

52 The Ethics of Solidarity Years Later

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REVOLUTION AND SHAME

“**T**he Owl of Minerva takes its flight only when the shades of night are gathering”¹ – Hegel’s famous statement was meant to make his readers realize that they could not understand the future course of events, but that they could only try to comprehend those events that had already happened and belonged to the past. This principle fully applies to the phenomenon of “Solidarity.”

Obviously, already at the time when “Solidarity” was forming, it was known that something within it would have to change in the future. It is impossible to maintain discipline in a ten-million union which gathered groups of people of deeply opposing interests. Nevertheless, the manner of its decay, and even some of the directions it

¹ G.W.F. Hegel, *The Philosophy of Right*, Ontario 2001, p. 20.

took, turned out to be a complete surprise. An observer gets two contradictory impressions: on the one hand, it seems that everything could have been predicted, on the other hand, that not much could actually have been predicted. If the former is true, it seems that we might have taken control over the process of destruction, but if nothing had been predictable, then attempts to control this process would have ended in failure anyway. In the end, no one knows what would have been better: reviving something which was dead in the water or watching it float down the river?

The difference in opinion as to the possibility of controlling the process of “Solidarity’s” destruction does not obliterate a widely shared conviction that it was caused, generally speaking, by some kind of “shortcoming of reason.” I side with Hegel on this point too. Hegel sees the development of history as the development of the consciousness and self-consciousness of its participants. In his opinion, we are continuously leaving the state of original ignorance and striving toward self-knowledge which is an incarnation of wisdom. We are continuously getting wiser after the event. It is depressing that it is only after the event, but still, we are wiser. After each defeat the same chorus returns to us, “had we been wiser. . .” In this way, Hegel claims, the “cunning of reason” is manifested. Despite the unforeseen twists and turns, despite errors and complications, our world becomes an ever more “rational” world. In the end, if we can ask the world a reasonable question when the shades of night are gathering, then the world will give us a reasonable answer.

I would like to look more closely at the directions taken by the decay of the idea of solidarity. I am not concerned with the shattering of the organization or the social movement. Our issue is a conflict on the level of ideology, or rather, the ethical self-knowledge of the society. In this conflict a mysterious facet of history is manifested. Or, perhaps this conflict reveals more distinctly human dramas in which, for unknown reasons, friend rises up against friend, brother opposes brother. These are always moral dramas. In his conversation with Napoleon, Goethe said that during their times politics adopted the form of ancient fate: those who had once fallen under the spell of politics might – like Oedipus did – become the murderers of their fathers and take their mothers for wives. Then they would carry on their shoulders a fatalistic guilt resulting from a crime committed without knowledge or will. What kind of historical fate caused the fact that the victory of the “Solidarity” movement meant its defeat?

In order to better understand the meaning of the process of decay in which we are interested, let us first draw attention to the subject of the “Solidarity” movement. Who created this movement? Who took part in it? It is most often said that it was the whole nation. Yet, we know how ambiguous this answer is. Nonetheless, let us try to follow at least a few steps along its path.

So it is said that the “nation” concentrated on the idea of solidarity, the “nation” found itself within this idea, the “nation” recognized that the idea of solidarity is its hope. Certainly, all of this is true. But what was this “nation,” what was its consciousness?

I said once that the “nation” consisted of people who were, whether they wanted or not, clients of socialism for many years. It is not the most important thing whether one was a member of the party, a farmer or a worker, a teacher or a physician, a priest or an artist; it is important that one, willingly or not, “consumed the commodities that socialism offered to people. Three things were of special importance to them: work, participation in power, the sense of one’s dignity.”² Socialism “employed.” It employed not only workers in archaic factories, but also farmers in small private farms which nourished the nation, and profiteers who created the black market and acted as fish in troubled water.

Socialism also gave the consciousness of taking part in power. What participation was it? Some sang that they were “moving the Globe from its foundations,” others that “we won’t bow our head before the tyrant,” and this means that all believed that they were, in their own way, part of the great current of History.

This was connected to the sense of dignity. Everyone could feel pride: some because there were building *Nowa Huta*,³ others because, as Stefan Niesiołowski⁴ writes, “led by love of the motherland and by politics, understood as the concern for the common good, had the courage to oppose communism when the calculation of forces indicated that this strife had not the slightest chance for victory.”⁵

Both the pride of the builders and the pride of those opposing the system, despite what they thought, were for both a reward for clients – “client” meaning that one is dependent on those who provide the basic commodities. Commodities are varied. Bread can be a commodity, but also a position in the system of power might be a commodity. Even an opponent’s consciousness can be a commodity: tell me your enemy and I will tell you who you are. The identity-in-opposition is also a dependent identity. King Oedipus could not leave the horizon of thought about his own father and his own mother; and so in the same way an inhabitant of a totalitarian world was incapable of shaping his own freedom beyond the horizon defined by the communist store of commodities.

