

**TITLE: THE ORGANIC REVOLUTION: GRASS-ROOTS ACTIVISM IN  
EASTERN EUROPE, 1985-1989. Five Papers**

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The Organic Revolution: Grass-Roots Activism in Eastern Europe, 1985-1989.  
Padraic Kenney

SUMMARY

The rise of a new type of pluralist social movement in Poland, beginning in the years 1984-1986, played a crucial role in bringing about the revolution of 1989 in Poland, and in the rest of Eastern Europe. These movements focused on single issues, which were often local concerns; the activists were frequently from a new generation, and brought a new style into the resistance heretofore concentrated around Solidarity. As they showed people how the state could be defeated, and overcame barriers to civic participation, they enabled a social mobilization which culminated in the election victory of 1989. Furthermore, many of these movements had a profound influence on similar movements in the neighboring countries, and thus contributed to revolutions elsewhere, too.

Those are the conclusions I am reaching after eleven months researching this project.<sup>2</sup> In the course of my research, I have interviewed one hundred and fifty activists from over twenty different movements all over Poland, and a few activists from Hungary as well. Thus far, I have collected a large quantity of archival material from private archives and from a few libraries -- most notably the Open Society Archives in Budapest and the Ossolineum Library in Wroclaw.

The following five papers, presented as my Final Report on research being carried out under a NCSEER contract during the academic year 1996-1997, consist of sketches of book chapters and do not represent finished research (let alone a completed study). They do represent the way I have come to view key issues in this research on the basis of what I have collected. I have tried to give a preliminary review of what I have collected, though most of the material will take much longer to analyze.

Part One outlines some of the problems raised by such a study, comparing my theory of the revolution of 1989 to theories which invoke Gorbachev, the economic crisis, or the power of democratic ideas.

Part Two examines the moment of crisis in the Polish underground which contributed to the rise of new movements.

Part Three looks at the most dynamic movement, *Freedom and Peace*, which campaigned on peace and environment issues.

Part Four examines the efforts at creating self-government in a variety of state institutions.

Part Five considers the importance of the Polish strike wave of 1988, which led to the Round Table Agreement in April 1989.

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<sup>2</sup>The duration of the Council contract in support of this research project was limited to 12 months by the Period of Validity of Council funds.

The result of this research will eventually be two books, as well as several in-depth articles. The first book will be on movements throughout East-Central Europe during the late 1980s; I have appended a chapter summary. Most of the book will naturally be on Poland, where such activism was by far strongest; the other countries will be dealt with in a comparative framework. It is my intention that this book be accessible to non-specialists, including college students and the interested public. The second book will be for a scholarly audience, and will focus on Poland's *Freedom and Peace*. This division will allow me to make use of the mass of material collected, and also to avoid burdening the first book with a sustained discussion of some of the complex theoretical issues which need to be examined about opposition, the regime, and the revolutions of 1989.

I expect to complete the first book by 1999, and the second three years later.

New Movements and the Fall of Communism in Eastern Europe:  
Part 1 from  
The Organic Revolution: Grass-Roots Activism in Eastern Europe, 1985-1989

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August 1997

Short of finding smoking guns in yet-to-be-opened archives, it is difficult to prove that the rise of new movements in Poland contributed to the fall of communism throughout Eastern Europe. Indeed, many participants themselves now wonder if their activism made any difference. Eight years of politicians and political scientists crediting Gorbachev, or crediting the disintegration of the economy, or the deal struck at the Polish Round Table, have left their mark on people's memories. What I want to do here is very briefly outline the shortcomings of the dominant theories, and then suggest some reasons why we might look to these social movements for answers.

First, a definition: I will refer to what took place as a *revolution*. There are many reasons for doing so, but the most important is that no other word captures both the complexity and the rapidity of change in 1989.<sup>3</sup> It is possible that we can avoid the term if we seek to explore the economic transformation of the region, or the political transfer of power. But if we want to explain *both* of these, and seek also to explore social phenomena (including changes in social expectations, changes in ways of participation in the public sphere, and changes in social structure) and cultural changes, then "transition" is more than inadequate. Moreover, the term "revolution" reminds us that we are dealing with an enormously complex phenomenon which no one factor can possibly explain. We must ask ourselves a number of questions: who was involved? what did they want? what did they expect? why did one set of goals triumph over others? why was the state weak or inclined to give in? why did events happen when they did, and at the pace they did? in which spheres did change take place faster, or more completely? We need also to keep these questions open-ended; the teleological concept of *transition* seems to imply a relation between *before* and *after* which is less obvious in the term *revolution*.

One disadvantage of the term *revolution* is that it discourages study of long-term factors, like "moral/religious inspiration", "dissent", "loss of legitimacy", or "ideological failure." Because such factors are present over a long period of time, or increase (usually) imperceptibly, they are not the first factors to which one turns in explaining a revolution; they might be more useful if we are

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<sup>3</sup>This point is forcefully made by Sabrina Ramet, *Social Currents in Eastern Europe: The Sources and Consequences of the Great Transformation*, 2nd ed. (Durham, 1995), 23.

explaining a transition -- especially if we know the transition's outcome. But a revolution is not, after all, something which happens over a brief period of time. Indeed, it may be the case that in order for the events in Czechoslovakia, for example, to qualify as a "revolution," we will need to count the activism in Poland as part of the Velvet Revolution.

This last point leads to one more word of explanation: I am taking it for granted that we can begin our understanding of the revolution in Eastern Europe as a whole by looking at Poland. Explanations of the Polish Revolution are therefore a part of an explanation for revolution across the region. This does not tell us *how* the Polish case affected the others; I will argue below that social movements might offer a better explanation of the linkage between Poland and *some* of the other cases.

The first explanation for the revolution of 1989, which gives credit to Gorbachev (or, alternatively, to reform-minded communists in Warsaw), is clearly insufficient.<sup>4</sup> In social movement theory, Gorbachev is said to have created a "political opportunity structure" which would-be activists recognized and exploited, by testing the limits of what was possible.<sup>5</sup> There are two grave problems with this. First, as I will explain below, the movements I am studying in Poland arose *before* Gorbachev came to power, and well before he announced his policies of *perestroika* and *glasnost*. It was several years, in fact, before it was clear to Poles that Kremlin policies toward Poland were changing.

A case can be made, certainly, that changes in Soviet policy toward Eastern Europe were evident as early as 1986; however, a political opportunity structure implies that activists *recognize* that opportunity. If they do not recognize it (rightly or wrongly), then its existence (or at least its effect) is questionable. Even the most realist of Polish activists were deeply skeptical of Gorbachev's intentions as late as 1988 (that is, at least until Gorbachev's visit to Poland in July of that year). WiP activists, for example, felt that Gorbachev's peace overtures were simply a means to pander to the West, leaving Eastern movements and their concerns again out in the cold and trampling human rights in the process.<sup>6</sup>

Nor did the liberalization of the Polish regime seem impressive from close up. The regime tended to treat the new movements (WiP, Orange Alternative, the Committee for Assistance to

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<sup>4</sup>Examples of this emphasis can be found in Ramet, *Social Currents*; J.F. Brown, *Surge to Freedom: The End of Communist Rule in Eastern Europe* (Durham, 1991); Joseph Rothschild, *Return to Diversity: A Political History of East Central Europe Since World War II*, 2nd ed. (Oxford, 1993), ch. 7; Iván Völgyes, "By Way of a Conclusion: Controlled and Uncontrolled Change in Eastern Europe," in *The Columbia History of Eastern Europe in the Twentieth Century*, ed. Joseph Held (New York, 1990), 394-403.

<sup>5</sup>See Anthony Oberschall, "Opportunities and framing in the Eastern European revolts of 1989," in *Comparative Perspectives on Social Movements: Political Opportunities, Mobilizing Structures, and Cultural Framings*, eds. Doug McAdam, John D. McCarthy, and Mayer N. Zald (Cambridge, UK, 1996), 93-121.

<sup>6</sup>See the open letter of WiP activist Piotr Niemczyk to American END activist Joanne Landy: *Biuletyn WiP*, 7-8 (26 April 1987).

Retirees and the Disabled) more harshly than Solidarity itself; second, what liberalization there was, activists feel, was won by the actions of these movements, and not the other way around.

What does the "Gorbachev phenomenon" explain, then? That the revolution took place in 1989 rather than ten years later is certainly in part due to the changes in Moscow. In addition, one can say that pressure or permission from Gorbachev helped to steer the changes in Poland toward a political resolution (Round Table and elections). This latter effect is the more important; as Chirot notes,<sup>7</sup> the revolution would have happened even without Gorbachev (only later); from the perspective of ten years later, one might argue that the revolution, as the new activists imagined it, was derailed by Gorbachev's influence on General Jaruzelski.

The second factor commonly cited is the dramatic breakdown of the economy (and the environment). This factor is of unquestioned importance; the problem is that it helps us to understand (though not by itself) only one small part of the revolution: the weakness of the state and its lack of legitimacy. This is obviously important; it is equally obviously an insufficient explanation for the nature of the revolutionary change which took place in 1989. Chirot, for example, posits a two-stage process: first, the will of those in power is sapped; then "massive popular discontent...could come into the streets."<sup>8</sup> How such discontent could transform into action, and whether such action itself played a role in sapping the will of the regime, are questions left unanswered in this model.

