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**NEGOTIATING REVOLUTION IN POLAND:  
CONVERSION AND OPPORTUNITY IN 1989**

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## **Abstract**

Beginning in 1989, Round Table negotiations ended communism peacefully in Eastern Europe and elsewhere. First in Poland, followed shortly in Hungary, and then later in Czechoslovakia, East Germany and Bulgaria, and much later Mongolia, the Round Table became the principal peaceful mode of extrication from communist rule. Poland's Round Table was critical not only because it was first, but also because it embodied a transformation of political culture from one based on mobilization against enemies into one based on the value of compromise and dialogue. This paper draws on a 1999 conference at the University of Michigan, which brought together many of the Polish Round Table's participants, to consider both the controversies that surround and the lessons that can be learned from Poland's experience of negotiated political change.

For me already, the “Round Table” was the expression of our own political creativity – like “Solidarity”. “Solidarity” had the ideational resources of Christianity. And the “Round Table” had the resources in “Solidarity”. These two conceptions – “Solidarity” and the “Round Table” – incarnate the very Polish road to a peaceful passage from the world of revolution to the world of peace.

—Józef Tischner, Polish priest and theologian, 1995 (in Michnik et al., 1995:558)

## Introduction<sup>1</sup>

Beginning in 1989, Round Table negotiations ended communism peacefully in Eastern Europe and elsewhere. First in Poland, followed shortly in Hungary, and then later in Czechoslovakia, East Germany and Bulgaria, and much later Mongolia, the Round Table became the principal peaceful mode of extrication from communist rule. Poland’s Round Table was critical not only because it was first, but also because it embodied a transformation of political culture from one based on mobilization against enemies into one based on the value of compromise and dialogue. Its lessons might even be extended, but in order to do that, one should learn from the participants in the Round Table, as well as from its opponents, about not only how the change happened, but why it is hardly celebrated today.

Drawing on a 1999 conference at the University of Michigan with many of the Round Table’s participants from Solidarity, the past communist authorities and the Roman Catholic Church, as well as interviews with other notables of Polish politics, this report expected to identify critical moments in which those committed to confrontation decided to give peace a chance. While there were indeed some critical moments that changed the calculus of many actors – notably the failure of the referendum on economic reform in 1987 and the release of political prisoners in 1986 – few if any actors marked their own conversion. Instead, actors tended to emphasize the coherence of their own life stories, or those of

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their constituencies, in their enduring commitment to decency and dialogue. Negotiations could proceed anew only because the conditions enabled, and demanded it. The political opportunity for negotiating communism's collapse appeared. But why did that political opportunity emerge?

Most of the interview subjects denied that Solidarity "forced" the authorities to the bargaining table. Most of Solidarity's leaders acknowledged their own weakness in mobilization. The former communist authorities were unlikely to emphasize corresponding weakness; instead, they pointed to the critical importance of preventing violence. In that commitment to peaceful dialogue lay strength, one might argue. But to be sure they also recognized their weakness before reform: they could not realize their economic aims without changing the political and social environment of the country.

Analytically speaking, therefore, most actors would agree that the Round Table negotiations emerged out of everyone's weakness. But because of that multivalent weakness, the critics of this negotiated change could argue that this transformation deserves more criticism than elaboration as a model of peaceful change. A few critics argued that this compromise was a political opportunity lost; with better leadership, or even greater patience, the system would have crumbled further, the opposition could have become stronger, and compromise would have been unnecessary. The velvet revolution would have been associated with Poland, not Czechoslovakia, and the end of communism would have represented the triumph of justice instead of compromise with the devil. These critics, however, are unlikely to consider the potential for violence in this transformation.

During the Round Table negotiations themselves, in the beginning of 1989, important actors acknowledged that they did not know how their neighboring socialist governments would appreciate the changes. While Mikhail Gorbachev supported recognition of Solidarity, the Czechoslovak government was putting Václav Havel on trial and criticized the changes in Poland. Perceived dangers of violence became even greater in the aftermath of the June 4 election, when Solidarity routed the communists in semi-free elections to government; even those in the Politburo negotiating the change feared the possibility of renewed martial law. When Tadeusz Mazowiecki assumed the position of premier, he was

not convinced that peace was guaranteed, especially when so many in the secret police stood to lose so much.

While this mode of change may not have "completed" the anti-communist revolution, it did assure a peaceful transformation. In the words of several, it provided a model for other countries to follow, so that the violence of Romania in late 1989 became the exception, rather than the rule, in communism's collapse in Eastern Europe. But it is difficult for Poles to consider the Round Table as something much more than a mechanism of necessity, and certainly not a model of peaceful change worthy of export.

Some, however, have argued that this mode of change has created a new Polish political culture, where there are not two classes of citizens, but rather a sense that all, regardless of background, can contribute to a better Polish future, in the spirit of reconciliation and pluralism. Unfortunately for the argument, however, it matters who says this. In contemporary Polish politics, communist leaders who articulate this kind of democratic pragmatism are seen as self-serving, seeking to overcome their contaminated past. Those connected to the Round Table and who appear to have profited financially or politically by that mode of transformation appear to be defending their own past choices, rather than arguing for something beyond their interest. To extend the lessons of the Round Table, therefore, requires not only fine arguments and great insight within Poland, but also theorists and practitioners whose integrity cannot be indicted by their fraternization with those contaminated by their association with the past everyone seeks to escape. Or it might require rethinking guilt and responsibility.

The Round Table tends to be discussed, even by its principal proponents, as an outcome that would not have been chosen but for circumstance. Treachery for its critics, convenience of the weak for its proponents, the Round Table works with identities made in conflict rather than recreated in dialogue. To identify its participants as partners is not enough, for that label only reinscribes their distance from the society worried about backroom deals and elite privilege. To find merit in this model, therefore, one must take more seriously the ways in which this assembly consciously worked to find a way out for Poland, one that would not risk the escalation of confrontation towards violence.

Few if any will recall today that they were prepared to use force to defend, or extend, their position in 1989. But more should be made of the *perceived fears* of violence that motivated action. Whether or not violence was on the doorstep may be less important for rethinking this model than whether its potential motivated political leaders to risk their own positions in their constituencies to do the right thing for a broader community. And by providing that model, those who took that gamble provided a lesson for those who would follow in Eastern European social change.

At the same time, however, in extending that lesson, one should not forget the role of productive tensions. While everyone might claim today their preference for peaceful negotiation, one also should point out that these negotiations were not consistent with their own prior commitments to rationality, to integrity, and to loyalty. That tension made negotiations more accountable to publics, even when they were not held in public.

In similar fashion, the tension between the negotiator's impulse to treat the criminal with respect, and the prosecutor's wish to try that criminal, might be useful to recall in recent discussions of human rights and global change. Even in Poland, where enemies became partners in dialogue, few admitted past guilt for crimes made in the eyes, or lives, of their opponents. They did, however, change their identities as they assumed responsibility for introducing a mode of change that enabled new parts of the Polish public to identify with democracy. Can political redemption be found without confession in the course of social and political change? This Round Table certainly suggests the value of rethinking our assignments of guilt and responsibility in freedom's making, especially when peace can be made part of it.

As the first example of Round Table negotiations, the Poles were obliged to innovate. Hungarian, German, Czechoslovak, Bulgarian and other negotiations were clearly informed by the Polish experience, and their work was facilitated by its accomplishments (Stark and Bruszt, 1998; Tökes, 1996; Elster, 1996).

Moreover, unlike other Round Table negotiations, the Polish opposition was beholden to a mobilized civil society, and its negotiators were concerned about a populist opposition that was ready to

denounce the deal made by elites to construct democracy from above (Staniszki, 1991; Kennedy, 1992; Osiatyński, 1996). The very identity of communist rule as an intransigent and non-transformable political system was altered by the success of the Polish negotiations, even as the mode of struggle against communism was transformed. The Polish Round Table talks are therefore critical to understanding the conditions for communism's negotiated and peaceful collapse and their analysis facilitates a reconstruction of the historiography of the transformation.

The inevitability of communism's collapse shapes, to a considerable degree, the writing of history and social science in the region. A focus on Round Table negotiations redirects our attention to the role of political consciousness and individual responsibility in change. While, certainly, broad structures and processes conditioned communism's collapse, the particular forms of agency expressed in the Polish Round Table negotiations shaped the *way* in which communism ended.