² Cf. J. Tischner, “Homo sovieticus,” in *Etyka solidarności oraz Homo sovieticus* [The Ethics of Solidarity and Homo Sovieticus], Kraków 2005.

³ A communist urban project that was to be the first truly communist town. It was meant to create a counterbalance against nearby Cracow, which was thoroughly resistant to the influence of the communists. *Nowa Huta* is now a district of Cracow, Poland. The name could be translated as “The New Stealworks” [trans.].

⁴ Stefan Niesiołowski – a Polish biologist and politician, a senator [trans.].

⁵ S. Niesiołowski, “Przyczernianie prawicy” [Blackening the Right], in *Życie*, issue: 7th Aug 1997.

A catastrophe occurred at some point. Communism suffered defeat. Years ago I wrote, “the defeat of communism means that its stall . . . collapsed. In its place there arises a different stall with different people, different commodities, different promises. Does the fact of the stall’s collapse mean that the customers in front of it have already changed?”⁶ A few generations, who are still alive, cannot define themselves otherwise than through the reference to communism. Regardless whether they were for or against, they are what they are through the communists.

It is said that after its defeat the outcome of communism is a society which makes endless demands. What demands are at issue? A long list of complaints could be made. But on closer analysis it turns out that at the source of all the complaints one can hear a voice that demands identity. Who am I really? Who am I beyond the shadow of the stall?

The Controversy Over the New Identity

A characteristic feature of big social changes is the fact that they violate the consciousness of social identity. Suddenly, it turns out that who was at the top finds himself at the bottom and who was at the bottom stands at the top. Where the sense of identity is subdued, where everyone is oneself and at the same time someone else, the sense of proper rights and obligations fades away too. In the time of great transformation all people can be everything, all want to be everything, all pretend to be everything – therefore, a question of identity, who is whom? This jolt means that an open society arises in the place of the old closed society. However, the opposing processes are activated immediately. Man cannot fly too long like an eagle in an open space. He needs a place, he needs a nest. Losing one identity, he frantically looks for another one. Yet before he finds it, he must go through the painful experience of birth.

There appear the outlines of several roads to follow in the search for identity. The first one leads backwards – towards communism. At the time of communism we had a thousand and one employees of the propaganda apparatus, lecturers of Marxism-Leninism, economists and philosophers, who basically did nothing but argued for the “superiority of the communist ideology” over any other creed. After the fall of the system – would you believe it – they all fell silent. What happened? No one knows. In any case, no one strives to reconstruct communism. The path of return seems to be closed.

What is in the way? Economy? Politics? Or perhaps the “anthropological error” about which John Paul II wrote? Perhaps simply no one, no man, wants to be a communist? No one wants to, because no one can. Just as it is impossible to build a *perpetuum mobile*, or as it is impossible to square the circle, so it is impossible to fulfill the “ideal” of the communist. One would have to leave behind an important part of one’s humanity. One

⁶ J. Tischner, “W cieniu komunistycznych straganów” [In the Shadow of Communist Stalls], in *Etyka solidarności oraz Homo sovieticus*, op. cit.

56 would have to trim one's reason, limit one's freedom, deny oneself. Communism proved to be a dead end in man's adventures with his own lot. So let us not overvalue the external barriers on the path of return, because there are others, more important, inner barriers.

Another possibility of restoring one's identity is taking part in the lawsuit which history brought against communism. One can be a prosecutor in this trial. The role of a prosecutor is important; voices of the victims of communism can be heard in his voice – voices of those who lost their lives because they did not fit in the form of humanity proposed to them. On the other hand, a prosecutor confirms that at the time of ordeal he himself was different and has remained different. A path to identity takes its shape in the substance of an accusation.

