

**Shaping a New Politics in Poland:  
Interests and Politics in Post-Communist East Europe**

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## Abstract

Hopes that East Europe would see a swift transition to liberal market democracy are frustrated by the weakness of civil society in the post-communist period, which is a legacy of the past. Whereas market systems divide interest groups into what Claus Offe calls "class organizations" (market-based interests) and "policy-takers" (groups dependent on state transactions), communist systems create state-dependent groups alone. By nationalizing all property and making citizens employees of the state, state socialism provides a weak foundation for diverse interest representation, and thus for a liberal polity. Post-communist social groups do not have a clear sense of where their interests lie. Solidarity in Poland, for example, is wracked by contradictory commitments to protect workers and to help introduce a market economy. Contemporary East European politics revolves around three alternative programs: neo-liberalism, populism, and social democratic corporatism. As the first option is undermined because it seems to benefit the old elite, a politically illiberal populism is likely to become the dominant tendency. Walesa's success in Poland is due to his ability to combine all three alternatives.



The demise of communism in East Europe means that politics must be constructed anew. Those who toppled the old regimes and have come to head the new ones like to assure people that political life will be organized completely differently from the way it's been organized in the past. Where civil society was subordinated to the state, now the state will be subordinated to society. Where politics ruled over markets, now markets will allocate resources. Where politics was largely the purview of the ruling party, now it will be open to all parties and interest groups. Where communism repressed particular interests, post-communism will embrace them. In short, where the communist system was state-centered, the new system will be society-centered.

Yet these assumptions come up against the problem that so far the organization of civil society in the post-communist period has been surprisingly weak. This paper will argue that the specificities of post-communist society will continue to make the state strong, and civil society relatively weak, for a long period of time, as people are more likely to continue focusing on the former than on the latter. Post-communist society seems to be marked by a peculiar relationship between state and society, between politics and interests, that makes most society-centered models of politics, constructed as they were for market economies, particularly inappropriate. This paper attempts to uncover some of these specificities in order to help us understand the political processes now unfolding in post-communist East Europe. It focuses on interest group formation in Poland, but tries to address issues faced by all East European countries. It tries to address the question of why the movement to liberal democracy is passing through many illiberal stages, from calls for collective revenge against those who profited off the old system to ethnic nationalist pressures to wide electoral

support for demagogic politicians. The paper suggests that one of the chief problems of the current transition is the attempt to introduce a bourgeois economy without a legitimate bourgeois class, and with a communitarian ideological rationale that undermines its object. The contradictions this entails, I argue, may drive a sizable number of people to favor a non-liberal, redistributive state once again. I then discuss three alternative paths for East Europe's future, suggesting that one of the keys to Lech Walesa's success in Poland has been his ability to combine these different courses. I conclude that neither a liberal nor an authoritarian solution is likely to prevail in East Europe, but rather a new kind of hybrid that will owe much to the prevailing pattern of societal organization outlined below.

### Civil Society in Post-Communism

We might best begin with an apparent paradox: the continued weakness of civil society in the post-communist era. For if one thing had seemed clear, it was that the post-communist period in East Europe would be marked by an explosion of new interest representation. "Civil society," after all, had been the democratic (and revolutionary) password of the opposition since the mid-1970s. Many of its theorists exercise power today throughout the region. Indeed, recent Western interest in this category comes as a direct result of its revival in East Europe. Earlier moments of freedom, such as the Prague Spring of 1968 and especially the Solidarity period of 1980-81, provided evidence of widespread popular interest in social organization, as people took the opportunity (and the time) to join

movements, attend rallies, sign petitions, take part in meetings, produce newsletters, elect representatives, and in general to participate in the recreation of a public sphere that became the envy of participatory democrats throughout the world. Given that these previous attempts to organize independently were crushed by force, it seemed natural to expect that if and when civic freedom was fully guaranteed, institutional representation for different interests in civil society would develop rapidly. It was hard to conceive of a non-communist East Europe, and particularly a non-communist Poland, without a thriving civil society.

And yet it hasn't happened like that. Although people can always be found to speak out about how specific policies are likely to affect particular trades or professions, few societal groups have as yet formed strong interest associations with a clear sense of program, and nowhere have they exerted a dominant influence on political life. Even industrial workers in Poland do not have an organization to represent them, as Solidarity has fractured into several pieces and even the trade union says little about workers interests per se. The expected differentiation and political representation of interests has simply failed to occur. Social groups still seem to be attached to the state, to look to the state to defend their interests. Far from the flourishing civil society and weak state that we might have expected in the aftermath of the anti-communist uprisings of 1989, the post-communist tendency is more the reverse: a state that's still strong and a civil society barely getting organized.

How is all this to be explained? The heart of the explanation, it seems to me, can be found in the specific way in which state-society relations were structured in the communist era. We might formulate a proposition as follows:

Because the interests that exist in post-communist society emerge from a state socialist framework that repressed the development of autonomous classes and made all groups dependent on the state, the organization of interests in post-communist society, even though the principles of the old regime have been discredited, is necessarily very weak. Social groups in post-communist society do not have a clear sense of what is in their interest and what is not.

Let me try to develop this point, and draw attention to some of its crucial political consequences, through a discussion of recent literature on the transition from authoritarianism to democracy. This literature, of course, deals mostly with the experiences of South America and Southern Europe. The natural tendency is to try to find commonalities between these experiences and the current transition processes in Eastern Europe. In my view, there is not a great deal in common, precisely because of the different economic bases of authoritarianism (a market economy in South America and Southern Europe, a state socialist economy in Eastern Europe) and the consequent different organization of societal interests. Interest, of course, is the fundamental category of democratization. The overthrow of dictatorship constitutes a "transition to liberal democracy" if and when particular societal interests become able to launch their political parties and begin a campaign to win political power. Democratization is thus a process whereby societal interests can, through competitive elections, assume control of the state in order to make the state serve these particular interests.

