**POLAND: Observations, Questions and Reflections. Mike Miller. July, 1996.**

**Preface**

 I'm walking down a street playing my harmonica. A boy, about my age, on a crutch hopping on one leg, comes toward us and stops before he reaches us. He silently removes his cap and holds it in a position to accept an offering. My father digs into his pocket and removes some coins. My mother tells me to stop playing my harmonica. Around us, for block after block, are piles of rubble and the occasional skeleton of a building. "Zienkoyu," says the boy as my father drops the coins into his cap. We move on. The year is 1946. The city is Warsaw. I am nine years old. The memory has remained indelibly imprinted in my mind. I am haunted by the unfairness of a world that has one semi-crippled boy begging and me playing my harmonica.

 Warsaw was in ruins when I visited it in my boyhood because it had been destroyed building by building by the retreating Nazis. In 1943, as a last gasp before the final destruction of the ghetto, Jews in Warsaw staged an uprising. Their courageous act was too little too late; the world still gave little priority to The Final Solution. The United States Government refused to bomb the train tracks to Auschwitz. In 1944, the pro-Western Warsaw underground rose up against its Nazi occupier. For two months a battle raged. The Russian Army sat on the other side of the Wista (Vistula) River, letting the Germans eliminate what would otherwise have been a post-war opposition to the Communists. The Cold War was really already underway. In the two months, most of the members of the Resistance were killed. Hitler ordered the block by block destruction of the city and then evacuated it. When Polish Communist and Russian units marched into the demolished city, they killed whomever was left of the underground.

 Warsaw's returning residents were faced with the choice of abandoning or rebuilding their city. They choose to rebuild. When I was there in 1946, age 9, on block after block there were human assembly lines removing the rubble. Hand to hand, brick by brick, stone by stone, they tore down what remained of the skeletons of their city...and over a ten year period re-built it. The Poles are like that. For one thousand years, their state has disappeared but they have persisted as a people. The principal bearer of the Polish national identity during these periods of rule by Prussia, Bavaria, Lithuania, Russia and the Austro-Hungarian Empire was the Polish Catholic Church. Only between World Wars I and II, and for a very brief period after WW II, were there democratic governments in Poland.

 Now, 50 years later, I was again in Warsaw. My trip had two major purposes and one minor one. I hoped to interest leaders in either Solidarity and/or the Polish Catholic Church in the kind of organizing work I've now done for 35 years in the United States. I also looked forward to the opportunity to learn from the experiences of others--particularly the experience of Solidarity whose struggle to establish a free trade union ultimately led to the end of Poland's Communist government. I was also interested in the emerging role of Poland's "non-governmental organizations"--the counterparts to the US "nonprofit sector."

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**The Context**

From August, 1980 to December, 1981, Polish society organized against its Communist government. The principal expression of this self-organization was Solidarity which, at its peak, had 10 million members. At the end of 1981, martial law was declared and Solidarity went underground. Most of its leaders were arrested. Efforts to negotiate with the Communist government had proven fruitless. The Communists would not tolerate an independent center of power with which they would have to negotiate on a basis of mutual respect even if control of the state apparatus could remain in their hands. But the Communist government without the support of society could not function. With perestroika and glasnost, Mikhail Gorbachev made clear the Russians would not bail the Polish government out if it got in trouble with its own people. As living standards declined because the system simply wasn't functioning, it became clear to the government that something had to be done. Strikes began again. In 1989, re-birth took place. The government finally concluded it had to deal with Solidarity and organized its "Round Table." Lech Walesa persuaded striking workers to go back to work. The government stalled until Gdansk Solidarity started to organize a General Strike. In mutually agreed upon elections that soon followed, the Communists lost and lost badly. Soon they were out of power, and a Solidarity backed government was in.

 The new government promised that with six months of free market "shock therapy" the economy would begin to rebound. It didn't. International financing by such agencies as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund came with strings attached: impose austerity and end various government welfare and subsidy programs. Western investment didn't materialize at the expected rate. Western capitalists came, looked, saw the antiquated state of much of the industrial economy and decided not to stay.

 Nor did the old Communists simply give up. Quite the contrary. With the tenacity that comes when faced with losing privileges and prerogatives, they fought to hang on. In many of the public bureaucracies they did. They retained control of state-owned enterprises that weren't privatized because there was no one to buy them. Their union regained some of its membership and support when the Solidarity-supported government failed to deliver on its promises.

 At the same time, market reforms did lead to some investment. New enterprises developed. New capitalists emerged. Some people began to do very well; there were suddenly Polish millionaires. Other people, many more of them, lost ground to two phenomenon which were unfamiliar in the Communist period: inflation and unemployment. Further, the security system began to collapse. The state would no longer provide, however inadequately, for basic health, housing, income and other needs.

 By the mid-1990s, the old Communists were back in power. Ironically, they are the beneficiaries of a delayed realization of some of the promises of the "free market" and the policies put in practice by the earlier governments. Poland's growth rate is now above 6%. While figures vary, it does seem that for a significant number of Poles (argument rages about whether the number is a majority or not) life is beginning to get better. And Poland is now an open society. Never domesticated by the Communists who sought a détente with it, the Catholic Church now plays a full role in Polish society. Other voluntary associations are emerging. There is a free press. Competing unions seek the allegiance of Polish workers.

 The open society also brings fears. When I was in Warsaw, a young man killed in the street when he went to the aid of a victim of a robbery-in-progress. Crime is a common concern. So is drugs. Parents and grandparents worry about the state of Polish youth. The sense of stability and community is eroding.

 A Polish intellectual, who wished not to be publicly quoted, was pessimistic about the current situation. "We face a situation in which other governments which might be allies place more emphasis on nation-state interests than they do on the development of Polish democracy. International investors are principally interested in the security of their investments and maximizing their profits. International institutions, particularly the World Bank and International Monetary Fund, are interested in controlling inflation, stabilizing the climate for private investment and creating an infra-structure for the free market. No one with any economic or political power is interested in the development of our people or the development of our democratic institutions if these conflict with other interests." He told me that he reluctantly voted for the former Communists in the run-off election. "It was not with any conviction that I voted for them," he said, "but I had no other way to protest to dominance of the free market ideology."

**Non-governmental organizations**

In my work in the United States, most "community based nonprofit organizations" play an ambiguous role in relation to the kind of organizing with which I've been involved. Many of them administer excellent programs--direct service, community development and advocacy. Many of them are sensitive to the needs and interests of those they seek and claim to serve. At the same time, the views of most of them toward community organizing range from indifferent to antagonistic. They often function as the "brokers" between "downtown" and the broad interests of constituencies of relatively powerless people. At the worst, they play a welfare colonialism role, keeping people dependent on "the power structure." Whether their funding comes from government, corporations, foundations or well-to-do suburbanites, they often oppose efforts to build broadly-based community organizations that could speak independently for the people who are the "clients" of these nonprofit organizations. In Eastern Europe, the desire to develop "civil society" often is expressed by support to the non-governmental organizations.