Those who focus on "pact-making" in transition certainly attend to the strategic behavior of elites in making change. The strategies and choices involved in the Polish Round Table negotiations can be explored with rational choice models (e.g., Przeworski, 1991; Elster, 1996). However, a focus on the strategic decisions of those willing to negotiate, framed by opponents to compromise on both sides of the negotiation, presumes a larger transparent field of political opportunity. As David Laitin (1998:24) has observed in the context of his own work on the tipping game and identity transformation, rational choice models presume a cultural universe that makes options credible or not. One must, then, smuggle into any nomothetic approach to strategic action a broadly informed, if often implicit, approach to the cultural sense of opportunity, possibility and impossibility.

One must also bring to the analytical table a good sense of who is who. These approaches typically take as a point of departure the categorical distinctions of reformers and hardliners among communists, and moderates and radicals in the opposition, and a clear distinction between us and them. These relationally-defined identities are, however, shifting in the context of such a radical but negotiated systemic change as the Polish Round Table and its aftermath (Reykowski, 1993; Castle, 1995; Osiatyński, 1996).



When undertaking this project, I presumed that analytical centering of the Round Table negotiations would demand more sustained attention to the perceptions of political opportunity (Gamson and Meyer, 1996), on the one hand, and the process of identity transformation (Laitin, 1998), specifically “conversion” to the value of dialogue, on the other. One of the most important preconditions to successful negotiation is the transformation of the relational identity of the negotiators, most obviously in regard to others, but also in relation to their own history. The process of negotiation must transform the negotiators’ understandings of conflict, and of one another as antagonists, into a potentially negotiable difference among partners trying to realize a just and fair outcome for both sides. While research in conflict resolution suggests that this identity transformation must happen for successful negotiation (e.g., Chesler, 1994), we know too little about how this transformation took place in the case of the Polish Round Table. The interviews conducted for this project provide exceptionally interesting data in order to address this scholarly lacuna.<sup>2</sup> They also help us understand the field of opportunities facing potential negotiators.

This field is neither uniform nor readily accessible. For instance, it is widely acknowledged that nobody anticipated that the communists would fare so poorly in the June 1989 elections, or that Solidarity would do so well (Castle, 1995; Osiatyński, 1996). However, this anticipation varies consequentially. Kiszczak did not anticipate such a disaster for communists, but Rejkowski and his sub-table colleagues discussed directly whether the negotiations were merely a sham, and whether they were not simply negotiating their exit from history. While some communists may have articulated such a vision of inevitability, this same sense in the opposition was often paired with a critique of who sat at the table.

For these critics in the opposition, the talks signified no sense of destiny, but of contingency, which depended on who the negotiators were and which institutions would be most consequential for

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<sup>2</sup> A list of project interviewees is provided in Appendix A; unless otherwise noted, quoted passages refer to interview transcripts. These interviews are challenging on a number of dimensions. Urban, for instance, said, “I really cannot reconstruct how exactly I imagined that, because those thoughts changed with the flow of the actual situation. Honestly I can’t recreate them....” (p. 8). Hence, we cannot treat oral histories as necessarily accurate recollections of past events; we can, however, treat them as additional guides to the interpretation of that past, and its implication in the present.

shaping change after the elections. Chrzanowski opposed the negotiations because of the exclusion of more conservative forces in the opposition leadership. Bujak and Wałęsa, not expecting the elections to be consequential and instead putting their faith in the trade union movement, decided not to run for Parliament in 1989. Michnik, anticipating the great potential for an independent press, concentrated his energies there. In short, identification as a moderate, radical, reformer or hardliner is itself dependent on perceptions of political opportunity, and these perceptions of political opportunity are themselves structured by sets of political expectations, assessments and networks.

Even this reformulation of categorical identities through a focus on identity transformation and political opportunity misses the more repressed alternatives that support the appearance of choice. One of these more subterranean perceptions, noted in passing by our interviewees and suggested by Paczkowski (1997), illustrates the variable contours of the political field we seek to elaborate. To what extent was violence a real possibility shaping the limitations of change in choosing the Round Table as a means of ending late communism's political economic stalemate? Violence functions critically in the sense of reformism and radicalism, and might in fact be an insufficiently marked element in recognizing the value of the Round Table.

These three themes – one's personal decision to negotiate or not, the perception of the field of opportunity and the perception of the dangers surrounding change – are critical antecedents to any account of negotiated revolution, whether drawing on rational choice or more contextually embedded explanations. These thematics are also central to the cultural and political history of communism's end, and the specific path to postcommunism made possible by the Round Table. Finally, these themes enable us to consider critical issues that might allow us to extend the lessons of the Polish Round Table to contexts beyond communism's collapse.

### **Political identity transformation**

It is easy to imagine the Party and Solidarity as composed of two opposed identities, perhaps complicated by moderates and radicals on both sides. After all, the discourse of Solidarity was shaped by

us and them (Toranska, 1987, 1994). But identities are not formed in concrete, at least for the most part. There are significant divisions among us and them, and there are also important possibilities for the transformation of political identities in the course of events. Certainly the move toward the Round Table embodies that transformation of identities in the move from confrontation to negotiation, in the shift in identity from jailer and jailed to partners in dialogue. However, the recollections of our respondents do not mark these identity transformations so clearly for themselves. One finds, strikingly, that those who negotiated at the Round Table were always interested in negotiation.

General Wojciech Jaruzelski, the force on the side of the communist authorities most responsible for enabling the Round Table but also imposing martial law, could identify an important thread of consistency in his disposition for dialogue:

This word, this phrase, or two words, (Round Table) they were spoken back in '81. (Interviewer: Really?) They were spoken, however, in a different context at the beginning. I used them; Rakowski used them. A Round Table was the government and the trade unions. This was primarily about social and economic issues. Solidarity rejected it, because they thought that they would not sit down with other unions. There were these branch unions, or "pink unions" that had three to four million people. Solidarity was against it. And this is when this term began circulating. And then there was the second round, the second act, when three gentlemen met – Wałęsa, Głemp and Jaruzelski – on November 4 (1981). I proposed then to call into being some national reconciliation council. Then it was a different formula, and I did not call it a Round Table, but it was the Round Table in conception. It did not happen unfortunately, but it is a separate, important and very interesting subject; now it was a brief moment to speak about it, because back then this opportunity was wasted. Who knows, perhaps we could have prevented this dramatic martial law? And I used that phrase for the third time on June 13, 1983 (he meant 1988). This was the 7th or 8th plenum of the Central Committee. I used that phrase a Round Table, and on August 20th, after two months, these strikes on the coast happened. And Andrzej Stelmachowski, who was a mediator there, representing the Church and Solidarity, addressed Józef Czyrek: "Mr. Secretary, do you see what is happening? Isn't this the moment when we should carry out these words and ideas that General Jaruzelski said about the Round Table?" Well, so this was coming closer and this term, this phrase functioned much earlier, but I can be proud to have proclaimed it for the first time in a formal, official and public formula (p. 11).

The other side also can find a straight road to the Round Table. Zbigniew Bujak, one of the leaders of the Solidarity underground during martial law, also could explain how the Round Table was a smooth extension of Solidarity's founding identity:

... since August 80, these negotiations in Gdańsk, in the shipyard, superimposed a certain pattern. Also during martial law, the idea of talks and reconciliation was maintained

throughout, mostly by Lech Wałęsa, who at all times emphasized that we could solve the situation only through reconciliation. Even we in the underground whenever we spoke about demonstrations and strike actions, we always emphasized this appeal, which wasn't always published because how many times could we say the same thing, but we always emphasized that this situation could and should be solved through talks (2: p. 10).

However, while both sides claim to be disposed to negotiate, they differed fundamentally on the conditions that would enable genuine negotiation, and perhaps, therefore, the meaning of negotiation itself. For those in Solidarity, this condition required the real release of political prisoners, and ultimately Solidarity's legalization. As Tadeusz Mazowiecki, the first non-communist premier of Poland's post-war years recalled: "Without that mass movement, we saw no possibilities of talking to the government back then, because it might have been just some elite agreement if it had not brought this great social, political and labor movement back" (p. 1). He had experience in the Sejm, and found that any political arrangement that might give elites voice, without the movement beyond it, "would suck us in and that would lose our authenticity" (p. 7).