The last of three most commonly-cited factors, the deal made at the Round Table, I understand to mean the decisive role of democratic intellectuals. Yet it is clear from accounts of the Round Table negotiations that the context of rising societal dissatisfaction and engagement was one of the strongest arguments the opposition leaders had -- though they were not in control of those social forces.<sup>9</sup> The greatest shortcoming of this explanation is that it makes it difficult to understand the return of the post-communists and the fracturing of the democratic forces so soon after 1989. While these events are not the subject of this project, a focus on the new wave of social movements before 1989 alerts us to the range of goals and strategies in Polish society well before democracy was achieved.

Without each of these factors, the revolution in Eastern Europe could not have happened; with all of them together, however, we still do not have enough information to understand the revolution. What, then, did the new activism accomplish? How did it pave the way for the 1989 revolution?

Above all, the new movements rescued Polish society from the apathy and fear it had retreated to by 1985. Cultural or symbolic resistance, so effective during martial law, were by now

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<sup>7</sup>Daniel Chirot, "What Happened in Eastern Europe in 1989," in *The Crisis of Leninism and the Decline of the Left: The Revolutions of 1989*, ed. Daniel Chirot (Seattle, 1991), 19.

<sup>8</sup>*Ibid.*, 21.

<sup>9</sup>See Bronislaw Geremek, *Rok 1989 & Bronislaw Geremek opowiada, Jacek Zakowski pyta* (Warsaw, 1990), 78.

contributing to a re-atomization of society, and active opposition was becoming a part of legend. Activists in many of the movements I am studying talked of "fighting fear" and breaking down isolation: the fear of the veteran of Siberian exile who had not spoken of her experiences for forty years; the isolation of the small-town student who wanted to avoid the army but did not know how; the helplessness of the Solidarity activist in a factory who wanted to help the workers right now, not someday when the communists would be overthrown. With the exception of the last case, this often meant reaching new people who had never before been involved, either because they were too young to have experienced free Solidarity, or because the slogans of the political underground seemed empty to them.

The new activism showed that change *was* possible. A polluting factory could be closed; a repressive law could be changed; one could organize a cultural event without the approval of the high-school principal or stage political theater in the streets in safety; workers could put pressure on management without resorting to hated government unions; a battered woman or a young junkie or a destitute elderly couple could get help without selling their souls. Each individual case contributed to a growing empowerment (re-empowerment) of society. As people ceased to fear the state, and to believe that change was possible, they acquired the necessary equipment to put their faith in Solidarity and its candidates in the 1989 election. They probably acquired the ability to participate in a different kind of revolution, too -- but that revolution did not happen.

Even as the new activism changed society, it also weakened the state. Often operating along the edge between legality and illegality, and between politics and social issues, these movements destroyed the state's ideological pretensions and exposed both its hypocrisy and its weakness. Traditionally political movements, and Solidarity itself, opposed the state on issues where there could be no common ground -- Poland's sovereignty and its relation with the Soviet Union, or the legality of martial law. They thus did not change popular attitudes toward the regime. New movements exposed the hypocrisy of the regime's professed love of peace, for example, or ridiculed the symbolism of communist anniversaries, or dispelled the illusion that in socialist Poland there was no domestic violence, no ecological disaster, no drug problem. As people became aware of these problems *and* discovered ways to resolve (or at least address) them without the state's help, the state was irreversibly weakened.

A third way in which some movements brought about 1989 was the way they crossed borders to spread their tactics and ideas to other East European societies. The Freedom and Peace seminars attended by Hungarian, Czech, East German, and Slovenian activists in 1987 and 1988; the 1987 ETAP conference in Warsaw for East European gay activists; the borrowing of Orange Alternative ideas by ecology activists in Ukraine; the festival of Czech culture organized by Polish-Czechoslovak Solidarity in October 1989 in Wroclaw -- each did more than simply broach barriers carefully guarded by the regimes of the Soviet Bloc; they also conveyed the valuable knowledge of the Polish

opposition to less experienced activists in more repressed countries. The revolution in each country, of course, had its own logic, and it is difficult to measure the value of these contacts; nevertheless, the contacts with Poland certainly played a role throughout the bloc.

The new movements also help to explain the style of the revolutions. Their light-hearted, ironic, "velvet" nature has often been commented upon; it seems to be either evidence of the rise of a "civil society"<sup>10</sup> or the result of the "benevolent neutrality" of the elites.<sup>11</sup> While the latter discounts *a priori* the possibility that "benevolent neutrality" was instead forced by new types of social protest, the former raises the question of the origin of the repertoires of protest used. The style of the new activism, stressing non-violence toward concrete and imaginable goals, and affecting a satirical view of all trappings of power, was a product of some lessons learned from KOR (see Paoer #3); from Western activists; but most of all from new activists' encounters with the writings of anarchists, of Gandhi and King; and from a simple desire to try tactics different from those of the first Solidarity era. By 1987-88, these new methods had come to seem natural to many in Poland, and even in Prague or Budapest. These were protests one could imagine joining, and thousands did. They followed scripts set not by those who would speak at the election rallies and mass demonstrations, but of the Orange Alternative, Freedom and Peace, and the employee councils.

It may seem strange in a discussion of 1980s Poland to place Solidarity or the Catholic Church in the background, but only thus can we become aware of the rises and declines of these influences, and see the more immediate factors which made the revolution possible. Solidarity in 1985 was not the Solidarity of 1981; in fact, it seemed to many that Solidarity was dead. Much of the debate among leading opposition political theorists was over the appropriateness of a "long march" strategy. Taking this seriously, as most did, meant (although no one at the time said so) the end of Solidarity: whatever would emerge at the end of the long march, it would certainly not be the same Solidarity which began the march -- no more than the Chinese Communist Party which reached Yunan was the same which left Shanghai. The new Solidarity which emerged in 1989 was in large part the product of the new movements.

The Church, in turn, must be at the background of any history of the movements in Poland and beyond. Its role was to provide a context, or the spirit for action. It was usually not the initiator of social movements, but, as with Solidarity, it is difficult to imagine many of the new movements

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<sup>10</sup>This concept, most famously advanced for Eastern Europe by Andrew Arato (in a series of articles in *Telos* 1981-1982) seems to me highly problematic as a conceptual tool for understanding the revolutions, primarily because it does not seem that most movement activists envisioned their participation in such a thing; or if they did, many now feel that civil society was not achieved. However, this remains the most thorny theoretical problem in this research. <sup>10</sup>12

<sup>11</sup>David S. Mason, *Revolution in East-Central Europe: The Rise and Fall of Communism and the Cold War* (Boulder, CO, 1992), 111-12.

emerging or surviving without the help of the Church -- or rather, of individual representatives of the Church.

The new movements of 1985-1988 also help to explain the nature of post-"transition" society. Here, other explanations of change -- Gorbachev, the economy, 'civil society' intellectuals -- fall quite short in explaining two phenomena: the enormous frustration or alienation often observed even in Poland, where society could be said to be rather politically literate; and, on the other hand, the explosion of non-governmental organizations and foundations which are changing the face of these societies today. These two trends are largely contradictory, yet each is easier to understand in the context of the new activism before 1989.

On the one hand, the rapid politicization of change in late 1988 and early 1989 froze and subverted the activism I have described. Activists who found a way to political power (in the elections of June 1989 or May 1990) did so within Solidarity, and therefore had to subordinate their agenda to one only partly of their own making. They -- and their former associates who did not choose to seek political power -- feel uncertain about the link between what they fought for and what they achieved. (There is another type of frustration, rooted in disputes before 1989 over positivist and non-positivist approaches to opposition; this frustration, visible especially in Krakow, is partly related but has had very different, more dramatic consequences.)

On the other hand, the activism of 1985-1989 provided new models of activism and examples of what individuals could achieve. Today's ecological movements, or ad hoc local initiatives, or identity movements, owe much to their pre-1989 predecessors. Participants in the earlier wave, meanwhile, have become local politicians and journalists, or (especially in the case of worker self-government activists) have joined the new middle class of small entrepreneurs. Most see themselves as continuing the work they began a decade or more ago. The new Poland is one which they have built.

## **Part 2: Crisis in the Underground: The Search for New Tactics, 1984-1985**

The winter of 1984-1985 was a low point for underground Solidarity. Polish society had kept its faith in the union through three years of repression, despite the rigors of martial law, the worsening economic situation, and the rapidly receding hope of immediate change. Optimists could point out that the traditional communist post-insurrection tactic of "normalization" -- that is, of defusing and diffusing popular dissatisfaction by offering material incentives for making peace with the regime and creating facade structures of national harmony, while keeping a firm hand on the whip -- had so far failed in Poland, in contrast to Czechoslovakia after the 1968 'Prague Spring' or Hungary after the national revolution of 1956. Solidarity had, in its sixteen months of freedom in 1980-1981, changed people's ways of thinking and acting too deeply for them to embrace a return to

the pre-Solidarity communist format. Yet for most of society, Solidarity was also becoming a legend, a closed chapter in Poland's long history of proud rebellions against dictatorships or repression. Their response to that legend was increasingly ritualized, consisting of, at most, the wearing of pins and attendance at so-called "Fatherland Masses", where participants sang forbidden songs and waved their fingers in the 'V' sign, then went home to 'normal' lives until the next Mass.<sup>12</sup>

Meanwhile, the opposition remained quite active -- powerful, even. One could hardly say it had fallen victim to normalization. Hundreds of underground papers continued to appear, many of them on a regular weekly basis. There were underground book publishers, underground seminars and underground educational institutions, underground stamps, underground theater and music, even underground radio.<sup>13</sup>

Yet there was a hidden dilemma in all of this work, one which very few underground activists considered until after they had won freedom in 1989. It is a problem, indeed, for the student of any revolution or social movement, as well as for participants: to put it starkly, does culture matter? That is, does participation in or attendance at performances, or the reading and writing of material banned by a repressive government constitute resistance, and in some way further the cause? The cultural studies tradition in recent Western scholarship is built in part on the premise that "symbolic resistance" matters. Yet can listening to a punk song, or reading (or publishing) a poem inspire people to participate in opposition, or does it merely confirm views of the regime? Worse, what happens if people decide that reading that poem -- and treasuring the underground monthly in which it appears -- is a sufficient political act unto itself, and that more risky forms of opposition are best left to others? Symbolic resistance of this sort was essential in the long century of Poland's occupation by Russia, Germany, and Austria (1795-1918) -- but were opposition leaders in the 1980s prepared to wait another 123 years for freedom?

