166).

CHAPTER VI

THE WORKER-INTELLECTUAL ALLIANCE: THE RISE OF CIVIL SOCIETY

Edward Gierek was no less a devoted Marxist-Leninist than his immediate predecessor. But he promised a new “second Poland”, and an “accelerated development” that would create a modern industrialized society, one that would witness “a widening and deepening of the active participation of the working class, the peasants, the intelligentsia, the youth” (Lepak 1988: 41, 43). Gierek was correct so far as the active participation of non-Party forces in society was concerned, but it did not occur in the way he had envisioned.

By the end of 1971, Gierek had attended nearly 200 meetings with workers, intellectuals and farmers. (Lepak 1988: 52). But for all his avowed pragmatism, communication skills and conceptions of streamlining the command economy, the new First Secretary did little through the decade of the seventies to essentially change what remained a “centrally controlled, inefficient heavy industry, which devoured most of the country’s scarce raw materials and energy resources.” This command economy was presided over by a *nomenklatura* “primarily of Communist hacks, more distinguished for their ... political reliability than their managerial skills. Polish managers of large industrial enterprises opposed economic liberalization ... that would diminish their privileges and perquisites” (Goldman 1997: 222-223).

Gierek purged the PZPR and insisted that the Party “should lead but not govern” - yet the centralization of economic decision-making actually increased. Small and medium scale industrial enterprises were absorbed into giant “socialist corporations” (Halecki 1992: 379, 382-384; Paczkowski 2003: 360-361; Woodall 1982: 161, 189-190). The new regime embarked on a policy

of upgrading and stimulating Polish enterprises and export-oriented industries by the importation of advanced technology from the West, financed by foreign loans and credits (Halecki 1992: 378-380; Poznanski 1996: 4-6, 7-9). Through the early seventies Gierek's policies were largely successful, with significant increases in growth rates along with real wages and consumption – a short period that has been called the *la belle époque* of Polish Communism (Lepak 1988: 137-139; Paczkowski 2003: 354-355). But the regime's plans foundered upon the accumulation of a huge foreign debt by the mid-seventies, parallel to a world-wide recession. Adding to the economic debacle had been the ineffective use of imported technology, secured by Western loans, that were fed into the maw of an inefficient and wasteful command economy (Kowalewski 1988: 4; Halecki 1992: 387-388; Paczkowski 2003: 355-356).

At the same time the rising expectations stirred by the improved economic conditions at the beginning of the decade, and by incessant government propaganda, turned to popular disillusionment with the increased scarcity of consumer goods - particularly food - and continuing housing shortages (Halecki 2003; 388). The new popular mood was coincident with a new wave of corruption and conspicuous consumption among the upper echelons of the PZPR, the *nomenklatura*, who now numbered some half million, within a membership of four times that number - many of whom were employed in spying, watching over or propagandizing the other 34 million of their fellow Poles (Halecki 1992: 396-397; Paczkowski 2003: 363-364; Karpinski 1982: 175). The popular classes became restive. Throughout the seventies there were hundreds of short "work interruptions" as the government termed them. The year 1974 saw strikes in the port of Gdynia and the mines of Silesia, and in the spring of the following year Warsaw housewives, frustrated over the disappearance of meat from counters, set a grocery store up in flames (Weschler 1982: 162; Laba 1991: 92; Halecki 1992: 388).

For all his presumed liberalism, Gierek moved to tighten ideological controls both within the Party and throughout Polish society. But Polish intellectuals, even many of those who were committed Marxists, retained a traditional belief in themselves as the sustainers and defenders of the Polish polity – a nation and a people that had been denied self-determination for most of its modern history yet survived as a cultural and spiritual entity. Polish culture had over time developed anti-authoritarian traditions and an innate distrust of government, hardly unusual in a country with such a long history of foreign domination. This was indeed “an orientation nurtured over centuries” (Castle and Taras 2002: 43).

Despite the First Secretary’s overtures to the intelligentsia, reaction among the latter was extreme when Gierek attempted to officially revise the Polish constitution. Among the new proposals to be legally inscribed were the recognition of the “leading role’ of the PZPR in Polish governance, a guarantee of “indissoluble fraternal ties’ with the Soviet Union, and a stipulation that a citizen’s rights were dependent upon the fulfillment of civil obligations. Despite the existence of a dictatorship that ignored the rule of law and that already *de facto* followed these policies, numerous open letters and protests were issued, eventually with some 40,000 signatories, the most widely known the “Letter of the 59”. In the latter document prominent intellectuals not merely rejected the new constitutional provisions, but demanded legal guarantees for freedom of speech, free trade unions and free elections for governmental representatives (Lepak 1988: 72; Halecki 1992: 386; Paczkowski 2003: 367). The episcopate of the Catholic Church vehemently objected to a constitutional order in which “the remnants of democracy would be eliminated” and Poland’s sovereignty undermined. Cardinal Wyszynski also called for the state’s recognition of “social pluralism”, the right of free association, including labor organizations, and political and economic rights for all citizens. This was the beginning of the Church’s more explicit critique of

official policies and more active involvement in political and social issues, obviously encouraged by the oppositional stance of the intelligentsia and the continuing disaffection of the working class (Lepak 1988: 72-73; Halecki 1992: 386; Paczkowski 2003: 366-367). All of this was particularly embarrassing to a regime that was courting public opinion in the West and had signed the Helsinki Accords proclaiming universal human rights (Paczkowski 2003: 372). The proposed constitutional changes were amended (Lepak 1988: 72; Halecki 1992: 386; Paczkowski 2003: 367). Civil society was now an actor in Polish public life, and the regime, now susceptible to pressure from several fronts, faced an increasingly diverse and articulate opposition.

Gierek's labor policies combined cooptation with a targeted repression – including the murder of at least one leader of the 1970-71 shipyard strikes. Lech Walesa recalled that at the Lenin shipyard in Gdansk, “little by little the shipyard got rid of those who had shown themselves as the most active. I ... found that I always received the worst work. Any raise or promotion was closed off to me” (Weschler 1982: 161, 162; Laba 1991: 92). The regime introduced a new Labor Code in 1975 that reemphasized the obligations of workers to the state and the need for labor discipline (Lepak 1988: 161). By the mid-seventies labor turnover and absenteeism had reached record levels (Kolankiewicz 1981: 145).

By now the Polish debt to the West had reached \$11 billion (Weschler 1982: 162). Reversing its earlier policy, the regime in June of 1976 resorted to drastic increases in food prices, i.e. 60% for meat products, 100% for sugar (Lepak: 74). Reaction was immediate and widespread. Over one hundred factories went on strike across the country (Ekiert 1997: 324). At Gdansk, shipyard workers shouted down a Party official who tried to persuade them to return to work and addressed them as “Comrades” – “We are not comrades”, they yelled back, “we are citizens; comrades - that is you, the bureaucracy, the dictatorship's people” (Bernhard 1993: 59). While most strikes were

relatively peaceful, violence broke out in central Poland. At Radom workers engaged in pitched battles with police and burned down the local Party headquarters. Strikers at the Ursus tractor factory near Warsaw fought with security forces, looted food centers and ripped up railroad tracks leading to the capital (Bernhard 1993: 46-64). The price increases were rescinded the very same day (Karpinski 1982: 194). The working class had again exercised a collective veto upon state policy in Poland – this time in a massive strike wave that was truly national.

But beyond the immediate results of the strike, the government overplayed its hand in the repression that followed. At Radom and Ursus, the special security squad, the ZOMO, had distinguished themselves for exceptional and indiscriminate brutality. Several people had been killed, hundreds injured and thousands arrested - including passersby and bystanders who were systematically beaten after their arrest (Karpinski 1982: 193). In the aftermath, thousands of workers were fired, hundreds of others indicted, some given prison sentences after secret trial proceedings (Ekiert 1997: 325).