The assumption here, of course, is that there are interests out there -- real, particular, independent societal interests, waiting for the chance to politically articulate their views and to use the state to implement these views. In political



dictatorships with market economies, the assumption is appropriate, as the capitalist market economy itself creates the classes that have opposing interests regardless of the dictatorship. Indeed, in countries such as Spain or (to a lesser extent) Portugal, workers and industrialists each organized themselves independently during the period of dictatorship, and although they worked together for the overthrow of the common enemy, each had its own organization ready for political action, and its own program and philosophy ready for implementation, immediately after the demise of the dictatorship. The disappearance of the common enemy did not paralyze political life, as it has tended to do in Eastern Europe. Rather the end of the dictatorship began a period where the different interests could compete among themselves, democratically vying for popular support.

Democratization from state socialism works in very different ways. In state socialist society, there are no clearly defined societal interests waiting for the chance to capture the state. With only slight exaggeration, one might say that there are no independent interests at all. The Leninist state prevents the formation of independent interests by nationalizing the entire economy, subordinating all citizens to the state. To be sure, different groups of citizens form loose organizations based on professional affiliation. Some of these were explicitly formed by the state and work closely with it, such as trade unions for workers or associations for writers. Other organizations were slightly more informal, and some scholars have seen these -- including groups of technocrats, military officers, economists, enterprise managers, or party/state officials -- as the equivalent of Western interest groups. The difference is that none of these

groups constitute independent interests that can form the basis of a party or program in a democratic future. On the contrary, all of these groups and associations are very much part of the state socialist system. Each recognizes the state as its sole life-support. Moreover, without that state, these groups have no natural rivalries among themselves. Each competes with each other only for a share of the pie distributed by the state. None of these groups inherently embodies the desire for an alternative political system. None has a program to present when the dictatorship is overthrown. On the contrary, when the dictatorship is overthrown, these particular groups lose their very reason for being. The problem for constructing a democratic system in Eastern Europe is that no other particular groups exist.

Contrary to what many theorists of democratic transition tend to assume, therefore, interests do not simply exist "out there," waiting for the chance to politically articulate their own visions. Rather, interests are decisively shaped by the state, by the political and economic environments in which they take shape.<sup>1</sup>

We can perhaps understand this better through Claus Offe's useful distinction between "class organizations" and "policy-takers."<sup>2</sup> The former include those organized groups that play a key role in shaping the economy through their role in the market, and that seek to influence the state to help the market position of their members. "Policy-takers," on the other hand, are those collectivities shaped not by the market but by the state. They seek to influence the state not in order to increase their market position, but because they have no leg to stand on outside of the state. "Class organizations" exist and have interests of their own outside of the state. "Policy-takers" do not exist as specific interest

associations apart from the state. Both kinds of organizations are present in Western polities. There are class organizations of labor and capital, and there are policy-takers such as taxpayer associations or local governments. In state socialist society, however, there is nothing else but "policy-takers." All social groups owe their existence to the state and all flourish or decline depending on the state's commitment to maintaining them. "Class organizations," in the absence of the state, fight it out among themselves. "Policy-takers" are entirely dependent on the state. In capitalist society, classes conflict against each other. Take away the authoritarian state, as in recent transitions in Southern Europe and Latin America, and the social classes are still in conflict. By nationalizing the entire economy, however, the communist parties in Eastern Europe really did "abolish classes." So take away the state in state socialist society, and you don't have natural conflicts between different social groups, you have the various groups looking around for a new state authority to carry out the economic redistribution that they have always relied on.

Here then is a fundamental danger to democratic transition. If there are no "class organizations" seeking to lay hold of the state in order to have the state serve its interests against the interests of other classes, and if all social groups are but "policy-takers" that owe their existence to the state, then it will be quite difficult to introduce the capitalist market economy that all groups in Eastern Europe say they support. In other words, everyone many desire a market economy, but no social group seems to have an interest in bringing one about. For each group has been shaped by a state that allowed no group other than the state to get in a position where it could dominate others. This contributed

wonderfully to the collectivist flavor of the anti-communist revolutions of 1989, but is a difficult burden as each country embarks on the process of marketization. The irony of the transition to liberal democracy in Eastern Europe, therefore, is that it is being carried out in the name of a class that does not exist. One new political party in Poland admits this openly. The leader of the Civic Movement for Democratic Action (ROAD) publicly stated, soon after the movement's creation, that ROAD intended to be the party of the "middle class" (a domestic bourgeoisie), and then added that ROAD's program was to create the conditions in which a middle class could arise!<sup>3</sup>

### Solidarity and the Ambiguity of Workers Interests

Since the state socialist system created particular societal groups that were appropriate to the state socialist system, these groups today, in conditions of marketization, do not have a clear sense of where their interests lie. This does not mean they don't support marketization. On the contrary, because of the complete ideological discrediting of the old system, virtually all social groups convinced themselves that a "market economy," symbolizing the Western standard of living more than a specific form of social and economic organization, was the answer to their particular problems. Yet when communist rule ended and new governments began moving to a market economy, the conviction began to waver. Workers do not know if it is in their interest to support a reform program that might cause them to lose their jobs: on the one hand, they don't want to be unemployed; on the other hand, they desire the better life they are told (and

believe) a market reform program will make possible. Intellectuals know it is in their interest to have the intellectual freedom that comes from removing the state from the academy. When the state withdraws its long arm, however, it also removes its fat pocketbook, and so intellectuals and artists are divided on how far the removal of the state should actually go; divided, that is, on where their interests actually lie. Farmers want the state to get out of their lives, to stop telling them what and how much to produce, and to allow them to sell their produce freely on the market. Yet when the government actually moves to implement a market economy, promoting a recession to counteract the hyperinflation that threatens with the elimination of state subsidies, commodity prices tend to plummet as demand drops off, and then the farmers come right back to the state to ask for the subsidies they didn't like in the past. They too are not quite sure where their new interests lie.

Let us look more closely at the dilemmas faced by workers in Poland, as evident in the lingering identity crisis of Solidarity as a trade union. Ever since victory in 1989, Solidarity has been consistently uncertain as to its goals or its role in the post-communist era. Should it fight for the interests of workers or for the interests of "society as a whole"? Indeed, the very way the question is posed reveals the depths of the crisis and the legacy of the past. Only against a monopolist state did society have common interests, and even then the commonality referred to procedural rules, not substantive outcomes. But whereas societal unity in a Leninist party-state constitutes an ultimately undefeatable democratic front, it has much different consequences in post-communist conditions. Today the defense of "universal interests" is either an apology for the

creation of a strong middle class or a call to preserve "national Christian values" against secular westernizing orientation of the political liberals. Both tendencies are present within Solidarity. Each of them, however, only undermines Solidarity's raison d'être as a trade union.