I wrote the following in a different article on the theme of the prosecution against communism:

According to the prosecutors, the communist party was an “incarnation of evil” – a criminal organization, because it strove to benefit from the misfortune which, for geopolitical reasons, befell Poland. All of its members, although in various degrees, have their part in the crime. Even if some of them tried, in a way, to limit the disasters which were striking people, it was mainly because they wanted to save their own skins. Is it not a crime to loot somebody else's possessions during a fire? Is it not a crime to take part in lying? As guilty of complicity in crime, members of the communist party have no moral right to hold offices in a democratic state. They have no appropriate intellectual qualifications either – how could they bind their hopes with a system which was irreconcilable with human rights? Their right to power cannot be legitimized even by an elective mandate. Democratic votes do not absolve. They often prove only one's political guile.⁷

Stefan Niesiołowski characterizes communism briefly: communism means today the danger of demoralization, corruption, mendacity and cynicism, just as once it was a danger of violence, political police and censorship.⁸

The Divided World

Will a prosecutor's attitude at the historical trial against communism suffice as the reason and the foundation for new identity? It is clear that it will not. Nothing can be built on pure negation. One must look around for something positive, something more solid. Fortunately, already the mere direction which is taken by the prosecution indicates where one should turn one's searches. Accusing communists of crimes against humanity, we stand on the solid grounds of morality. If so, then our main support will be morality. We want to be the people with the clean hands. We will not be, as Niesiołowski puts it, cynics, liars, “demoralized demoralizers.”

⁷ J. Tischner, “Kot pilnujący myszy czyli cierpienia okresu transformacji” [Cat Watching the Mouse or Sufferings of the Transformation Period], *Znak*, issue 7, 1997.

⁸ S. Niesiołowski, “Przyczernianie prawicy,” *op. cit.*

We want to join in with all moral forces of the world in order to build the future free of mendacity and violence. 57

This attitude goes back to the golden age of the history of “Solidarity.” Let us remember Adam Michnik’s words written in the article “We, the People of Solidarity” in 1984.⁹ It is a precious example of how “Solidarity” was felt, how it was thought and written about:

What then is “Solidarity?” It is a movement of the defenseless, a movement of the nation that, despite the totalitarian oppression, restores its identity, breaks the barrier of powerlessness and fear, rebuilds its internal bonds. “Solidarity” is the movement of all social strata, the movement of workers and priests, farmers and intellectuals, Catholics and non-believers, a movement which encompassed the entire nation, has borne repressions of the military dictatorship, created the independent circulation of information and reflection. When after many months I was released from prison, I had a sense of experiencing a miracle – here, under the police pressure, thanks to the attitude of the underground “Solidarity” and the help of the Catholic Church, Poles have saved their inner sovereignty. I know it for certain – my nation is alive.¹⁰

How do they write about “Solidarity” now? Today, years later, Teresa Bogucka reproaches the heirs of the “Solidarity” movement, trade unions and peasant organizations:

They are painting for people a picture of a Manichean world, in which power got into the hands of forces who are wicked, foreign, at best, stupid. Those forces should be fought in order to secure universal well-being by means of a few simple and obvious measures. This well-being is within an arm’s reach, provided that the hands of the government are clean and honest. . . . But here is an uneducated man who does not see that this is all nonsense. He truly believes in conspiracies, inimical capital, misappropriation and foreign powers. He simmers with understandable anger and demands an end to such things.¹¹

This is how our world evolved. We see this world, it is precisely divided – the world of moral good and evil. What divided our world so beautifully? Obviously, it was the moral principle itself. There is a moment in the development of consciousness when morality turns into moralizing, and moralizing becomes anti-human. The moral principle does not serve the development of man any more, but his humiliation. The “evil” which is then described by the principle is no longer the evil of communism, which is becoming more and more distant, but the alleged evil of a candidate for the same political position. He who lives by morality, shall perish by morality. Hegel wrote the following:

⁹ Adam Michnik – a historian, essayist, the editor-in-chief of the major Polish newspaper “Gazeta Wyborcza,” one of the leading organizers of the underground opposition in the years 1968–1989 [trans.].

¹⁰ A. Michnik, “My, ludzie *Solidarności*” [We, the People of Solidarity], *Aneks*, issue 37, 1985.

¹¹ T. Bogucka, *Polak po komunizmie* [A Pole After Communism], Kraków 1997, p. 107–108.

This virtue has now to conduct the government in opposition to the Many, whom their corruption and attachment to old interests, or a liberty that has degenerated into license, and the violence of their passions, render unfaithful to virtue. Virtue is here a simple abstract principle and distinguishes the citizens into two classes only – those who are favorably disposed and those who are not. But a disposition can only be recognized and judged by a disposition. *Suspicion* therefore is on the rise . . .¹²

Is this the end that must await the opponent of communism and his adventure with morality? Have we fallen into an “anthropological error” again? Something bizarre is happening. Here we see on television people who are “bearers of virtue” and their mere sight is unbearable. Someone might say that appearances are not everything – this is true. Yet, someone else might repeat, “this is a matter of taste.”¹³ This costume clearly does not suit man – it is a costume for an angel. Apart from the appearances of virtue, we sense a new dead end into which people from the communist stalls have strayed.