Most fatefully for the future of the dictatorship, the repression proved to be a call to action for Poland's dissident intelligentsia. The recent successful campaign against constitutional reform had mobilized and encouraged Polish academics and professionals in their resistance to the state. Now moral outrage against the government's draconian policies spurred fourteen prominent intellectuals to formally announce the formation of the *Komitet Obrony Robotnikow* (KOR), the Committee for the Defense of Workers – an open oppositional movement. Immediate emphasis was placed upon providing financial, medical and legal aid for the victimized workers and their families. KOR also began to publicize the workers' plight through open letters and various manifestos, and finally by creating and circulating clandestine newsletters, journals and publications contradicting Party propaganda, an activity that would continue through the next two

decades until the fall of the Communist regime (Kolakowski 1983: 63; Bernhard 1993: 76-77, 82-83; Paczkowski 379-380) This included the bi-weekly *Robotnik* (The Worker), a project of intellectuals and worker activists (Lepak 1988: 170-171; Paczkowski 2003: 383). KOR attracted hundreds, then thousands of members and sympathizers, encouraging and overlapping with other reformist, nationalist and unofficial organizations of intellectuals and dissenters like the Movement for the Defense of Human and Civil Rights, the Confederation of Independent Poland, the Clubs of Catholic Intelligentsia, the Committee for Student Solidarity (Kolakowski 1983: 64-65; Lepak 1988: 169; Paczkowski 2003: 411-412). Unique in Eastern Europe, according to one view the “dissent or democratic movement visible in Poland since mid-1977” developed in an “environment of stagnation and economic decline” in which “members of all social and occupational groups began to speak and act in ways counter to regime desires.” Thus it seems probable that “several million citizens were drawn into various dimensions of the democratic movement at some point” in this period (Lepak 1988: 171-172). KOR maintained a tacit connection with the Church, with significant funding supplied by parish donations collected by local priests (Kolakowski 1983: 65; Bernhard 1993: 80). Support for KOR came from trade unionists, intellectuals and radicals in the West, from Polish émigrés and even from the Italian Communist Party (Bernhard 1993: 81, 120-121, 125; Paczkowski 2003 387- 388).

Renaming itself the Committee for Social Self-Defense KSS-KOR, the organization persisted and broadened its activities, both overtly and covertly, despite continuous harassment in the form of beatings, firings, searches, fines and at least one murder (Karpinski 1982: 198-199; Kolakowski 1983: 63; Paczkowski 2003: 381). Its example stimulated other autonomous groups and projects that produced independent publications, formal and informal discussion circles, peasant associations, “underground” universities – a true counter culture in opposition to an incompetent

and reactionary state, now revealed as morally bankrupt (Bernhard 1993: 140-150; Poznanski 1996: 60-61). The aim of the opposition was the “self-organization” of Polish society, to “get people to do things – anything – just as long as they did it on their own, with no official mediation to produce an ethos of self-determination, a belief in one’s ability to act publicly” (Ost 1990: 70).

By the late seventies, an informal alliance had developed between workers , intellectuals the Church - a civil society independent and increasingly autonomous, out of control of the regime. The elevation of a Polish cardinal to the Papacy, and his subsequent visit to his homeland in 1979 was another bitter pill for the Communist government to digest. Millions of people attended his outdoor masses and heard sermons urging his fellow Poles to remain hopeful for better times to come, and emphasizing Poland’s attachment to the larger European community (Paczkowski 2003: 393-395). One observer noted that it was during the Pope’s visit that the civil opposition “learned its true strength and ... gained new recruits.” Evidently dissenting opinion had even permeated the ranks of the Party itself - “I remember seeing in my hotel in Krakow a group of Communist officials who, thinking they were unobserved, drank the Pope’s health at the moment of his arrival in the city” (Cviic 1983: 103).

CHAPTER VII

SOLIDARITY

Despite the workers' success in rolling back the draconian food price increases, and the display of their collective power, the government was determined to solve Poland's economic crisis through greater exploitation rather than economic reform. New piece-rate quotas were introduced in a number of industries in 1978, requiring operatives to toil for more than eight hours a day to make a living wage. For many, overtime was a necessity, including work on weekends and holidays. In the shipyards of the Baltic, twelve or fourteen hour days were not uncommon – some spent as long as 350 hours per month on the job. This made for fatigue and an accompanying rise in industrial accidents, and the lowering of health and safety standards – particularly severe in the case of women textile workers and miners (Laba 1991: 121; Bernhard 1993: 153-157). Between 1976 and 1980 there may have been more than 1,000 work stoppages across the country (Lepak 1988: 163). An official survey of worker opinion conducted in the late '70s , based on a sample of 2,800 factory workers, found that some 60% favored strikes, slowdowns or sabotage in conflicts with the state authorities. A longitudinal study by sociologists revealed that where 60% of the general public felt that 1973, in the short period of relative prosperity, had been a “good” year, by 1979, 78% of the respondents reported a “bad” year (Bernhard 1993: 152, 153).

Throughout the late '70s, civil associations and committees continued to proliferate. These included the Free Trade Unions group, consisting of activists who had participated in the 1970 and 1976 strikes, and who hoped to create a national independent union

movement (Osa 2003: 161-163). The first step in that direction was taken soon after by militants of the northern shipyards, who formally founded the Free Trade Unions of the Baltic Sea Coast in April of 1978. Prominent among them was the Gdansk electrician Lech Walesa and the crane operator Anna Walentynowicz – both well known to the authorities (Paczkowski 2003: 383; Wislanka 2010: 3). Their founding declaration, besides announcing themselves as autonomous defenders of the interests of the working class, called for “a process of widespread democratization. The population must continue to struggle for democratic control” (Baltic Free Trade Unions 1982: 69). The shipyard workers began to publish their own newsletter – *Robotnik Wybrzeza* (Worker of the Coast) with Walesa and Walentynowicz among the editors (Bernhard 1993: 185).

By the summer of 1980, the opposition to the regime, though hardly monolithic, had grown into a formidable and diverse social force, encompassing blue collar workers, academics, professionals, farmers, students and clergy. Dissident organizations had developed the capacity for the printing and distribution of newsletters, periodicals and pamphlets, and established communication networks throughout the country as well as contacts in the West, and with other oppositional groups in the Eastern bloc. The journal *Robotnik* now circulated among tens of thousands of readers (Paczkowski 2003: 387-388, 402-405)

Nevertheless, the severity of the economic crisis determined the government to implement an austerity program that had twice incited popular uprisings in the previous decade – an increase in food prices. On June 1st the price of meat was more than doubled, with the implication of more to come (Simon 1985: 21; Lepak 1988: 195-196; Halecki 1992: 397). Strikes immediately broke out nationwide which the government and

local officials attempted to control through wage concessions, hoping to keep workers' demands confined and focused strictly upon economic issues (Wechsler 1982: 168-169; Poznanski 1996: 67; Paczkowski 2003: 405). However the turning point came in August in the Baltic port of Gdansk. Here the shipyard management rather vindictively (and foolishly in the midst of a nation-wide crisis) fired the Free Trade Union members Walesa and Walentynowicz – the latter just months short of her retirement. (Paczkowski 2003: 405-406; Wislanka 2010: 3). The Union, well organized, immediately called a strike and demanded reinstatement, an increase in wages and the construction of a memorial to the victims of the 1970 clash. Although shipyard management agreed to these terms, the strike continued in solidarity with other workplaces still out. By mid-month, representatives from over 150 factories met at the shipyard to form the Inter-Enterprise Strike Committee - the MKS. The Committee demanded “free trade unions, independent of the party and employers” (Paczkowski 2003: 406). At the end of August, the MKS swelled to over 500 delegates representing 400 factories (Wechsler 1982: 173).

This development precipitated a crisis within the Gierek regime. Members of KOR were arrested, but the government was reluctant to take a hard line with the strikers. There was public support for the MKS even among some PZPR members, and the Party Politburo feared that the security forces and the army rank and file could not necessarily be relied upon (Paczkowski 2003: 406-409; Simon 1982: 27). There was further concern about the government's ability to restart industrial production after a violent seizure of the workplaces (Paczkowski 2003: 409, 415). But Stanislaw Kania, soon to succeed Gierek, argued that to accede to the strikers' principal demand, trade unions autonomous of the Party-state, would indeed bring the strikes to an end, but “at

the price of bringing to life a permanent structure that will be stronger, more dangerous, with millions of members.” Gierek agreed, noting that such a “political act” could result in “unforeseeable consequences for the country and the entire socialist camp” (Paczkowski 2003: 409). These were prophetic words indeed.

Talks between the government and the MKS began with Walesa as the strikers’ chief spokesman. Prominent among the union’s Twentyone Demands, along with economic issues, were the legal recognition of trade unions independent of the Party and the state, the guarantee of the right to strike, freedom of speech and of the press, and the release of all political prisoners (Persky 1981: 87). There was finally tentative agreement by the state, but full acceptance was delayed while the government carried on the legal fiction of submitting the accords to the nation’s highest court. (Paczkowski 2003:414-415).

Meanwhile delegates of the MKS meeting in Gdansk created a national labor organization, the Independent Self-Governing Trade Union Solidarity – *NSZZ Solidarnosc*, with Lech Walesa elected chairman of the national coordinating commission (Raina 1981: 608-624; Persky 1981: 148-149; Paczkowski 2003: 412-413).