Yet universalism is Solidarity's legacy, and is not easily shed. Because of the absence of internal class conflict under state socialism, Solidarity was too broad a movement in the past. When both sides repeated, during the first Solidarity period of 1980-81, that the conflict pitted "state against society," this was not mere rhetorical flourish. By subordinating citizens to the state, communist rule engenders only a collectivist opposition, not particularistic ones.

Unity, however, has proved particularly damaging for the development of workers' interests, adding an ideological and organizational inertia to the structural logic that already impedes clear interest articulation. The problem is that unity was forged under the ideological leadership of liberal intellectuals for whom the program of "reconstructing civil society" benefited workers only peripherally. That program, as is well known, hinged on the effort to promote an open and independent public sphere, in which various social groups would be able, and encouraged, to articulate their particular interests in a pluralist environment. The liberal intellectuals became active in union work, already in 1978 with the formation of the Free Trade Union movement in Gdansk, only because they saw the union movement as a way to revitalize civil society, not because they sought to help articulate a particular working class perspective. Indeed, most of them thought preciously little about workers, as evidenced by their striking unpreparedness for the 1980 events.<sup>4</sup>

The specific conditions of state socialism, however, made the liberals' program quite attractive to workers, who were more stifled in the independent articulation of their interests than any other social group, due to the ruling party's historic claim over the working class. The liberals did not focus their efforts on developing independent trade unions -- indeed, they almost unanimously recommended to the striking shipyard workers in August 1980 that the latter drop their claim for independent unions<sup>5</sup> -- but for workers the liberal program was an indispensable starting point, allowing them finally to get a foot in the door. Thus, although industrial workers created Solidarity on their own in 1980, they eagerly adopted as their guiding ideology the civil society strategy of the liberal intellectual opposition.<sup>6</sup> That is their problem today. For when that old liberal agenda was achieved, as it was for the intellectuals in 1989, it largely lost its value for workers. A program which defended only the right to organize leaves workers, in post-communist society, with no better claim to a share of the pie than any other social group. Moreover, because the liberal agenda was identified with a workers movement, workers have in fact been less able to develop a new claim than other social groups not so self-consciously tied to this restrictive ideology. In other words, Solidarity must abandon its founding ideology if workers are to defend their own interests today. But precisely because liberalism is the ideology of its foundation, Solidarity has so far been unable to make a clean break.

During the 1980s the leadership of Solidarity, or the liberal intellectuals in close alliance with Lech Walesa and only a few other working class leaders, changed its views decisively, albeit logically. Whereas this leadership originally

understood the civil society program as entailing the radical democratization of the political public sphere, after martial law it focused increasingly on the liberal economic aspects of civil society. The earlier slogan "No economic reform without political reform," now changed into its opposite: "No political reform without economic reform, and Solidarity ended up embracing a program of radical marketization that spoke preciously little about defending workers rights.<sup>7</sup> All along, however, the program was Solidarity's, and so the workers went along. In 1989, when Solidarity put together a government, the workers stood as the putative social base of a government that clearly stated its intentions of undermining traditional workers' benefits and subordinating workers' rights to the effort to create a new bourgeoisie.

In such conditions, how can workers organize on behalf of their own interests? The answer, so far, is not very well. For the most part, Solidarity itself has said that defending workers should be secondary to building capitalism and a new middle class. Walesa repeatedly argued this in the months leading up to and immediately following the introduction of the neoliberal Balcerowicz Plan (named for Finance Minister Leszek Balcerowicz) in January 1990. The two other most prominent working class leaders of Solidarity during the 1980s, Zbigniew Bujak and Wladyslaw Frasyniuk, became leaders in ROAD, the political tendency that openly espoused the neoliberal position. Thus, Solidarity began its post-communist life as a very strange interest group indeed: arguing that the interests of its members were best served by accepting deep sacrifices on behalf of a class that did not even exist, in return for benefits that it was hoped -- and only hoped -- would accrue in the future. The communists of course justified



their own policies in the 1940s exactly the same way.

Encumbered by the authority of Walesa, the union did not even try to negotiate the terms of the "shock therapy" that would strike so heavily at its members. In late 1989, at the high point of its political strength, and thus in a perfect position to come to a neocorporatist arrangement with a friendly government that would at least oblige the government to take the union's views into account, Solidarity passed the opportunity by. Walesa announced in December that the impending Balcerowicz Plan was in the interests of workers since a "Solidarity government" had produced it.

As it turned out, this decision was largely responsible for the political chaos of 1990, when Walesa chose to buck the government he had created in order to keep step with workers who suddenly felt that no one was on their side. They might not have felt that no one was on their side if the trade union Solidarity had insisted on coming to a formal deal with the government rather than simply giving the government a blank check. This need not have meant abandoning macroeconomic stabilization either. A government concession, made under union pressure, to accept, say, 2% wage inflation, would have given Balcerowicz less than he wanted, but would also have given the program a political credibility that it desperately needed, as soon became clear. Polish workers began rejecting the view that their sole role was to make sacrifices very soon after the Balcerowicz Plan was put into effect. A crippling railroad strike in May 1990 drove the point home. Following the local elections at the end of the month, Walesa joined the workers' anti-government critique, and began his presidential campaign that led to the break-up of Solidarity into rival camps.

(There were important personal reasons involved in the decision too, as the collapse of the Soviet bloc in the previous months showed Walesa that there were no longer any geopolitical reasons why General Jaruzelski should be president instead of him.) But although Walesa appeared to side with workers, he was more closely aligned with a group of Gdansk liberals who felt the "Warsaw-Krakow circle" of liberals in government were not transforming the economy fast enough. Yet with Walesa presenting their argument to workers -- "the reason workers are suffering is that the government isn't moving toward capitalism fast enough" -- Solidarity's identity crisis could only deepen. During Walesa's presidential campaign of 1990, the new interest articulation of workers that had been emerging at the start of the year was repressed once again, as workers were again able to believe that their own interests would be met by radical marketization.