Striptease Forced or Willful?

In the all encompassing atmosphere of temporariness and ambiguity in which the principles of identity have been undermined, the question of cynicism repeats itself time and again. The only thing left to us is the stance of a cynic. What is cynicism? Cynicism is a praise of ambiguity, being myself and the opposite of myself as well. It is showing myself as others want to see me and at the same time a hiding of myself just for myself. Is cynicism a sin or is it a fate? Do we want to be cynical or do we have to? Or do we have to and therefore we want to? Paweł Śpiewak¹⁴ has recently drawn attention to the phenomenon of cynicism. He mainly aimed at politicians, but perhaps all of us are doomed to some degree of cynicism? Śpiewak writes:

What does the cynical language consist in? A political cynic, depending on the situation and the demands of the moment, uses any ideological language. When he wants to close down an allegedly inefficient enterprise, he wears the colors of economic liberalism. He speaks then about the market, the harsh rules of supply and demand, the modern style of managing. For instance, those who strive to liquidate the Gdańsk Shipyard eagerly refer to commercial reasons, although at the same time they use the language of the Left when it comes to speaking about different areas of economy or when it is necessary to enclose in the constitutional project an immeasurable number of social rights. It can also happen that a party which openly supports the market economy model, at a moment of weakness, or election, will reach for the language of the Left. It will do it, because a survey carried out by sociologists indicates that unemployment has become the most painful problem for citizens. When encountering in turn protests on the part of a significant, but politically weak group, for instance, doctors or teachers, the party will refer to the concept of

¹² G.W.F. Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*, Ontario 2001, p. 470.

¹³ A paraphrase of a line from Zbigniew Herbert's well-known and poignant poem “The Power of Taste,” whose subject matter is the blurring of borders between ethics and aesthetics [trans.].

¹⁴ Paweł Śpiewak – a Polish politician, sociologist and essayist [trans.].

Searches for identity conducted by former clients of communism cause sharp controversies over “everything” to rage across the country. There is no distinction between less and more important matters, because “everything is important” for the building of identity. This everything concerns the act of accusation against the former communists and their adherents, it concerns public morality, it concerns cynicism as the perspective. However, there is one more element present in all of this, the element of shaming – to persuade means here to force someone to blush with shame.

About what should our opponent be ashamed? He should be ashamed about what he was not merely this or that deed, but the very principle of his deeds – himself. Let us remember, at first “Solidarity” put communists to shame by drawing their eyes to every crime of communism. Then, communists put “Solidarity” to shame, drawing its attention to its own defeat in the election. And today? Here you are, just open the newspapers!

Still, we all know how it works: the more putting others to shame, the more shamelessness. The forced striptease turns into a willful striptease. If one cannot feel remorse for one’s sins, one must boast about them. The manner of criticizing our world turns out to be suicidal.

A New Identity?

We ask about the decay of the idea of solidarity. What picture do we get? It is not the “idea” that was shattered, but its subject – the client of “socialism.” Decay has been experienced equally by both; by the one who was close, at the counter, and who obtained material benefits, and by the one who was a hero and hence derived a feeling of moral superiority. The question, “who are we?” has come to a head. There is a question and so there is an answer. Some cry, “you are citizens of the state.” Others shout, “you are Poles.” Yet another group calls, “you are the image and likeness of God.” This is all true and yet untrue. This is a truth for angels. But what of this really concerns people?

Must the question of identity then remain without an answer at all? No, but at the time of transformation only a temporary answer can appear, an answer whose source is the very experience of passage. A particular pain becomes then the foundation of identity, the pain of the tension which is born when man loses one place in the world and does not yet gain another place. It is a pain of some kind of recollection and some sort of hope, the pain of an unfulfilled dream and of the fall into mediocrity, the pain of a risk that was not taken at the right moment and the pain of the unrecognized sense of one’s own value. While at the heart of this all – the pain of shame.

¹⁵ P. Śpiewak, “Cynicy i integryści” [Cynics and Integrists], *Tygodnik Powszechny*, issue 19, 1997.