 Most of the non-governmental organization leaders with whom I met are supported with funds from some combination of US AID, American foundations or Western European funding sources. Each of them was engaged in useful, interesting and important, activities. Deeply influenced by their western nonprofit organization counterparts, they think of themselves as providing services for, or advocating in the interests of, a beneficiary group. The idea that people with problems should themselves be organized in democratic voluntary associations through which they speak in their own behalf was not at the center of their agendas, though some were sympathetic to it and there were often points of common interest.

 The Institute for Democracy in Eastern Europe is working to teach local weeklies to become independent through advertising, sales and subscriptions. Their strategy is to give small, one-time grants that give just enough of a spurt to allow an almost successful weekly to make it on its own. Now there is an informal network of the successful papers. They help one another, and try to spread the word for independent journalism and are teaching others how to achieve the same independent standing. I like the idea of nurturing independent voices--and this program had appeal. The papers typically cover things like local government activities, parish news, human-interest stories--including about students, announcements of local activities and problems in the local community.

 As we spoke, The Institute's Director , Monica Agopsowicz, acknowledged that in some cases the most successful local papers may take initiatives away from local citizens because they come to depend on the paper as their advocate. On the other hand, these papers make discussion of local issues public and give people confidence that these matters should be the topic of public discussion. The Institute is "deliberately staying small, with a low overhead. We don't want a big superstructure."

 The Local Initiatives Program is supported by PHARE, the European Union's fund for democracy and pluralism in Eastern Europe. I met its Warsaw-based manager, Jerzy Drazkiewicz. He sees the main problem in Poland as the "lack of civic will." There are few non-governmental organizations or voluntary associations. "We are just getting to the point where people organize themselves to protect their interests," he said. The NGOs are the first step in that direction. There have been single-issue campaigns in Poland, but no permanent constituency organizations. Now emerging are various self-help groups such as parents of the physically or mentally disabled, associations of people with diabetes, breast cancer and other illnesses. "People are just learning they have a responsibility to create their own environment." The best signs in Poland today, according to Drazkiewicz, are at the local level. Local governments are trying to solve problems, and are more responsive.

 Jacek Kozlowski, Foundation to Support Local Democracy, also sees the best hope for developing citizenship at the local level. But he saw big difficulties. "We are developing democracy from the top down," he told me. Poland is working on its parliament and national government, but not giving enough attention to things at the local level. He estimates that there are now in Poland 6,000 foundations, 20,000 other NGOs and 30,000 informal organizations. The only Polish experience with democracy was between World War I and II, with a brief post-WWII experience. Poles, he said, still need to learn democratic citizenship.

 Like other NGO leaders, Kozlowski places his hope in what is emerging at the local level. People are developing trust in local government--much more than for national political leaders. The new government is now blocking reforms which would strengthen local government because it wants to keep things centralized.

 Poland's non-governmental organizations are still in their infancy. Volunteerism isn't part of the new culture, though it is beginning to develop. Most voluntary associations are made up of younger people who have time for such things. But there is a tremendous problem of burnout. In order to sustain volunteerism, there is probably going to have to be a group of professionals whose work is to nurture and sustain volunteers. But where will the money come from? The development of donor foundations is also just beginning. Since there aren't many Poles with money, and since those with money are still involved in personal accumulation, there doesn't appear to be a domestic donor base for the kind of grant-making that exists in the US.

 During the Communist period, everything was run from the central government. People are just beginning to get used to the idea that local government can do things to solve problems. As experience with local government emerges, people are beginning to get more involved. But there are also multiple legal restrictions on NGOs making it difficult to establish them. All this is still in the process of being worked out in Poland.

 After several meetings with representatives of the non-governmental organizations, I focused the remainder of my trip on labor and church leaders.

**Solidarity**

 Solidarity is in the midst of a crisis of identity. It toppled the Communist regime and elected its principal leader to the Presidency of the new democracy. Heavily influenced by free market economy advocates, the new government initiated its shock therapy program. While there is debate about the current state of the Polish economy, and exactly who is benefiting and how much, there is little doubt that the early period of shock therapy is largely responsible for the re-emergence of the former Communists as a major political force in Polish society. That experience is, in large part, the source of the identity crisis within Solidarity. Because they were defending the new government, Solidarity was in some ways outflanked by the old Communist union and its affiliates that now have substantial strength among Polish workers. That strength is enriched by the fact that Solidarity's assets, built up from a dues of one-percent of wages and the contributions of independent unions from around the world in the first period of Solidarity (August, 1980-December, 1981), were turned over to the National Federation of Trade Unions (OPZZ) after martial law was declared at the end of 1981 and have been kept by them since. Negotiations over the issue of assets are now underway, and various international labor bodies are withholding recognition of OPZZ until it is resolved.

 Solidarity's internal debate now is over whether they are a "social movement" or a "trade union." Their understanding of the former involves taking a responsibility for the whole of society--which, unfortunately, they make coincidental with their defense of the Solidarity-backed government. Their understanding of the latter involves defending the particular interests of workers, and even the more particular interests of those workers within a specific occupation or sector of the economy. My major question in our discussions was, "Why is it either-or?" The answer was that Solidarity's attempt to speak for society as a whole had led it to ignore its membership--and that it was time to do the latter. "How can you speak for the membership without addressing the problems of society as a whole?" I asked. It is painfully clear that Poland's domestic economic policy is shaped by more than what can be bargained for in contract negotiations. While many of Solidarity's leaders are well aware of their dependence on international private investment, The World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, I heard little about how these forces might be addressed.

 It is important to understand that Solidarity is a unitary organization--not a federation or confederation. A worker joins Solidarity. She or he is then automatically also a member of the occupational grouping (branch) within Solidarity (teachers, miners, etc.) which represents that individual's workplace. "Locals" and other bodies of particular occupations are administrative organizations within Solidarity, as are inter-union bodies that might form at a regional level.

 Massive problems remain for Polish workers despite a generally improving economy. Incredible corruption accompanies transfer of ownership of government property to private ownership. Because former Nomenklatura control much of the bureaucracy and are still managers of state-owned enterprises, there is endless conniving to turn government property over to them. On the other hand, where enterprises are unlikely to be able to survive in the marketplace, there is pressure to keep government subsidies coming to them and/or to keep them under government ownership. In the first round of privatization, former Communist bureaucrats made the rules in government ministries then became the owners of the newly privatized companies. None of these old managers/ new entrepreneurs want to deal with strong independent unions.