Even after Solidarity’s official recognition in November, tensions persisted throughout the country, with arrests of activists and delays in implementing wage increases particularly where local hard-liners held sway. And there was pressure on the Polish Party by the increasingly uneasy Soviets (Paczkowski 2003: 414-419). But Solidarity could claim some nine million members by the end of 1980 – 54% of the nation’s workers and nearly 1/3 of the national adult population (Paczkowski 2003: 419) Solidarity provided an umbrella for efforts by other elements in society to organize themselves, including police, soldiers, artisans, retirees (Ekiert 1997: 329). During

Solidarity's sixteen months of legal existence, it is estimated that one out of five Polish citizens participated in a collective protest of some kind at least once (Ekiert 1997: 329).

In the immediate aftermath of the "Polish August", non-governmental organizations and associations of civil society proliferated. One sociologist identified over forty national groups that functioned in this period involved in political issues alone – from the Confederation for an Independent Poland to the Club of Catholic Intelligentsia to the Revolutionary Youth Union (Osa 2003: 188-191). Poland had undergone a cultural and political revolution, the creation of a counter culture parallel to the official Party-state. A Polish journalist described Gdansk and Szczecin as "cities in which a new morality took control Crime fell to zero, aggression disappeared People became friendly ... and open with one another" (Ost 1990: 9; Geremek 1990: 104). This feeling of collective euphoria and communal renewal has been compared to other revolutionary episodes in European history (Ost 1990: 9-10; Barker 1986: 159)

Acting as the spearhead of a self-organized civil society, before the summer of 1980 labor militants had as their aim the establishment of an independent union movement. After that, they had to struggle to maintain it. Necessarily within the context of the Communist system, it had to be a struggle for political power. The so-called self-limiting revolution initiated by Solidarity sought to avoid violent confrontation with the authorities, but rather attempted to occupy social spaces where the power of the state was weak or non-existent. For example, local branches of the union attempted to institute economic reform by both formal and informal encroachments upon the prerogatives of factory management – through democratically elected workers' councils and committees, with varying degrees of success (Barker 1986:39, 42-51;;Paczkowski 2003: 429-4; Phelps

2008: 107-108, 116-118). Local strikes and demonstrations flared up.(Halecki 1992: 404-405; Paczkowski 2003: 429). In the city of Lodz, and in other areas, Solidarity branches took over the rationing system and the provision of foodstuffs (Kowalewski 1988: 22-31; Ost 1990: 121). An officially sponsored survey in June of 1981 revealed that 6% of the population expressed confidence in the PZPR, 24% trusted the government, and 62% had greater faith in Solidarity (Paczkowski 2003: 429).

Since economic and political power are as one in the centralized dictatorship, Solidarity's economic demands were simultaneously and unavoidably political – a basic challenge to the authority and legitimacy of the regime. The Marxist-Leninist state could not coexist with a powerful, autonomous movement within its jurisdiction but beyond its control, a movement that was obviously capable and quite willing to take on the functions of government itself. A clash was inevitable. In March of 1981 in the town of Bydgoszcz Party hardliners provoked a confrontation with the union with the beating of Solidarity activists by security police. Solidarity threatened a general nation-wide strike if the perpetrators were not brought to justice. After tense negotiations the union backed down, but not without achieving recognition for Rural Solidarity, the independent organization of farmers (Barker 1986:51-55; Halecki 1992: 405-406).

The results of the Bydgoszcz incident brought severe criticism down upon Lech Walesa within the ranks of Solidarity. Not merely for his willingness to compromise, but more pointedly for his apparent assumption of sole authority (Simon 1985: 52-54; Barker 1986: 93; Ost 1990: 126, 134). Nevertheless, at the Solidarity's national congress the following autumn, Walesa was able to win 55% of the vote of 900 delegates for Solidarity national chairman – somewhat less than expected. His moderate policies were still

avored , if not by an overwhelming majority (Paczkowski 2003: 435-437). According to one view, "From the very beginning, Solidarity activists had displayed a propensity for radical debates followed by moderate decisions" (Paczkowski 2003: 426). This, however, was about to change.

The Communist Party congress held a few months before Solidarity's convocation also featured heated and angry debate. PZPR hardliners attacked Gierek's recent successor Kania and demanded a crackdown on all "anti-socialist" elements in Poland. But the Party first secretary retained the firm support of General Wojciech Jaruzelski, representing the army and the security apparatus. A relative moderation still remained the regime's guiding principle. These internal polemics and disputes of the Party, which included personal attacks, were played out before the public in radio and television broadcasts and cannot have helped to restore confidence in the government (Paczkowski 2003: 432-434).

CHAPTER VIII

THE MILITARY COUP: SOLIDARITY UNDERGROUND

The economic situation had become more dire, with long lines outside of state stores and extreme shortages of butter, milk, and other items. The black market boomed and hunger marches were staged. Violations of the previous year's accords continued on the part of local authorities and the police, while local strikes persisted. A significant movement began to build within the ranks of Solidarity going beyond the self-limiting revolution and advocating workers' management of production and distribution through elected councils and union direction of national economic policy making, followed by free elections to the national parliament.. This program was officially adopted by the union in the autumn under the rubric of "The Self-Governing Republic" (Solidarity National Congress 1982: 205-225). By now the Party had lost over 200,00 members since its acrimonious congress, along with most of its effective authority (Paczkowski 2003: 428-431, 437-439. 457-458; Kowalewski 1988: 8-9; Simon 1985: 61). Some 50% of the defectors from the PZPR were blue collar workers (Kolankiewicz 1981:151) The general secretary of the Soviet Communist Party, Konstantin Chernenko, ruefully observed that "where 'pluralism' flourishes it leads only to the loss of the party's fighting efficiency, to the erosion of its ideological foundations" (Kaminski 1991: 8).

The army stepped into the chaotic breach. General Jaruzelski introduced martial law in mid-December. Some 5,000 Solidarity and KOR activists were arrested as the general's decree prohibited all activities, meetings and public gatherings of all civil organizations and associations, including of course strikes and street demonstrations (Paczkowski 2003: 446-450).

The imposition of martial law and the suppression of Poland's movement toward democracy was welcomed in Western financial circles who were concerned over Poland's ability to repay its considerable international debt. "The only thing we care about," said the chairman of the board of Citibank, "is can they pay their bills?" (Kowalewski 1988: 9-10). The coup may also have appeared to many in the government, and even to Polish dissidents, as far preferable than outside intervention by their neighbor to the East. The Polish Primate Cardinal Glemp, always conciliatory, exhorted his fellow citizens, "Do not lose your heads, brother workers ... martial law has been dictated by a higher necessity, it is the choice of a lesser rather than a greater evil" (Paczkowski 2003: 451). This "greater evil" had always been on the mind of Polish Communists and political reformers since the days of Gomulka. Just how much national independence and departures from strict Marxist-Leninist principles Moscow would be willing to tolerate had always preoccupied the leaders of the Polish Party, who walked a tightrope between reconciling a hostile populace and retaining the confidence of the Russian Politburo. Indeed, it was among the considerations of the national independent union movement in opting for a "self-limiting revolution". Although both the Carter and Reagan Administrations had cautioned the Soviet Union against intervention, the Red Army had already twice moved to block reform and regime change in Eastern Europe, in Hungary in 1956 and in Czechoslovakia in 1968, the invasion of the former provoking a prolonged and bloody struggle. Perhaps fortunately for Poland, Russia was at this time also preoccupied with its military adventure in Afghanistan (Dziewanow 1976: 267-281; Paczkowski 2003: 311, 322-323, 375-376, 414-418, 479, Ost 1990: 68, 111, 126, 190).

Nevertheless, taken by surprise, Solidarity's instinctive reaction was a wave of local

strikes and street confrontations lasting over several days. Initially suppressed by the military, in some cases with the use of deadly force, public resistance to the regime of martial law nevertheless persisted through 1989 and the final disintegration of the Polish Communist state, in the form of an unceasing series of protests. Most of Polish society remained openly hostile or at best passively mistrustful of the state. A Polish historian has noted that Poland throughout the martial law period existed as two societies - the official establishment and the alternative community, "with its own media, literature, cultural and educational activities," a movement "well-organized and self-sufficient receiving strong moral and material support from the West." (Halecki 1992: 436).