Sometimes revolution kills, sometimes it does not kill, but it always puts somebody to shame; it puts to shame the defeated and the victorious. This shame is an unhealed wound. The wound hurts. It should be healed. But it cannot be healed. If the wound did not hurt, it would not testify to an identity. Therefore, one must continuously rub it. The very rubbing of wounds is an identity.

THE ETHICS OF SOLIDARITY YEARS LATER

In the year 1968, at the time of memorable demonstrations and protests against censorship, there appeared a spray-painted inscription, “Be a realist, demand the impossible,” on the wall of the Warsaw University. This quote represented, in short, the sense of the opposing actions taken then. First, it said that the Opposition strove for something that was impossible to achieve in that political situation. Second, it expressed a conviction – in total contrast to the sense of helplessness – that the Opposition’s aims were perfectly realistic, because they had been realized all over the civilized world a long time before. The Opposition tossed between opposites: on the one hand, they had an impression that only a thin wall of glass divided us from “normal” society, on the other hand, each time they tried to break the wall, it turned out that the wall was indeed bending, but was unbreakable.

The consciousness of this contradiction has endured until today. However, this time its bearers are not simply the Opposition, but so called reforming forces. It is very difficult to understand why what is clear and distinct as well as recognized all over the civilized world, in Poland becomes unclear, blurred, and evokes protests. The idea of privatization, the idea of the state of law, the idea of local self-government, the idea of rational integration with Europe – all of this has been critically pondered hundreds of times. In the end it brought fruit in the form of social development and peace lasting half a century in civilized Europe. The war in the former Yugoslavia is the exception that proves the rule. In spite of this, Polish reforms run ashore time and again. How does it happen that, in the game of interests, the interest of a part outweighs the interest of the whole?

The consciousness that “so little suffices to change so much” is essentially an ethical consciousness. It is connected to the experience of every good, every value, to the knowledge of every commandment. There is nothing more simple than “do not kill,” “do not lie,” “do not betray.” Do we need arguments for this? It is rather the opposite that requires argumentation. But still people lie, kill, betray, straining their reason to argue that this is the right way. Medieval scholastics said, *Bonum est diffusivum sui* – “good of itself diffuses itself,” it does not require additional momentum. Therefore, one is taken by surprise when somebody loves darkness more than the light or when the thin wall of glass does not crack.

The “Solidarity” movement and the ethics of solidarity was born in this atmosphere, an atmosphere of the conviction that “so little suffices to change so much.” What did this ethics mean?

In order to answer this question, let me use the names of persons rather than definitions. Lech Wałęsa, Tadeusz Mazowiecki and Leszek Balcerowicz are considered to be those who took the decisive step in overcoming communism in Poland. Lech Wałęsa was the leader of the revolution which came about without blood spilling – the place of class strife was taken by the spirit of solidarity. Tadeusz Mazowiecki built institutions of the democratic state of law and at the same time connected the “Solidarity” movement with Christian personalism, whose beginnings are in the writings of Emmanuel Mounier, Jacques Maritain and its continuation is found in the constitution *Gaudium et Spes* of the Second Vatican Council. Leszek Balcerowicz connected the solidarity utopia with Anglo-Saxon political economics. The solidarity revolution achieved its first goal. It was known that the difficult period of system transformation would require many sacrifices. But this time, not like before, these sacrifices would not be senseless.

The concept of “the ethos of solidarity” is not and has not been unambiguous, however, ambiguity did not deprive it of its strength. It was precisely the ambiguity of the word which turned out to be its value, at least for some time. The word included an opening of horizons for a reality which was to occur rather than a description of an *a priori* demanded reality. It was not a set of ready-made rules of conduct. It suggested thoughts about the categorical need to change not only the social system, but also man’s entire manner of being in which the system was deeply-rooted. The word awakened faded memories, it suggested thoughts about the dignity of man and the value of heroism. If I were today to sketch in a few sentences the scope of its meaning, I would recall the following quotes: “solidarity is not against anyone, but with someone and for someone; solidarity means “Bear ye one another’s burdens: and so you shall fulfill the law of God” and also “Polish work is sick.” There was something about the “Polish mill” and that “there will be bread from this flour.”¹⁶ For the ethos of solidarity, apart from everything else, was an expression of the deepest human, and at the same time Polish, hope.

However, in order to penetrate deeper into the sense of the “ethos of solidarity,” it is worthwhile to look at the issue through the prism of its decay. The anatomy of a concept is unveiled in its decay. Yes indeed, decay has taken place. Three planes of decay seem to be particularly instructive: the plane of the attitude toward the past, the plane of the attitude toward governmental reform, the plane of the attitude toward the reform of work.