 Solidarity leaders generally have accepted a "service model" idea of unionism. According to this view, the primary function of the union is to provide representation for its members. This emphasis is largely because of the influence of the AFL-CIO and various individual American union representatives who have worked with Solidarity. In this approach, it is principally full-time union representatives or work-site stewards who "represent" the interests of workers in relation to supervisory and managerial personnel at the workplace, and it is full-time elected or appointed representatives of the workers who negotiate contracts. While some American unions have begun to shift to an "organizing model," it is often the case that the language of organizing is simply superimposed on old practices. In some cases, a new layer of workers become involved as stewards and they do things that were previously done by business agents or representatives. But even in these cases, there is little active engagement of groups of workers so that a new kind of power relationship can be developed between workers and their managers.

 An interest on the part of a union, especially in the public service sector, in making direct alliances with the beneficiaries of the services provided by its members is a pre-condition to involvement in broadly-based community organizing. Otherwise, "the community" tends to see the union as simply another interest group serving the interests of its specific members but uninterested in the people they are supposed to serve.

 At Solidarity headquarters, I met with Andrezej Adamczyk and Bob Fielding, an American expatriate who has been with Solidarity for a number of years. Fielding was instrumental in getting me appointments with various Solidarity officials around Poland. One place I very much wanted to visit was the Gdansk shipyard, formerly the Lenin Shipyard and birthplace of Solidarity. Despite his best efforts, Fielding couldn't get anything set up. "The workers want to know how it's going to help them," he told me. "There have been so many people who visited, made promises, left and were never heard from again."

 Adamczyk and Fielding are among those who think the real income for most workers is now going up. So are choices in the marketplace. People can buy appliances, furniture and other goods that were previously available only to the Nomenklatura. The down side, however, of the current economy is that there is a 15-20% unemployment rate. This figure may overstate the actual pain being experienced by people. Perhaps as many as one-half of the officially unemployed are working in the underground economy, especially in construction.

 Fielding described ways in which state-owned enterprises are sold off by former Communists in government to former Nomenklatura. One method is for a manager to give employees a raise that he knew would bankrupt the company. Once bankrupt, the company would be sold at a low price to an investor who had bribed the manager to do the bankrupting. Of course this is illegal. In another method, an unprofitable company with a profitable unit or subsidiary would use the profits from the latter to buy out the company which would then be acquired by its old management group. Yet another approach is underway now in the parliament. A law is being worked on that would transfer state-owned enterprise to various management elements of the former Nomenklatura. Similar legislation was vetoed by Lech Walesa when he was president. With the former Communists now controlling the entire government, such legislation has a good chance of becoming law.

**The Solidarity Teachers Union and Polish Education**

 The national leadership of the Teachers Union is interested in educational reform. Its President, Stefan Kubowicz, told me that one of the union's tasks is "to prepare society for the idea of reform." But in this undertaking, the leadership sees itself as "ahead" of its members. I met with a number of Teacher Union leaders. Those with whom I spoke see the teacher rank-and-file as "patient, frightened and accepting whatever is given them by the government." The teachers are "passive, used to doing what they are told. The local situation now is one of fear, in part because of the 1993 strike that the teachers lost." (There may be a realistic basis for fear. One Krakow teacher told me that the old Communist security apparatus is now the base for a 100,000-person private security guard system. While these workers now work for many private firms, there is fear that they could be mobilized by a new Communist government. I have no idea whether or not the number is accurate; in this case, the perception is sufficient to be the basis of fear.) Teachers are "used to the old authoritarian system" in which the government had a standard way in which to educate children, and teachers simply implemented it. "They want the union to do things for them, but not to be involved themselves." But teachers have some real concerns. Evidently violence is growing in schools. Funds are limited, and the government, now run by former Communists, claims the money isn't available. The government asks, "Do you want us to take it from health care? from the miners? From whom do you want us to take it?" The situation is in tremendous flux, and it is difficult to predict what the future holds.

 At the Foundation for Democracy, another of Poland's emerging NGOs, I met Victor Kulerski, former Assistant Deputy in the Department of Education for the first post-Communist government. Now he runs a foundation whose major purpose is to assist local voluntary associations. Two of the groups with which they've worked closely are the Solidarity Teachers Union and emerging student organizations. The Foundation is interested in democratizing Polish education. In the Communist system, the content of curriculum came down from "on high," and the authoritarian teaching method left little room for teacher initiative or classroom discussion. Kulerski observed that in their training work with public school teachers, "People now want rights, but not responsibilities. For so long the state was the enemy and rights were limited. The Communist Party and the government always talked about responsibilities. Now the idea is suspect."

 The Foundation has adapted role-playing exercises they learned from American visitors to their Polish context. They use simulations, games and role-playing to draw people out and break through the old mode of someone in front of a classroom lecturing while everyone else took notes. Kulerski is influenced by the Rochester (NY) Teachers Union, and wants teachers to take greater responsibility for the quality of their work. This isn't a popular idea with the teachers. The Solidarity and former Communist Teachers Union compete with one another to be more militant in defense of teachers; neither is interested in asking teachers to assume greater responsibility. Most teachers, Kulerski said, want a union for safety and security. He thinks Poland has a way to go before its unions can go beyond this. His interest is in moving the union beyond this narrow agenda. I heard echoes of the debate in the US labor movement over participating in various kind of workplace quality committees with management and wondered whether Kulerski's view could be pursued while unions retained their ability to defend teachers narrower bread-and-butter interests--which include not only economic benefits but class size and adequate teacher training. Teachers, and the education system, are still relics of the Old Order, he said. "To have a democracy, we must create a system of democratic education." The situation is complicated by the fact that the old Communist-led union competes with the Solidarity union for members. A teacher organization which pushes its constituents beyond their comfort level might well lose its members.

 Efforts have been taken to develop local school site boards. Often teachers are opposed, parents indifferent and students afraid. Like other institutions, Poland's school system is in flux. It was administered nationally, and teachers were employees of the national government. Local governments are now taking over running the schools, but teachers remain employees of the national education department. And the teachers want to keep it that way. Both unions want to retain the national employee status for teachers. What does this mean for local accountability? When people feel under assault, they retreat to narrow comfort zones. The fox-hole mentality sets in, and change becomes almost impossible. Can Solidarity at once defend the legitimate interests of teachers and lead them to become supporters of democratic education reform? Perhaps the new government, aligned with the old Communist unions, will provide the resistance that Solidarity needs to build its base and struggle for educational reform. Its rival is not likely to be a militant opponent of the government--something it was only too ready to do when Solidarity-supported politicians were running things.