That the autonomous movement of Polish civil society, the Self-Governing Republic, spearheaded by *Solidarnosc*, was able not merely to survive but to actually flourish under repressive conditions speaks to the bravery and determination of its democratic militants, but it is somewhat less surprising when considered within the context of twentieth century Polish history. The Polish people, after all, had been living under conditions of totalitarian rule of one kind or another since 1939. They had developed an endemic mistrust of authority and were well-schooled in techniques of resistance, both passive and active. Nazism and Communism were considered alien ideologies, antithetical to Polish culture and religion, and imposed upon the Polish populace by force. The increasing incompetence and ineffectiveness of the PZPR in dealing with the current economic and social crises merely confirmed their disaffection.

Solidarity's internal structure ensured its survival throughout the years of martial law. The confinement and imprisonment of Lech Walesa and the other members of the union's

national committee had no effect on Solidarity's ability to maintain its organizational cohesion and mount strikes and demonstrations. Solidarity was not organized in vertical industrial units, but rather horizontally, on a geographical basis, encompassing all enterprises and workplaces within a given area. This decentralized structure allowed the regional union branch to address local political and social issues alongside economic concerns (Singer and Petruszewicz 1981: 13; Kowalewski 1988: 7-8; Ost 1990: 105-107). Although *Solidarnosc* was set up along regional lines, within regions the component union locals were organized industrially, not by craft or skill. As the American Congress of Industrial Organizations had done in the 1930s, locals were set up to include all workers in a particular factory or plant, with no distinction as to the job performed. This system of organization aimed at fostering feelings of unity and collective empowerment (Ost 1990: 108).

Prior to the military coup, Solidarity locals had formed committees in various industries in attempting to assert some control over production (Kowalewski 1982: 230-233; Simon 1985: 55; Phelps 2008: 116-118). These advocates of *samorząd* or self-management organized themselves into a Network of Solidarity Organizations of Leading Workplaces, the SIEC. This SIEC Network drew its greatest support from large industrial plants – with members in over 90% of enterprises with more than 1,000 workers, like the Lenin shipyards and the Ursus Tractor Works. Representing 250 councils under the chairmanship of Hans Szyc, the network claimed descent from the rebels of the '56 revolt and advocated the formation of a workers' militia. At odds with Walesa and the more moderate Solidarity leadership, the Network's slogan was "Give us our factories back!" (Stefancic 1992: 79-80; Kowalewski 1988: 8-9). Already in place, now these committees

and groups concerned themselves with maintaining their organizational presence, collecting dues, disseminating information and coordinating strikes and public demonstrations (Persky 1982: 31). They formed the rank and file bases of Solidarity in the workplace (Paczkowski 2003: 456-457) Key to the organizational presence in industry was the maintenance of a regular system of communication and information. During the martial law period over 700 trade union publications of various types were produced and distributed. The circulation of some national and regional publications fluctuated between 20,000 and 60,000 per copy. In the huge Lenin steel complex at Nova Huta, 6,000 copies of the plant newsletter were regularly distributed. (Kowalewski 1988: 42). Solidarity militants also managed to make sporadic broadcasts over clandestine radio and television transmitters interrupting official programs on the state-controlled airways (Lopinski, Moskit and Wilk 1990: 110-111; Ost 1990: 153).

At the same time a multitude of leaflets, newsheets and publications were produced by newly formed Committees of Social Defense and the numerous allied groups and organizations of Poland's well-established alternative society, now assuming the character of "a diverse and loosely organized underground" (Ost 152). Two undercover publishing houses were even able to print and circulate several hundred books and pamphlets during the military regime (Lopinski, Moskit and Wilk 1990: 106-110; Paczkowski 2003: 457-458).

The variety and types of popular protests launched by Solidarity and Polish civil society against the economic, social and political policies of the Jaruzelski regime covered the spectrum of active dissent. They included work slowdowns, strikes of varying durations, factory sit-ins, street fighting with police, non-violent rallies and marches,

religious processions, boycotts, the posting of leaflets and the painting of graffiti.

Gestures of opposition could also involve the personal and the mundane. The shipyard worker Bogdan Lis, a major figure pursued by the authorities through the '80s, engaged in such activities as setting off a stink-bomb in the cafeteria of the Security Service, and in pouring glue into the locks of cars belonging to collaborators (Lopinski, Moskit and Wilk 1990: 118).

Solidarity's morale was buoyed by the presentation of the Nobel Prize to Lech Walesa in 1983, and now explicitly demanded political reform as a prerequisite to reform of the economic system. The repression, with some exceptions, generally eased, in tandem with the rise to power in the USSR of Mikhail Gorbachev, whose plans for the renovation of Soviet society appeared to have much in common with Solidarity (Halecki 1992: 437-438; Paczkowski 2003: 481-482). In some views, the example of *Solidarnosc*, a powerful, independent labor movement, may have influenced the Kremlin to consider carrying out top down reforms in the Soviet Union rather than risk an eruption from below (Weschler 1990: 251-252; Poznanski 1996: 158-159). In any case, the new Gorbachev policy of non-intervention left the nations of the Eastern bloc to their own fates and removed the Russian army as the final prop to Communist rule (Castle and Taras 2002: 66; Paczkowski 2003: 482).

CHAPTER IX

THE TRIUMPH OF CIVIL SOCIETY

By the later '80s Poland's economy, which had improved somewhat in the immediate wake of the coup, suffered another downturn. Real income dropped twentyfive per cent (Halecki 1992: 435; Poznanski 1996: xx-xxi). A new wave of popular mobilization boiled up in the spring of 1988 and continued into the following year, with younger workers particularly restive. Strikes broke out in the Baltic shipyards, in the giant steel mills of Nova Huta and Stalowa Wola, in the coal mines, in hundreds of other work places, independent street demonstrations took place across the country, and students staged occupations of their universities (Ekiert 1997: 333-334; Paczkowski 2003: 490-491). It was not merely the spent force of the Party that could no longer control events, but government itself.

Mindful of the precarious state of the nation, Jaruzelski finally saw no alternative to consultations with the representatives of the civil opposition, Solidarity's National Executive Commission, headed by Lech Walesa - thereby granting *de facto* recognition to the independent social movement (Castle and Taras 2002: 70; Paczkowski 2003: 490-492, 497). His decision may have been hastened by the chaos and division within the Party itself. To the dismay of Jaruzelski and his colleagues, the official trade union, the OPZZ, - the creature of the Party/state - fought to maintain its organizational survival by encouraging strikes and by seconding Solidarity in demanding free elections and the abolition of censorship (Paczkowski 2003: 497). To widen national

representation in the upcoming talks, Solidarity facilitated the formation of a Solidarity Citizens Committee, composed of intellectuals and professionals who had been associated with KOR, and thus providing the union with a specific political arm (Halecki 1992: 441; Paczkowski 2003:495-496)

The so-called Round Table discussions began in February, 1989, against a background of sporadic strikes and often violent demonstrations by various radical organizations – Fighting Solidarity, the Confederation for an Independent Poland, the anarchist Freedom and Peace Student Action group (Paczkowski 2003: 498, 502). Members of the Church hierarchy were in attendance to act as a moderating influence upon the two sides. The several hundred, often contentious participants divided into three groups to consider the economy, union pluralism and reform of the political system. It was recognized that the solution of the first two issues depended upon the success of the latter. The accords finally agreed to in April of 1989 provided for a transition from the disintegrating totalitarian state to a somewhat restricted representative democracy (Halecki 1992: 442; Paczkowski 2003:498, 499).

The *Solidarnosc* union was legally recognized. The governmental structure was revised. The office of President was created, with powers similar to those possessed in Western European states. A Senate was formed to sit alongside the regular Polish Diet, the *Sejm*, to form a National Assembly. Blocs of seats for the upcoming June elections were allotted in advance to the PZPR and to free vote, lopsidedly to the advantage of the former. Subsequent to the elections, Solidarity promoted Citizens Committees to mobilize the opposition vote, while acknowledging that the elections “were not yet fully democratic”. A Solidarity May Day rally in Warsaw brought out some 100,000

demonstrators. The following month the candidates of the Solidarity popular front won a startling and overwhelming victory for the seats selected by free vote, exceeding the opposition's most optimistic expectations, garnering 72% of the vote totals and signaling a total disaster for the PZPR. Gorbachev advised the most recalcitrant of the Party *nomenklatura* to accept the verdict of the citizenry (Halecki 1992: 443-444; Paczkowski 2003: 504-505, 506).