After his election in December 1990, Walesa soon abandoned, under pressure from the Gdansk liberals (one of whom he appointed as prime minister) and from the International Monetary Fund, one of the main promises he had made to workers: to withdraw the punitive wage tax that workers experienced as a wage freeze despite continuing price hikes. He did cancel the wage tax for private enterprises, but the disparity only left Solidarity's ranks, almost all of whom worked in the state sector, feeling even more betrayed.

In these new conditions, with even Walesa beginning to compromise himself in the eyes of the workers, Solidarity may finally become an organized interest association for workers. One important sign is that Walesa's choice of successor as union president was rejected at Solidarity's Third National Congress

in February 1991, with Marian Krzaklewski from Silesia chosen to replace him. Polish workers may only now be ready to begin developing an interest group with political clout.

Even so, however, there are obstacles. While the last paragraphs have focused on the ideological and organizational obstacles to the development of a strong workers' interest group in Poland, the structural obstacles discussed earlier are also critical. The fact is that workers' interests really are quite unclear in this present transitional period. Although workers want to keep their jobs, many would undoubtedly be better off if their present firms are restructured or even fold, and they are given retraining and obtain better-paying and more highly-skilled jobs. Workers tend to be particularly pro-reform in small firms, where the fear of bankruptcy is greatest and where restructuring is most easily carried out. In many such firms it is the workers themselves who are in the forefront of healthy restructuring efforts. In large firms workers tend to be more resistant, as even in the post-communist era many feel that their numbers protect them.<sup>8</sup> (Which government is going to shut down a giant plant with tens of thousands of pro-Solidarity workers?) On the other hand, there are too many "ifs" involved, even for those workers more ready to embrace reform. Closing an enterprise may be easy; providing efficient and effective retraining is not. Nor is it clear that there will really be any new and profitable enterprises to employ newly-retrained workers. Understandably, workers will resist making all the sacrifices while these other measures remain only good ideas. Putting them into practice will take more time and more planning, both of which, these days, are politically unpopular.

The Nomenklatura and the Obstacles to Liberalism

If East European reformers were simply carrying out a program in the interests of a class that does not yet exist, the obstacles would be formidable but perhaps not insurmountable. After all, each person could hope and believe that he or she will land in this new bourgeois middle class, and the state could take action to facilitate some upward social mobility. The real problem, however, and one that all the East European countries are now facing, is that there may already exist the embryo of a bourgeois class-in-formation. Unfortunately, this class-in-formation is one nobody likes: the old communist nomenklatura. The problem, in other words -- and this is one more legacy of the old regime -- is that the one group most likely to take advantage of the new possibilities that come with liberalization and marketization is the one group with the least legitimacy to do so.

One hears numerous stories throughout East Europe today of former managers and directors and old party officials using their connections and their capital to lease firms, set up new companies, and otherwise provide for themselves in the new economic environment: the so-called phenomenon of "spontaneous privatization."<sup>9</sup> In Poland and Hungary, pro-marketization legislation passed during the last period of communist party rule, and generally supported at the time by the increasingly pro-market democratic opposition, enabled managers of state enterprises to legally transfer state assets to themselves as new owners of new private companies.<sup>10</sup> In this way many former party members have become legitimate entrepreneurs today, spoiling the liberals' attempt to forge a new pro-

market consensus. In Poland in 1990, one of the most active groups in support of marketization was the Confederation of Polish Employers, a fledgling interest association made up of many former nomenklatura personnel who now boast of the old elite's usefulness to the new market society in the making.<sup>10</sup>

There is really nothing surprising about this behavior. After all, as East European oppositionists have themselves long noted, few people joined the communist parties after 1968 because they were "communists." People joined because the party was the only game in town, because they were looking out for themselves, and the way to do that in the old days was through the ruling party. They were, in other words, acting as rational economic actors who just happened to live in a system that suppressed alternative paths to success. As the pervasiveness of spontaneous privatization suggests, such people are simply continuing to "act rationally" today. They may not be acting very democratically, but then again they never did, nor does neoclassical economic theory suggest they should. But those who cared about democratic values and collective interests tended to join the anti-communist opposition. Those who cared chiefly about self and family became "communists."

The paradox in Eastern Europe is that there was a collectivist revolution to bring about an individualist system. The market economy is being introduced today thanks to the victory of oppositionists who long embodied communitarian

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\* Some people of course did join the Party for "better" reasons: because they saw something salvageable in the socialist legacy, or because they just wanted the chance to influence their surroundings and make public life somewhat more liveable. Such "communists," however, are not the ones partaking in "spontaneous privatization" today.

values, as can be seen in the radical participatory ethos of the original civil society program. This was a kind of liberal communitarianism, with an Arendtian or Habermasian vision of a fully open society based on the universal practice of citizenship rights. In the mid-1980s these oppositionists came to embrace individualist market principles without publicly disowning their original communitarianism. In the communist era, of course, it was not obvious that there was a contradiction, since that system quashed political and economic liberalism alike. In the post-communist era, however, the dilemmas are all too clear. With the old nomenklatura poised to take advantage of economic liberalism, it is increasingly clear that it may not be possible to uphold economic and political liberalism at the same time. If the new regimes accept the embourgeoisment of the old elite, they run the risk of alienating the population and promoting the rise of a populist opposition that may still talk of the benefits of a liberal market economy (since everyone wants to believe markets will make them rich) but will come out strongly against the political principles of liberalism. This is the basis of the anticommunist authoritarianism that so many political liberals now fear, and that some economic liberals now champion.<sup>12</sup> On the other hand, if the new governments seek to prevent the old elite from taking part in the liberalized economy, they run the risk of squandering the chance of economic reform and of economic liberalism, since it is unclear where investment capital will come from if not from those who already have the money, particularly since the domestic ideological consensus argues against active state intervention here, as do important international creditors as well. Moreover, Western investment would be scared off by any new attempts to repress business interests, and would

not be mollified by an argument that such repression was necessary only because the businessmen were communists.