A second, even greater immediate problem was that there was almost no way for the underground to attract new participants. Those who had not been active in 1980-1981 were hardly likely to become involved now, when the risks were much greater. And for the new generation which had witnessed the first Solidarity revolution in grade school, the concerns of the "adult opposition" (as it came to be called by the so-called "generation of '88") were hard to understand, marked as they were not only by the scars of 1980-81, but also those of the student revolt of 1968 and the worker uprisings of 1970 and 1976. Many had learned their political lessons from activist parents, but it was difficult to apply these lessons in the real world of work and school. At best,

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<sup>12</sup>For a perceptive analysis of the ritualization of support for Solidarity, see Ireneusz Krzeminski, *Czy Polska po Solidarnosci? Tresci swiadomosci spolecznej i postawy ludzi* (Warsaw, 1989), 30-37.

<sup>13</sup>For an overview, see *Reinventing Civil Society: Poland's Quiet Revolution, 1981-1986*, A Helsinki Watch Report (New York, 1986).

Solidarity was stagnant, collecting dues and distributing literature to a committed but slowly eroding group of supporters.

Two events in winter of 1984-85 heightened this sense of crisis. The first was the kidnapping and murder of Father Jerzy Popieluszko by secret policemen in October 1984. An event which shocked the whole world, it reinforced society's ritualized attitude toward opposition. Fr. Popieluszko had been one of the leading practitioners of Fatherland Masses, in his church in a working-class neighborhood in the north of Warsaw. Though his sermons clearly contained a call to action, they were for most listeners simply the most powerful expression of the new opposition ritual. His death was therefore interpreted the same way: he was a martyr whose death confirmed the futility of open opposition to the communist regime. Even the unprecedented spectacle of the trial of the policemen connected with the murder did nothing to change this, for the communists simply gave notice in this way that they would handle problems within their ranks by themselves.<sup>14</sup>

It seems fair to say that most of the active opposition resigned itself to this marginalization of society. The underground press condemned the Jaruzelski regime in the harshest terms possible, but it also emphasized society's powerlessness against a state capable of such horrible acts. It could offer no plan of action for those who felt a need to respond.

If the first event reaffirmed the state's power, the second exposed Solidarity's weakness. In February 1985, the government announced price hikes to take effect shortly. While these price hikes were not of the magnitude which had provoked the uprisings of December 1970, June 1976, or August 1980, they did represent a return to traditional regime practice of forcing through painful economic change with only a charade of 'consultation' with society. In response, Lech Walesa and the Solidarity leadership called for a brief nationwide work stoppage to take place February 28 at noon. This was the first attempt since 1982 at any national coordinated action, and factory activists throughout the country began to prepare feverishly for this test of workers' commitment to the union.

At the last moment, however -- the night before the strike was to take place -- Walesa called off the strike. The government had agreed to rescind or ease some -- but not all -- of the price hikes. On the one hand, this was a success for Solidarity: it had forced the government to back down, and to acknowledge Solidarity's continued influence on society even as it continued its attacks on its activists (indeed increased the pressure, through a spectacular arrest of three leading Solidarity figures, Wladyslaw Frasyniuk, Bogdan Lis, and Adam Michnik, that same month).<sup>15</sup> This is the position taken today even by most factory activists of the time. On the other, Solidarity in a sense echoed the government's tactic by calling off the strike without consulting its membership

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<sup>14</sup>Krzeminski, 35.

<sup>15</sup>See Jerzy Holzer and Krzysztof Leski, *Solidarnosc w podziemiu* (Warsaw, 1990).

(admittedly a near impossibility) and thus highlighted the gap between leadership and rank-and-file. Moreover, the union wasted an opportunity to discover the depth of support and commitment it still enjoyed, and to reveal this power (should it still exist) to society and to the communists.

For a minority in the opposition, the Popieluszko murder (and, though less consciously, the failed strike, especially for older activists) suggested a need for a radical break with current underground practice. (It should be remembered that 'liberalization' was nowhere in sight; Konstantin Chernenko was still doddering on in the Kremlin, while the rhetoric of the Polish communists was considered by some to echo that of high Stalinism thirty years earlier.<sup>16</sup>) Each found a different solution to this problem; the result was the emergence of a new wave of opposition which, though radically different from Solidarity practice of the preceding three years, did hark back to earlier traditions, in particular that of the Workers' Defense Committee (KOR) in the late 1970s. Just as KOR's emergence was a decisive step toward Solidarity's success in 1980, so too this new opposition was vital to the success of the revolution in Poland in 1989.

Zygmunt Lenyk, a Krakow psychologist, was among a group of professionals (especially lawyers) who chose a similar tactic beginning a few months earlier. The Committee for the Protection of Legality (KOP), formed in Krakow in response to the Popieluszko murder, was the first time since martial law began three years earlier that activists other than Solidarity leadership signed their names -- and addresses -- to bulletins and appeals. This was nothing new -- members of KOR, Solidarity's ancestor, had done the same in the late 1970s. The dual goal of such a tactic -- to show other people that there was nothing to fear in honesty, and to convey information on where to turn for help -- was essentially the same. Yet the contrast with the vast majority of the opposition was striking.<sup>17</sup> Members of KOP were among the founders, in early 1985, of what was to become the most powerful above-ground opposition movement, Freedom and Peace (WiP).

Jerzy Zurko, a Wroclaw student activist, had gone to jail in 1984 for his work in the underground. Almost alone among his colleagues, he felt that the underground was no longer viable in the context of the Popieluszko and other murders, and began to search for a new strategy. His first direction was toward the philosophy of non-violence and civil disobedience, espoused by a group around Fr. Ludwik Wisniewski (who had played an important part in encouraging new thinking in the opposition in Gdansk in the 1970s), and inspired in part by Eastern philosophy and the writings of Martin Luther King and Gandhi. He soon found his way to WiP.<sup>18</sup>

Another student from Wroclaw, Jaroslaw Obremski, was less certain, but found he had no choice: the government's tactic of frequent amnesties (a common component of normalizations) was quite effective in splitting the opposition, as those released from jail could not easily return to the

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<sup>16</sup>Michaz Gzowacki, *Mowa stanu oblezenia*, Warsaw, 1996.

<sup>17</sup>Interview with Zygmunt Lenyk, Krakow, 12 January 1997.

<sup>18</sup>Interview with Jerzy Zurko, Wroclaw, 23 November 1996.

underground for fear of leading the police to their colleagues. Like many others, Obremski had been 'outed', and had to find a way to reconcile his desire to continue active opposition with the constraints of life above ground. He at first turned to organizing independent cultural events (concerts of underground songs, or lectures on historical or ethical issues, for example) in a semi-official student club.<sup>19</sup>

In the factories, some Solidarity leaders began to answer the question of what to do as early as the fall of 1984. Anastazja Konieczna, Solidarity head (and thus underground) in the River Shipyard in Wrocław, simply decided that someone would have to try to work within the official Employees' Council for which elections were being held. Most in Solidarity felt that participation meant collaboration, but Konieczna wanted to win concessions for her co-workers -- to do things, in other words, which her union would do if it were legal. She ran and won a seat which she kept even as she continued to direct her union local and to produce single-handedly the Shipyard's underground paper. This double role was almost an impossible one, and led to her arrest and firing less than a year later.<sup>20</sup>

Pawel Gross had been in a wheelchair since a mine accident almost fifteen years earlier. It was far more difficult to be an activist in a city like Jastrzebie Zdroj which, without a university or an archdiocese, lacked any protective intermediary between society and the state. Underground Solidarity had almost disappeared throughout the Upper Silesian mines. Yet Gross, too, decided after Popieluszko's murder that enough was enough, and helped to found the Committee for Assistance to the Retired and the Disabled. As another founder, Henryk Wojtala, put it, "we bet on courage" (*mysmy sie postanowili na te odwage*). The Committee issued appeals about the status of pensions and tried, informally, to advise pensioners of their rights.<sup>21</sup>

The underground did not, of course, cease to exist. In fact, it was still of enormous importance till the very end of communism. First, the image of the underground fighter continued to have a strong hold on the public imagination. While enthusiasm for the inconveniences of the underground -- offering one's apartment for the use of printers or for a clandestine meeting, for example -- had faded by 1985, the courage of the underground still commanded respect, and was a key part of Solidarity's image. Secondly, the aboveground activities simply could not survive without the underground. Konieczna's authorship of the underground paper, for example, remained a complete secret, even to colleagues in Solidarity in the factory. Even Freedom and Peace, for whom openness was an article of faith, kept its printing presses -- and the identities of its printers -- secret. KOP, meanwhile, solved this problem (unfortunately for the historian) by publishing no newspaper at all.