 In Krakow, I met for several hours with regional leaders of the Teachers Union. They described the difficulty they have involving teachers in activities of the union. The union "explains" issues to the rank-and-file and tries to "convince" them to back the union. "We end up with names on petitions, but not much else," one of the leaders said. The vast majority is "apathetic. It is natural that the majority be inert. Only at times of a direct threat or crisis do we get involvement." Speaking of the elementary school teachers, one of them said that at the present time, only 10% of the teachers are active in any union; they are split roughly 50:50 between the ZNP (the OPZZ affiliate) and Solidarity. "We tend to bemoan the fact that we are so few," she said. "The aura around Solidarity is disappearing. We will lose members if we don't effectively develop into an association that can enhance the life of teachers." Fear, time and trouble were the main reasons all the leaders gave for non-participation. The "model of life has shifted; it is based on the idea of the marketplace. Teachers ask themselves, 'If I put in time, what will I get out of it?' People are losing their idealism."

 I sat in on a regional leadership meeting of the Krakow teachers. There was a report from a just-concluded national meeting. The picture was bleak. Principals are now signing single-semester five-month contracts with teachers, thus the teacher isn't paid for the summer. There are various cuts in public education spending. Subsidies to local schools are being cut. Hours required of teachers are increasing. In the second day of the national meeting, the union decided on a demonstration to take place on a specific day, and wanted the same slogans used around the country. The scheduling wasn't good for the Krakow region, and its leaders had some additional ideas for slogans. It was a standard problem of coordinating a national effort while being sensitive to local particularities, and emblematic of the multiplicity of problems facing Solidarity as a union.

 What struck me in the lengthy conversation with Krakow Teacher Union leaders is how similar to their US counterparts are the problems they face. I was particularly struck by their descriptions of member "apathy," hearing echoes of the complaints of many American union officials with whom I've worked over the years. When I made this observation, one of the Krakow leaders dead-panned, "yes, I think it's because we came down from the trees at about the same time."

**A Model School**

 The Krakow Union leaders also invited a parent leader (who is also a teacher at a different school from the one his children attend) to meet with me. From him I heard one of the most optimistic stories of educational reform. He is part of a parent council that emerged as a result of parent self-organization. It is now an officially recognized structure supported by the school's principal. The parent group has been involved in both the quality of education and upgrading the physical plant of the school. In his high school, there are 1,000 students, 31 classes and 85 teachers. In addition to the parents meeting separately in their own organization, there is a tri-partite body made up of teachers, parents and students. Each other group also has its own separate body that meets apart from the tri-partite group. The student parliament has its own bulletin, access to internal media in the school and sponsors various social and educational activities. In the parent group, there are three representatives from each class--with a total of 93 people. There is an 85% participation rate. They meet every two months. In between these larger meetings, there is a 17-member executive which meets every three weeks, is internally self-governing and administers its own budget which comes from parent dues. But dues don't exclude anyone. If a parent can't pay the suggested dues, she or he can work in lieu of payment. I asked how widespread such schools were, and my informant didn't know. But, he said, this system exists on paper for all the schools in their district. He told me unequivocally that "this school is state-owned but it is virtually run by its parents, students and teachers." The school is not a typical one: 85% of its graduates to go college; seven foreign languages are taught at it. Only 12 of Krakow's 38 high schools send as high a percentage of their graduates to college. The remaining schools have specialized vocational education. A majority of the parent participants are women, and many of them are college educated.

**The Solidarity National Maritime Section**

 The National Maritime Section of Solidarity is in the historic Baltic port city of Gdynia. There I talked with Andrezej Koscik and Jacek Gegielski, a veteran Solidarity leader from the 1980-1981 period who spent some time in prison after martial law. There is, he said, a reaction against claims for justice beyond what is narrowly just for a particular group of workers. People are suspicious of "universal justice" because the idea was used by the Communists to justify denial of specific justice for specific workers. There were also, according to Gegielski, experiences in 1981 and 1989 with partnerships between workers and management. In both of these, the workers representatives were coopted and began to think like managers. The union had to struggle against the very people it elected to joint labor-management productivity committees. In Gegielski's view, the union has to educate its own members about what the union is and does. We had a lengthy discussion about how such education takes place and the relationship between direct worker involvement in action and education.

 Polish seamen, as is the case with other seamen is countries with independent unions and higher standards of living, are now threatened by "re-flagging." Ships fly under national flags. A ship flying the Polish flag negotiates with Polish seamen's unions. The same ship, with the same ownership, may "re-flag" in another country, hire non-union seamen there and achieve tremendous cost savings--by cutting wages and benefits, eliminating benefits and diminishing working conditions, and by sacrificing safety to increase profits. The union is fighting a defensive battle. To avoid being blamed by the membership for the shrinkage jobs, the union has to educate the members. (Again, the language of "the union" "educating" its members.) The Peoples Republic of China is now prepared to provide 250,000 seafarers to compete with western, unionized seafarers.

 "The question Solidarity now faces," Gegielski told me, "is whether it will be a trade union with experts or whether it structures a movement that cares about people who have no representation." He thought the union was now in a decisive period on this question. There is a tendency, he said, toward professionalization of union leaders and a growing gap between leaders and members. This is exacerbated by the reaction against the Communist system in which "there was a claim for universal justice, but there was no particular justice for anyone. Now people want particular justice at their workplace, and are suspicious of claims for justice for everyone."

 On the positive side, Gegielski told me that "Solidarity still has a capital of trust. We haven't spent it all yet. We lost some of it because of our identification with the government we helped elect. If we act like a union, we can build on this trust." But a union for whom? Gegielski agonizes about the dilemma. "If we try to protect everybody, then we are told by our members we aren't protecting them, and we are told that we are blocking 'market reforms'." Like waterside and seafaring unionists I've met around the world, the seamen of Poland are comfortable with an international perspective. Their members travel, and they host unionists from other countries. As one of Gegielski's associates simply put it, "There is a world-wide attack on our wages, working conditions and safety." For Gegielski, the principal answer to the problems facing Solidarity is to educate the members. "We have to explain the changing context," he said. He was for more "internal education." And, "Our general task is to educate our workers. It is not an easy task."

 This idea of education, heard from Teachers, Seafarers and Miners, tends to separate education from action and assumes a rather traditional idea of exactly how education works. The union leaders, possessing more information and elected to represent the interests of the workers, have the responsibility to educate their rank-and-file. This idea of education dominates Solidarity. The idea of education closely linked to action that could be taken at the local level didn't seem present. The current understanding places Solidarity leaders in the unenviable position of having to "explain" why they can't deliver for their members. To the extent that the members see "The Union" as the people who are full-time elected and appointed officials, then just to that extent are they likely to be "consumer members" of the union. Another approach would make them co-creators of the union. That approach is related to a more participatory idea of what democratic unionism is. Just as this approach is generally absent in the U.S., so it appeared to me to be absent in Poland.

