

Andrzej Rychard / Gabriel Motzkin (eds.)

The Legacy of Polish Solidarity

Social Activism, Regime Collapse,
and Building of a New Society



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EDITION

Introduction

Twenty-five years ago there was a series of velvet revolutions in Eastern and Central Europe. These represented the final stage of the collapse of the communist system in this part of Europe. They began with the Round Table talks between rulers and opposition in Poland, and gathered pace thereafter. Today, the majority of these countries have the fundamental market-oriented and democratic changes behind them and a decided majority of these countries are members of NATO and the European Union.

The phenomenon of the practically bloodless collapse of the communist system in this part of Europe is one of civilization's great advances, as are the democratic success and market transformation of these countries. Yet the fears at the onset of the changes were strong and well founded. Particularly feared were potential social reactions in the form of protest in the face of difficult market reforms. It was feared that after gaining democratic instruments, the post-communist societies would use them to reject the market. This was one of the dangers of simultaneous transformation in the political and economic spheres. The risk of a rejection of this kind was particularly strong in countries suffering very poor economic situations with a strong tradition of social protest. Poland was just such a country. Nevertheless, mass rejection of the market economy by society did not come about either in Poland or in the other countries. In order to explain this it is necessary to look at the deeper historical and structural factors.

This book is an attempt at such an explanation while focusing on one country – Poland. It refers to the experience and the heritage of the Polish Solidarity movement which, after it was established in 1980 under the leadership of Lech Wałęsa, represented the first breach in the institutional structure of communism. Solidarity grew to be an oasis of independence and civic participation. Although the introduction of martial law interrupted its official activities for more than a year, illegal activity and above all the memory and experience of Solidarity nevertheless allowed, almost a decade later in 1989, for democratic and market transformations to be developed on Solidarity's foundations. This book, a collection of texts from leading Polish and foreign sociologists and political scientists, focuses on displaying the multilayered and evolutionary nature of Solidarity. These characteristics are necessary for understanding apparently paradoxical

phenomena, such as, for example, how a mainly workers' trade union introduced and supported market transformations.

In the first part of the book the authors view Solidarity as a social movement. Henryk Domański (Institute of Philosophy and Sociology, Polish Academy of Sciences) analyses the Solidarity social protest movement in a comparative perspective. Empirical data point to the existence of interesting structural differences between the participants of the Solidarity protests and those of other countries' protests. In Poland, the over-representation of workers is striking. Marcin Frybes (CADIS-EHESS, Paris) looks in turn at Solidarity from the perspective of its changing character. He distinguishes as many as six variants or "lives" of this movement characteristic for different periods (among others, a movement that was legal, one that was underground, one linked to systemic change and a movement of betrayed trade union ideals). Ireneusz Krzemiński (Institute of Sociology, University of Warsaw) draws attention in his analysis to democratic participation as a characteristic of the Solidarity movement. He proposes the thesis that the delegalization and suppression of the legal Solidarity movement by the communist authorities constituted one of the causes of the collapse of the communist system through its delegitimization of the system.

The second part of the book focuses on the role of Solidarity in political change. Jack Bielasiak (Indiana University, Bloomington) analyses the particular role of values against the background of the role of interests in Polish politics. He analyses the significance of Solidarity in this respect and the function of values in building a new political system. In the author's view, one paradox is the fact that the neoliberal agenda strengthened the role of values and not solely that of interests. Andrzej Rychard (Institute of Philosophy and Sociology, Polish Academy of Sciences) attempts to answer the question of how it was possible that a predominantly workers' trade union movement promoted market and democratic transformation. He notes the particular character of the Solidarity movement, which included from its beginning both populist as well as modernizing elements. Marek Ziółkowski (Institute of Sociology, Adam Mickiewicz University) focuses in his text on an analysis of the role of extra-political factors in the construction of democracy. He shows the difficulties that joining this process caused for the trade union.

The third and final part of the book is dedicated to the experience of Solidarity against the general background of peaceful European revolutions. Francois Bafail (CNRS, CERI/Sciences Po, Paris) attempts to explain the phenomenon of Solidarity against the background of declining civic engagement in post-communist countries. He shows, the significance of other forms of civic participation, such as those of a local character. Jan Kubik (Rutgers University) analyses the importance

of memory in the process of the consolidation of democracy. He answers in a systematic way the question of what we remember from the Solidarity experience, and documents the multi-dimensional character of the process of remembering. Our volume concludes with a text by Shmuel N. Eisenstadt (The Van Leer Jerusalem Institute). He analyses the experience of the velvet revolutions in the light of other classical models of revolution. He notes the similarities and differences between them (for example, the relative lack of utopian elements in the velvet revolutions).

This volume is the outcome of a conference organized in Jerusalem in 2009 jointly by the Graduate School for Social Research at the Institute of Philosophy and Sociology of the Polish Academy of Sciences, the Van Leer Jerusalem Institute and the Adam Mickiewicz Institute. Its authors were all participants in the conference. As it is already a few years since this conference took place, almost all the authors have presented new or amended texts for publication. Our thanks go to all the institutions that contributed to the success of the conference and to this publication. Our special thanks go to Dr. John Fells, director of the Graduate School for Social Research.

Our volume is dedicated to the memory of Shmuel N. Eisenstadt.

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