Solidarnosc was officially legalized by the National Assembly.(Halecki 1992: 442). An internal Party poll found that over seventy per cent of PZPR members favored democratic change (Castle and Taras 2002: 86). Communists deputies began to align themselves with the opposition. In August the Marxist-Leninist Party that had ruled Poland since 1945 was voted out by an overwhelming majority in parliament and the Catholic activist Tadeusz Mazowiecki, an activist oppositionist since the '70s, became Prime Minister, while Communist regimes tottered all across Eastern Europe (Paczowski 2003: 508-510). In December the Senate and the *Sejm* declared the Republic of Poland to be a democratic state under the rule of law (Halecki 1992: 446-447). The PZPR disbanded at the beginning of 1990, transforming itself into a social democratic electoral party.(Castle and Taras 2002: 87-88). The "self-limiting revolution" had far exceeded its initial goals.

CHAPTER X

SOLIDARITY AND DEMOCRACY

Karl Marx had predicted that industrialization and the creation of a growing mass of exploited proletarians would eventually result in political revolution. It certainly did so in twentieth century Poland, but in a context that Marx could never have foreseen. Here a state proclaiming itself Communist was the exploiter, denying the working class basic civil liberties and the freedom to form their own labor organizations as in the capitalist West. In Poland Communism was popularly viewed as an alien ideology imposed upon Poland by its ancient antagonist Russia. Its militant atheism and crude materialism threatened Roman Catholicism and traditional Polish culture. Consequently totalitarianism never took firm root, nor was its full implementation ever attempted. Non-statist entities like the Church and the small-holding peasantry were allowed to exist by the sufferance of a hostile state. The Polish intelligentsia, even including its Marxist elements, generally held itself aloof from the government, regarding itself as the guardian of independent thought and defender of national culture. The Polish Communists themselves were usually split and factionalized. Debate over policy was often open and public – offering opportunities for dissidents and reformers. The Polish Party never achieved the monolithic structure of its sister parties in East Germany and the Soviet Union.

For the mass of workers, official policy seemed to be periodically driven by an arbitrary and punitive industrial management. Economic problems were to be solved by draconian wage and price adjustments, with no consideration of working conditions. Social benefits, if apparently luxuriant for the Party *apparat*, for the rank and file remained meager.

Al these factors provoked latent popular opposition, but it was a militant labor force that became the inspiration, vanguard and spearhead for a mass democratic movement that eventually brought down the dictatorship through a steady encroachment upon the authority of the Party-state. The democratic framework for the autonomous society, the Self-Managing Republic, was developed by the shipyard hands on the Baltic coast, adopted by workers in other plants and factories , and followed by citizens across the country. The independent trade union surviving within the state Communist structure, even when making limited demands upon the command economy, cannot avoid functioning as a dual power in the system, perhaps inadvertently at first, and then consciously. In confrontation with the state in the workplace, the trade union becomes the representative of civil society, a democratic organization subversive of the Party-state, what has been termed “an organically revolutionary organization” (Laba 1991: 179). From their very origins, the workers councils, the Baltic Free Trade Unions, Solidarity, all were incompatible with the existing order. Allied to the intelligentsia, the lower clergy, the peasantry, *Solidarnosc* fashioned the new society within the shell of the old.

CHAPTER XI

THE MEXICAN REVOLUTION AND MEXICAN LABOR

The first attempt to establish a liberal democratic society in Mexico in the twentieth century was the early movement for political reform initiated by middle class elements against the dictatorship of Porfirio Diaz. Throughout the decades of his personal rule, Diaz had encouraged North American and European investment in Mexico. By the end of his reign, the spread of factories, mills, and mines had permanently altered what had been a traditional agrarian society. But besides the creation of an industrial proletariat, economic development had produced a growing middle class, a new strata of Mexican society increasingly conscious and resentful of the obstacles to upward mobility, the corruption and the monopoly of economic and political power exercised by a small elite grouped around the dictator. Official resistance to reform bred revolution, a movement that was soon joined by hundreds of thousands of impoverished peasants and discontented workers (Ruiz 1980: 298-313).

Despite the claims of the dispossessed, the Mexican Revolution of 1910-20 did not introduce any radical changes in the social structure or the prevailing economic system. As some historians have noted, the final results of the rebellion in Mexico place it closer to the model of the French Revolution – the revolt of an expanding urban bourgeoisie – rather than a forerunner of the later revolutions in Russia or China (Ruiz 1980: 7, 410; Cordova 1981: 82-83). Just as in the Revolution in France, the more radical elements among the peasantry and the urban proletariat were eventually suppressed, contained or coopted. Vitally important to this process of limiting and controlling social revolution in the urban areas of Mexico was the attachment of significant sectors of the organized labor

movement, first to one or another of the various contending factions following the overthrow of Diaz, and finally to the regime that emerged in the aftermath of the power struggle.

By 1910, nearly 800,000 workers in Mexico toiled in manufacturing, transport or extractive industries (Carr 1991:19). Labor associations, long suppressed upon the Diaz regime, now revived with the coming of revolution. Skilled workers and artisans took the lead in organizing radical trade unions, along anarcho-syndicalist lines, dismissive of politicians and distrustful of government. Militants spoke not merely of immediate improvements in wages and working conditions, but of moral uplift and an eventual cooperative commonwealth of all who work (Hart 1978: 104-111). Particularly influential was the anarchist organizer and polemicist Ricardo Flores Magon, who asserted that the social revolution was near, and that “Government in all its forms ... is a tyranny ... an institution ... to protect the strong” (Albro 1992; Magon and Rivera 1977: 105). The anarcho-syndicalists founded the *Casa del Obrero Mundial* in Mexico City which was simultaneously a national headquarters for union organization, a publishing house, a school engaged in worker education, a cultural center and a social club – an aggregation dedicated to *comunismo libertario* and the overthrow of capitalism and the state, although the latter goal was to be achieved passively by ignoring the government rather than necessarily resorting to violence (Huitron 1980: 249-251; Hart 1978: 108-118).

But it was difficult to carry on radical activities in the national capital under the eyes of the various revolutionary *jefes*, all in contention with each other. Barely tolerated by Madero, the first president of the new republic, the *Casa* was suppressed by his assassin, General Huerta (Carr 1991: 55-57). Rather inadvertently, the libertarian syndicalists were

drawn into the power struggles of the Revolution. The urban working classes were considered a new source of political power. .Courtied by the Constitutionalist anti-Huerta forces following the General's defeat, the activists of the *Casa* were given title to a former convent to house their organization, anarchist principles aside. The syndicalists even formed Red Battalions to help defend the new government against the radical agrarian Emiliano Zapata, whom they erroneously regarded as a clerical reactionary. Thus began The often one-sided collaboration between the Mexican state and the main elements of the Mexican labor movement (Hart 1978: 126-12, 133-135; Huitron 1980: 273-274; Carr 1991: 63-65). The Casa del Obrero was soon suppressed by its erstwhile allies and formally dissolved (Hart 1978: 183).

Out of the often chaotic and economically ruinous post-revolutionary power struggle a political consensus emerged. Financial interests, local political *caciques*, landowners and military chieftains managed to form the *Partido Nacional Revolucionario*, a coalition of elites that would ensure domestic peace, contain potential conflicts, and soon develop into a powerful political machine dominating Mexican society and essentially guaranteeing that Mexico would remain a one-party state for decades (Turner 1968: 144-146; Ruiz 1992: 346-347; Krauze 1998: 428-431). In the immediate aftermath of revolution and civil war however, one Mexican historian observed that "Thanks to the PNR, Mexico avoided the militarist destiny of almost all Latin America" (Krauze 1998: 431).

Despite their libertarian heritage of a classless society and voluntary association, many Mexican trade union leaders were by now anxious to secure government patronage and protection. While the Mexican Constitution of 1917 and subsequent

federal labor codes granted workers the freedom to organize, and the right to negotiate closed shop agreements, at the same time it prohibited revolutionary syndicalism, factory occupations and the wildcat strike. Labor disputes would be subject to governmental arbitration (Carr 1991: 82-86). In 1918, with government sponsorship, the *Confederacion Regional Obrero Mexicano* (CROM) was founded, led by Luis Morones, a conservative trade unionist with ties to the American Federation of Labor. CROM's modest aim was an "equilibrium between capital and labor", and the union became noted for its frequent collaboration with employers , and the provision of government sinecures to its officials (Ruiz 1992: 360-361).

Independent unionism survived among the streetcar workers and textile operatives who established the *Confederacion General del Trabajo* (CGT), supported by the anarcho-syndicalists and the newly formed Communist Party. The CGT looked toward the collectivization of industry and also attempted to organize the peasant *campesinos*. Until the early 'thirties, more than two-thirds of Mexico's working population labored in agriculture (Ruiz 1992: 360-361; Zapata 1989: 174).