 Organizing the emerging private sector, especially enterprises owned by the entrepreneurs who built them, is proving very difficult for Solidarity. These entrepreneurs (like their US counterparts) view the company and its employees as theirs. They are very anti-union. Since workers employed by them often earn much better wages than counterparts in the state sector, they initially see little need for a union. Then an issue arises, and they call the union. But it is often too late. The employer can dismiss these workers because he knows there are many waiting to take their place.

 I heard contradictory things about Polish workers, often from the same person. On the one hand, most of the union leaders bemoaned the apathy, withdrawal, defeatism and fear they described as being widespread. On the other hand, Bob Fielding said the problem is that workers will strike at the drop of a hat, ignoring procedures and their own leadership. They don't think strategically and, he said, "As a result, they lose when they could win." I thought both things might be true at the same time. In most situations, the old fear might be dominant. But aroused by a particular injustice, workers might recall the legacy of Solidarity and strike.

**The Solidarity Mineworkers Union**

 In Katowice, at the center of Upper Silesia, is Poland's coal industry. I met with a number of leaders of Solidarity's Mineworkers Union, including their President Krzysztof Mlodzik. The central problem facing the miners, like that of the Gdansk shipyard workers (whose yard was recently closed because it can't compete in the international market), is the technological backwardness of the mines. A restructuring and modernization of the mines would in all likelihood be accompanied by massive lay-offs. Compounding the difficulty for the Union is the fact that 60% of the people in the Katowice region have only an elementary school education. The idea of re-training or going back to school is alien to them. They simply want to keep their current job.

 As one would imagine, Mlodzik has given a good deal of thought to these matters and has a strategy to deal with the problem. There needs to be a government funded center for the re-structuring of industry that looks at the entire problem. In the past few years, he said, partial studies have been made but none of them adopts a long-range overview. These studies must look at not only what the miners can do but also at what government can do for miners who would become redundant--either if the industry modernizes or if it closes down. Among the things Mlodzik thinks government could do: cut taxes on people from the mining communities who start new businesses; lower the per unit price of electricity for companies in the local area; subsidize capital that invests in the region; spread the cost of environmental reclamation throughout the nation rather than imposing it on the mining region; spend some of the money now being spent on the environment for new technology for the mines. Mineworker jobs pay over twice what is being paid in jobs being created in the region by new investment. "Our workers won't take these cuts; it is too big a reduction in their standard of living."

 "We have managers who won't manage," Mlodzik said. "We think it is better to have a smaller enterprise than none. Inter-union rivalry and recalcitrance on the part of managers is blocking this kind of reform." The managers, he said, won't take intitiatives and depend on the government to do their thinking. The government ministries won't take any initiatives because they are too close to the managers (both coming out of the old Nomenklatura). It will take a new generation of managers to bring about the necessary changes in the industry. If a manager is enterprising, he loses resources which are allocated to managers who aren't doing anything. Thus there is no incentive to be a problem solver.

 The problem of a "service" versus "organizing" approach was implicit in a story Mlodzik told me about the difficulties Solidarity has in expanding its membership. "We work on the nitty-gritty day-to-day problems of workers," he told me. "The union has trained some advocates to represent workers on worksite grievances. Workers from other unions come to us for these services, but they don't join Solidarity. Last February, our union led a strike over back pay. Management claimed that the amount of money owed was small. By accident, the Union discovered documents that disclosed the amount owed was large. Solidarity won the strike. Despite this kind of service and representation, the workers aren't leaving other unions and joining Solidarity."

 The Mineworkers worry that the pressure from the environmentalists will force capital to leave the region with massive unemployment as the result. "These pressures," said Mlodzik, are coming from people who aren't from this region, whose lives don't depend on work here." It appears to be a classic work versus environment situation.

 The Solidarity Mineworker leaders worry about the competition among unions in the mines. "The trade union movement is now in bits and pieces," I was told. No union is willing to come to an agreement that involves layoffs because it will then be called a "sell-out" by competing unions. At the same time, workers are disenchanted with the inter-union rivalries and see them principally as a struggle between leadership groups, not a struggle that is in the interest of the workers themselves. A mine may have as many as eighteen unions competing with one another for the allegiance of the workers. Any leader who loses an argument or position within his union can quit and start a new one. No one, I was told, will unite willingly. Unity is going to have to come about by legislation that mandates sole bargaining agents who are selected at appropriate election times and then can't be challenged until some reasonable time period has elapsed. There are now bargaining councils of all unions. For agreements to be reached with management, there must be unanimity among the unions. In a recent situation, four of five unions agreed to a health provision. The fifth, and smallest, union vetoed the deal. Efforts by the four majority unions to get miners to put pressure on the hold-out were viewed by workers as an example of "quarreling among the leaders." The workers were unwilling to put pressure on the smallest union. Since this experience, Mlodzik came up with a new tactic. He goes to inter-union meetings with a tape recorder and when they get bogged down he says he wants to tape the proceedings so he can play them to the workers. This, he says, has forced a degree of accountability. On another occasion, he said he wanted to meet in a room with a microphone and loudspeaker so that the meeting could be broadcast to the workers. (In 1980, the Gdansk Lenin Shipyard workers used this tactic to great advantage.) The matter of inter-union competition is further complicated by the fact that the unions are affiliated with political parties. Thus workplace issues quickly get magnified into political and ideological differences. Mlodzik contrasted the behavior of the unions to that of potential investors who "come here together while the unions divide themselves."

 The Mineworker leaders were also suspicious of the government--any government. "Politically, foreign capital has more influence on the political parties than the Polish people." Despite pledges to the contrary, one of the leaders told me, between 1989-1995 there were secret negotiations and agreements between the Solidarity supported government and the World Bank regarding the mining industry. Nothing was debated in Parliament. Secret documents are now being released which show these agreements. Mlodzik has ideas for a government-supported solution to the miner's problem. First, buy out miners who are three years away from retirement at 70% of their present annual wages. Second, move some miners from less to more productive mines. Third, normal attrition will further diminish the workforce. Fourth, the provincial government should endorse some of these initiatives and become an ally of the Mineworkers Union to put pressure on the national government. Total employment has decreased from a post-World War II height of 340,000 to a present 270,000. Even this number can't be sustained. None of these solutions, however, deal with the problem of the children of mineworker families who want to remain in the area. It is not difficult to foresee an Appalachian scenario in Upper Silesia with all its tragic consequences for community and family life.

 The suspicion of government was confirmed for Mlodzik in the national election. "We are moving toward a society in which 5% of the people have 90% of the wealth. Walesa knows this, but didn't say anything about it in the campaign. Neither did the Left. No one did. None of the politicians addressed this issue.