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<sup>19</sup>Interview with Jaroszaw Obremski, Wrocław, 23 January 1997.

<sup>20</sup>Interview with Anastazja Konieczna, Wrocław, 3 January 1997.

<sup>21</sup>Interviews with Pawez Gross, Jastrz"bie Zdr[j], and Henryk Wojtala, Wodzisław Íl'ski, 22 February 1997.

Like printing presses and paper, money was also liable to confiscation, and was kept secret in all these cases.

It is important to note that none of the activists described above chose to work directly within the structures of Solidarity, though all felt some connection to Solidarity, and some depended upon Solidarity's resources. One reason for this distance was that Solidarity already existed underground. Therefore, those who would work openly as members of Solidarity had to contend with, besides the threat of rearrest for illegal activity, the need to coordinate tactics and actions with the underground. This often proved impossible, both due to the dangers of exposing the underground and to mistrust on the part of underground leaders. At least at first, therefore, amnestied Solidarity leaders like Stanislaw Handzlik in Krakow and Wladyslaw Frasyuniuk in Wroclaw -- both men of enormous moral and organizational authority -- were hampered by a frustrating protective wall, erected both by the police and by the Solidarity underground itself. The regime seemed to have played many (certainly not all) of its political cards right by late 1985: most of the opposition had adopted a defensive stance, and most of society had either become passive consumers of resistance symbols or had closed that chapter in their lives entirely. The several dozen veterans who would push for change were tightly controlled by the police and feared by society. Frasyuniuk recalls that for nearly a year after his release from prison in 1986, virtually no one from Solidarity dared approach him on the street or call on him at home. The only ones who dared were the young people of WiP.<sup>22</sup>

What Frasyuniuk and Solidarity needed was a bridge between Solidarity and society, one which would help revive the mass engagement of 1980-81. What they got was a multitude of bridges, each of which helped to breach that isolation locally and reestablish Solidarity as not simply a legend, but a living, active force in Polish society.

### **Part 3: The Freedom and Peace Movement**

No single movement in Eastern Europe better makes the case that newly-emergent social movements helped to make the revolution of 1989 possible than the Freedom and Peace movement (WiP) in Poland. Though it was the most dynamic and effective force on the Polish political scene for at least two crucial years, it has received little attention either in Poland<sup>23</sup> or in the West, and it is still poorly understood.

Time has passed at blinding speed since WiP's founding, and the movement is long gone, its participants having departed in often completely opposite directions. Nonetheless, WiP had an enormous impact on the tactics of the Polish opposition and attitudes towards communist power and

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<sup>22</sup>Interview, Wladyslaw Frasyuniuk, Wroclaw, 29 January 1997.

<sup>23</sup>There is one secondary work on WiP, an undergraduate thesis written by a participant shortly after WiP's demise: Maciej Sliwa, "Ruch 'Wolnosc i Pokoj' 1985-1989", (Uniwersytet Jagiellonski, 1992).

the potential for change. Second, it introduced powerful new mobilizing issues into political discourse, drawing new supporters into the opposition orbit and shaping the nature of political discourse for a new generation of activists until today. Third, it identified and attacked particularly vulnerable areas of the communist system, contributing in this way to the weakening of the system. Fourth, it fostered new political opposition in other Eastern European countries, which thus benefited from WiP's experience.

WiP was possible thanks to a coincidence of disparate, almost contradictory influences which arose independently in the dark period after Father Popieluszko's murder. One might say that a movement like WiP -- representing the "post-Solidarity" generation, and raising issues heretofore neglected -- was inevitable by this time. Yet the power and precision of WiP's assault on the communist regime was anything but foreordained, and was thanks both to its unusual ancestry and to the creative talents of its founders.

Even as Solidarity was forming, a handful of people, some close to Solidarity and in particular a predecessor, the Student Solidarity Committee (SKS -- an ally of the Workers' Defense Committee [KOR] in Warsaw, Krakow, and Wroclaw in the years 1977-1980) and others only distantly connected to Solidarity but with their roots in the Polish hippie culture of the 1970s, had begun to view opposition to the army of the Polish People's Republic as a logical consequence of anti-communism, pacifism, or both. This distinction was an important one, which would later be a source of WiP's power, though it also meant constant strains within the movement. Some felt that military formations were necessary; they objected principally to the oath required.<sup>24</sup> For this reason, WiP should not be described as a 'pacifist' group, as it usually is.

For each conscientious objector, refusal to serve or take the oath was an individual decision which did not generally meet with much understanding from the rest of the opposition. Leszek Budrewicz, the architect of Wroclaw's WiP circle, refused to take the military oath in 1980, inspired in part by his SKS colleague in Warsaw, Roland Kruk (now a truck driver in the US), who had refused to take the military oath a year earlier.<sup>25</sup> Like others in Wroclaw, Budrewicz was influenced by the non-violence or civil disobedience ideas propagated both within the church and out. The first documented case of refusing military service altogether was that of Wojciech Jankowski, a leading figure in the Alternative Society Movement (RSA), a Gdansk-based anarchist group. Though

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<sup>24</sup>It is worth noting that this oath was particularly important to university students, who became a sort of reserve officer corps upon graduating. Those who did not go to college -- and only a small percentage of secondary-school graduates attend university -- usually entered Basic Service, for which such an oath was not required. This fact, along with the fact that Poles consider the military as a repository (even under communism) of the national spirit, helps to explain why WiP remained a movement dominated by students.

<sup>25</sup>Interview, Leszek Budrewicz, Wroclaw, 5 November 1996.

his refusal to serve came only in 1985, after WiP's founding, he had made his intentions plain since RSA emerged two years earlier.<sup>26</sup>

Meanwhile, a group of Krakow lawyers and underground politicians and activists had formed the Committee for the Protection of Legality (KOP). This was both a hearkening back to the original method of opposition exemplified by KOR in the 1970s -- documenting government repression and helping its victims -- and the logical next step for those who had been condemning the martial-law regime and wanted to do more. KOP participants shared common goals and (unlike WiP) broadly common political views. Some, like Stanislaw Handzlik and Edward Nowak, both from the Lenin steelworks at Nowa Huta, were Solidarity leaders now "sentenced to openness" after being released from jail. Others, like Zygmunt Lenyk and Ryszard Bocian, were professionals active in the underground political party Confederacy for an Independent Poland (KPN), a right-wing party formed in 1979 by Leszek Moczulski. They were joined by a younger generation (including Jan Maria Rokita, Radoslaw Huget, and Bogdan Klich) associated either with SKS or its 1980-81 successor, the Independent Students' Union (NZS).

The catalyst for all these disparate political interests to come together was the arrest and sentencing of Marek Adamkiewicz, a Szczecin student who had been a member of SKS in Wroclaw, for refusing the military oath. Unlike in the earlier cases mentioned above, the authorities reacted harshly, sentencing Adamkiewicz on December 8, 1984, to two and a half years in prison. Friends in Warsaw organized a week-long hunger strike in a church in nearby Podkowa Leśna in March 1985. Meanwhile, KOP organized a 'rotating' hunger strike in the church in Biechanow outside Krakow, to protest both Adamkiewicz's sentence and other examples of the regime's harder line against opposition activists. Both initiatives owed much to the inspiration of Jacek Kuros. Kuros, the foremost strategic thinker in KOR and Solidarity, had come around to the necessity of more concrete, above-ground action. Though he felt the initiative should come from others, he encouraged people like Budrewicz, Jacek Czaputowicz (an NZS leader in Warsaw), and Handzlik to pursue such a plan.

The origins of WiP are significant in that they clearly call into question a common assumption about the fall of communism: that liberalization of the regime, and in particular the arrival of Gorbachev, made democratic activism once again conceivable. First, WiP (and before it, KOP) emerged before Gorbachev came to power. Moreover, they were responses to increased repression, and not to relaxed controls. Later on, the amnesties of political prisoners and other 'liberal' actions on the part of the communists would encourage WiP to intensify its activity. However, one can attribute that minimal liberalization in part to the pressure which WiP (among others) placed upon the regime. No less a figure than Jerzy Urban, then government press spokesman -- and thus the

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<sup>26</sup>Interview, Wojciech Jankowski, *Czarne*, 29 June 1997.

author of much anti-WiP counter-propaganda -- now admits that WiP itself (and not some internal liberalization of party or army) was responsible for its victories.<sup>27</sup>

Freedom and Peace can not be called an organization, and it had no 'members'. The only structure in the movement was a foundation (based in Warsaw, with representatives from each circle) which dispersed money (from Solidarity, or from Western sources) to various circles; another 'structure' was WiP's network of twenty-five or more publications. Estimates of active participants in the movement range from 200-500, with major circles in Krakow, Wroclaw, and Gdansk, and large ones in Warsaw, Gorzow, and Szczecin.

From its founding declaration, signed by 20 students in Krakow on April 14, 1985 (and by another 15 from Warsaw and Wroclaw two weeks later), it was clear that WiP was not like other anti-military or peace organizations, such as those in the West. Polish specifics aside, this was largely because the realities of communist rule, even in the post-martial law period, made the unity of opposition more important than programmatic differences. This, after all, was in keeping with the practice of Solidarity itself, especially during its first, legal phase. Within WiP, anarchists and radical socialists worked together with christian democrats and members of KPN. Freedom and Peace was divided, if at all, not by positions on issues but by tactics. What we might call 'idealists' (dominant in Wroclaw and Gdansk) focused upon the issues -- the military oath, alternative military service, or, later, ecological issues -- and believed that resolving these would make for a better society. 'Instrumentalists' -- a tendency which dominated the Krakow circle, and was also strong in Warsaw -- considered the issues to be of secondary importance, except as weapons with which to attack the regime.