CHAPTER XII

THE CORPORATE STATE

The real beginnings of the corporate state in Mexico, and the firm integration of organized labor into the political system, originated in the administration of the populist President Lazaro Cardenas, from 1934 to 1940. Another in a line of revolutionary generals to ascend to the presidency, Cardenas pursued a leftist policy of land reform and the nationalization of foreign-owned enterprises – most notably Anglo-American oil fields and railways. The political arrangements inherited from the post-revolutionary settlement provided for a powerful President, limited to one six-year term, with legislative and judicial branches subordinate to the executive, under a federal structure controlled from the center (Ross 1996: 34-36). Cardenas increased the role of government in the economy and in Mexican society, undertook internal improvements and the expansion of public education (Ruiz 1992: 396-403).

Cardenas reconstituted the national political party - the PNR was superceded by the *Partido Revolucionario Mexicano*. The new PRM was a truly corporate body including sections for the campesinos, the urban middle classes, and the workers. For the latter, the party provided a new association, the Confederacion de Trabajadores de Mexico – to be kept totally distinct from the peasant organization. By 1936 the CTM was functioning as the labor branch of the corporatist party-state and numbered over 350,000 workers, mainly based upon unions organized in various state-owned enterprises. Cardenas considered that the powerful party-state with its civil sectors would secure and maintain the gains of the Mexican revolution and his own populist and nationalist program against

the opposition of domestic conservatives and foreign financial interests (Ruiz 1992: 403-409; 395-396; Krauze :1992: 469-471, 483-484).

The Mexican corporate state has been compared to the regime of Juan Peron in Argentina – but as its base was institutional rather than personalist, it proved to be far more durable (Monroy 1997). The populist and social reform policies of Cardenas gave way to the more conservative, pro-business administrations of his successors, yet for better than half a century the state party, rechristened the Partido Revolucionario Institucional, continued to monopolize political power, its key function the effective control, limitation and channeling of popular demands through official party organizations and state agencies. Until recent years, it had been able to retain the loyalty of its various constituencies through a selective system of patronage and social welfare benefits distributed both individually and collectively, and to mobilize popular support at election time. Any independent group or association of workers, peasants or citizens that existed outside this corporate network had no legal standing or political legitimacy, and might be subject to repression or at best a begrudging toleration, depending upon the national political climate or the attitude of local party chieftains. A Latin American journalist termed Mexico's rule by the PRI "the perfect dictatorship" (Ruiz 1992: 446-447; La Botz 1995: 66-67; Ross 1996: 34). For decades, as an American sociologist noted, the PRI was "the Only party with a grass-roots organization and local social service agencies" (Eckstein 1988: 127).

For officials of the CTM and other satellite labor organizations , cooptation by the state and cooperation with management, whether public or private, meant guaranteed positions in the union hierarchy, often with promotion into local, state and federal political

office through the medium of controlled elections. Such advancement depended solely upon service and loyalty to the PRI, not on democratic selection by the rank and file workers or the general public (Monroy 1997). This corrupt system, involving collusion with employers and subservience to the government, was eventually termed *charrismo* by labor dissidents, a reference denoting the crude or primitive. .As one social activist described it, “ A *charro* is one who holds a union office and has a political career someone whom the workers never saw working ... who dresses like the boss, and has a new car with driver” (Perez Arce 1990: 109). According to auto worker Raul Escobar, despite the rights granted to workers in the Mexican Constitution, “the official confederations which are the right arm of the government have been anti-democratic. Workers who ... demand their rights are repressed, threatened, or assassinated.” Union representatives “are imposed on the workers ... obviously they toe the labor federation line, which adheres to the government’s economic plans. The decision is never put to the workers to accept or reject an offer” (La Botz 1992: 36).

CHAPTER XIII

REBELLION IN THE RANKS

The decades of the nineteen-forties and fifties have been called the period of the “Mexican miracle.” The government’s economic strategy of import substitution combined with some liberalization of international trade policies succeeded in accelerating the national economy to an average rate of growth of over 6% per year between 1945 and 1970, twice the rate of population increase (Soliz 2000; Middlebrook 1995: 213). By the latter year, some twenty per cent of Mexico’s citizenry could be considered middle class – one of the largest in Latin America (Ruiz 1992: 419). As industrialization and urbanization proceeded apace, the economically active sector of the population quadrupled to over 22 million, approximately a third of the population of the country (Zapata 1993: 134-135). Wage levels were held down however, and real wages were in decline by the 1950s. Labor in large measure subsidized the cost of economic advancement (Ruiz 1992: 412-413, 431).

The Mexican work force now presented a heterogeneous picture, with wide variations in wage scales, working conditions, productivity and skill levels. The support, or toleration, for the CTM was dependent upon its ability to deliver at least occasional pay raises and benefits for its organized constituency – the most important of which were the strata of skilled and unskilled employees in state enterprises. But the by now ubiquitous corruption permeating the union structure, along with the erosion of real wages agitated a restive rank and file, many now second or third generation urbanites better educated and more knowledgeable than earlier generations of workers. The first large-scale rebellions against *charrismo* broke out in the late ‘fifties among the most skilled sectors of organized

labor. Most significantly, these efforts were spearheaded by railway workers and members of the national teachers union, who mounted independent campaigns concerned not merely with traditional labor demands but also with radical reform of their union structures. The state and the CTM managed to contain these dissident forces , but only by eventual resort to physical force and extra-legal means – a portent of the future (Ruiz 1992: 432-433; La Botz 1992: 68-71; Cook 1996: 66-71).

A new, much more powerful wave of worker discontent spontaneously burst out in the early 'seventies - the period called *La Insurgencia Obrera*– within the context of an uncertain economy. This time the movement was not confined to the more skilled workforce of the state-owned enterprises, but was characterized by innumerable actions on the part of employees in small and medium-sized workplaces as well as the large national concerns. Masses of workers in unorganized shops and plants attempted to form independent unions. Within the traditional CTM organizations, strong reform forces challenged the entrenched bureaucracy – particularly among railroad workers, teachers and electricians, who were often able to score local successes. Other official unions faced active rank and file secessionist movements, attempts to disaffiliate from the corporate network and form independent associations outside of the CTM (Alafita Mendez 1977: 119-125; Perez Arce 1990: 109-110, 112-119; Taibo 1997: 32-37).

Between 1971 and 1982 there were over 1400 strikes in Mexico, more than twice the number than in any other ten year period since the early 1930s (Zapata 1993: 136). But this figures only represent those strikes that reached state arbitration boards, and does not include labor-management disputes settled informally (as in often the case in Mexico), or wildcat strikes and lockouts that were never officially recorded. The CTM *jefe*

Fidel Velazquez felt constrained to advise private employers to be reasonable and “not to play with fire” in denying wage boosts(FAT n.d.A: 19-26; De La Graza Toledo 1994: 46; Cockcroft 1990: 300).).

Most important, if not crucial, to the impetus of this movement and to those successes and gains it was able to win, was the active support and participation of many among the citizenry at large. Strikers and union dissidents solicited and received aid and encouragement from student organizations, neighborhood associations and peasant cooperatives. Middle class citizens joined local *frentes populares* and *coordinadores* to back striking employees. Among them were former student radicals of the ‘60s decade who had seen their movement for social reform violently suppressed, culminating in the massacre of several hundred at Tlatelolco in 1968, an act that shocked even partisans of the PRI (Krauze 1998: 688-726, 733-737). For many of Mexico’s intellectuals, the brutality of the government’s actions at Tlatelolco was a turning point in their attitude toward the “perfect dictatorship” – much as the Polish state’s violent repression of student and academic protesters in that same year alienated Poland’s intelligentsia (Gawronski 2002: 370-371; Cohen 2005: 179-182). Supporters, advisors, or sometimes even union members themselves, these elements regarded the working-class insurgency as a major step toward the transformation of the Mexican state and society (Perez Arce 1990: 112-113) Indeed, in attempting to democratize and reform their labor organizations, Mexican workers were undermining one of the foundation blocks of the corporate social and political order. The next decades would see the continued growth and strengthening of such democratic activism the workplace and in civil society itself, twin movements that now grew increasing together.