 From the Solidarity leaders I heard a strong emphasis on professionalizing--with both positive and, for me at least, negative implications. They want to learn the economics of their industry, become competent at generating proposals for restructuring and be able to match management with data and facts. All that, I think, is to the good. At the same time, one of them told me that, "it's the force of your argument that counts now. You can't just occupy the mine and make demands. If you have an argument, you have to be able to win your point. You have to translate your point of view into language which workers and management (my emphasis) will understand." Is the "force of your argument" a substitute for or a complement to the power to shut the mine down? I thought these leaders came very close to abandoning worker power as one of the tools with which to pursue their values and interests.

**The Piast Mine**

 From union headquarters we went to the Piast Mine, one of the sites of major historic strikes in the development of Solidarity. Leaders there told me about a visit to their mine by a delegation from the United Mine Workers of America. The Poles asked the Americans to guess how many miners worked in their mine. The Americans guessed 350. The Poles then told them some particularities about the depth of the mine, the technology being used to extract the coal and other particularities. The Americans doubled their estimate to 700. "Add a zero to your number," the Poles said. There are 7,200 workers at the Piast mine. The Americans reacted in shock.

 The Piast leaders now are wrestling with how to deal with the market economy. "We look at the human side, and the government and managers are now looking at profits," they said. "Some of the present restructuring plans seek only to cut costs and people. There is no thought for the human dimension. These plans represent 'wild privatization'." Things are now being done to workers for which there is no economic reason. The Polish Mineworkers are not against restructuring or increased efficiency in their mines. They attribute the breaking of the British mine workers union by the Thatcher government as in part due to the union's refusal to agree to restructuring the British mines. I don't know the facts, but this was the perception in Poland.

 "At the end of the Communist period," these leaders told me, "we believed in the free market. That was an error. Now we understand there isn't a free market. The market is structured by institutions, including businesses, government and unions. We agree with a reform process, but it should serve people who work here not serve international capital at the expense of local people. Where there is no union, capital is entering Poland like it is butter. Where there is a union, the butter is a little frozen. Capital has to negotiate to cut through. At present, government is still involved in the Polish mines. It can help with the restructuring." Are the plans of the unions "realistic?" I had no way of knowing. They think there is growing international demand for coal, and that the quality of their coal can compete in the international market.

 The Piast Solidarity union now has many members who came from the old Communist union. "We are in the process of re-educating our members to change their mentality as to what a union is," I was told. The leadership wants its members to see the union as a representative for their interests. They have a lawyer who advises people on legal problems; they have researchers who are helping them analyze the economics of the industry; they are about to run courses for their negotiating committee on the economics of the industry. The purpose of these various approaches, they reiterated, is to "create a new union mentality." The union leaders define four major activities: legal and economic services, social activities--both for members and families, grievance handling and contract negotiation. Referring to the strike that took place earlier this year, these leaders said their branch of Solidarity had gained membership as a result of the strike. This information seemed to contradict the overall regional experience. I was unable to find out why.

 The Piast mine leaders have a number of reasons for believing their mine could be made competitive. These include the low sulfur content in their coal; proximity to the Rotterdam port for export purposes, and; a lower cost of their coal.

**Co-Management**

 In 1981, and again in 1989, Solidarity experimented with ideas of worker participation in management. In the first period, I was told the Communists blocked participation by non-Communists on local factory committees. There was continuous struggle around who could participate and what these bodies could decide. The result was that they never fully functioned, despite the fact that many of them came up with good ideas to increase productivity. In 1989, Solidarity again supported the creation of such bodies. This time, Jacek Gegielski told me, "we found our friends were coopted." The Union had conflicts with its own people who began to think more about their particular enterprise than the workers. The logic of the marketplace, without constraint from other values and institutions embodying those other values, began to dictate decision-making. Loyalty shifted from workers to individual firms because worker representatives on joint management-labor bodies became persuaded that if their firm was to succeed it would have to do things to make it more competitive.

 As in the US, co-management, cooperation and other schemes for "jointness" between capital and labor are no substitute for a strong union whose logic is not simply that of the marketplace. For example, nominally strong unions agree to two-tier pay systems in order to protect the majority of workers. Five or ten years later, the former majority becomes a privileged minority. Deep resentment exists because second tier workers realize they were "sold out" by those who preceded them. The logic of solidarity is different from the logic of the marketplace: my firm-, my unit-, me-first.

**Where Is Solidarity?**

 Emphasized again and again in various conversations with Solidarity leaders and others is the identification of ideas of universal justice, community, sharing and other collectively oriented values with the Communists. As Professor Krzysztof Frysztacki put it to me, "the great creativity of 1980-81 died with the idealism that was crushed out of the working class and peasantry by the cynicism and lying of a government that pretended to negotiate but had no intention of sharing power." Since its re-birth in 1989, Solidarity has had a narrower focus. That earlier period was also a time of great ferment among Polish dissident intellectuals who enjoyed an important influence in Solidarity's development. But that kind of role for the intellectuals doesn't exist any longer. Frysztacki says of the current period, "There is no intellectual center for people like me. The role of the intellectuals and intelligentsia is quite confused now. Intellectuals are becoming professionals, focused on a much narrower range of inquiry and perhaps tied to a particular interest group in society. The intellectual as a social critic is without a forum at this point in time."

 Solidarity's connection to the politicians it created, including its former leader Lech Walesa, is particularly problematic. The politicians, of course, claim that they are still part of Solidarity though at times it is clear that their priority is in getting elected not being accountable to the union. Solidarity leadership, on the other hand, find it extraordinarily difficult to extricate themselves from relationships forged in struggles that included taking life and death risks. Nothing is more difficult than holding your own accountable. Further complicating matters, there is a tendency on the part of Solidarity leaders to assume a one-to-one correlation between being a "broader social movement" and supporting candidates or a political party in elections. The idea that a parliamentary democracy will only be as good as the civil society in which it exists is still new in Poland. Thus there is little experience in the balancing act of being close enough to the electoral game to influence its outcome but not so close as to be coopted by the politicians. Nor is the matter simply one of experience. These questions remain difficult in both the labor and community movements in the US.

 In place of the broader commitment of the earlier Solidarity period, the union now appears to focus on the particularities of a specific industry, a specific region, a specific enterprise. All this is important and necessary. There is, no doubt, a tension between the particular and the universal, but must the particular be viewed as contradictory to a commitment to universal justice? It appears that the Polish voters have had enough of the free market, and that is in part why they elected a former Communist as their President. How will Solidarity act in the new situation? Can the union be both a militant union, defending the interests of its members--both as a whole and in its particular sectors--and, at the same time, develop an overall program for the democratic renewal of society and the maintenance of democratic institutions? Only time will tell.