This dilemma is being played out all across East Europe, most acutely in Poland. When the Mazowiecki government declined to take action against the old elite just because some of its members were profiting in an era of general austerity, Lech Walesa promised to be "president with an axe," ready to take action against the remnants of the old system and to rule by decree "if necessary." This then inspired the government to take a harder line against investment by members of the old apparatus, and to itself begin skimping on liberal procedures of parliamentary rule. Already in the summer of 1990 the Mazowiecki government bypassed parliament in introducing measures such as religious education in the schools and restricted access to abortion.

Liberals defending human rights for all are accused by populists of sympathizing with the communists, and since this is a charge guaranteed to be fatal in elections, liberals find it increasingly hard to remain liberals. This is well illustrated by the legal action taken against Walesa's presidential rival Stanislaw Tyminski, whose surprisingly successful challenge (he defeated Prime Minister Mazowiecki in the first round of voting) had been organized in part by former communist officials. During the election campaign Tyminski had accused Mazowiecki of treason, and the liberals, trying to prove that they too were ready to persecute communists, responded not with disdain but with court action, utilizing the very same legal code forbidding the defamation of government officials that many of them had suffered under in the past. In this way the first democratic election in Polish postwar history took on a sadly familiar hue, where

one of the two candidates faced a situation where victory takes him to the presidential palace and defeat takes him to prison. The Polish Helsinki Human Rights Committee's defense of the prosecution elicited a strong reaction from the Helsinki Watch center in New York, which publicly criticized what it saw as a very dangerous precedent. But the Polish liberals, wary of the persistent criticism that they were "soft on communism," held firm, agreeing to change only the code under which Tyminski would be investigated.

Introducing a liberal democratic society in East Europe is thus likely to face very formidable obstacles. Liberals face the problem that market liberalism, in action though not in theory, is widely perceived to represent the interests of the communists. This explains why many leading pro-market liberals in Eastern Europe are accused of being "leftists": their policies aid those in the old elite more than they aid "the people." This of course is true, but any market society is always a wager on the wealthy. The problem is that East Europeans, having made a collectivist revolution for a market economy, tend to want their capitalists to be collectivists, too. Such are the entangled consequences both of the old system and of the struggle against it: when capitalists are merely individualists, they run the risk of being denounced as communists. Marketization will be fully acceptable only if an acceptable group profits.

Yet outside of the unacceptable old elite, there is no social group, and certainly no other politically organized social group, that has a real interest in implementing a market economy. The only possibility seems to be the new private entrepreneurs, so prominent in Hungary's widespread second economy and increasingly prominent in Poland, mostly as petty traders. Yet even here there is



no clear-cut sense of interest. While these small entrepreneurs have an interest in seeing the establishment of the legal infrastructure of a market economy, many of them also have an interest in the continuation of an inefficient state sector, since they have traditionally profited so well precisely from that sector's deficiencies. In any case, this group is politically quite unorganized, especially in Poland. This is understandable, considering the conspiratorial conditions in which they often had to work, the networks of corruption in which they had to be embedded, and the perpetually uncertain status of their enterprise.<sup>13</sup> All of that breeds a mistrust of the authorities and of each other that is not conducive to the establishment of stable interest organizations. The result is that the important economic interests represented by this group, the only non-elite sector with a vested interest in capitalist formation, are not forcefully represented either in policy-making or opinion-forming spheres, damaging the liberals' economic and political agenda alike.

Significantly, one of the most prominent new groups in formation is one that challenges the very logic of the new system: local governments. State socialism was rather congenial to local interests. Outlying cities managed to articulate their needs to the capital center, often quite forcefully, through the intervention of local party secretaries and enterprise managers alike, each of whom had various channels of communication with responsible authorities. Since local authorities were rewarded on how well they performed their administrative tasks, they had a strong interest in forcefully representing local needs to higher authorities. These higher authorities, meanwhile, saw local governments, like state enterprises, chiefly as means of maintaining stability, and so also had an

interest in satisfying local needs.

Transition to a market economy changes all this. Forced to reduce budget expenditures and cut subsidies in its effort to balance the budget, stabilize the economy, and please foreign creditors and would-be investors, the Polish government has drastically cut aid to local communities, forcing them to go it alone in conditions where they have neither the means nor the know-how to do so. The severest cuts were imposed soon after the first free local elections in May 1990, when local governments became responsible for funding education, health services, and cultural institutions out of their own dwindling budgets. The collapse of the old political system, with the patronage networks that made it work,<sup>14</sup> left local governments without institutionalized channels of protest. In response, local officials have begun organizing new structures: a Union of Polish Towns, and a national sejmik of local governments. Trying to institutionalize the bargaining power local governments used to have through the communist party, these associations are pushing for a constitutional amendment to turn the recently-revived Senate, an institution presently without a clear mandate, into the direct representative of local governments, something like the Bundesrat in Germany.<sup>15</sup>

It is not surprising that local governments are better organized than small entrepreneurs. We would expect this because of the continued weakness of "class organizations" in post-communist society. Local governments, of course, are "policy-takers" par excellence, old-style interest groups working against rather than on behalf of market policies. There is little doubt that as marketization proceeds apace, they will become increasingly organized in East Europe. As this happens,

those groups and individuals who suffer in the economic transition will look increasingly to local governments as a bastion of defense. In other words, people are likely to continue seeing their interests best represented by a redistributive state than by new class organizations of their own. In this way the social foundations of liberal democracy will continue to remain weak.

Over time, of course, marketization will itself create the particular interests and the class organizations that state socialism stifled. This weakness of civil society, in all its aspects, is not likely to be a permanent condition. But the present situation has important political consequences, and what is crucial here is the short-term. New political systems are being shaped today on the basis of what is, not what will be. Institutional frameworks will be created in response to present demands, not future ones, particularly since this transition to a market economy, unlike the long historical process in the West, is being undertaken in conditions of universal suffrage from the very beginning. People as they are today, not as elites would like them to be tomorrow, will decide which political models to follow. And their choices will affect a wide range of substantive and institutional outcomes in the future, including how interests are organized and their ability to influence political structures. In other words, the weak civil society of the immediate post-communist era will shape the state that will in turn affect how citizens can influence state and economic policy in the future.<sup>16</sup>

Possible Futures

What then does the future hold in store? To answer this, let us move from a discussion of Poland to a discussion of East Europe as a whole. Not only is this more interesting and more relevant to a wide Western audience, but it also allows us to see the alternatives in a much clearer light.