The Attitude Toward the Past

First, let’s take the attitude toward the past. Almost the day after the victory, a question was born, “what is to be done with the heritage of com-

¹⁶ A play on a Polish saying about predictable positive effects of a given action [trans.].

62 munism?” In order to answer this question, one must know beforehand what this heritage is. A certain illusion arose as far as this matter was concerned. Namely, it seemed that there was no heritage at all and one could start a new current of history from scratch. This conviction was expressed in a way even by Leszek Kołakowski himself, who towards the end of his *Main Currents of Marxism* stated, “Marxism was the greatest fantasy of our century.” What remains after fantasies? Nothing. At the very end, Kołakowski added:

The self-deification of mankind, to which Marxism gave philosophical expression, has ended in the same way as all such attempts, whether individual or collective: it has revealed itself as the farcical aspect of human bondage.¹⁷

What remains after a farce? Bitterness. A little embarrassment. In the final analysis, nothing remains either. I myself was of a similar opinion. In the year 1979, editing the final chapter of my book entitled *Polski kształt dialogu* [The Polish Shape of Dialogue], I expressed quite common attitudes when I asked, “Who still needs Marxism?”¹⁸ Meaning, the system which meant to show the sources of exploitation and fight it, yet ended up legitimizing totalitarianism. The answer was due to impose itself at once – no one. So let bygones be bygones.

Nonetheless, there is something which has remained. It turned out that all societies where the principle of private ownership has been undermined are doomed to turn into “consumer societies.” Man cannot live and have nothing. But having was prohibited. What was the way out? The only way out was to consume, to consume what one did not have. We must make a distinction between “capitalist consumption” and “socialist consumption.” In “capitalism,” one usually consumes what one has; in “socialism,” one could consume what was not one’s own. This was essentially the superiority of socialism over capitalism. Still, we would commit a fallacy believing that only material goods can be objects of consumption. The point is that immaterial goods, too, are objects of consumption, especially political positions and privileges. It is not true that if no one knows what the matter of dispute is, it is always the money. Very often, it is not a matter of money but honor. This is precisely our case – the consumption of victory. As a legacy after socialist consumption, we have inherited the motto, “let us consume the winnings.” Describing a similar phenomenon but in a different context, Hegel used the metaphor of flies and milk. When someone upsets the pitcher, flies hurry along to drink the poured-out milk. It is clear that it was not the flies which upset the pitcher, but they are hurrying in order to, as Hegel would have put it, have the sense that they are at least busy with something. Incidentally, a particular skill in this field was shown by those who were supposed to watch the pitcher so that no one would upset it.

¹⁷ L. Kołakowski, *Main Currents of Marxism*, W. W. Norton & Company 2005, p. 1212.

¹⁸ J. Tischner, *Polski kształt dialogu* [The Polish Shape of Dialogue], Kraków 2002, p. 259.

From this moment, solidarity “with someone” and “towards someone” ⁶³ became a solidarity “against someone.” This “against” referred, above all, to the closest rival competing for the same power and the same penny. The idea of universal solidarity was replaced by a factional solidarity and even the denominational one. Certainly, each faction seeks to develop its own ideology. We have a few propositions: one is called “social democratic,” another “national,” yet another “independent,” “Christian,” there even appeared “Catholic” ideologies. Where the spirit of solidarity reigns, each of these ideologies is capable to cooperate with any other, each can complete the other. In the final analysis, where the need to consume victory reigns, no ideology is what it purports to be. Then all are against all – a “mask ball” is established. How can we debate over the sense of an ideology if it is clear that it is not only a matter of spilled milk? Cyprian Kamil Norwid¹⁹ once wrote:

For the motherland, my compatriots, is a moral union without which no party can even exist, without which parties are like polemical camps, whose fires are disagreements, whose reality is the smoke of words.

The Attitude Toward Power

The ethos of solidarity was, first of all, an ethos of great hope. Hope defines not only the horizon for tomorrow but, above all, the perspective of a particular man. Namely, then it revealed that all, regardless of their past, could be the servants of this hope. This point of view applied also to former Communists. Why? First, because the great majority of party members actually realized that the experiment of real communism was approaching its end; “For the fashion of this world passeth away” (1Cor 7:31). Second, because the main critics of communism came from the party’s inner circles; their critiques of the system had such great significance for they knew Marxism and the party from within. Third, enemies should not be multiplied beyond necessity. A great effort of system transformation awaited us; in this situation only an insane person, definitely not a politician, would provoke arguments over matters which did not serve the historical enterprise. Thus, the idea of the Round Table Talks²⁰ was born,

¹⁹ Cyprian Kamil Norwid – a poet, dramatist, painter and sculptor of 19th century, considered as one of the four most important Polish Romantics [trans.].