The man that he appointed to be deputy secretary of the interior said something similar. Kryzysztof Kozłowski recalled,

I saw with my own eyes, how my friends, who created the Znak circle in the Sejm, were pulled into something like that, how their independence was gradually limited to the point when they had to withdraw, throw it away not to fall into complete disrepute. I saw when General Jaruzelski formed this political board during the martial law period – how was it named? It was some advisory board to the President of the National Council.<sup>3</sup> He drew some independent intellectuals into it. It was to be some discussion forum or something like that. We pulled away with all our might, and we begged all our colleagues not to get into it, because nothing good would come out, only a foul odor. The same fear appeared before the Round Table began, the fear of another attempt to pull us into something that smells really bad (pp. 10-11).

There was, of course, good reason for this skepticism. Several former communist authorities acknowledged that they sought to maintain their authority without recognizing Solidarity. Recognition was not based on a wish for negotiation as much as an opportunity to create a more supportive

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<sup>3</sup> For those willing to cooperate with the regime, Jaruzelski established a "consultative council", with about one-third of its members from the regime, one-third from Catholic circles and one-third independent intellectuals. The Solidarity leadership criticized that Council, established on December 6, 1986, for the deliberate exclusion of Solidarity's intellectuals. Only a few prominent and independent intellectuals, notably Władysław Siła-Nowicki, Andrzej Świącicki and Andrzej Tymowski, joined it.

environment for their own leadership (Rakowski, p. 2). Indeed, they saw Solidarity as getting weaker and weaker (Rakowski, p. 5). General Kiszczak, for instance, argued that they felt no domestic pressure whatsoever from Solidarity. Jerzy Urban argued similarly (p. 4). And most of those associated with Solidarity reinforced the sense of the communists' accounts.

Underground labor activist Zbigniew Janas acknowledges that in the late 1980s there was no basis for any radicalism that would depend on the mobilization of the masses (p. 9). Opposition journalist Stefan Bratkowski argues that the strikes of 1988 did not represent even a fraction of the force Solidarity had in 1980/81: "there were many devoted and eager people in the movement, but all in all it was not a meaningful force. It was the degeneration of the system that made the regime realize the negotiations were essential. The impasse could have lasted for years. Contrary to popular belief nobody forced them to start talking with us" (p. 1). Another underground labor activist, Władysław Frasyniuk, agrees:

These final strikes, the strike wave, it sounds so proud and nice, but in fact those pathetic remnants of strikers, they were just nothing. I took part in the first strike then, and running from factory to factory, I got the Dolmel plant up with difficulty, by sheer force of my authority. There was no will to fight. People knew it would result in repressions. I think the biggest risk was that we would lose there, that they would ridicule us, destroy our prestige, that we would be finished for good (p. 7).

Jacek Kuroń, one of the leading advisors to Lech Wałęsa, articulated this weakness at a more theoretical level:

Nevertheless, it is obvious that in the moment when we approach the Round Table, the situation is that the movement had burned out. I and everyone that acted back then knows that, even if they don't tell that aloud. During those last strikes, we were trying to mobilize the crews, put a great effort into that, to regain Solidarity back then, when Wałęsa was striking in the Shipyard. They were locked inside, together with Mazowiecki. So we were trying to rouse that but it was not working. Young men, a bit, just like in the Shipyard – young people went on strike. The classic example is Zbyszek Bujak. He escaped his bodyguards, went to Ursus, urged them to begin a strike, and they did not even move. Such was the climate back then. People did not want it; they had enough. They were fed up; they had no trust that the movement might change anything (1: p. 2).

In this sense, we might focus less on the question of changing dispositions to negotiate, and more on the basis of relative strengths to mobilize either the movement or society to realize certain goals. For many of our respondents associated with the communist authorities, the failure of Polish society to

embrace reform in the 1987 referendum was the critical signal that they could not go it alone, and had to engage the opposition at a new level. Solidarity found it could not mobilize society as it had hoped. At the University of Michigan conference on the Round Table,<sup>4</sup> President Aleksander Kwasniewski said that the Round Table was a product of the weakness of both the authorities and Solidarity and of the Soviet Union itself (Conference, p. 246). But that point, while perhaps analytically appropriate and resonant with the sense of identity among those at the Round Table, is also a very weak claim before those who criticize the Round Table.

### **The identity of the Polish Round Table**

The 1999 conference on the Polish Round Table of 1989 was premised on the assumption that one should understand the conditions that enabled a peaceful end to communist rule. Some of our critics accused us, however, of overlooking another emphasis: that this was not so much a peaceful transformation, but an interested one that prevented the revolution against communists from realizing its potential. A few of those we interviewed suggested something similar.

Leszek Moczulski represents one of these tendencies in Poland and marks his difference with Solidarity in terms of political skills. He does not have much appreciation for their leadership during the 1980s. The Round Table was “a realistic solution”, but only because the political skills of Solidarity’s leadership were themselves so limited. Instead of taking action, they waited and were carried along by events (p. 2). Had Solidarity waited to negotiate with the communists and simultaneously escalated the strikes, Poland also could have had some sort of velvet revolution like in Czechoslovakia (p. 4). The problem, he argues, rests in the Marxist infection; too many of Solidarity’s leadership were formerly members of the communist party, and they were infected with its way of thinking, and the need to compromise with it (p. 6).

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<sup>4</sup> “Communism’s Negotiated Collapse: The Polish Round Table, Ten Years Later” took place at the University of Michigan from April 7-10, 1999. Conference citations refer to the transcript, “Communism’s Negotiated Collapse: The Polish Round Table, Ten Years Later,” transcribed by Kasia Kietlińska and Margarita Nafpaktitis, translated by Kasia Kietlińska and edited by Donna Parmelee, available at <[www.umich.edu/~iinet/PolishRoundTable](http://www.umich.edu/~iinet/PolishRoundTable)>.

Most of the others who were critical of the Round Table were neither so critical or self-confident as Moczulski, but they also had their reservations. Bogdan Borusewicz declined to participate in the Round Table because, like Moczulski, he thought there should be more mobilization of society. Such a mobilization would, after all, enable a stronger hand in negotiation with the authorities (p. 1). Jarosław Kaczyński participated in the Round Table, but he did so “without excessive enthusiasm” (p. 27). Jan Olszewski also had doubts whether this was the right moment for breakthrough (p. 1). He didn’t voice his skepticism at the time, because to do so “would be a great responsibility”. However, he also held the talks at arms length, “for it was all too clear to me that the other side was setting us up for talks” (p. 2). The critique of the Round Table rests not only on skepticism toward the communist authorities, however. The critics also had doubts about the motivations of those in Solidarity who sat at the Round Table.

Borusewicz noted how the Round Table shifted Solidarity’s leadership from the underground (Bujak, Frasiński, Lis, Lityński, Bielecki and himself) to that which emerged from the Round Table (Kuroń, Michnik, Geremek, Mazowiecki). Janina Jankowska also recalls conversations with others in the underground who take this shift in elites as evidence that this was a kind of treachery. “These elites were self-nominated, and not nominated by the working people of half of Poland, but also, these elites, well, were perceived by these old activists, or let’s say those who were against the Round Table, as usurpers of a kind, as if they were acting for their own sake. Well, anyway, there was no direct link between them and the society” (1: p. 2).

Jankowska herself sat at the Round Table, as did Zbigniew Bujak, who recalls the alienation of his underground when he offered his own support for these open negotiations.

There were those who created the underground structure, and in a way these were the most heroic people, keeping the Solidarity banner high up, defending Solidarity the most, sacrificing themselves the most one could say that they perceived themselves to be my army; they were Bujak’s officers and soldiers. It was our struggle, our cause... We will win; Jaruzelski will surrender and he will have to flee to Moscow, or someplace else, you know. That was, let’s say, the mentality and imagination of these people. When in our proclamations we spoke about reconciliation, well, you know, people in the underground treated it as some kind of tactics, something that had to be done but for them it really wasn’t about any reconciliation but winning and getting rid of others... When Lech (Wałęsa) would say that ok, all right, he’s got the Nobel Peace Prize, but when Władec (Frasiński) or I would do this, they were suspicious. Well, so when I was released from

prison, they expected this uprising-like activity to be continued. And they felt more in this position, all these underground activists, this army of mine. They felt important and morally superior to those "on the surface", as they used to say, to people like Jacek (Kuroń), Geremek and others... But when I get released from prison and I start, I call for creating the open leadership of Solidarity, this is basically a betrayal of these people. And that's how they treated it then... that I was some sort of traitor (2: pp. 15-16).