In a sense the main political choice East Europe faces today is its package of economic choices. There are three main tendencies in the postcommunist debate on economic reform. These tendencies can be called bourgeois-liberal, populist, and social democratic corporatist.<sup>17</sup>

The bourgeois-liberals (or neoliberals) argue that the state socialist economy must be transformed as quickly as possible into a capitalist market economy, with private property and free movement of capital. The first step, they say, is to create a sound environment for private investment by abandoning the fundamental features of the socialist economy: easy credit to state firms, price controls, subsidies on basic goods, and job guarantees. Such economic features may assure plan achievement and a modicum of social stability, but they also create budget deficits, shortages, inflation, and poor labor productivity, none of which is likely to leave private business salivating at the chance to invest. The neoliberals therefore advocate slashing state spending, including subsidies on food, housing, healthcare, and unprofitable state enterprises, in order to erase the budget deficit and disaccustom citizens from looking to the state for assistance. They propose tax breaks for private investors, particularly foreign investors, and call for rapid privatization of most state-owned industry. The liberals believe that

through free trade and comparative advantage the countries of East Europe can find a prosperous place in the European and global economy, and they point to the "Asian tigers" as proof. They acknowledge that the program entails great social costs, but they argue that not embarking on their program will ultimately be even costlier. "If you must cut off a cat's tail," they say, "do it in one stroke rather than piece by piece."

Populist critics say the liberals propose cutting off the tail at the neck. East Europe, they argue (although they usually speak only of the country they live in, since as populists they tend to be nationalistic), can be quickly integrated into the world economy only as a pauper, not a leader. The liberal program, they say, will lead to a dangerous recession, mass unemployment, agricultural crisis, and the sale of national wealth to foreign capital that doesn't have our interests in mind. It will destroy existing social ties and consequently threaten the entire national fabric. Rather than try to copy Western models of development, which took ages to evolve there and have frequently produced poverty and social chaos instead of generalized prosperity when tried elsewhere, let us, say the populists, reconstruct our countries on the basis of what we already have. Let's promote small-scale business and peasant entrepreneurship, create a domestic bourgeoisie before inviting in a foreign one. Let us use the state to build up our country, not just to sell it off to the highest bidder. Against the liberals' argument that there is too little domestic capital, they point to the "second economy" that developed during the old regime as the basis for the new economy. But they are cautious. We are likely to be losers in the world economy for a long time to come, they say. Instead of naively counting on foreign capital to do

the trick, and promoting a recession to help bring it in, let us gradually develop what already exists and make a slow transition to a full market economy. In this way we can avoid the poverty and social dislocation that the liberal program entails. This may require a strong state to do the job, but populists are not opposed to a strong state, as long as it serves the nation. Nation and "the people" are the primary values for the populists, not GNP or foreign investment or self-management.

The social democratic corporatist approach shares with the liberals the view that large-scale industry will continue to remain most important, and with the populists the commitment to minimize social costs. The adherents of this tendency reject, on both moral and economic grounds, the liberals' view that workers should be left out of the transition process. On moral grounds they argue that those who paid the costs for so long, and who made possible the revolutions of 1989, should not once again be sacrificed in the interests of future generations, just as the communists had always done. On economic grounds they argue that neither labor productivity nor the crucial export sector can be increased without workers participation, and they point to West European experiences with corporatist arrangements and post-Fordist technologies as examples of participation facilitating economic growth. Workers' participation, they contend, is needed to prod management to make the changes that don't follow from monetary manipulation alone. Without an employee stake in reform, including but not restricted to employee stock ownership, management is more likely to try to survive through an alliance with local authorities, as in China, than through rationalization and improvement of the firm. The social democratic

corporatists don't deny that employee participation might slow the transition, but in the end, they say, it will be more secure because carried out with the consent of workers rather than against them. Their belief in the value of worker participation leads them to support strong social welfare provisions on economic as well as on moral grounds. But the charge that they are recycling discarded Western models would be unfair. They fully recognize that Scandinavian-style welfare guarantees cannot be attained, and they strongly favor marketization in general. Against liberals and populists, however, they argue that markets in post-communist society cannot be established the way they have been in pre-communist society.

Of course, this general account of the three tendencies inevitably glosses over differences within the various camps. For example, there are both democratic and authoritarian populists, the former eschewing the clericalism and anti-semitism that come naturally to the latter. Social democrats, meanwhile, are torn between those who emphasize worker participation in the enterprises and those who want workers' interests expressed chiefly by "peak associations" and contacts between union and government. And while most neoliberals favor democratic parliamentarism, many believe that popular outcry against the costs of the liberal program will be so severe that only an authoritarian government, a la South Korea or Chile, will be able to bring it about. Here we have the crucial distinction between economic and political liberalism that is only now coming to the fore. When the old system suppressed both, democratic oppositionists could gloss over the distinction and claim to champion both. But when introducing economic liberalism requires measures that elicit strong opposition, the

contradiction becomes evident and liberals must choose.

The three tendencies are not equally strong throughout the region. Populism is prominent in Hungary, with deep roots of peasant entrepreneurship and second economy activity, and in Poland, with its private farmers and its historic connections with Catholicism. It is less prevalent in the industrially developed Czech lands, though quite strong in rural Slovakia. In poorly developed Romania and Bulgaria, populism has a strong potential base that was tapped in the 1990 elections by the former communists, who presented themselves as protectors of the people against the market rules the liberals want to impose. In Yugoslavia, meanwhile, populism and nationalism were the most important currents in the various regional elections of 1990.

In the immediate aftermath of communist rule, bourgeois liberalism had the greatest credibility. It appeared to be the "victor" in the Cold War, and among its adherents were the best-known anti-communist activists of the past. Perhaps most important, adopting economic liberalism was increasingly a precondition for receiving Western aid.<sup>18</sup> (The United Democratic Forces in Bulgaria used this -- perhaps unwisely, since they lost -- as a campaign issue, arguing that only a UDF victory would help the country since the West would help only them.) And so neoliberalism became the basic framework for economic discussions. Do populism and social democratic corporatism simply represent "right" and "left" wing critiques? While these categories are used in East Europe, from a Western point of view they are not entirely apt. Although it favors artisan production and pre-modern and frequently authoritarian values like church and nation, populism shares with the left a commitment to workers' participation



and a concern for those the market leaves behind. Yet this critique of capitalism is different from the Western left's in that it tends to hark back to an idealized, "authoritarian but just" past, rather than to an emancipated, free-spirited future. One should keep in mind that East Europe is still in a pre-capitalist stage, and the right-wing critique is still far more pervasive than a left critique, just as in the pre-war period.