The weapons WiP chose were well-picked. Each had the virtue of seeming to agree with basic tenets of doctrine or of law in the Polish People's Republic, yet were postulates to which the authorities could not easily agree without weakening their hold over society. To put this another way, each drove a wedge between the state and its ideology, forcing the regime either to admit that it had no ideological justification or to resort to sheer force to stay in power. Each was also fundamentally appealing to large social groups, and was easy for the average citizen to comprehend.

The first of these, as already mentioned, was the problem of the military oath. The oath included a declaration of fealty to the Soviet Union as well as to the "government of the Polish People's Republic" (that is, not to the nation or state or people). While there had been occasional protests before, as noted earlier, WiP's genius was to recognize that coordinated protest could force

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<sup>27</sup>Interview, Jerzy Urban, Warsaw, 17 June, 1997. Another example of such direct effect came in September 1986, after the government amnestied "all" political prisoners, leaving however two WiP participants, Jaroslaw Nakielski and Wojciech Jankowski in prison. Against the advice of Solidarity leaders, WiP staged a sit-in in downtown Warsaw on October 3, before Western cameras. Though all participants were detained and fined, Jankowski was released from prison the next day, and Nakielski two weeks later.

the authorities to reveal its hypocrisy: if the Jaruzelski regime really valued Poland's strength above all, as it constantly declared throughout the 1980s, then it could not object to young men who expressed their willingness to fight for Poland yet who desired a slightly different oath. As more than one WiP participant expressed it, the idea was in part to show other Poles to what absurd lengths the communist regime was willing to go, and how empty its nationalist slogans really were.

The demand for alternative service had similar power -- though it ran greater risk of offending those Poles who regarded military service as either a national obligation or a test of manhood, or both. First, Polish law did theoretically allow for Conscientious Objector status, though this was almost never granted. Second, petitioners pointed to the Polish constitution's protection of the freedom of conscience, and frequently based their request on religious grounds. Third, petitioners emphasized their desire to work in health care or social work in place of military service. Even more than the military oath question, the conscientious objector issue invoked the spirit of the Helsinki Accords. Those arrested or sentenced for refusing military service were not, in WiP parlance, "political prisoners," but "prisoners of conscience." Indeed, WiP for a time produced and edited an Amnesty International Newsletter for Poland.

The third major issue to be embraced by Freedom and Peace was the environment, specifically industrial pollution. The first protests -- and the longest campaign -- opposed the building of Poland's first nuclear power plant at Zarnowiec, just outside Gdansk, as well as plans for two other nuclear plants. These protests gathered speed after the Chernobyl explosion: an issue which had seemed rather distant to most Poles suddenly became very frightening, and participation in WiP demonstrations soared. As a result, protests against plans for dumping of radioactive waste near Miedzyszcz were the most powerful and popular of all WiP campaigns, with participation in marches of over 10,000.

Ecological issues illustrate the decentralized yet coordinated nature of WiP's campaigns. Defense of imprisoned conscientious objectors -- or of colleagues arrested for demonstrating -- involved the entire WiP community speaking with one voice in a common protest. Environmental protests, in contrast, were generally local: Gdansk coordinated the Zarnowiec protests, Gorzow and Poznan organized the protests at Miedzyszcz, and the Wroclaw circle conducted monthly marches to call for the closing of a metallurgical plant at Siechnice which was poisoning the city's water supply. Yet each of these causes received support -- publicity in WiP papers or attendance at local demonstrations -- from other circles. The broad acceptance of overarching goals and a generally common lifestyle meant that, within reason, any member might propose an issue and count on local and even national support in carrying out protests.

In every single campaign which I have mentioned here, Freedom and Peace was successful. The military oath was changed in June 1988; one month later, the Polish parliament amended the law on universal military service. The Zarnowiec plant and the factory at Siechnice were scrapped,

and plans for other nuclear reactors were shelved, as was the radioactive waste dump at Miedzyszec. All of these decisions were made, or at least began, during communist rule, and regarded issues which, with the possible exception of the Siechnice factory, gained the government nothing for its retreat. How can one explain the enormous success of this small group of students, at a time when Solidarity could boast of nothing more than an occasional seat on a powerless advisory board?

As a starting point, one should note the striking similarities between WiP and the Workers' Defense Committee (KOR) a decade earlier. Each was born among the *inteligencja* during a crisis period of heightened repressions, and focused in part on righting the wrongs of the regime. Each stressed openness and a loose structure. Each, it might be argued, helped to shape the forms of opposition in the latter part of their respective decades. It is more difficult to compare their outcomes, of course. At this point, I would argue that while Solidarity in 1980 followed roughly along paths laid down by KOR, and the regime did not make other directions possible, the potential for a similar scenario was eliminated when the Party opted for a political solution in late 1988.<sup>28</sup>

As with KOR, WiP's success was largely due to its tactics. First, WiP was well coordinated, and used the media well. Every protest, no matter how small, reached Warsaw and Radio Free Europe immediately. This was standard practice in Solidarity as well, but WiP was, until the rise of Orange Alternative in the summer of 1987 and then the strikes of 1988, the only opposition producing newsworthy events. Moreover, WiP events were often spectacular -- participants climbed building scaffoldings (once even chaining themselves to a scaffolding) to hang banners or scatter leaflets, or marched with their trademark slogan: "Come With Us! They're not Beating Today!"

Second, WiP influenced not only their "constituents" (high school and college students) but also the police. Whether due to belief in the practice of non-violence or a perception that the police were unimportant in the face of higher goals, WiP participants did not call the police "Gestapo" or even resist arrest. They also held the police accountable: in separate cases in 1986 and 1987, Agata Michalek and Jan Maria Rokita of Krakow each won cases against the police for unlawful mistreatment.<sup>29</sup> It was still common for a demonstration to end with police beatings, and detentions were a matter of course until the end, but WiP participants generally reported more polite treatment from the police.<sup>30</sup> One can suppose that this relationship (which would reach a new stage with the Orange Alternative in 1987-1988) helped to lessen one of the gulfs which divided Polish society.

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<sup>28</sup>Some in WiP (the 'instrumentalists') welcomed this development and called for WiP's dissolution; those who remained pushed WiP ever farther toward the counterculture. KOR and WiP have also suffered similar fates: KOR was pushed aside by Solidarity and closed in 1981; WiP suffered a similar fate in 1990-91 when some of its most prominent participants, now in government, repudiated some of WiP's ideals.

<sup>29</sup>Interview, Agata Michalek-Budzicz, Krakow, 17 January 1997.

<sup>30</sup>Interview, Grzegorz Francuz, Rybnik, 20 February 1997.

Most important, however, was the way in which WiP changed popular perceptions of the regime. While no one in Poland liked it by 1985, it was certainly seen as both hermetic and very dangerous. WiP showed, first, that its ideology was full of holes, as mentioned above. It also showed that while the regime would go to ridiculous lengths to protect itself, there were people who were not afraid to risk the consequences -- and that the consequences were not that terrible, either. It is impossible to measure the extent to which the regime was prepared to give up on its ideology as a result of WiP's critique, or the extent to which witnesses to WiP's actions felt somehow empowered by what they saw. Nevertheless, the nature of WiP successes leaves no doubt that it played a powerful role in the ending of communism in Poland.

#### **Part Four: The Self-Governing Republic: Underground Democracy in Poland's Factories, Schools, and Villages**

Once upon a time, they dreamed of a "Self-Governing Chamber" in parliament, a body consisting of representatives of self-governed entities -- factories, cities, and villages and having control over the national economy. Instead of this, of course, Poland now has a Senate in which candidates are nominated by political parties and run on party platforms and are elected by the people. This is not the "workers' democracy" which the slogan "Self-Governing Republic" -- popularized at Solidarity's first national congress in 1981 -- implied.

The utopian dreams of East Europeans before and during 1989 -- that the world could be made more moral, that one could do away with politics, etc. -- seem today nowhere more frankly unrealistic than among the advocates of worker self-government. By the late 1980s, it would be hard to find advocates of self-government anywhere in the bloc (outside of the Soviet Union) except Poland; in Hungary and Yugoslavia, the concept had become so bureaucratized by the 1980s as to lose its charm for the independent thinker or the activist worker. The idea that workers would govern or own their factories is of course central to the dream of a "Third Way" between communism or capitalism.

Except for those few self-government activists who have become proponents of American ESOP-style privatization, no one in Eastern Europe still takes the ideas of the self-government movement seriously anymore. However, those who would dismiss the self-government experiments as misguided, utopian, and unrealistic seriously misrepresent the actual experiments, and greatly underestimate their importance. The most dramatic examples of the self-government idea were also its least important (though their proponents sometimes considered them key). The macro-political ideas which self-government activists espoused bore little relation, however, to the actual impact of self-government initiatives, which did much to change the face of Polish activism in the 1980s. In

fact, the Polish self-government movement was a crucial link in overcoming the psychological and organizational barriers to change in Polish society.