These criticisms of the Round Table negotiations, then, suggest a very important change in the narrative of Solidarity's disposition to negotiate. While Solidarity may have always had elements of its movement disposed to negotiate, as Bujak's first narrative suggested, there also were important factions who placed compromise behind revolution against communists in a list of Solidarity's goals.

But it is not so simple as dividing Solidarity into moderates and radicals. Rather than assign these priorities to categories of actors, it's probably more appropriate to think of these tensions as productive antinomies shaping the making of communism's negotiated collapse.

Władysław Frasyniuk, one of the most significant figures in Poland's underground resistance, recalled the difficulty of negotiation at Magdalenka, the resort run by the Secret Police. Negotiation implies that one has partners whom you might potentially trust. This was difficult for Frasyniuk to do, for he worried that the first meeting at Magdalenka was another trick of the secret police. They were still trying to:

... humiliate, to indicate we were not so clean. Magdalenka was such an attempt too. They knew me from their police reports. So they knew me as aggressive, dangerous. Kiszczak didn't shake my hand, because he was afraid I might have a blade in it. Well, I didn't shake his hand either, for different reasons. I think one shouldn't shake hands with such a man. For me, he was a butcher. But then, at the end of that pointless meeting, about nothing really, it was suggested we made a gentleman's agreement and kept it very secret... I told them no. For me it wasn't any politics. It was just a cops' trick... Openness was our strength. And it turned out later on that I was right. There were dinners; there was alcohol. I was the only guy who did not drink with them, who didn't fraternize... There were two games that went on. On one hand, they knew they had to come to terms with us, but on the other hand, they still wanted to downgrade us (p. 4).

This fraternization is often used as evidence, by those who wish to criticize the factions leading negotiation at the Round Table, that the Round Table was inappropriate. It also helps to explain why the revolution against the communists was never completed (J. Kaczyński, p. 30; L. Kaczyński, p. 11). At the same time, however, many of these critics recognize that the Round Table was probably the right



thing to pursue. In light of what followed the Round Table, Borusewicz believes he was wrong to oppose it (p. 2).

While Jan Olszewski expressed his distance from the Solidarity leadership by refusing to wear his Solidarity lapel pin during the negotiations, he couldn't be so sure that denying the opportunity of the Round Table was the right thing to do:

I would not allow myself to say that we should reject the proposition (of the Round Table) and go on waiting to see what would happen. It could not be done because our side did not see any perspectives. We did not know yet what the other side knew, and namely that in this case there was a political decision, already made in Moscow, to withdraw from this system of full domination over Central Europe (p. 7).

And beyond that, according to Olszewski, waiting carried additional costs:

The economic situation, on the other hand, was very visibly getting worse almost from day to day. It is not the case that social upheaval is determined by a very bad economic situation because a bad economic situation is not enough to lead to unrests. But it has its very wide range of consequences, undermining the civilized base for functioning of the state and the social order. Obviously, degradation of the economy was the next step, and if we did not do something and the authorities were not able to do anything, then every month, every year was pushing us aside, in comparison to our surroundings, the world, etc. And this was a threat. This threat forced some action, did not allow for waiting, because the cost of waiting would be too high and could not be accepted (p. 7).

Subsequent events shape the interpretation of the Round Table to be sure. On the one hand, the elections of June 4, when Solidarity defeated the communists and their allies overwhelmingly, far exceeded most people's expectations, from all sides of the negotiating table and beyond. The formation of the first non-communist government after World War II, with Tadeusz Mazowiecki at the helm, was another unexpectedly radical departure from most expectations in the time of the Round Table negotiations. It is hard to deny, in retrospect, that the negotiations moved social change ahead, but at what costs? And with what benefits? That, in the end, suggests the challenge of interpreting the Polish Round Table of 1989.

### **Political opportunity lost**

Adam Michnik enjoys a status unshared by any other in these interviews. While to be sure Gorbachev, Jaruzelski, Wałęsa and the Pope are identified as key personalities without whom

communism's end may not have occurred, Michnik seems to be the object of the most political resentment. Jarosław Kaczyński goes so far as to assign Michnik responsibility for what could, and would not happen, in communism's negotiated collapse. When asked whether it was possible to complete the revolution begun by Solidarity, Kaczyński replies:

What does it mean "possible", you know? Was some other attitude on the part of Michnik possible? That's what we should really ask. And now, you can provide two answers. If Antoni Macierewicz were sitting here, he'd say, "No, it wasn't. That attitude was entirely determined by the environment it had originated from, by his other actions as they were, by Adam Michnik's overall ignobleness, so to speak." Well, I would answer in a different way: "A man is autonomous in his actions, whatever the environment." This is all true, that he kind of lived in some specific world, but, all in all, he fought against communism, and his merits in this fight proved great, and he could have made another choice. Had he done this... and please don't get me wrong; it is just a personification, and the issue is broader, since it concerns the entire group, then yes, it would've been possible, hard, perhaps and even combined with some violent events, maybe even bloody events, but still, possible (p. 7).

In this, Michnik is held responsible for limiting the Round Table to what it was, and even profiting in turn.

One of the conference speakers, Wiesław Chrzanowski, an early Solidarity advisor, one of the founders of the Christian National Union and a former Marshall of the Sejm, argued that the Round Table was a consequence of the system's collapse, not a cause of the system's decomposition. After all, he notes, several months after the Round Table, together with the fall of the Berlin Wall, other communist regimes in Central Europe, except for Romania, collapsed peacefully (Conference, p. 28). This Round Table was not, in his opinion, a means to end communism, but rather a way for some groups to improve their position in communism's collapse.

The movement in opposition to communism, Chrzanowski argued, was the more important thing causing that system's fall, alongside a weakening of support from the Soviet Union. The communist authorities developed this idea of the Round Table to co-opt that opposition and smooth their anticipated fall from power. The authorities thus tried to shape their partners in negotiation, so that they could get the best deal. The opposition itself saw this as an opportunity, too. To be sure, these negotiations would lead

to some of the goals they held: "broadening the margin of freedom, restoration of legal Solidarity and preventing some sort of frontal collision" (Conference, p. 27).

Chrzanowski also saw, however, that this was an opportunity for the leftist opposition, of which Chrzanowski was not part, to eliminate or limit the influence of the right wing of the opposition, by which he meant nationalist or Christian Democratic elements (Conference, p. 27). Alongside this political advantage comes some privilege, some advantages (Conference, p. 28), what Chrzanowski later in the conference called "frosting" (Conference, p. 123):

... as a result of the discussed agreement (the Round Table), the pre-June government camp (the communists), instead of capitulation and punishment for the past, found its place smoothly within the new order of parliamentary democracy and retained its material and organizational assets. The accepted formula of state law often serves as a cover from punishing lawlessness. Among gains of the other partner was the ability to make personnel decisions regarding the negotiated one-third of the 1989 Sejm seats... As for taking over important mass media, its enough to mention *Gazeta Wyborcza*, presently Mr. Michnik's paper, the publication of which was a concession from the government to Solidarity arranged at the Round Table (Conference, p. 29).

Although Chrzanowski is a conservative lawyer and political leader, his account draws quite clearly on a "radical" portrait of society in its linkage of power and privilege (Lenski, 1984 (1966)). He very clearly identifies a dichotomous view of society, which of course was hardly limited to the right-wing opposition. But his assessment of the Round Table is more specific to the right wing, and akin to radical pictures of inequality in their direct linkage between power and privilege. Radicals tend to believe that those in power whom they oppose act in a fashion that produces selfish benefits. Chrzanowski quite clearly attributes this motive to the communists' Round Table participation, but he also implies that his former, more leftist, colleagues in Solidarity had some of the same ambition (Conference, p. 123).<sup>5</sup>

Adam Michnik was quite disturbed by Chrzanowski's charge. Michnik countered that Chrzanowski was creating a black legend associated with the Round Table, by arguing that this agreement was made for the profit of those who negotiated, rather than for the good of Poland. It is true that Michnik's newspaper is one of the most successful papers in Poland, and in Eastern Europe broadly,

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<sup>5</sup> Chrzanowski acknowledges, however, that these subsequent advantages were not "foreseen" at the time (Conference, p. 123).

but Michnik's witty reply to Chrzanowski suggests one reason for its success. "You worry that I have frosting from *Gazeta*, and I'm happy that Poland has a good newspaper. And I'm happy that no other post-communist country has a good paper like that. And I wish you and your political friends could make another such daily and we will have two best newspapers" (Conference, p. 126).