CHAPTER XIV

THE AUTHENTIC LABOR FRONT

In the Fall of 200 the Frente Autentico del Trabajo – FAT – celebrates its fiftieth anniversary as Mexico's oldest independent labor organization. With some 50,000 members in its various branches, concentrated among textile and auto parts workers. As an autonomous association of workers, the FAT considers itself as carrying on the tradition of the social revolutionaries Emiliano Zapata and Ricardo Flores Magon, figures of the Mexican Revolution hostile to capitalism and distrustful of state power (La Botz 2000: 7-8)

The origins of the FAT may be traced to the pro worker activities of a Catholic prelate, Father Pedro Velazquez, who had been trained in the worker-priest movement in Western Europe. Drawing inspiration from the encyclicals of Pope Leo XIII and mindful of the influence of atheistic Communism in the labor movement, Father Velazquez returned to Mexico determined to work for a just Christian social order that would reject both materialist capitalism and Communism. Despite opposition from the conservative Church hierarchy, Velaquez launched his Promocion Obrera (Workers Promotion) group in the mid-50s to agitate for social reform and train its members for leadership positions in the union movement. Relations were established with Christian labor confederations in Latin America and Europe. With aid from the latter and what assistance Father Velaquez could provide, the Frente Autentico del Trabajo was officially founded in 1960.

The FAT's first members were drawn from the Church-sponsored associations like the Juventud Obrera Catolica (Catholic Working-Class Youth) and parish credit unions. Although the FAT would eventually end its formal attachment to the Church, workers who

were active in Christian base community groups and influenced by the new Liberation theology were particularly attracted to the *Frente's* brand of social unionism throughout the sixties, seventies and thereafter (Robles and Gomez 1995: 79; Hathaway 2000: 57-59; Martinez 1997). Speaking to this topic in 1964, a FAT organizer, while emphasizing that unions must be strictly non-denominational bodies open to all workers, yet added that the “only doctrine that sustains a true conception of humanity and the world is Christianity” (Hathaway 2000: 61-62). Although the rancor and antagonism between the Catholic Church and the officially anti-clerical Mexican state has abated considerably in recent years, the emergence at that time of a radical independent workers organization with overt Church sponsorship must have aroused particular suspicion on the part of government authorities.

Although gradually secularized, the FAT nevertheless retained its strong ethical commitment to the concept of *formacion* and its importance for the development of each of the union's members. *Formacion* may be translated as a process of education and transformation, through which an individual comes to a realization of his or her self-worth and human dignity, and becomes prepared to take an active role in establishing and exercising basic human rights in a democratic society. Indeed, it is the union's guiding principle that a fully human existence is possible only in a fully democratic society. Derived from Christian ethics, this theme is constant through all of the FAT's educational and organizing activities (Hathaway 2000: 60-62; Brito Crabtree 2000, Lujan 1997).

It is this aspect of its ideology that particularly distinguishes the *Frente* from other independent unions and reform caucuses in active in the Mexican labor movement. The FAT conceives of itself as a radical social movement as much as a trade union, and

thereby must inevitably be in conflict with the corporate political and economic order in Mexico. The organization's very existence constitutes a challenge to the status quo, and in this the FAT is obviously akin to similar movements in other countries, Solidarnosc in Communist Poland, the anti-apartheid Congress of South African Trade Unions (MacShane, Plaut and Ward 1984). An American equivalent might be found in the early Knights of Labor or the Industrial Workers of the World, or perhaps in the intense organizing campaigns of the Congress of Industrial Organizations in the 1930s, which combined the assertion of democratic rights with radical ideology.

Democracy as defined by the FAT is a conception that goes beyond the merely political or normative representative form. The attainment of real political democracy is regarded as a long-term, transitional project for Mexico, the achievement of which will be a great step forward. But, according to the *Frente*, full democracy and liberty are only possible in a society of *socialismo autogestionario*, or self-managed socialism. Union literature does not use the term socialism very often, preferring instead to refer frequently to *autogestion*. This self-management is described as the direct and active participation of the individual in determining the social and economic policies that will affect his or her life (Dominguez 1997; Montoya 2000; FAT n.d. B). This concept is a form of libertarian, participatory democracy that recalls the various anarcho-syndicalist, council communist and soviet movements in Europe and the Americas at the beginning of the twentieth century. It was the ideology of the early labor movement in Mexico, exemplified by figures like Zapata and Flores Magon.

The state itself is hardly mentioned in this discourse on the self-managed society, and then only to the extent that its reform is acknowledged to be the necessary prerequisite for

the emergence of the new social order. The corporatist welfare state is to be abandoned and power transferred to civil society, to the *libre juego* (free play) of diverse democratic forces. This latter will consist of organizations of the popular classes in independent unions, citizens groups, neighborhood assemblies, collective and cooperative enterprises and associations. These grassroots elements will form the network for a “Worker-managed ... democratic political and economic system.” In its public presentations, organizing and educational projects, the FAT is careful to point out that their libertarian model for the self-managed society is the direct opposite of the state socialist regimes that finally collapsed in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union (FAT 1998: 2; Hathway 2000: 149; Lujan 1997).

In line with these considerations, the FAT likewise defines itself as apolitical in respect to organized parties and political associations. The union’s program has always been emphatic on the point that the FAT will never formally endorse or support a candidate for political office, although it does urge its members to participate in elections. While the union may find it useful to cooperate with political groups in pursuit of particular goals, it will never align itself with a political party, believing that an organization of workers should at all times maintain complete autonomy from all political parties, employers and the state. For the deadly affects of subordination to political expediency and subservience to the corporate regime, the *Frente* points to its official rival, the corrupt and *charro*-ridden CTM (Dominguez 1983: 59, 161-164, 172).

But recently this distancing has been challenged by the rise of the Partido de la Revolucion Democratica (PRD), a leftist split-off of the PRI. Several union activists have resigned from the union to work for the PRD, and in the municipal government of Mexico

City, under a PRD administration. Nevertheless, it is feared that the PRD and the *Frente* may fall into the clientistic relationship of the PRI and the CTM, a long-standing characteristic of Mexican political culture (Ilgu Ozler 2009).

The themes of autonomy and responsibility, individual and collective, carries over into FAT educational programs and classes. Workers, peasants and ordinary citizens must solve their own problems themselves, through their own organizations. Paternalism is often cited as a traditional characteristic of Mexican society, an anachronism that must be overcome by the ideas of responsible citizenship and equality, and the development of democratic thought processes and procedures (Brito Crabtree 1997; Miranda 2000; FAT n.d.B).

The union conducts regular classes, seminars and forums on a variety of topics, from basic economics to public speaking, along with study circles in those workplaces where it has a presence. It publishes an attractive monthly magazine, *Resistencia Obrera* (Workers Resistance) and a host of various educational materials, workplace newsletters and pamphlets. In its extensive educational programs, the FAT has much in common with the very first workers associations in the days of the Revolution (FAT 1997; Dominguez, Lujan and Martinez 2000, Hathaway 2000: 150-151).

The organizational structure of the *Frente* at the base consists rank and file, democratically elected union committees at the workplace. The FAT consists of both national industrial unions and smaller locals of various types grouped into zonal and regional councils – somewhat in the manner of Polish Solidarity. Membership numbers some 50,000, but the union also includes several thousand from the popular sectors, there are sections for peasant and producer/consumer cooperatives and neighbor

associations – these last usually squatters from the shanty towns on the fringes of the capital city. In its policy of social unionism, of the admission of organizations of civil society into its syndical structure, the FAT validates its claim to constitute a social movement representing all of the popular classes, as well as a militant labor organization fighting for workers' rights. Delegates to annual national congress elect three national coordinators, responsible for day-to-day decision-making. The statutes of the FAT require that at least one of the latter must be female (Anguiano Rodriguez 1985: 85-92; FAT 1998: 7-8; Dominguez, Lujan and Martinez 2000).The FAT is a vital part of a coalition of independent unions – the Union Nacional de Trabajadores (UNT) – whose membership totals some 700,000, with an influence beyond its numbers (Hathaway 2000: 206-207; Rosen 2008: 40).

Since its inception, the *Frente* has faced formidable obstacles to its independent organizing. Theoretically, according to Mexican labor law, workers and employees are free to form unions or associations of their choice. In practice, however, only those unions able to obtain official approval for registration have any legal standing. For independent unions, successful registration is often a difficult or hopeless affair, subject to denial by government whim or indefinite delay by red tape (La Botz 1992: 44-47). The FAT has consistently followed the letter of the law whenever possible, and has insisted that state authorities do the same. But government obduracy is not always the greatest barrier to organization and recognition. For decades, the CTM and other official labor bodies have routinely employed violence to prevent independent organizing, or to crush and intimidate dissident and reform movements. These tactics have included threats, harassment, beatings, kidnappings and sometimes murder, often aided and abetted by

local authorities (La Botz 1992: 72-74, 143-160, 188).