As much as the first generation of activists concentrated almost entirely on the factories, the new generation of the mid-1980s saw self-government in a much broader perspective. Some worked on student self-government, others on self-government in the high schools, and others on village- or district-level bodies. As one student activist (also an underground consultant to employee self-government) explained, such initiatives all sought simply to widen the space of freedom which each individual had.<sup>31</sup> The purpose of self-government was not really to control the country, or the economy, but to achieve the same goal (an end to state control over society) by incremental steps. In this sense, and seen in this broader context, we must say that the self-government movement succeeded, and indeed made 1989 possible.

A sizable minority of activists in the Solidarity trade union in 1980-81 advocated worker self-government. Most were representatives of the largest factories; some of these came together in the Spring of 1981 in the Network (*Siec*) of Leading Factories, which encouraged the formation of worker councils (called employee councils in an effort to distinguish them from earlier communist-controlled councils), worked on drafts of the law authorizing such councils and, last but not least, provided a means for activists throughout the country to communicate.<sup>32</sup> The principal objection to self-government was a fear among many in Solidarity that the union was too young, and faced too formidable an opponent, to be able to afford to support two separate bodies in the factories. It was possible that self-government activists would become absorbed in the day-to-day workings of the factory, to the detriment of their work as union activists. Some feel that this is exactly what happened.

The same fears emerged even more strongly when the regime allowed for the revival of employee councils in 1983. If Solidarity activists -- who were far fewer now, after two years of martial law -- were to enter these councils by standing for election on terms set by factory directors and campaigning publicly for a position -- how could they continue their allegiance to the union? Worse, why would anyone want to continue to pay dues to Solidarity if he or she saw that the good guys were now in the Employees' Council? All that Solidarity could offer was some underground literature and souvenirs, plus limited social insurance (payments for sickness, funerals, births, etc.). An employees' council could offer much more: a position from which to negotiate with factory management over wages, benefits, and work conditions, as well as an opportunity to influence the management of the firm (this last seems to be more of an afterthought in the minds of most council

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<sup>31</sup>Interview with Henryk Feliks, Wroclaw, 11 December 1996.

<sup>32</sup>Marcin Chodorowski, *Siec* (Warsaw, 1993); Janusz Lewandowski and Jan Szomburg, *Samorząd w dobie 'Solidarnosci'. Wspolpraca samorządow pracowniczych Pomorza Gdanskiego na tle sytuacji w kraju w latach 1980/81* [London, 1985]; Szymon Jakubowicz, *Bitwa o samorząd 1980-1981* (Warsaw, 1989).

members from Solidarity. In other words, a successful council could fulfill the functions a normal trade union should -- functions Solidarity was prevented from fulfilling and the official unions would not perform. Would it also then replace Solidarity, rendering it irrelevant?

At worst, an employees' council could corrupt: every council-Solidarity activist I have interviewed could tell stories of once-faithful unionists who could soon be seen drinking with the director, going on factory-paid trips, and making more and more compromises with management. These activists were lost to Solidarity, and the workers lost doubly, having in effect squandered their votes and sacrificed their underground representation, too.

In Krakow in particular, Solidarity activists kept arm's length from the council elections. The odd exception, at the Kabel factory, proves the rule. There, radicals from Solidarity (involved with some of the more violent youth demonstrations which marked the Krakow underground) took over in 1983, led by Ryszard Majdzik; they used their positions to organize demonstrations, and were gone within the year.<sup>33</sup> In the Lenin Steel Mill, Marian Kania tried, with inspiration from the Krakow Industrial Society, an underground positivist think tank, to inspire self-government work. He was elected to the council in 1985, but quickly resigned, seeing the whole of Solidarity against him.<sup>34</sup> The steel mill's underground leaders finally embraced the idea of employee councils in early 1988; some of those elected in February played a key role in the strike which erupted two months later, starting the process which led to the Round Table agreement in April 1989. Generally, though, employee councils were seen as an unnecessary diversion.<sup>35</sup>

Nevertheless, some Solidarity activists did make the decision to work above ground, and created "authentic", independent employees councils. Some felt that this was their true calling; others merely wanted to accomplish something concrete while Solidarity was blocked. Their activity had an enormous impact. First, they could demonstrate to employees that one could circumvent both the party and the official union and achieve certain victories -- sometimes greater, sometimes minor. Second, they forced Solidarity itself to rethink its strategy; the union leadership came to realize they could not take even the active membership for granted; by 1988, Solidarity was working harder to meet the short-term needs of workers in ways which made it possible in 1988, as would have been unthinkable in 1985, to demand as a priority the relegalization of Solidarity. Finally, many employee-council activists went on to become entrepreneurs and managers of small private firms; in other words, they joined the new managerial middle class.

Wroclaw was one of the major centers of the employee self-government movement. It had the tacit support of local Solidarity, especially of Jozef Pinior, the Solidarity treasurer and later a

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<sup>33</sup>Interview with Ryszard Majdzik, Krakow, 28 May 1997.

<sup>34</sup>Interview with Marian Kania, 15 January 1997.

<sup>35</sup>Interviews with Maciej Mach, Krakow, 16 January 1997, and Stanislaw Handzlik, 14 January 1997; interview with Janusz Pura, Marek Szczupak, and Andrzej Marciniak, Krakow, 28 May 1997.

founder of the Polish Socialist Party (1987). The movement's stronghold was the Polar factory (which produces large household appliances). There Przemyslaw Boguslawski and Krzysztof Zadrozny, both Solidarity activists in the factory since 1980, took control of the council elections in December 1984 by organizing a boycott of the first round of voting and then submitting a late list of candidates who were elected in the second round. Even some from Solidarity's underground who opposed such "collaboration" were put forward and elected.<sup>36</sup> Council leadership through 1989 was purely Solidarity. The council even attempted, in 1987, to fire the factory director, and frequently protested his decisions to the Ministry of Industry.

It is remarkable that in such an opposition-controlled factory, there were no strikes in May 1988, in contrast to factories where Solidarity was strong and self-government weak which did strike (see Part Five). Zbigniew Kostecki, chair of the Polar council in 1987-90, thinks now that a word from him could have started a strike which might have spread throughout Wroclaw; instead, he let the moment pass.<sup>37</sup> The case of Polar raises the question of whether the self-government movement did turn out as its Solidarity opponents feared. On the other hand, Polar was one of the first factories an above-ground Solidarity reorganized, in the late spring of 1988. The employee council proved to be a way for union activism to survive the difficult years of the mid-1980s.

Kostecki is now the manager of a publishing house partially-owned by Solidarity. Andrzej Piszal, who led the council at Wroclaw's ELWRO computer factory and then formed a nationwide Club of Self-Government Activists (and was elected to parliament in 1989) now heads a small telecommunications firm.<sup>38</sup> Their individual success symbolizes (at the very least) the creation of a new non-communist economic elite; as individuals, they are having roughly the effect on the economy that self-government was supposed to bring about.

They are also affecting Solidarity; Boguslawski, who says he considered himself more of a self-government activist than a unionist, is now the treasurer of Solidarity's Lower Silesian branch. Even before 1989, it was evident that Solidarity was again learning how to work as a union, partly in response to the pressure from employee councils. The move to come out from underground began in 1987; in Wroclaw, led by Zadrozny of Polar. One might even speculate that the growth of Solidarity charities (in particular that led by Kazimierz Fugiel and Zygmunt Ferczyk in Krakow, the Society of Solidarity Assistance) was partly an answer to the challenge of self-government initiatives.

Thinking of Solidarity, we naturally focus on workers. But self-government in other institutions shared the basic goals and functions -- and problems -- of employee councils.<sup>39</sup> In 1983,

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<sup>36</sup>Interview with Przemyslaw Boguslawski and Krzysztof Zadrozny, Wroclaw, 24 January 1997.

<sup>37</sup>Interview with Zbigniew Kostecki, Wroclaw, 11 March 1997.

<sup>38</sup>Interview with Andrzej Piszal, Wroclaw, 19 December 1996.

<sup>39</sup>There were also self-government initiatives in villages, particularly near Krakow, where the Krakow Industrial Society and Edward Nowak, a founding member of Sie: from the Lenin Steel Mill, organized seminars teaching activists in rural areas how they could win more autonomy for their community. Interview with Edward Nowak, Wroclaw, 4 March 1997.

the Ministry of Education passed a new law on student organizations which seemed to permit student self-government. Most student activists were veterans of the now-outlawed Independent Student Union (NZS); they strongly opposed any collaboration with the regime. The few students who did try found endless litigation stretched before them -- until the Ministry again changed the law in 1985 to remove the loophole, and ended attempts at a legal existence. The only organizations left were dormitory clubs which organized occasional cultural events. Some of those active in these clubs, like Krzysztof Jakubczak, a physics student and renowned underground performer (he recorded cassettes of forbidden songs) found they shared a desire to counteract students' growing apathy. They formed "The Twelve" -- three representatives from each school at Wroclaw University except the Law School -- and posted flyers with their names and departments. Though they had no official standing, they were able to meet with the rector and began negotiating a number of issues of importance to students. In the fall of 1986, Jakubczak and Pawel Kocieba, a young history student, tried a new tactic: they commandeered an open-top bus used for sightseeing tours, decorated it with silly slogans, and careened around the city holding impromptu parties (or demonstrations, depending on one's point of view).<sup>40</sup> This was the first surrealist "happening," a full year before Orange Alternative would appear on the scene in Wroclaw and grab world-wide attention. Like Orange Alternative (in which Jakubczak and others from The Twelve participated), they succeeded in breaking down apathy and ridiculing the bureaucracy.