Wittiness aside, this exchange cuts to the heart of one of the most politically delegitimizing issues with the Round Table. Was this a secret deal cut between communists and certain parts of the Solidarity opposition to produce advantage for all of the negotiators? Even the Bishop who was most closely associated with the negotiations of the Round Table, Aloyzy Orszulik, could express disappointment with the Round Table's allocation of privilege ten years after. After all, he said, the transformations of the last ten years have hurt the workers and the peasants the most. They are the victims of this transformation.

And in contrast, notes Orszulik:

Some people from the (communist regime), well even a lot of them, have remained well off, in a good situation, not just because they kept their apartments, but also because of their salaries and opportunities to get employed in some other lucrative work. I remember when Mr. Sekula (a former leading communist) was leaving, immediately the Japanese offered him the position of an expert, I think one hundred fifty thousand zlotys a month. Today, I'm looking at myself in retrospect, and as a seventy-seven year old, having been formally employed at the Secretariat of the Episcopate for thirty-three years, I have a pension of, I think, about four hundred and thirty zlotys before taxes, and after taxes three hundred and ninety six zlotys. So, that's some act of injustice, too (Conference, p. 259).

Those who adopt a radical perspective on the Round Table negotiations and examine the link between the interests of the powerful and the process of change, and the link between power and privilege, are likely therefore to find something less than heroic about the Round Table. But it is important to try to distinguish between the results of the Round Table, and the making of that negotiated revolution.

Another conference participant, Lech Kaczyński, spoke about the Round Table in terms similar to those of Bishop Orszulik. Both the Bishop and the politician would agree that the Round Table was a very positive means to develop, peacefully, an independent and democratic Poland. It legalized Solidarity

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and it opened the way to democratic elections. On that foundation, Solidarity succeeded and won the elections. It even took advantage of that victory and managed to form a government, led by Tadeusz Mazowiecki. But after communism collapsed in the rest of the region, Kaczyński believes that the Solidarity government should have moved quickly to deepen changes, to privatize industry more rapidly, to introduce civil liberties and democratic procedures more quickly, to build a new state and to restructure society more fundamentally. Kaczyński argues that, after the collapse of communism throughout the region, there should have been a more aggressive move to establish justice, to punish those who committed gross crimes under communist rule and certainly to end their privileges (Conférence, pp. 238-39). But this picture of a missed political opportunity also minimizes two major concerns shaping the cultural landscape of the Round Table: peace and plurality.

### **The political constraints of the Round Table**

For most actors, the Round Table negotiations, the elections of June 4 and finally the stalemates that resulted in Tadeusz Mazowiecki forming a government, were all qualitatively different kinds of political opportunities. For nearly everyone, they represented ever broadening possibilities for what Solidarity might do. On the other hand, the political opportunity represented by the Round Table was shaped by terrific uncertainties in what the communists, both within Poland and beyond, would allow. For nearly everyone in our interviews, Gorbachev represented a qualitative shift. Some even attributed to Gorbachev a leading role in recognizing Solidarity.

Alfred Miodowicz, the leader of the communist trade union movement formed in opposition to Solidarity after martial law and a member of the Party's Politburo, believed that Gorbachev "was willing to recognize Solidarity much earlier than our government wanted to" (p. 1). However, the Soviet Union was not the only actor about whom General Jaruzelski was concerned. He recalled:

Well, when we were approaching, with a great difficulty and different kinds of obstinacy, and even with some dramatic situations, such for instance as the 10<sup>th</sup> plenum of the party in January 1980 (he meant 1989), we had to constantly observe what was happening outside of Poland, and figure out what kind of reaction we had to consider, as well as to what degree the conservative forces in Poland could count on the support of the outside

factors. However, it did not only have a political dimension but, to a greater extent, it was economic... so we could not indulge into any big disharmony in relations with our neighbors. And here I am putting more stress on the German Democratic Republic and Czechoslovakia, with whom our economic relations were very strong; we depended highly upon each other, and respective supplies... (in addition), we had much evidence that our neighbors, the ones I mentioned, and Romania, Bulgaria and others, were criticizing and disapproving of the events in Poland.

So in this situation, I thought it was necessary to visit a few countries, and send my representatives to the others. On February 1<sup>st</sup>, 1989, that is five days before the Round Table, when the decision that the Round Table would happen was made, I paid a visit to Prague. I met Husak and Jakes... There were talks, in which I had to convince them that the path we had entered was a rational path and that we did not see any other possibilities. I called it also "a historical experiment". It was received, however, with great doubts, reluctance, and, in a certain sense, with the lack of comprehension. But why am I talking about it? Because there is one poignant matter. When I was paying my visit to Prague, they had just begun the so-called Havel's trial. Please, notice how many things were keeping us apart. Here you had Havel's trial, and there, at the same time, we were sitting down with Wałęsa at the Round Table. This was a huge difference of the situation, wasn't it? May 22<sup>nd</sup>, I am in the German Democratic Republic, already after the Round Table, and it is similar, or even more critical and unsettling... (pp. 1-2).

The June 4 elections were also a major watershed for potential violence. Although General Jaruzelski himself said that from the very beginning, he ruled out any possibility of annulling these elections, he also acknowledged that there were voices recommending this (p. 8). One of the negotiators for the Communist Party, Janusz Rejkowski, was especially apprehensive at this moment. He said,

I was very much afraid...I have... At that time, there was a scientific conference, held in my institute and someone took a picture of me when I dropped by, and when I look at this picture and see myself, I see a man who was totally depressed. [laughing] It was because I came directly from the White House, from the Central Committee with a feeling of immense mobilization of forces that would aim at the reversal of elections, a coup d'etat, you could say. This tension...this intensity of the attack was so great that I was afraid the leaderships would not make it. It was not until Thursday when we managed to negotiate with Solidarity the way...in a certain way the rescue way for the national list, so that it would not collapse entirely but would be partly saved, only then did the mood get better and the pressure on the authorities was reduced.

But until that Thursday I was so afraid that it would happen this way... I was afraid of two scenarios. One scenario was simple, namely that the leadership would be abolished and that new people would make a decision about the annulment of elections. And this way, we would open, as I thought, a period of more than just strikes, but perhaps something leading to the civil war in Poland. This is what I thought, that such a move is a prelude to a war... When all forces are mobilized, when all emotions are well-defined, when masses of people are involved and the authorities make such an obviously deceitful step, that is a spark that can set everything on fire. The other possibility...I did not exclude the possibility that some of the present leadership, and I had something of that kind on Thursday before I met the Solidarity team, when about 10 or 11 a.m. we met in Kiszczak's office to get ready for the meeting with Wałęsa. And at this meeting an expert's report was presented, because there was a question what we should do with a list

that would come out, well, and you heard: "There is no other way but to acknowledge that the elections were not held in accordance with the rules and hence annul them." And again there was an argument about these experts' reports, questioning whether we should act according to this recommendation that seemed so horrendous, or whether we should settle with Solidarity upon how to get out of this situation.

Fortunately, the second point of view prevailed. I cannot imagine what would have happened if it didn't. I don't know what Jaruzelski would have done if told that the majority was voting for reversal of the election. I cannot foretell. Perhaps he is too wise a man but the example I gave yesterday in public shows – and this is true in general in the world – that a wise and cautious man can make a misjudgment in some situations. And this misjudgment that happened was a typical one in these times (p. 10).

Even when Tadeusz Mazowiecki assumed the position of Prime Minister on August 24, 1989, he was still concerned about the dangers of violence, both from abroad and from within. He said,

I thought that all people should envision their future in that change, both we, from Solidarity, and they, from the party and those organizations affiliated with it, over 2.5 million of them. And that it had to happen in a peaceful way. And I felt, first and foremost, that my responsibility was to make it a success, to make it happen peacefully, without any provocations, which were entirely possible, or without external intervention or pressures. Not just intervention but economic pressures of some sort that would make the situation more difficult for us, and so on.