For these reasons, a voluntarist, non-statist labor organization like the FAT has had to resort to a variety of tactics, particularly those most congenial to its own philosophy – direct action and community mobilization. Direct action may consist of wildcat strikes, short-term walkouts, slowdown (striking on the job), factory occupations or simply ignoring work rules. Its great advantage is its immediacy, effectiveness and non-reliance on intermediaries, governmental or otherwise – a perfect model of *autogestion*. Likewise, support from the local community can often be effective in restraining the employers or the authorities from resorting to violence or illegalities. The FAT has often acted in concert with the Citizens Movement for Democracy and other reform organizations (Rosales 1997; Saez de Nanclares 1997; Tung 1999: 5). Any successes of autonomous unions, peasant leagues or middle class associations in acting jointly to affect governmental policies is a strengthening of civil society and the democratization of the Mexican polity (Santos Azuela 1993; Foweraker 1990).

CHAPTER XV

THE EROSION OF THE CORPORATE STATE

If the populist Cardenas administration of the nineteenthirties was followed by more conservative machine politicians, the last twenty years of PRI rule saw a succession of technocrats trained in neo-liberal economics. Following global economic trends, Presidents De La Madrid, Salinas and Zedillo worked to replace the traditional Mexican policy of import substitution and corporatism with a free market economy, including the privatization of state-owned enterprises and major cuts in social services (Ross 1996: 55-57; Monroy 1997; Astudillo 1999: 17). The modernizers also viewed electoral reform as a means of defusing potential opposition. But the loss of local patronage implied in the retreat from corporatism and the liberalization of Mexico's political structure caused splits within the ruling party (Collier 1992: 97-98; La Botz 1995: 102-110; Gawronski 2002: 371-372). The old-line politicians of the PRI and the officialdom of the CTM bitterly opposed liberalization and electoral reform as a threat to their power and position. The Salinas administration particularly took an aggressive posture toward the CTM with its policies of privatization undermining the union's power base, and the harassment of recalcitrant union leaders (Middlebrook 1995: 291-29; Baez-Camargo 2000).

By the 1980s, the PRI faced serious electoral opposition with the rise of the right-wing Partido Accion Nacional (PAN) and the leftist Partido de la Revolucion Democratica (PRD), which originated as a splitoff from the ruling party (Klesner 2005: 129-133). The long-term persistence of the PAN, and later the PRD, enabled the new competitors to take many state and municipal offices, despite intimidations or worse - in the 1970s, over two hundred PRD activists were murdered (Shirk 2000: 27-28; Klesner 2005:

103-105; Preston and Dillon 2004: 199, 297-298). But the seventy year grip of the PRI on national political power was broken with the election of PAN's candidate Vincente Fox in the 2000 presidential election – a great step forward toward the establishment of a permanent political democracy in Mexico. It is probable that many leftists and intellectuals, although preferring the PRD, voted strategically for Fox as the candidate with the best chance of ousting the PRI (Dominguez 1999: 12-14).

Though the head had been cut off, the limbs of the corporate organism remained vital. A multitude of PRI politicians remained in local office, in state agencies and the civil service (Davidow 2002). The CTM, starved by the neo-liberals, saw a steady decline of half its membership, from over 900,000 to less than 500,000 by 2005 (Roman and Velasco Arregui 2006: 98, 102). But the CTM remained entrenched in the maquiladora zone of textile and assembly plants along the border with the U.S. The new PAN administration found cooperation with the CTM to be useful as a barrier to more militant and representative labor organizations, and as a cover for further privatizations (Roman and Arregui 2006: 96-98; Robles 2009: 49). In the northern states of Mexico, the recovery in the CTM's finances and business investments has been attributed to its ties with the powerful drug cartels (Roman and Velasco Arregui 2006: 98, 102; Rosen 2008: 39). Some CTM locals, however, attempted to function like real trade unions, defending their membership and bargaining for wage increases – much as some of the official trade unions in Communist Poland reacted when faced with real competition from Solidarity (Dominguez 1997).

CHAPTER XVI

THE RESURGENCE OF CIVIL SOCIETY

The democratic electoral reforms enacted by Mexico's political elite were carried through as much in reaction to the new civic awakening among the Mexican citizenry as they were part of the program of laissez faire neo-liberalism. The parochialism and low level of civic culture in Mexico described by Almond and Verba in their classic study in 1963, had been transformed by the nineteneighties by a proliferation of voluntary associations, autonomous social organizations and interest groups at all levels of society. Over the last twentyfive years, these entities of civil culture have moved into the social vacuum left by a shrinking and dysfunctional corporate state. The new civil society, besides independent trade unions, is composed of peasant and farmer cooperatives, neighborhood associations of *colonos* in the barrios and shanty towns of Mexico City, middle class political reform groups, womens' collectives, Catholic congregations, small business leagues and the semi-guerrilla Zapatista movement of indigenous peoples (Carlson 1989; Foweraker 1990; La Botz 1995: 1-42).

Public *desconfianza* in the PRI party-state, and subsequent governmental administrations, may be said to have begun with the state massacre of student demonstrators at Tlatelolco in 1968, and confirmed by subsequent events - the incompetence displayed by the authorities in the aftermath of the 1985 Mexico City earthquake compared to the effectiveness of civilian volunteers, the economic dislocations of neo-liberal policy, the outbreak of the Zapatista movement in the state of Chiapas (Krauze 1998: 735-737; Kandell 1988: 570-573; La Botz 1995: 21-42). The new civic culture of Mexico became infused with the idea of citizenship in place of

clientage, a citizenship that requires active political participation (Saez de Nunclares 1997; Tung 1999; Dominguez, Lujan and Martinez 2000). A Mexican political analyst observed that “Civil society is the communitarian effort at self-organization and solidarity, the space which is independent of the government, or more exactly, a zone of antagonism to it” (Monsivais 1987: 79).

The aim of both the PRI and the PAN has been to keep Mexico a low cost, low wage site for profitable investment. The effects of neo-liberal economic and social policies and the North Atlantic Free Trade Agreement have not benefitted Mexico’s working class, some 500,000 of whom flock across the U.S. border yearly in search of employment. Since 1992, Mexico’s growth rate has averaged around 1.6%, one of the lowest in Latin America. Limited job gains in manufacturing and services have been offset by the huge losses in agricultural employment (Carnegie Study 2009: 8). According to a recent survey conducted by the Technical University of Monterey, 53 million Mexican citizens live in poverty, 49.3 of the population (Statistics 2010: 11). Approximately one-half of all new jobs in Mexico are in the informal sector, the *changarros*, self-employed, constitute 24% of the national workforce, many of them children (Salas 2005: 25; Tilly and Kennedy 2007: 18). To add to the social derangement are the violent and continuous wars between the narco gangs that the Mexican government is apparently unable to halt or bring under control. This is subversive of the stability that Huntington, among others, identifies as the precondition for political democracy (1968: 35, 79, 91). Public *desconfianza* must be especially acute among the working classes.

But Mexico’s independent labor movement struggles not merely to better the living standards of its members, but, acting as part of a communal endeavor, to effect radical

democratic change throughout all of Mexican society. In so doing, it has so far managed to purposely avoid entanglements in party politics, both from pragmatic and from ideological reasons - the example of the PRI-CTM connection providing a constant reminder of the consequences of the loss of autonomy and independence. Benedicto Martinez, a long-time activist in the FAT, and current vice president of the broader independent federation, the National Workers Union, expressed the attitude of many of his comrades, "I don't have much confidence in the political partiesthe challenge will come from a coming together of social organizations from the grass roots" (Rosen 2008: 40).

CHAPTER XVII

SOLIDARNOSC AND THE FRENTE

The experience of autonomous labor organizations in authoritarian societies as vanguards of political and social change, contradicts the conventional view of democratic transitions as merely bargains struck between elites. Likewise, it undermines the Leninist dictum that rank and file workers are incapable of higher levels of social consciousness, and require enlightened intellectuals to guide them.

The independent labor association acts from the most basic of human needs – material welfare. Under the conditions of dictatorship or state monopoly of power, it finds that it cannot better the situation of its members without imposing upon the prerogatives of the ruling elite. It is impelled to do so. And its very existence as an autonomous entity makes it a subversive element. If it retains its independence, it cannot be otherwise. As an organization of popular representation, it occupies the political vacuum normally filled by political parties, interest groups and voluntary associations. Solidarity and the FAT could only fully function and pursue their goals under a political order that observed the basic rights and liberties of the citizen. So they are thrust into the vanguard of the democratic transition, possessing an internal dynamic and an organizational coherence that other non-state bodies may lack.

In Poland, as the major, great driving force of millions for democratic change, Solidarity affected the very course of world history. The *Frente* represents a more modest constituency, within a smaller federation of civil associations, if equally dedicated and determined. The role of the labor democracy in the Mexican Republic remains to be

seen, still a work in progress.

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