Despite neoliberalism's ideological predominance, only Poland chose to embark on such a program right away, with the Balcerowicz Plan in January 1990. Hungary and Czecho-Slovakia have gone slower, the populist Democratic Forum having won elections in Hungary while an ideologically diverse but social democratic-leaning Civic Forum having been elected in Czecho-Slovakia. (Civic Forum began moving in a neoliberal direction itself in late 1990). The reluctance even of Hungary to embark on the neoliberal program, the country previously considered the champion of economic reform in the East, is ample testimony to the severe obstacles liberalism faces today.

Can bourgeois liberalism succeed in face of the massive social dislocation it will necessarily cause? Many factors militate against it: 1) It is too painful in the all-important short run, and people usually vote according to their immediate experiences. 2) It has no natural social base, since nowhere in East Europe does there yet exist a legitimate bourgeois class to support the neoliberal program. Liberalism so far exists only as an idea, and ideas rarely prevail over interests. 3) The liberal program will place these countries in a subordinate position to the West. The large industry that the liberals count on will likely be controlled by Western interests, for with average monthly wages of \$100 - \$200, who else has

the capital to buy out or set up a new factory?"\*\* Only perhaps the old party elite or the state, but embracing the former is politically impermissible while embracing the latter most neoliberals find ideologically impermissible. Even universal share distribution is likely to aid either the old elite or the West, since such small shares are likely to be sold off fast. Yet a dominant role for the West conflicts with the nationalists' desire that finally, with the communists out, Poland should be for Poles, Hungary for Hungarians, etc. Communism and neoliberalism share an internationalist orientation that is contrary both to present moods and to most people's immediate interests.

Nevertheless, all East European governments will be forced to introduce a large degree of economic liberalism, since no Western aid will be forthcoming without it. The deep indebtedness of all these countries -- even Romania, which had paid its debts under Ceausescu, is beginning to run them again in the face of enormous consumer and infrastructure needs<sup>18</sup> -- gives the West a powerful lever with which to influence policy. The political problem for the various governments, therefore, is how to legitimize such policies to the public. As noted before, some neoliberals see dictatorship -- the "Chilean" or "Korean model" -- as the only answer.<sup>19</sup> But that is not very likely. Most people are too attached to the principles of democracy to countenance their obvious breach. Parliamentary

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\*\* Even diplomats have dropped their guise and joined the fray. In early 1990 the US ambassador to Hungary, Mark Palmer, resigned from his post in order to head a business venture actively buying out former Hungarian state property, often at bargain prices. The outcry was enormous, and parliament passed laws restricting what foreigners could purchase. The question of foreign ownership rights continues to be one of the most fiercely contested issues throughout East Europe.

politics is thus likely to continue, but one can expect success for those parties that offer the voters something other than mere hope for the future. The victors are likely to be those that offer substitute satisfactions for the vast economic and psychological hardships that marketization and "primitive accumulation" always entail. Such substitutes include political illiberal measures such as persecuting supposed enemies and enhancing religious influence in economic and social life, restricting press freedoms and reviving ethnic and national rivalries.

No new party in East Europe is opposing marketization and "capitalism" per se: the combination of the discrediting of the old regime, the huge foreign debts, and the fact that every viable alternative requires at least some additional reliance on market allocations all make sure of that. But the ones that have emerged as dominant -- the Center Alliance in Poland, the new Civic Forum under Vaclav Klaus in Czecho-Slovakia,<sup>21</sup> or the Democratic Forum in Hungary, not to mention the various victors in Yugoslavia -- have done so by being willing to play to nationalism and political illiberalism, accepting this as the price to be paid for moving toward a market economy.

In the pre-war years such illiberal actions, despite the survival of parliamentary politics, contributed to the characterization of countries such as Poland or Hungary as "dictatorships." I suspect that many of the same features could be instituted today and most scholars, not to mention most Western governments, would still call them "democracies." Whether systems are democratic depends on how democracy is defined. Much of the recent transition literature sees democracy as entailing competitive elections and market economics alone. These two features are probably here to stay in Eastern Europe. No

influential party or movement opposes them. Yet "liberal democracy," it seems to me, entails more: citizenship rights for all, a commitment to an open public sphere, respect for minority rights (and thus strict separation of church and state). These are the values that many new politicians in East Europe have been challenging with success. We need to keep the distinction in mind. Parliamentary politics should have little trouble being consolidated. Achieving liberal democracy is much more doubtful.

In the end, post-communist transition is likely to involve aspects of all three paths. One might say that neoliberalism is where East Europe would like to go (rich neoliberalism, that is), populism is where it gravitates to when liberalism fails to deliver the goods equitably, and, as the state sector survives longer than many had initially expected, corporatism will be increasingly demanded by state sector workers who feel cut out by the other tendencies. Walesa has been so successful precisely because his coalition addressed all three groups. His was a neoliberal economic program with strong populist sensibilities attached to sound social democratic working-class credentials. Klaus is now trying to recreate such a winning team in Czecho-Slovakia, though the lack of a strong social movement base is a serious impediment. In Hungary, Imre Pozsgay resigned from the Socialist Party in order to try to build such a coalition there. Hungary's difficulty so far in producing a single dominant political tendency, despite its well-developed party system, is probably due to the populists' inability to develop a convincing economic strategy and the fact that the most popular individual leaders are too closely identified with neoliberalism. In post-communist East Europe, that does not seem to constitute a politically viable mix.

For with East Europe's weak structure of organized interest associations, liberalism is unlikely to succeed unless it can appeal to communitarian and populist sentiments. It can appeal to these sentiments, however, only by undercutting its political liberal credentials.