Everything was possible. Such instruments existed – for instigating provocations, for exerting external pressures, economic and others. Such instruments were still in the possession of that camp and we were alone. (Interviewer: You say "camp", and what does that mean?) The Soviet Union, and other countries, and leaders of other countries communist parties. Ceaușescu directly demanded an intervention. So, there was this deep faith within me that it had to succeed, because I wouldn't have taken that up if I hadn't this internal faith that it had to succeed. But I also had a conviction that it would take decisive, yet careful action, you know, because we are alone and because many different countermeasures could be activated (p. 9).

Krzysztof Kozłowski, his deputy minister of security, shared some of the same concerns:

It is so easy to say after ten years that something had to be done this way, not the other. However, it was only the formation of the government by Mazowiecki that practically excluded any kind of violent reaction from the other side, although not entirely. I might say, not entirely, yet. After all, we had nothing, not even a single armed man. What problem was it to disperse that whole company? (Interviewer: Then when did you finally feel some relief?) When PZPR was disbanded, I think. The whole system was based on a strict hierarchy, and the Party was its focal point while militia, security service, even the army, were only the instruments in its hands. Of course, after the Party was disbanded, there might have been some reactions of individual groups, but I had no fear of an organized coup by the military or the security service.

You know, so many things are told today about all that could have been done back then and what was never done. In March 1990, at the beginning of March, I came to the Ministry of Internal Affairs as the undersecretary of state, the first deputy minister originating from Solidarity, one of many deputy ministers from Solidarity. As I said, the Ministry consisted of some 160 thousand of men, most of them armed: Vistula Militia troops, Border Defense Corps, more than 24 thousand people in the Security Service, 40

generals, 4.5 thousand colonels and I, by myself. (Interviewer: How did you feel?) I didn't have the slightest idea what it was all about. We never had military and security service specialists in the underground. We had never had any access to them before, never before had we had any knowledge about such things, but Tadeusz Mazowiecki said to me: "You'll go there and take control over it." And then I waved my hands and answered: "Listen, that's not my specialty. I'll think about it and find someone else for you." My misfortune, however, was that at the head of the government stood a man, dubbed "Hamlet" by naive people, who in fact was ruthless, who didn't care about someone's waving hands and squeaking but said: "You will go and do it."

And he wouldn't allow any discussion... I did not expect Tadeusz Mazowiecki to come up with something like that. I was a senator, but he ordered me to do it, so there was no point in arguing. After three months, I became a minister, so I managed to gain control over it at last, but it wasn't just the lone sheriff's achievement, but certain processes really had to occur. The Security Service ceased to believe in itself, and that process had to be hurried, all had to be destroyed quickly, but without causing a catastrophe. When you dismantle a building, it might fall apart suddenly in an uncontrollable way. Then again, I had to deal with, just as I said, thousands of armed people, whom I fired, threw out, made them change their occupation after thirty years of work, when they had never done anything else than sit there, and then a sudden change appeared and they had to start a new life in their mature years. That was not that easy.

Then, however, I did not believe in a possibility of a second martial law period or that anyone would just shoot the minister of internal affairs. That was entirely possible, although one could be afraid more or less. I preferred to be afraid less. And not being afraid meant, for instance, that I kept no bodyguards, traveled to Kraków by train, to my home, to my family. (Interviewer: You did all that?) Yes. And then it turned out that everything was not that scary. They were so frustrated that they didn't even shoot me (pp. 7-8).

This kind of uncertainty – the fragility of peace, the uncertainty of violence – is rarely, if ever, highlighted in the narratives of those who wished to complete a revolution. Nevertheless, for many, even for the critics of the Round Table, Romania at the end of 1989 offers a powerful lesson.

Formerly communist authorities were more likely to emphasize the significance of that Romanian possibility, including Jerzy Urban (p. 12) and Stanisław Ciosek (p. 8). But this danger was also recognized by those associated with Solidarity, both at the Round Table and beyond it, including Kozłowski (p. 5) and Borusewicz (p. 3). Jacek Kuroń even recalled that he and Andrzej Gdula, a prominent figure in the Party's central committee, had something of a "hotline" that they could use to contact each other in case one or the other sides "instigated unrest in various places" to undo the possibility of negotiation (p. 5).

Especially at the time of the June 4 elections, people considered the violent alternative quite possible. Stefan Bratkowski, a leading opposition journalist, believed that "they had another martial law



waiting in the wings: they were ready to arrest us all and did not do it, we have to give them lots of credit for that” (p. 3). Władysław Frasyniuk put it most directly here:

I should say that whoever questions the Round Table must have tremendous conscience problems to not regard it as an absolute success, their own success, too. All the more so, as there was never any settling of the accounts about martial law. We never said how it was during martial law, how many Solidarity activists were really active, how many we could really depend upon. People feel secure that we never attacked the reds: we weren't radical after 1989, although we could have and had thousand reasons to be. We didn't do it, because we wanted to build an open Poland, without hatred, driven by thinking about the future, giving everybody a chance to contribute to its welfare, to add something of value (p. 11).

This, one might say, is the greatest challenge to theorizing the Round Table. Was this simply a matter of convenience, of necessity? Jarosław Kaczyński and Lech Kaczyński argue that this negotiation was not a matter of principle, but a tactic appropriate to the constraints of the times and the uncertainty of violence. But might it be something more? Is it, as Frasyniuk suggests, the opportunity to create a different kind of Poland? And if it is, it must address squarely that at one time productive, but perhaps now anachronistic, antinomy organizing Solidarity: the need to negotiate and the will to mobilize against one's enemy. And Adam Michnik is at the heart of the controversy in formulating that problem.

### **The political lessons of the Polish Round Table**

Michnik believes that each side had a strategic goal in the Round Table: the communists sought to gain a new legitimacy for communist rule in Poland and abroad, and allowing some form of legalized opposition was to be the price for that. The strategic goal for the Solidarity opposition, on the other hand, was the legalization of Solidarity and launching the process of democratic transformation (Conference, p. 10). There were no secret deals, much as Lech Kaczyński and others also affirmed, but it was a compromise. And as Michnik noted, all compromises produce subsequent accusations of betrayal by extremists (Conference, p. 16).

While Michnik believes that the Round Table negotiations didn't produce an ethos, it was embedded in a different kind of climate that made it possible for the two worlds, which spoke two different languages, to communicate (Conference, p. 108). Indeed, he learned in that context that while

this communist viewpoint was certainly reprehensible in some ways, it was also far more influential than he or his colleagues would have admitted.

These communists, Michnik argued, even those who,

... accepted the communist government for their own benefit are a component of the Polish nation, which cannot be excluded from Poland, unless one wants to destroy the Polish national community. And this is what I learned at the Round Table. There are two philosophies. Today, we can either say to those people, who used to be my enemies then, and who used to lock me up in jail we can say: You have an opportunity either to become friends of democratic independent Poland, a Poland which is oriented toward the West and has a free market economy, or you can make a conscious choice and opt for the status of an enemy of the new Poland. In other words, there are two philosophies faced by any group reaching out to participate in the government after the times of the communist, totalitarian or paratotalitarian dictatorship. Two logics. The logic of re-conquest and the logic of reconciliation: re-conquering the country is a deeply anti-democratic logic in the sense that it really undermines the pluralistic character of our society (Conference, pp. 108-09).

Michnik seeks to elevate a certain value that he learned at the Round Table, and a different way of thinking, a different identity for the Polish state (Conference, p. 234). This identity, based on a philosophy of agreement, presumes that those who fought against the People's Republic and those who served the People's Republic, are both part of a democratic future (Conference, p. 16).

This can make sense in a broader public discourse, especially when one moves beyond the political elites and beyond the capital. As Jan Lityński recalled:

To me, it seems that it was like that. I mean that as opposed to Warsaw-based activists, or to people of Wrocław even, to those people these ideological problems that they had to deal with the commies, whereas workers had to talk to the commies on a daily basis, for their foreman at work was part of the commies, and the manager was a commie. They lived in this strange symbiosis: those up there persecuted them, and yet they worked together... Telling a worker, I mean, a striking worker that he shouldn't talk to the commies. Then... what should he go on strike for? (p. 12)

There are certainly important class differences in the factory, but these differences do not preclude talking, even when there is not an abundance of trust on either side. Rather, there is a sense that these differences are negotiable and that for the factory to continue to function, these differences must be negotiated.