A similar self-government movement emerged in the high schools, where self-government was never outlawed. In the high schools, though, apathy was a much greater problem; students in 1985-1986 had no experience of Solidarity, only of the grim days of martial law. Other than the occasional opportunity to throw rocks at police, few found reason to participate in anything at all. Students searching for something to do soon had a reason to organize: repressive regulations introduced in 1986 mandated school on Saturday, and sanitized the curriculum. With the help of a new underground organization, the Inter-School Resistance Committee (MKO), self-government chairs sponsored a beauty contest with themselves as judges -- and thus could meet without arousing their principals' suspicion. The result was a city-wide boycott of Saturday classes in March, 1987.<sup>41</sup> The apathy was gone; Wroclaw students fueled the massive street demonstrations of 1987 and 1988.

Most of these students are today not involved in politics; what is remarkable is their generally benevolent view of the changes in 1989 and even the return of the communists. As Barbara Wider, leader of student self-government in Lyceum No. 12 in Wroclaw and now a doctoral student in

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<sup>40</sup>Interviews with Krzysztof Jakubczak, Wroclaw, 18 December 1996, and Pawel Kocieba, Wroclaw, 16 December 1996.

<sup>41</sup>Interviews, Slawomir Sobieszek and Pawel Kieruzal, Wroclaw, 9 January 1996, and Barbara Widera, Wroclaw, 27 January 1997.

architecture, explained, "now there are lots of volunteers (for political work), so I can take care of myself."<sup>42</sup>

The contrast with Krakow could not be greater. There, NZS activists scorned above-ground work, and focused on the broader political campaigns of Solidarity. High-school activists in the Federation of Fighting Youth became famous for violent demonstrations (including armed attacks on secret police) which culminated in the demonstrations in front of the Soviet consulate and the Lenin statue at Nowa Huta in 1989 and 1990 which nearly provoked an international crisis. Today, these activists are very much involved in politics (many in the Republican League, a quasi-party on the right) -- and very bitter. They do not feel they have won at all; last year, they pelted the ex-communist Minister of Education with eggs as he visited Krakow. They are still fighting the battles of 1989.<sup>43</sup>

In the contrast between Wroclaw and Krakow students a decade later, we can see the true value of the self-government initiatives. By showing what was possible in an inhospitable world, they taught the art of politics and compromise. Those who participated came away from the communist era not with a sense of enormous frustration and hatred, but with a certain sense of empowerment and a knowledge of what politics can and should not achieve. They are the younger generation, and thus do not dominate the political scene (which is still acrimonious everywhere); their counterparts in the factory are similarly removed from politics as well. As Poland enters its second post-communist decade, one can hope that these will be the people in charge.

### **Part Five: New Movements, Solidarity, and the Strikes of 1988**

The strikes which exploded in many of Poland's key industrial centers in two waves in the spring and summer of 1988<sup>44</sup> were a shock not only to the communist authorities, and to scholars then and now, but also to Solidarity itself. Some strikes began in factories which were Solidarity strongholds -- but without the knowledge of union leaders there. Other strikes began in places where Solidarity was weak -- among workers who did not even know much about Solidarity. The generation gap yawned widely for Barbara Wieland, a nineteen-year-old crane operator at the Lenin Shipyard in Gdansk: "When I came to work at the shipyard in February (1988) and heard that

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<sup>42</sup>Widera, 27 January 1997.

<sup>43</sup>Interviews with Wojciech Polaczek, 11-12 January 1997, and Darius Walusiak, 12 January 1997.

<sup>44</sup>I will treat here the strikes as a group, even though the coal miners' strike (and a partial strike at Nowa Huta) fell four months later, because the first two were not successful. In some way, the first wave of strikes can be said to have led to the third strike; however, more can be learned by considering them as a group of strikes representative of the same phenomenon.

Walesa works here, I burst out laughing, because it seemed to me that Walesa, who is so famous, was in the government, a minister..."<sup>45</sup>

From the perspective of the new movements of 1985-88, the strikes seem less anomalous. A whole generation of young activists had taken the stage in the schools and universities and on the streets since the murder of Father Jerzy Popieluszko. For some Solidarity was an important point of reference; for others, it was just the "adult opposition", and irrelevant unless it was handing out money. It should not be surprising that there should be similar dissatisfaction and distance in factories. Some new movements, especially the reborn Polish Socialist Party, turned particular attention to these workers and gained some popularity. Some WiP activists attempted to organize workers;<sup>46</sup> the Orange Alternative's antics attracted young workers equally with their peers at university. Meanwhile, many factories had been reawakened by tenacious employee councils, which fought for factory independence in ways Solidarity could not. Just like all these new movements, the strikes of 1988 were an assertion of the possible: even as Solidarity leaders repeated stubbornly that it was too soon to strike, and too soon to demand Solidarity's relegalization, these workers demanded it anyway -- and eventually won.

The link between the new wave of activism and the strikes of 1988 is more ambiguous, however. After a brief overview of the strikes, I will discuss ways in which the strikes can be connected with the new grass-roots activism. While new activism can be said to have helped to make the strikes possible in only limited ways, the tenor of the strikes reflected the style and the concerns of the new movements. Secondly, activists from new movements played an important role in assisting the strikes and in helping strikers afterwards, particularly in the fall of 1988. The connection between activism and strikes can best be characterized as the joining of two separate strands, which together exerted a significant influence on the course of events leading to the fall of communism in 1989 and on the post-communist transformation.

The Lenin Steelworks in Nowa Huta, Krakow, were a major Solidarity stronghold. The union boasted not one but several factory newspapers, and its activists dominated regional union leadership. Even after six years in the underground, most workers (an estimated 70%) were still paying union dues. Some protest could be expected after the government once again raises prices sharply in February. Yet the strike was completely unexpected; its instigator was an outsider par excellence, Andrzej Szewczuwaniec, who had once been convicted for trying to blow up Lenin's statue in Nowa Huta. Rumors that he was a secret police plant -- that the regime hoped to defuse Solidarity by calling their bluff and, when such a strike would fail, exposing Solidarity's weakness -- persist to this day, but it is sufficient to notice that Jan Stanecki, who forced the strike in the Lenin Shipyard

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<sup>45</sup>Tomasz Tabako, *Strajk '88* (Warsaw, 1992), 78.

<sup>46</sup>Maciej Ćliwa, "Ruch 'Wolnosc i Pokoj' 1985-1989," (Uniwersytet Jagiellonski, 1992), 69.

in Gdansk (begun May 2, in support of Nowa Huta) and Marek Bartosiak, a leader of the strikes in the coal mines of Jastrzebie in August were similarly outsiders. Neither were well-known to their fellow workers (Bartosiak was not even a miner), yet both were determined to protest and somewhat contemptuous of the caution of their elders. A masterfully coordinated police provocation is much less likely than that all these young men reflected the anger and frustration of those who struck with them.<sup>47</sup>

These young men were exactly the bridge which Solidarity had been looking for. In all three cases Solidarity leaders were involved from early on. News of the strike in Nowa Huta reached Maciej Mach, head of Solidarity in the factory, very quickly; he and his colleagues searched for a way to maneuver the unknown Szewczuwaniec out of the way and put demands for relegalization of Solidarity at the top of the list.<sup>48</sup> An almost identical process took place in Gdansk. In Jastrzebie, it was maverick Solidarity representative Danuta Skorenko from Katowice who found and trained Bartosiak and others; she had to engage in some subterfuge to slip the demand for Solidarity on to the miners' list of demands.<sup>49</sup>

One of the greatest questions about these strikes is why Wroclaw, where new grass-roots activism was strongest, did not see much strike activity in May or in August. The answers are important, for they throw some light on the significance of the new movements which were so strong in Wroclaw, and help to understand the significance of the strikes.

Jacek Suchorowski, Solidarity leader at the Hutmen metal factory and a member of the Polish Socialist Party, which participated in most of the demonstrations that year in Wroclaw, explained: "Who needed strikes, since we had the streets?"<sup>50</sup> In other words, demonstrations and strikes, by 1988, demonstrated opposition, so that strikes would only duplicate efforts. There is an interesting analogy here to the argument that workers' self-government was unnecessary where Solidarity was strong. Both arguments miss the point that people participate in opposition in various ways, so that a multiplicity of forms is likely to be necessary.

A more troubling explanation is that Solidarity's fears about self-government were realized. When Wroclaw Solidarity leader Wladyslaw Frasnyniuk arrived at the Pafawag rail-car factory (Wroclaw's largest factory) on May 3 to agitate for a strike, he was greeted by employee-council chair (and Solidarity activist) Wieslaw Rachwal, who showed him how to sneak into the factory -- but then left, since to be seen with Frasnyniuk could endanger his position.<sup>51</sup> Pafawag did not strike. Nor did Polar, where employee council chair Zbigniew Kostecki addressed a protest demonstration

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<sup>47</sup>Tabako, *Strajk \*88*; interview with Marek Bartosiak and Lech Osiak, Jastrz"bie, 22 February 1997.

<sup>48</sup>Interview with Maciej Mach, Krakow, 16 January 1997.

<sup>49</sup>Interview with Danuta Skorenko, Katowice, 23 February 1997.

<sup>50</sup>Interview with Jacek Suchorowski, Wroclaw, 7 January 1997.

<sup>51</sup>Interview with Wladyslaw Frasnyniuk, Wroclaw, 29 January 1997.

before factory gates. Perhaps Wrocław activists really had lost sight of their priorities, and strayed too far from Solidarity.