²⁰ The Round Table Agreement Talks took place in Warsaw from 6 February until 4 April 1989. The government initiated a discussion with the banned trade union “Solidarity” in an attempt to defuse growing social unrest. Despite an attempt to crackdown on the opposition earlier in the decade, the times were changing and it became impossible to hold off change. There was fear of social unrest due to an economic downturn and runaway inflation that had greatly lowered Polish living standards. By 1988 the authorities began serious talks with the opposition. In September of 1988 a secret meeting was held which included, amongst others, the opposition leader Lech Wałęsa. They agreed to hold the so-called Round Table Talks to plan out a course of action for the country. The Polish communists hoped to co-opt prominent opposition leaders into the ruling group. The talks instead radically altered the shape of the Polish government and society. These events in Poland precipitated and gave momentum to

64 the event of the Round Table was generally received not only as a political event but, above all, as an ethical one. Was it possible to conduct the Round Table Talks in a better way? Yes, certainly, but often the better thing is worse than the good one; while disputing over the manner of carrying out the Round Table Talks, no one can question its ethical value.

However, the moment came when the ethos of open horizons was replaced by narrow-minded casuistry. The devil is in the details. “Christian values” became now the object of the dispute and specific problems emerged. To forgive Communists or justly punish them? Moreover, shall we teach religion at schools? What about the human life protection act? What about the access to radio broadcasting? What about the concordat? In this strife, only one thing ceaselessly repeated itself: the all-or-nothing demands, in other words, the inability to reach rational compromises. All Christian values shone out at full brightness, all but one – prudence.

In disputes over these matters, attempts occurred, time and again, to deprive the entire reform movement of its legitimacy. Democratic institutions established themselves slowly to build the state of law. What was the use if the powers who created these institutions found themselves objects of delegitimizing critiques? I repeat, it was not ordinary criticism, but criticism aiming at delegitimization. Even the manner of conducting the controversy over Christian values was such that it plainly contradicted these values. It was a devastating blow to the ethics of solidarity. Factional and even denominational solidarity shattered human solidarity.

Was it not possible to conduct these disputes in a more rational manner? Do it with more calm? In the end, the whole civilized world has been solving these problems somehow, but we made it look as if we led the way. The outcome of the disputes was such that all the ethos of hope receded somewhere in the shadows, whereas belligerence and casuistry remained the focus. What is the use of even the most glorious ideals and values when the wide horizon of hope which embraced them is gone? Deprive man of hope and then try to make him persevere in Christian values: not to lie, not to betray, not to kill – you cannot.

This cast a shadow over Christianity, the Church. The authority of religion declined. Yesterday, the Church brought hope for Poland. What does it bring today? At present it brings some kind of fear of the world, that is, essentially of man. We should not take offense at these words because, in spite of what sanctimoniousness will say, it is really the case, the place of Christian personalism is taken by Catholic integralism. Someone malicious might say, “you did not like Mounier, Maritain, the authors of *Gaudium et Spes*, so you will have Lefebvre.” Obviously, none of the prominent Catholic politicians will say that his aim is and has been a religious state. Yet, as it turned out, a vision of such a state continuously haunted us. Even if it did not emerge from the words of these politicians, it accompanied their speeches. They spoke, above all, about themselves, to themselves and for themselves.

the fall of the entire Soviet-Bloc.

In spite of it all, some foundations have been laid for a democratic state of law. Nevertheless, the moment of victory became a moment of defeat. A question arose, is this the defeat of a few people or is it the defeat of the whole generation, the generation of “Solidarity?” After the defeat of the Spring of Nations, Norwid wrote:

This whole generation is to be a hecatomb for the future. It will wear out like a tool of some need that never existed. Still happy are those who are not granted the understanding of this position. Arrogance will console them, haughtiness will pass for courage, cynicism will counterfeit philosophy and a diseased imagination will take on the form of religion.²¹

Is it really so? Do we console ourselves with our arrogance? Have we traded courage for haughtiness? Has our piety not become a piety of the diseased imagination?