Negotiations on the political level were different, of course. When the negotiations began, most of those participating suspected another trick by the authorities (e.g., Łuczywo, p. 5). Henryk Wujec, the man who ultimately assembled the people who would negotiate for Solidarity, put it eloquently:

It was a proposal for talks. For Solidarity it was a very big problem whether to accept this proposition, because such talks... well, you talk with an enemy, you talk to those, who were responsible for the coup d'état, who imprisoned our colleagues...people, and who actually murdered some of them, and thus were guilty of their death. It was very difficult for us to undertake these talks, because actually we should have assumed that they... they were criminals, who should stand trial and be sentenced, and put to jail. We should have taken them to court to prove them guilty, instead of trying to talk with them. And yet we could not refuse their proposal, either... We could not, as it was obvious for us that nobody would understand, especially when the authorities themselves came up with such a proposal of a peaceful solution. We have always been saying that they would eventually give up on martial law. And now if the authorities... Had our refusal become public, nobody, neither society nor the international public opinion, would have understood why Solidarity would have not accepted that peaceful process. What was more, we did not see what should be done instead, what kind of solutions were still possible for Solidarity (p. 5).

The communist authorities were quite fortunate in Poland, for if there hadn't been the uncertainty of violence and the lack of agreement about the directions of change in the Soviet Union and rest of Eastern Europe, the compulsion to negotiate communism's end would not have existed. As Stefan Bratkowski put it, to overlook the opportunity of the Round Table would have been foolish: "not only the world but the people would never have forgiven us such a blunder. Everybody would have thought we were plain stupid" (p. 4). But it was not just a matter of Solidarity taking this risk.

The communist authorities clearly took responsibility for ensuring that communism's end would be peaceful. Stanisław Ciosek, another former communist leading figure, who subsequently became ambassador to Russia, offered one argument along these lines:

The system could have been crumbling for a long time, and in quite a bloody way. It's a cliché, but before something really ends, it can go many different ways. History is not always going forward. Poland was not doomed to compromise... Everything that happened in Poland was really illogical. It was contrary to conclusions drawn from previous experiences. It really had no right to happen, yet it happened anyway... Maybe this was Divine Providence... that was watching over our moves. According to common sense, and according to conclusions drawn from the history of the system, this should have led to bloody confrontation. It would have been enough for other options to have won in the Soviet Union and in Poland, and then without excessive imagination, we can assume attempts at reforming the economy without any changes in the political system.

even including a possibility of passing through this Tiananmen Square... in China... This was real, this fear of civil war; it really motivated us (Conference, p. 42).

But once again, this concern for avoiding bloodshed, while meaningful in and of itself, and producing a certain solidarity among all Poles, is hardly a lesson that endures beyond times of constraint, and hardly contradicts those who wish to identify the subsequent privileges that accompanied Round Table participation.

Relatively few people in Poland were able to articulate the value of the Round Table beyond its convenience and utility in a time of uncertainty. That hesitation, in fact, helps to fuel the fires of those who would mark it as opportunism and, certainly, unworthy of broader lessons. To the extent the value of the Round Table is associated with the person, and arguments, of Adam Michnik, this search for broader lessons only becomes reinscribed in the political resentments animating the contest over Poland's future. It matters who articulates these lessons. And thus it becomes important to pull this debate into a broader discussion, for the Round Table has several potential lessons beyond who benefits from its particular outcomes in Poland.

First, one must consider directly the lessons this particular transformation in Poland provided the rest of the communist bloc. As Henryk Wujec observed:

Poland was unable to present itself on the international stage, although Poland was the author of the collapse of communist bloc. The whole reform began in Poland. Poland is the symbol of the disintegration of the communist bloc, and not the fall of the Berlin Wall. Poland was a source of changes: the election in 89; the constitution of Mazowiecki's government; all what has happened in Poland earlier, in the years 80-81, and during martial law. First of all, it was the Round Table, and afterwards the parliamentary election and creation of the government that were followed by transformations in other countries, also in East Germany. There wouldn't have been any unification of Germany, any fall of the Berlin Wall, any disintegration of the communist bloc, any collapse of the Soviet Union, if not for Poland, without all that happened here, without Solidarity, without the Round Table, without the first parliamentary election, and without the Mazowiecki government. All that showed the way of peaceful overcoming the totalitarian system, the system which caused the death of a great number of generations of people, which murdered enormous masses of people, and which was guilty of immense...immense crimes.

It needs to be admitted that at that time it was not that bloody and cruel any longer, that it did evolve a lot, but nevertheless these graves would remain forever. Nobody could ever imagine that it could be done in such a peaceful way. I think nobody...today the role of Poland tends to be ignored. Historians do not stress it enough. That's why it is so good that you are doing your research, because I do think that all those

events were eventually blurred, dominated by a very spectacular fall of the Berlin Wall. In order to have the Wall fall, however, first all those events had to happen in Poland and in our... part of the world. Without it, any attempt to make the Wall fall would have ended in a salvo of machine guns, and nothing else (pp. 10-11).

Wujec is right. The narrative of collapse, of systemic exhaustion, of the end to the division of Europe, is captured magnificently by the fall of the Berlin Wall. But this metaphor overlooks the strategic vision of Poland's political leadership and popular classes, and the incredible value of that productive antinomy between the will to negotiate and the capacity to mobilize, between the opportunities for change and the value to be found in self-limitation. And by leaving the Round Table in the middle of Poland's own political contest, Poland also loses the possibility to present itself as a model for emulation. But what kind of model?

In this sense, placing the Round Table negotiations next to the broader human rights movement may lead to another productive antinomy. For the most part, the human rights movement today seeks to find a way to bring those responsible for crimes against humanity to trial. By contrast, the Round Table negotiations were symptomatic of a suspension of that charge of criminality, and a willingness to negotiate with those who may have murdered one's colleague, one's relative.

For many Poles associated with the Round Table, one should simply leave the Round Table as it was, and refuse to consider it to be anything more than a mechanism out of stalemate. One could consider separately, then, whether, as Jarosław Kaczyński (p.7) recommended, "de-communicization, which is, well, depriving a certain group of the possibility to be active in public life, and including vetting, that is liquidation of the old liaisons with the Security Service" should be pursued.

One can debate this very question in terms of outcomes and feasibility, as Kryzstof Kozłowski suggested:

Some people claim that if vetting and de-communicization had been done, communists judged and locked up, everything would have been very different. Perhaps it would have been, but it was impossible, because it is not easy to de-communicize the whole country being a minority. Not because the majority was communist, but a large group was tied to the system, though not ideologically... communist ideology was already dead but it was tied to the former system.

Another part of the society was not interested in anything, and definitely not in radical changes. That silent 40% was dangerous. What could have been done in a

different way? For years people explained to me: "If you'd performed de-communization like in the Czech Republic, now things would have been much different. You should have followed the Czechs; they've done that and they have a free country." Let me remind you, however, that after 10 years, the strongest party in the Czech Republic is not even social-democratic, but communist, and compared to it, our SLD (the Social-Democratic Alliance) looks like European liberals.

It seems it is so easy to enact anti-communist decrees and acts, but human attitude has to be changed slowly and through real actions. You won't change a way of thinking with a decree. Nowadays in the Czech Republic, the biggest protest marches take place with one motto on the banners: "Go to hell, all of you: Havel, Klaus, Zeman, go to hell." And the protesters are the people who struck down communism during the velvet revolution. I am not ironic and I'm not making fun of the Czechs. I know that it takes long years, generations even, to change people's mentality and it can't happen in a day (pp. 12-13).

That might, however, be the very point. One can't change mentalities by decrees and one can't solve problems with legislation. But the debate over responsibility needs to be paired with the question of openness and democracy's constituency. Tadeusz Mazowiecki summarized the essence of Solidarity in that way:

However, from the point of view of the rules of democratic thinking, which was the essence of Solidarity, it ensued that everybody was supposed to have a future, you know, and not that the others were supposed to be second-class, were supposed to be a second-class citizens. It was, above all else, the fundamental change. If we, non-party members, were de facto treated as second-class citizens in that system, then we couldn't come just like that and say: "Now we would be the first class and you would be the second." We alone were able to create that change by saying that there would no longer be any actual divisions of citizens into categories. So, it was, first of all, from the principled point of view, and second of all, from the point of view of reason and peaceful carrying out of that enormous change in a situation when we were alone (p. 10).