**The Communists**

 One of my translator's told me her father is still a member of the Communist Party. She is a loyal supporter of Solidarity, and they argue about it all the time. "How," I asked, "does he explain what happened in the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe?" "Bad people rose to the top," she replied. Her father, like many rank-and-file Communists, is an idealist. His explanation of what went wrong ignores the ideological and structural reasons for Communism's faults, but it made me think again of the Communists who contributed so much to building the industrial union movement in the US and the deeply flawed movement of which they were a part. It is not unusual for families to be divided in this way, nor is the division always generational. Siblings, their parents or their grandparents might be split right down the middle in their political affiliation. It is my impression, however, that the trend is a generational one with the younger generation more likely to support Western-oriented parties and the older generation the former Communists.

 By 1980, the Communist Party in Poland was (mostly) run by men who enjoyed the exercise of power and the privileges attendant to that power. Whatever sense of Communist mission may once have existed was gone. The apparatus of party and state was a power machine serving the interests of those who ran it. Its cynicism about its own egalitarian ideology is evident in the endless stories of privileges these Party members bestowed upon themselves. The Nomenklatura was the route to positions of status, responsibility and decent income. Anyone who wanted to rise in the system had to get him/herself nominated to be part of this privileged class (or strata) of society. But at the base of the Party, in unions especially, were workers who were idealists, who believed in universal justice and who were willing to sacrifice for what they understood to be the greater good. That they could be manipulated by cynical leaders in the face of overwhelming evidence against the Party's claim to be a "vanguard of the proletariat" remains one of the great tragedies of 20th century history.

 The (former) Communist unions, under the OPZZ, are enjoying a comeback. While Solidarity was occupied defending "its government," the former Communists rebuilt a base of support in the working class. In the martial law period, they were given Solidarity's assets. The Solidarity-supported government was unable to return these assets to Solidarity. Much of the old bureaucracy remains in the hands of former Communists. Jacek Gegielski told me, "We underestimated our adversary. The Nomenklatura is fighting with everything at its disposal to retain its privileges." Across Eastern Europe the fall of Communism was followed by a debate over how to deal with the Communists. Different countries handled it differently. All of them had to face the fact that almost anyone with experience running any kind of an organization was a member of The Communist Party. The question then was how to eliminate an old ruling class (or strata) without organizational life grinding to a halt. Who should be punished, for what and with what consequences were the key questions. In Poland, former Communists retained key positions in government ministries, various bureaucracies (like schools and public health) and as managers of business enterprises. A friend once said to me that a revolution is, "by definition a rise of the incompetents. That is, those who haven't had power take it. The only way they can learn to run things is by doing it." This view was not followed by the Solidarity-backed government.

**The Catholic Church**

Most of the people with whom I spoke said the Catholic Church was the most important institution in the Communist period. It provided a space for resistance and a sense of community independent of the government and party. On the other hand, many felt the Church had acted in aloof, high-handed and autocratic ways since 1989. Instead of becoming actively engaged in building democratic society, people in both Solidarity and the NGOs complained about the Church's attempt to dictate thinking without discussion and reasoning. "The typical priest," one person told me, "is concerned with things like a new church building, not with the life of the people. The Church is too used to the authoritarian structure it perhaps had to have during the Communist period. While that may have been necessary then, it won't work now. People are beginning to get the taste of freedom, and they won't accept priests simply telling them to do things." The vote against Walesa was, I was told, in part a vote against the Church for being too involved in politics. This point was made in various ways by a number of people. It was not so much that the Church sought to influence parishioners. Rather it was that the Church failed to reason with parishioners and, at times, simply sought to dictate to politicians.

 The highlight of my visit was an individual meeting with Bishop Jozef Zycinski, in the Diocese of Tarnow in southern Poland about an hour east of Krakow. While at the Chancery, I also met for two hours with six local labor and political leaders, most of whom were associated with Solidarity.

 The Bishop and I spoke for over an hour. I asked him his greatest fears for the future of the people of his Diocese. He is deeply concerned about the loss of community. In the West, he said, "everyone is a stranger." He also sees problems of consumerism, materialism and rugged individualism. Everyone has a satellite dish and watches TV; even poor villages have a local place where people can go to watch TV. He is concerned about the declining quality of life for many of the people of his Diocese, as well as for the people of Poland in general. The Catholic Church has been the heart of the sense of Polish community for many years, and was the haven in the heartless world of Communism. The Church was the second major institution to play a critical role in the fall of Communism; indeed some analysts see it as the central institution in the fall of Communism.

 The Diocese of Tarnow comprises 430 parishes. Its population is 1.2 million people. There is a surplus of priests, and the Seminary is training so many of them that the Diocese is able to send a number each year to Latin America, Africa and Russia as missionaries. Bishop Zycinski speaks fluent English. He regularly comes to the United States. He and I have tentative plans to meet on his next trip to the US, which will be in the Fall of 1996. In the meantime, I have spoken with staff persons at the Catholic Campaign for Human Development to determine Bishops with whom he might meet while he is here. I wanted to determine places in which there were good local organizing projects, Polish-Americans involved in these projects and a Bishop who was supportive of this kind of community organizing. I have written to Bishop Zycinski, and await a response from him. If he is interested in pursuing the development of an organizing project in his Diocese we will proceed. The general idea I outlined with the Bishop was one that included these two major elements. First, he would have to become convinced of the merit of this kind of organizing and make a commitment to support it. I suggested that he either correspond with, or make visits in the US with, Bishops he knows to determine their support for "broadly-based community organizing." At my request, the Campaign for Human Development sent Bishop Zycinski a packet of materials describing its work in the United States. Second, and assuming he becomes convinced of the merit of this approach, I suggested that a project would involve either his sending some people of his choice to spend at least a year in this country in full-time fieldwork placements to learn the work of an organizer or a bi-lingual American community organizer going to work in his Diocese so that local people could be trained to carry on the work.

 The Bishop told a lovely story. One of his parish priests said at mass, "I think every person has a hidden artist within. If you are interested in discovering your hidden artist, come to a meeting we are having..." and he announced a time, date and place. Thirty or more people came, and they are now developing a folk arts program. They paint, sculpt and do other arts. As a good-bye present, the Bishop gave me a hand-painted egg and other art work from the new artists of his Diocese.

**The "Man on the Street"**

 Lacking knowledge of Polish, and with an already busy itinerary, I didn't have a lot of opportunity to find out what "average" Poles thought. When I got a chance, I took it. I asked translators, drivers, hotel staff and others what they thought of different aspects of current life in Poland today.

 A former mineworker, now a part-time driver for the Mineworkers Union, told me that he'd started a business and lost everything. It went bankrupt. "But I learned from it, so I don't regret it," he said. "I've had several jobs as well. That’s o.k. too. Most Poles don't think or operate this way. They don't want to change jobs or start a business. They are afraid of risk. They want one steady job with security for the minimum necessities. This is what they are used to from the Communists, and it's what many of them want to return to.”