The Horizon of National Labor

During the First Congress of “Solidarity” we said, “Polish work is sick.” And it was the case. We were conscious of it and we were conscious that work, as John Paul II wrote, constitutes the “key to the social question.” At the same time, however, the consciousness of sickness was bound to the readiness of courage, heroism. We had the courage to face difficulties. Our dignity, among other things, consisted in this. Dignity and courage were the integral ingredients of hope. It was clear that without a sort of heroism that we had to muster, Polish work would not recover from its sickness. But the problem lay in the fact that the picture of this heroism was specific, very different from the one that history had taught us to get used to. Until this moment, people would leave their homes, their loved ones, in order to risk their lives for the sake of the motherland. Now, people were supposed to leave counterfeit work in counterfeit workplaces for the sake of true work in true factories. They were supposed to pass from a form of the lie to some truth. Nothing of the kind had ever happened in our history. What’s more, people were not only supposed to take this risk, but also vote for the government that had given them such a bitter pill to swallow.

The breakdown of the solidarity ethos came as a refusal of heroism. Aleksander Smolar²² aptly wrote about it, “The victory of Poland was internally submissive, faint-hearted, timid, it always, like any normal society, tried to adapt, play games, fiddle.”²³ Let us admit openly, someone chickened out somewhere. But his cowardice, the cowardice of reforms, became a social category. Only one question arises, in what manner does

²¹ C.K. Norwid, “List do Jana Skrzyneckiego” [A Letter to Jan Skrzynecki].

²² Aleksander Smolar – born 1940 in a family of communist activists, political publicist, a party member who became a revisionist, emigrated in 1968, in 1989 became an advisor of post-communist Poland’s first Prime Minister, Tadeusz Mazowiecki.

²³ A. Smolar, “Polska Kwaśniewskiego” [Kwaśniewski’s Poland], *Tygodnik Powszechny*, issue 1, 1996.

66 the one who chickened out justify himself? Certainly, he will not admit to being afraid. He will do something else: exchange courage for haughtiness, and haughtiness for impudence. Here is what we have, impudence and haughtiness reach for the fruits of yesterday's victory.

An exchange of heroism for impudence takes the form of neo-socialist ideology. The neo-socialist ideology consists in repeating what we have already gone through. Private ownership was evil and was the source of all evil – is it not the case today? Openness toward imperialist Europe was evil – is it not the case today? The exploitation of the employee was evil – do we not have a similar exploitation now? Evil proliferates and multiplies. Is the welfare state not good? Is it not good when the employee exploits the employer, especially when the employer is the state? Cannot the state itself be an object of consumption? This neo-socialism delivers perhaps the most serious blow to the ethics of solidarity. For it penetrates down to the place where the idea of solidarity took on flesh – into the interior of the organism of work. It creates an illusion that factional solidarity can replace human solidarity.

Let's Be Realists

“Bear ye one another's burdens,” “‘Solidarity’ is not against but towards,” “the Polish mill from which there will be bread” – these are echoes of times when our thinking was a thinking of open horizons, and our courage was a courage of offering hands to all people of goodwill. In light of that hope, the wall of absurdity was really thin. “Be realists, demand the impossible” – what seems impossible today?

Let us once again have a look at the attitude of consuming the victory and all its consequences: at factional and denominational solidarities, at our mask balls, at flies around the spilled milk, at polemical camps, at the cynicism of negation, at haughtiness counterfeiting courage, at the diseased imagination that has taken the form of religion. What is this consumption, coarse on the one hand, on the other, sophisticated?

Consumerism essentially consists in the refusal of heroism.

In the final analysis, all is reduced to the fact that man does not have the courage to make sacrifices. Sacrifice is needless. Sacrifice is inhumane. Today there is a kind of politics which refers to consumption everywhere. Politicians fear to speak about sacrifice. They think that they will lose their voters. So, a vicious circle is established; voters behave as if they wanted to consume, politicians, as if they were to guarantee consumption. Essentially, everyone feels it is not true. But they carry on with their game.

Today, Poland and Polishness are discussed at length. However, is it not the readiness for heroism that has really indicated Polishness? Sometimes it was a heroism of deed, sometimes it was a heroism of thinking, but always – heroism. What will happen with the young generation if they are persuaded that their aim is to take?

Besides this, it is not true that man realizes himself in taking. Hero- 67
ism is an essential dimension of human existence. It is also a dimension
of the ethics of solidarity. Each time when one must go beyond the limits
of factional solidarity, one needs courage. First of all, and above all, it is
the courage to think.