Frasyniuk's own explanation is that the police took special care to keep a tight lid on Wrocław. Frasyński and other leaders were so tightly guarded that organizing a strike was almost impossible. It might be added that Wrocław Solidarity was deeply divided, between Frasyński's above-ground faction (dominated by non-workers, especially from Freedom and Peace) and the underground faction, led by Marek Muszyński, a professor at the Polytechnic. The former was somewhat distant from workers; the latter doubted that it was worth exposing carefully protected underground structures by calling a strike<sup>52</sup> (thus a *Szewczuwaniec*, who could call a strike from outside any structure, would have been handy in Wrocław).

But perhaps we can return to the first answer. The original Solidarity was a total movement, whose strength was in unity and coordination. In 1988, the strength of the opposition was in its variety and complexity. Perhaps, then, it was sufficient that some cities strike, while others hold peaceful demonstrations, and achieved very different, though equally necessary goals. While Nowa Huta and Gdansk raised the specter of a return to the working-class unity of 1980, Wrocław's demonstrations exposed the weakness and absurdity of the state. Each, then, needed the other.

The pluralist activist community in Wrocław may even have made it impossible to strike. As Frasyński and Paweł Kociuba (from the 'Twelve' group at the university) agitated for a strike at Pafawag, Józef Pinior and two young women from the Socialist Party were next door at the Dolmel factory. All were long-time friends, and considered themselves part of the same movement community, which accepted different styles or ideologies toward the same goal. Yet it seems this same diversity caused a duplication of efforts; the two teams could have worked together with more impact, yet failed to coordinate.<sup>53</sup>

The strikes of 1988 were very different from their predecessors of 1980-81 in many important ways. Piotr Marciniak has enumerated the changing contexts and factors causing the strikes;<sup>54</sup> here, I want to draw attention to the new style. In Gdansk, workers assembled tanks and water cannons out of styrofoam and paraded them before the police on the other side of the factory gates. The Orange Alternative's surrealist and subversive street cabaret had thus been reinterpreted on the front lines of factory conflict.<sup>55</sup>

In Gdansk, Szczecin, and Krakow, members of WiP proved to be the trained cadres the strikers needed. WiP activists printed strike bulletins, conveyed information to the international

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<sup>52</sup>Interview with Marek Muszyński, Wrocław, 12 March 1997.

<sup>53</sup>Interview with Jolanta Skiba, Wrocław, 30 April 1997.

<sup>54</sup>Piotr Marciniak, "Strajki polskie lat osiemdziesiątych - ciągłość i zmiana," in *Studia nad ruchami społecznymi* vol. 5 (Warsaw, 1990), 7-23.

<sup>55</sup>See Tabako, *Strajk* #88, 293-4.

media, and acted as couriers, slipping through factory gates. Groups of WiP and other activists (including Ryszard Bocian, of Krakow's Committee for the Defense of Legality) traveled to Jastrzebie when the strike began there on August 14, and helped to coordinate the strikes in several mines. On the 25th of August, Freedom and Peace opened an International Human Rights Conference at the church at Mistrzejowice, long a center of opposition activity in Nowa Huta; this became a clearing house for information about the miners' protest. After the strikes, when (despite government assurances that no one would be punished) hundreds of miners were drafted into the army against their will, WiP took the lead in publicizing their cases and offering them assistance.<sup>56</sup>

On the surface, this was nothing new; the strikes of 1980 had also benefited from outside assistance; only the fact that they began during the summer probably prevented wider student support. Yet most members of WiP in Gdansk identified with anarchism; their publication *A cappella* often expressed contempt for Solidarity's traditions of patriotism and Catholicism. It would be difficult to imagine these activists finding common cause with workers, even those from their generation. Yet such an alliance promised to materialize from the strikes. Even in Jastrzebie, where almost everyone worked for the mines, such an alliance emerged as young activists from Katowice, Wroclaw, Krakow and Warsaw, from the Polish Socialist Party, Fighting Solidarity, the Confederation for an Independent Poland, and Freedom and Peace descended on the city. Some stayed for several months; they left behind nascent political organizations and determined activists.<sup>57</sup>

The strikes of 1988 took place in a new context, one built by the new movements which had emerged since Solidarity's last attempt to strike three years earlier. In a sense, they were a product of that new context. While events moved too quickly after the strikes to be able to consider their social ramifications separately, the regime could not but be troubled by the possibility of a generation link being formed between the counter-culture and a new generation of workers with fewer ties to the factory than their elders. Indeed, strikes in 1980 had produced an agreed-upon list of demands, focused on the factory and backed by total unity; in 1988, all the strikes were accompanied by a myriad of opposition groups which used the occasion to voice their own demands; it might be said that while this cacophony lessened the strikes' power, it also increased the sense of a broad social opposition to the regime.

The strikes have left a profound sense of betrayal among those who participated -- in Gdansk, where the shipyard is now closed; in Jastrzebie, where one strike leader hanged himself two years later; in Krakow, where some are still obsessed with the question of police provocation in April

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<sup>56</sup>Documents in WiP archive [uncatalogued], Ossolineum Library, Wroclaw. On the strikes in Szczecin & interviews with Robert Naklicki and Wojciech Wo/niak -- both young WiP activists from Solidarity families -- Szczecin, 5 July 1997.

<sup>57</sup>Interviews with Andrzej Kaminski, Jastrzebie, 21 February 1997 and Pawel Gross, Jastrzebie, 22 February 1997. Also interview with Piotr Ikonowicz, Warsaw, 1 February 1997.

1988. This is in part because the strikes, like the violent protests in Krakow the following year, asked for something which could not be given. Strikers demanded a Solidarity which no longer existed, and economic guarantees which no longer could have any meaning. What they got instead was a political revolution for which none of them were quite ready. That the strikes forced the government (eventually) to the Round Table seems clear; however, the conversation at that table turned in directions unimagined by the strikers, and toward solutions in which the strikers would have no place (though even the Round Table participants did not realize this at the time). In fact, one can conclude that one result of the strikes was a destruction of the working class. Out of the strike of August 1980 there emerged one more-or-less united Polish working class; out of the strikes of 1988 there emerged at best scattered strongholds and a mass of workers who were not prepared to express unity with other workers. Soon, their enthusiasm for Solidarity itself would be cast in doubt.

The strikes of 1988 have thus left behind a mixed legacy. On the one hand, they were of unquestionable importance in destabilizing the regime, in showing that Solidarity had not been defeated, and could still rally large numbers of workers and maybe even paralyze the economy. On the other, it is difficult not to see them as the greatest tragedy of Poland's revolution -- perhaps a tragedy which was inevitable, and even necessary.

## **Appendix: Chapter Outline, Volume I.**

### **Introduction: resources and cultures, c. 1984**

Traditions of dissent; Solidarity, 1980-1985; the emigre community. Solidarity: debates over tactics and role of underground, symbolic resistance, and politics: Fighting Solidarity, Confederation for an Independent Poland (KPN), Independent Union of Students (NZS). Catholic Church (Oazy [youth retreats], Catholic Inteligencja Clubs [KIK]. Subcultures/countercultures (punk, reggae, anarchists [Alternative Society Movement]). Regime normalization: consultative councils, reform programs; significance of Chernobyl.

### **1. Up from the underground, 1985**

Committee for Protection of Legality (KOP); Freedom and Peace (WiP); Committee to Help Retirees and the Disabled.

### **2. The Self-governing Republic**

Self-government in factories, rural communities, universities, high schools, local patriotism; Ladek Zdroj; apartment block communes (Stalowa Wola)/cooperatives? Positivists and liberals: Krakow Industrial Society; Junior Economic Association.

### **3. Within and near the Church**

Ministries for workers, students, peasants; Brother Albert Association [homeless]; Sobriety Brotherhood; Alliance for the Family? Concern for Life [anti-abortion]?

### **4. Working within the system: “safety valves”?**

Wole Byc [I Want to Live; ecology]; MONAR [drug rehab]; others: handicapped initiatives? women's shelter, Warsaw?

### **5. The generation of '88**

Orange Alternative; Inter-school Resistance Committee (MKO); Federation of Fighting Youth (FMW); Polish Socialist Party; Green Federation; QQRVQ [straight-edge punks].

### **6. New movements, Solidarity, and the strikes of 1988**

April-May and August strikes: Krakow, Gdansk, Jastrzebie; why does Wroclaw not strike? The political process: participation in the Round Table and the elections of 1989 and 1990.

### **7. Identity movements under communism – outside politics?**

Women's movements/feminism; gay movement. National minorities: Ukrainians, Jews. History, culture, and internationalism: Eastern Archive; Polish-Czechoslovak Solidarity.

### **8. Eastern Europe follows Poland**

Hungary: Democratic Opposition spawns new movements 1985-1987: SZETA, conscientious objectors, peace and ecology, surrealists, nationalists; Polish contacts. Slovenia: Mladina and new movements, 1987-1988; Marxist traditions; Polish role? Czechoslovakia: New Peace Initiative, and surrealists and ecology, 1987-1988; role of Polish influence (esp. Polish-Czechoslovak Solidarity); Prague and the provinces. East Germany: why is it different? Role of Evangelical Church, and of Polish ties. Ukraine: the special case of Lviv: peace and ecology movements and Polish influence.

### **9. Theories of 1989: what they explain, and how this book changes the story**

Cutting through the jargon: civil society, revolution, transition; does Gorbachev matter? Significance of economic decay? How do social movements mobilize?

### **Afterword: Organic work and post-communist societies**

Where are the activists now? attitudes towards politics, activism, and careers.