Here, in this essence of Solidarity one finds, once again, that productive antinomy that motivated Solidarity, except this time slightly reformulated. On the one hand, Solidarity is based on principle, not the mobilization against communists but the value of democracy. Next to it is the compromise required by the constraints of potential communist violence. That formulation remains, thus, within the Polish political contest, as it should be. But it might also rest on a formulation that takes the lessons of the Round Table into a broader discussion about guilt for past crimes and responsibility for peaceful change.

For the value of the Round Table to find its broader resonance in global social change, I believe that we need to reformulate the questions with which we began this project. It's not a matter of the transformation of the sense of one's own identity that needs to be explained in the course of negotiating

revolution. It's more a matter of how one's constituencies can understand, or appreciate, that shift to negotiation. Is it a sign of weakness? Treachery?

Although both are popular theses when it comes to the Polish Round Table, with one associated with humility and the other with an abundance of confidence, neither encourages us to reformulate the categories with which we have inscribed the previous struggle. Instead, we might look for the conditions under which the terms of the contest can be changed in light of negotiated revolutions. And here, then, we need to rethink the vocabulary not only of justice but also of peaceful redemption, whose combination is not easy to find in the language of social science, or in the prevailing terms of the Round Table and its location in Polish political contest ten years later. One might, however, begin to find it in the quotation with which this article began, and in the advice of Pope John Paul II provided with regard to the conference at the University of Michigan. His Secretary of State wrote that His Holiness hoped that:

... this disciplined reflection on the spiritual, cultural and political aspects of Poland's peaceful transition to democracy will highlight their ultimate foundation in a moral imperative arising from man's innate dignity and his transcendent vocation to freedom in the pursuit of truth.<sup>6</sup>

One might find this vocation in the Round Table, but it will take much more theory and practice around negotiated revolution to see beyond its implication in contemporary Polish contests. And one might begin by asking whether it is possible to find political redemption without confession in the course of social and political change when movement from the world of revolution to the world of peace, rather than the contest of political wills in the Polish arena, becomes the point of reference.

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<sup>6</sup> Encyclical Letter *Centesimus Annus* 23-24 is referenced in this letter sent from the Vatican on March 5, 1999 to President of the University of Michigan, Lee Bollinger.

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## **Appendix A: NCEEER project interviewees**

*Bogdan Borusewicz*, politician, Solidarity activist, member of parliament

*Stefan Bratkowski*, author, journalist, member of Polish United Workers' Party (PZPR) (1951-81), participant in Round Table discussions for the opposition

*Ryszard Bugaj*, economist, Solidarity activist, participant in Round Table discussions for the opposition, member of parliament

*Zbigniew Bujak*, politician, underground Solidarity leader, participant in Round Table discussions for the opposition (3 interviews)

*Wiesław Chrzanowski*, professor of law, Solidarity activist, member of parliament, founder and president of the Christian National Alliance (1989-94)

*Stanisław Ciosek*, participant in the Round Table discussions for the communist government, Polish ambassador to Moscow (1990-95)

*Josef Czyrek*, foreign minister (1980-83); secretary of the Central Committee of the Polish United Workers' Party (PZPR) (1981-89), participant in the Round Table negotiations for the government/coalition

*Bishop Bronisław Dembowski*, bishop of the Diocese of Włocławek, professor of philosophy at Catholic University of Lublin, participant in Round Table discussions

*Władysław Frasyniuk*, Solidarity activist, head of the lower Silesian region of Solidarity, participant in Round Table discussions for the opposition, vice-chair of the Democratic Union (UD) and Freedom Union (UW)

*Andrzej Gdula*, presidential advisor on matters of internal security, participant in the Round Table discussions for the communist government

*Aleksander Hall*, Solidarity activist, participant in Round Table discussions for the opposition, member of parliament, leader of the Conservative Party (1992-97)

*Zbigniew Janas*, electrician, Solidarity activist, member of parliament

*Janina Jankowska*, broadcast journalist, Solidarity activist, participant in Round Table discussions for the opposition (2 interviews)

*Gabriel Janowski*, farmer, member of parliament, Catholic activist, founder of Solidarity of Individual Farmers, participant in Round Table discussions for the opposition

*General Wojciech Jaruzelski*, minister of defense (1968-83), prime minister (1981-85), first secretary of the Polish communist party (1981-89), president of non-communist Poland (1989-90)

*Jarosław Kaczyński*, Solidarity activist, founding member of the Workers' Defense Committee (KOR), participant in Round Table discussions for the opposition, head of the Presidential Chancellory (1989-90), co-founder of the "Porozumienia Centrum" Party (1991)

*Lech Kaczyński*, lawyer, Solidarity activist, participant in Round Table discussions for the opposition, president of the Chief Inspectorate/NIK (1992-95)

*Krzysztof Kozłowski*, journalist, politician, participant in Round Table discussions for the opposition

*Marcin Król*, professor of history, editor-in-chief of *Res Publica*

*Bogdan Królewski*, businessman, farmer, member of ZSL (United Populist Party), governor of Bydgoszcz region (1980-84), participant in Round Table discussions for the government/coalition

*Jacek Kuroń*, politician, historian, author, founding member of the Workers' Defense Committee (KOR), Solidarity activist, participant in Round Table discussions for the opposition (2 interviews)

*Jan Lityński*, mathematician, founding member of the Workers' Defense Committee (KOR), Solidarity activist, participant in Round Table discussions for the opposition

*Helena Łuczywo*, journalist, Solidarity activist, participant in Round Table discussions for the opposition

*Roman Malinowski*, chief of the Polish Peasant Party, participant in Round Table discussions for the government/coalition

*Tadeusz Mazowiecki*, editor, Solidarity activist, participant in Round Table discussions for the opposition, first prime minister in non-communist Poland (1989-90)

*Jacek Merkel*, Solidarity activist, participant in Round Table discussions for the opposition, minister for security affairs (1990-91)

*Adam Michnik*, editor-in-chief of *Gazeta Wyborcza*, Solidarity activist, human rights activist, participant in Round Table discussions for the opposition

*Leszek Miller*, politician, member of parliament, participant in the Round Table discussions for the communist government

*Alfred Miodowicz*, leader of the All Polish Trade Union (OPZZ) sponsored by the communist government, participant in Round Table discussions for the government/coalition

*Leszek Moczulski*, lawyer, journalist, author, from 1979 leader of the Confederation for an Independent Poland (KPN), presidential candidate (1990), member of parliament (KPN - Right) (1991-)

*Jan Olszewski*, politician, lawyer, founding member of the Workers' Defense Committee (KOR), participant in Round Table discussions for the opposition, prime minister (1991-92), leader of ROP (Movement for the Reconstruction of Poland) (1997-)

*Bishop Alojzy Orszulik*, bishop of the Diocese of Łowicz, professor of canonical law, participant in Round Table discussions

*Marian Orzechowski*, rector of the PZPR Academy of Social Sciences (1984-86), minister of foreign affairs (1985-88), participant in Round Table discussions for the government/coalition

*Mieczysław Rakowski*, editor-in-chief of *Polityka*, member of Central Committee of the Polish communist party (1975-90), prime minister (1988-89), first secretary of the Polish communist party (1989-90)

*Janusz Reykowski*, professor of psychology, participant in Round Table discussions for the communist government

*Jan Rulewski*, politician, Solidarity activist, member of parliament

*Zdzisław Sadowski*, professor of economics, participant in Round Table discussions for the communist government

*Józef Ślisz*, politician, farmer, member of Solidarity of Individual Farmers, participant in Round Table discussions for the opposition

*Grażyna Staniszevska*, politician, Solidarity activist, participant in Round Table discussions for the opposition

*Andrzej Stelmachowski*, lawyer, Catholic activist, participant in Round Table discussions for the opposition (2 interviews)

*Hanna Świda-Ziemia*, professor of logic, Solidarity activist, participant in Round Table discussions for the opposition

*Jerzy Urban*, journalist, official in the government of the People's Republic of Poland (1981-89), participant in Round Table discussions for the communist government

*Jerzy J. Wiatr*, professor of political sociology, participant in Round Table discussions for the communist government

*Henryk Wujec*, physicist, Solidarity activist, organizer and recruiter of opposition participants for the Round Table, member of parliament