 One of my translators, a woman in Krakow, had lived in Algeria and Canada. She returned to Poland to be with her aging mother. "In 1980-81, people on the street were smiling even though daily life was difficult. Now daily life is still difficult, but people are glum. Politics here is bitter. There's no handshake at the end of an election. People hate candidates of the opposition, and the opposition often feels that way about each other. Walesa won't recognize the election of his opponent."

 A waitress in the Krakow hotel where I regularly ate breakfast told me in broken English that she felt very lucky to have her job. Many of her friends were working, but were looking for other jobs because their pay was so low.

 Whenever I was traveling alone, people were willing to help me with directions; many of them, especially those who were younger, spoke some English. When they didn't, as in Tarnow when I showed people on the street the address of my destination, they would walk me to a corner and point the direction in which I should walk.

**Anti-Semitism Without Jews**

 Polish anti-Semitism is generally known. My letter of introduction to people with whom I hoped to meet in Poland included, "I come from a culturally Jewish family..."

 Msgr. George Higgins, long-time leader in the Catholic Church's relationship with the American labor movement, warned me about this anti-Semitism before I left the United States. He told me he'd cut his ties with Fr. Henryk Jankowski, the Gdansk "Solidarity priest", because of anti-Semitic remarks he'd made at a mass meeting. He added that Lech Walesa had failed to repudiate these comments. Defenders of Walesa, both here and in Poland, said that the Polish leader had made his opposition to anti-Semitism clear and public, and that it was unfair to expect him to make it a focus of attention every time anti-Semitic statements were made. Solidarity officially repudiated the priest's comments. In Gdansk, Solidarity leaders said that the so-called "Solidarity priest" is only one of a number of priests who identify with the union. In Warsaw, an American expatriate who closely follows Walesa told me that he pandered to anti-Semitism in the recent Presidential campaign.

 Bishop Zycinski told me that his Diocese had a Jewish population of 400,000 prior to World War II. Less than one-percent of that number is there today. The few who survived the war were hidden by Polish families who would have been summarily executed by the Nazis had they been caught. Some of these were infants who were so integrated into their adoptive families that they thought they were Catholic. Only in adulthood were some of them told who their real parents were. Other became curious because they didn't look like their parents. Questioning from them led their adoptive families to reveal their identities. In Zycinski's town of Tarnow, a small group of which the Bishop is part has opened a Jewish museum.

 About an hour from Krakow are what is left of the Auschwitz-Birkenau concentration camps. I have nothing to add to what has already been said and written by many who have visited these testimonies to man's inhumanity to man. Like others, I was overwhelmed by the massive scale of the extermination operation and by the ruthless efficiency which seemed to characterize it. But I did learn interesting things about the current situation in the town. On the train from Krakow to Berlin, I met a woman who is involved in a program which brings German high school students to Auschwitz. The students learn, write and reflect on their experience. The program is one of the ways in which Germans hope to inoculate themselves against a return of anti-Semitism. There is a new tension between the international Jewish community and local townspeople. It is a classic case of conflicting claims, each with legitimacy. Townspeople have planned several economic development projects which would be built on land that the Jewish community feels should remain untouched because it is part of the remembrance of The Holocaust to leave it alone. As with other situations of conflict, I lacked the time or resources to dig beyond the conflicting stories to see if there was a discernible "truth." For example, Poles with whom I spoke said that Jews were almost every place in the town during the war. Prior to being sent to the gas ovens, they worked in various projects that took them into town. Because of this, these Poles said, anytime the town tries to develop anything it is said by the international Jewish community that the development will desecrate sacred ground.

 A knowledgeable observer told me not to underestimate the depth of Polish anti-Semitism, nor the support it implicitly still receives from elements in the Catholic hierarchy--this despite the Polish Pope's repudiation of anti-Semitism.

**On The Social and Political Conditions for Sacrifice**

 The Solidarity period of 1980-81 was marked by tremendous sacrifice on the part of millions of Polish workers and their allies. With a history of past brutal suppression of strikes, and killing of strikers, Polish workers struck. With a history of union activists losing their jobs and other benefits, Polish workers built an independent union. In 1989-90, after eight years of martial law, Solidarity again rose. In power, it was able to command the same willingness to sacrifice though the physical risks were not the same. Millions of Poles were willing to give the new government the benefit of the doubt, to try the free market, to accept austerity, to defer personal gain.

 The spirit of sacrifice now seems dead in Poland. On that there was almost unanimous agreement. The market encourages individualism. The use of power for personal privilege by the new politicians created new skepticism. The failure to deliver on promises made led to cynicism, as did the fact that the beneficiaries of the old system re-emerged as the beneficiaries of the new one. While many experienced losses in their standard of living, a few became very wealthy. Parliamentary debate, a necessary ingredient of a democracy, seemed to many Poles to be wrangling among leaders who were more interested in their own political futures than in the good of the nation and its people. For significant numbers of Poles, the Catholic Church, the bastion of resistance and haven amidst heartlessness in the Communist period, seemed to be yet another heavy-handed bureaucracy whose priests often seemed more interested in the church as edifice than they were in the church as the people of God. The hierarchy often appeared haughty and arrogant in its ex cathedra demands of the laity.

 Is this the necessary post-revolutionary/post significant reform experience? What are the conditions for maintaining an ethic of sacrifice when such an ethic is necessary for the rebuilding of a country or the renewal of an organization? These questions persist now that specific memories of my trip fade in the past. When Poles spoke of the 1980-81 and 1989-90 periods, they spoke of them with fondness. They remembered how they, their friends, their neighbors, their co-workers and complete strangers seemed to be part of one big community. Is there a way to build such a community without an all-encompassing adversary or the headiness of a recent revolutionary triumph? Can this kind of community, at a lesser level of intensity of course, be built into the ongoing life of religious, civic, labor and other voluntary associations so that participation is so highly valued that it is viewed as a natural part of social life and is as important as watching TV or other private pleasures? Can participatory structures be developed in the workplace and governmental institutions or are unresponsive hierarchy, abusive power and invidious status distinctions necessary concomitants of the modern condition?

 These and other questions are part of the benefit of my trip to Poland. What I learned there, as I have wherever I have worked or traveled, is that the capacity of regular people (often called "ordinary") to do extraordinary things is revealed in those special moments in history when the values of human dignity and justice for all briefly triumph. We are regularly reminded of our human limitations and potential for sinfulness. We are too seldom reminded of our capacity for creativity and good. Both stir within and are part of the human condition. I am in debt to the many Poles who generously gave me their time to remind me of these facts.

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