The East European future is thus likely to be neither a liberal democracy nor an authoritarian dictatorship but a hybrid that will owe much to the particular pattern of state-society relations from which it has emerged.<sup>22</sup> How these countries develop depends on factors such as national traditions, the relative strength of social movements and of an indigenous bourgeoisie, the presence or absence of strong leaders, and the political orientation of the dominant figures. As is all too clear to East European experts now swamped in a mass of new information and lacking the unifying theme Leninism used to provide, we will need good empirical studies of the various systems now unfolding before we can assess the validity of the new generalizations we are all tempted to make.

This paper has attempted to focus on some of the specific problems facing democratic politics in Eastern Europe. It suggests that many of the problems facing East Europe today stem from the nature of the organization of particular interests in state socialism, a framework that continues to influence politics in the post-communist era as well. If liberal democracy requires the existence of diverse social groups with a clear sense of interest, then it can probably be easier introduced where a market economy has already heightened popular awareness of interest. In post-communist systems, the political and economic aspects of liberal democracy seem inevitably to come apart. As economic liberalism proceeds apace, political liberalism tends to become increasingly undermined.

## NOTES

1. For an excellent overview on interests and politics in market societies, see Suzanne Berger's "Introduction" in the volume she edited, Organizing Interests in Western Europe (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981).
2. Claus Offe, "The Attribution of Public Status to Interest Groups: Observations on the West German Case," in Suzanne D. Berger, op. cit.
3. "Na Zachod od Centrum" [To the West of Center], interview with Zbigniew Bujak, co-founder of ROAD, in Polityka, July 28, 1990.
4. Lawrence Goodwyn, Breaking the Barrier: The Rise of Solidarity in Poland (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991).
5. See the discussion by Goodwyn, op. cit., pp. 34-43. Adam Michnik, for example, was prevented from going to Gdansk to urge against the formation of independent unions only because he was arrested. (His account is quoted in my book, Solidarity and the Politics of Anti-Politics [Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1990], p. 77.) Liberal intellectuals were present in the Gdansk Shipyards as "expert advisers" to the strikers. See also Tadeusz Kowalik, "Experts and the Working Group," in A. Kemp-Welsh, The Birth of Solidarity (New York: St. Martin's, 1983); and Jadwiga Staniszkis, Poland's Self-Governing Revolution (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984).
6. This thesis is argued in detail in chapters four and five of my book cited above.
7. See my article, "The Transformation of Solidarity and the Future of Central Europe," in Telos No. 79, Spring 1989.
8. An excellent account of the various attitudes to and strategies of economic reform is Janusz Dabrowski, Michal Federowicz, and Anthony Levitas, State Enterprise Adjustment: Poland January - June 1990 (Gdansk, 1990); reprinted in Working Paper Series on East Central Europe, Center for European Studies, Harvard University, 1990.
9. See discussion in David Stark, "Privatization in Hungary: From Plan to Market of From Plan to Clan?," in East European Politics and Societies 4:3, 1990.
10. For a detailed account of the legal basis for these changes in Hungary, see Andras Sajo, "The Struggle for Ownership Control," in International Journal of the Sociology of Law 18, 1990.
11. "Miliarderzy, menedzerowie, zwiaskowcy" (Millionaires, managers, and unionists), interview with Andrzej Machalski, president of the Confederation of Polish Employers, in Gazeta Wyborcza, November 13, 1990.

12. On the political implications of the rejection of economic liberalism in the prewar period, see Daniel Chirot, "Ideology, Reality, and Competing Models of Development in Eastern Europe Between the Two World Wars," in East European Politics and Societies 3:3, Fall 1989. For a strong economic liberal defense of political dictatorship, see Andranik Migranian et. al., "An Authoritarian Perestroika?" in Telos No. 84, Summer 1990 (translated from Russian).
13. Although admittedly an extreme, one recent news report on second economy shepherds in Ceausescu's Romania constantly cheating the government and bribing police officials well indicates the patterns of corruption that were essential to the past, but are not necessarily desirable or effective, politically or economically, in the present. Stephen Engelberg, "Good Life in Romania is Off the Beaten Path," New York Times, February 17, 1991, p. 27.
14. Michael Kennedy and Ireneusz Bialecki, "Power and the Logic of Distribution in Poland," in East European Politics and Societies 3:2, Spring 1989.
15. Jerzy Hausner and Andrzej Wojtyna, "Evolution of Interest Representation in Poland," paper presented at Conference on Market, Politics, and the Negotiated Economy -- Scandinavian and Post-Socialist Perspectives," in Krakow, Poland, January 1991.
16. On how states shape the framework by which people can influence economic policy, see John Campbell and Leon Lindberg, "Property Rights and the Organization of Economic Activity by the State," in American Sociological Review 55, October 1990.
17. For a clear statement of the liberals' economic program, see Jeffrey Sachs and David Lipton, "Poland's Economic Reform," in Foreign Affairs, Summer 1990. The liberal political program is best articulated in Adam Michnik's many writings, such as "The Two Faces of Europe," or "Why I Won't Vote for Lech Walesa," in The New York Review of Books, July 19, and December 20, 1990. A democratic populist perspective is presented compellingly by Ivan Szelenyi, "Alternative Futures for Eastern Europe," in East European Politics and Societies 4:2, Spring 1990. The social democratic corporatist perspective presented here is culled from the November 1990 programmatic statement of "Solidarnosc Pracy" (ms, Warsaw), and various other writings from the Polish press. See also Stark, op. cit.
18. On Western financial pressure on East Europe, see Peter Gowan, "Western Economic Diplomacy and the New Eastern Europe," in New Left Review No. 182, July-August 1990.
19. David Deletant, "After Ceausescu," paper presented at the New Hampshire International Seminar, Durham, April 1991.
20. Migranian et. al., cited in note 12. For a superb account of the difficulties in

introducing neoliberalism, see Paul Piccone, "The Paradoxes of Perestroika," Telos, Summer 1990.

21. In February 1991, the Civic Forum split into two groups, a dominant faction led by Finance Minister Klaus, leading the party in a rightward direction of free markets and vendettas against the old elite, and a smaller Liberal Club made up of many of the prominent oppositionists in the past.

22. "Part free and part authoritarian" is how Lucian W. Pye describes these "hybrids." See "Political Science and the Crisis of Authoritarianism," in American Political Science Review 84:1, March 1990, p. 13.







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