



THE DEMOCRATIC THEORY OF THE POLISH
OPPOSITION: NORMATIVE INTENTIONS AND
STRATEGIC AMBIGUITIES

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ABSTRACT

This paper analyzes the political vision and social theory of Jacek Kuron and Adam Michnik, two of the outstanding spokesmen of the opposition to the Polish regime between 1976 and 1982. The paper argues that the work of Michnik and Kuron anticipated important aspects of the Solidarity movement of 1980-81 and, more generally, made significant contributions to reflecting about democracy in the context of post-totalitarian socialism. The author argues that Kuron in particular worked out a normative project that was to express the developing political philosophy of the Solidarity movement. He then sustains that the strategic dimensions of Kuron's work remained ambiguous before, during, and after the aegis of Solidarity. Finally, he argues that the impasse of Solidarity was due in part to the theoretical failures of the movement's major intellectuals, including Kuron and Michnik, particularly the tendency to overstate the totalitarian elements of the Polish regime and to understate the potential for effecting more conciliatory, albeit limited, change within that regime.

RESUMEN

Este texto analiza el pensamiento social y político de dos sobresalientes exponentes de la oposición al régimen polaco, entre 1976 y 1982. El autor argumenta que la obra de Jacek Kuron y Adam Michnik ha anticipado aspectos importantes del movimiento Solidaridad de 1980-81 y, en general, ha contribuido notablemente a una reflexión sobre la democracia dentro del contexto socialista post-totalitario. Kuron, en especial, produjo un proyecto normativo que podemos considerar expresión del desarrollo político filosófico de Solidaridad. A este respecto, el autor sostiene que las dimensiones estratégicas de los escritos de Kuron permanecieron ambiguas antes, durante, y después de la égida del movimiento. A guisa de conclusión, el trabajo argumenta que el impasse de Solidaridad se debió parcialmente a las fallas teóricas de sus principales intelectuales, incluyendo Michnik y Kuron. En particular, por causa de su tendencia a sobreestimar el régimen polaco en relación a sus elementos totalitarios, y a subestimarlos en relación a su potencialidad para efectuar un cambio limitado de carácter reconciliatorio.

This presentation is based on a much larger manuscript provisionally entitled "New Democratic Theory as Critical Social Theory: The Program of the Polish Opposition 1976-1982," a manuscript which stands at the crossroads of two projects, one dealing with the 50 year confrontation of varieties of critical social theory with societies of the Soviet type and the other with some historical and systematic problems of the theory of democratic civil society. The theory of the Polish democratic opposition and above all that of KOR (Workers' Defense Committee), the most sophisticated and influential of its parts, belongs to both of these projects, i.e., to the history of Marxian ideas in East Europe and to the history of democratic theory. Aside from its intrinsic theoretical interest, the work of in particular two members of KOR, Adam Michnik and Jacek Kuron, anticipated important aspects of the movement of 1980-81 and helped to articulate on an intellectual level two of the ascending stages of the 16 months of Solidarity which could indeed be called after Michnik and Kuron respectively 'new evolutionism' and 'self limiting revolution.' It will be my first thesis that KOR and in particular Kuron worked out a normative project of significant interest toward what I would call 'the plurality of democracies' that was to express rather well the developing political philosophy of the Solidarity movement. My second thesis however will argue that the strategic dimensions of this

project remained ambiguous before, during and after Solidarity's 16 months. And, finally, I will present a third thesis according to which some of the strategic ambiguities can be traced back to theoretical failures, and more specifically to the unfortunate inflation of a normatively based democratic theory of action to the whole of social theory in a renewed totalitarianism thesis.

The development of the political theory of KOR, in particular Kolakowski (at home and in exile), Kuron, and Michnik toward post-Marxian positions reveals much about the crisis of Marxian theory in Eastern Europe and the difficulties of working even with neo-Marxian paradigms in context of the existing movements. My larger manuscript pays much attention to this problem area. Here I would like to stress rather what constitutes the importance of KOR in the context of the history of democratic theory. In my opinion two major antinomies of this history were successfully addressed: one between statism and pluralism, and the other between political and socio-economic meanings of democracy. Both of these were explored as early as Tocqueville, who pointed to the deep potential tension between the centralistic organization of the modern state, however formally democratic, and the democratic life of small scale associations of all kinds as well as that between democracy in the sense of democratic self-government and democracy in the sense of "equality of conditions." While it is obviously true that Tocqueville's sympathies were with small scale associations and self-government,

and his fears were of the authoritarian consequences of centralism and levelling, he knew of course that without the general laws provided by a central political instance, plurality could degenerate into local or sectional oppression and hierarchy, and that without a form of social equality more than a merely formal equality of opportunity genuinely equal political participation is not possible. Neither Tocqueville or anyone after was really successful at confronting those antinomies which represent the embarrassment of democratic theory in face of the modern state and the modern capitalist economy respectively. Amazingly enough however, Eastern Europe in the years after 1945, around 1956, and from 1968 to the present has been an important laboratory for experimentation with new solutions that represent the resumption of the program of the Democratic revolutions in new non-capitalist contexts.

As the Hungarian political philosopher Istvan Bibo has repeatedly and eloquently argued the struggle for political democracy where the road to capitalist private property was closed (among other things by the very social character of those in struggle) had a good chance of developing a third road combining high measures of political democracy and social equality. The implication is of course democratic socialism as long as under socialism we understand, as did Bibo, not statist controls but the free economic self management of all manners of councils, cooperatives and associations. Bibo

furthermore, squarely in the Tocquevillian tradition, understood political democracy itself as the combination of central and local forms of self-government. One may add to his analysis a crucial reason why Eastern European democratic struggles always seem to favor such a combination. In the double context of imperial oppression and suffocating centralism these struggles are simultaneously for the restoration of national sovereignty and the devolution of the authority of the state, a double result that can be achieved only in the combination of different types of democracy.

In different East European movements the two problems of democratic theory I have just mentioned have received rather different weights. In Hungary in 1956 the stress was on the combination of parliamentary and council forms of democracy; the issues of constructing an economy compatible with both political freedom and social equality were hardly raised. In 1968, in Czechoslovakia the stress was reversed and in this period a formula emerged for combining market, workers' councils and state planning and redistributive mechanisms which has since dominated most discussions of economic reform among critical intellectuals in Poland and Hungary as well.

The theory of the Polish democratic opposition, not only of KOR but also of the discussion group DiP (Experience and Future), the Catholic intellectual clubs, and most importantly the economic program of Solidarity worked out by its "networks"

of self management all presuppose some version of such a tripartite economic structure. The real contribution of the theory of KOR however involved another reversal, i.e., a renewed stress on the problem of sovereignty and plurality. The difficulties with the conception too are related to this context.

While it is sometimes contested that East European movements experiment with new forms of democracy with respect to the West, the historical record that has already inspired people such as Arendt, Castoriadis and Lefort among others should by now speak for itself. Although it is indisputable that milieux of critical intellectuals have tended in 1956 and 1968 to simply reinvent parliamentary democracy, the movements in which they have participated have always aimed at more. And some theorists such as Bibo in Hungary and now Kuron in Poland have produced principled arguments anticipating and reexpressing the very real tendencies of their movements to creatively combine different forms of democracy. Kuron, a long time advocate of council democracy, continued to operate from this position as his starting point even as he turned in a post-Marxian theoretical direction in the 1970s. But from this time on he refused to totalize his direct democratic position which he still saw as the best way of representing the interests of workers as producers. His 'vision' as he once called it now became far more general and he was one of the first in Eastern Europe

to formulate under the heading of 'radical pluralism' a position that I would rather call the 'plurality of democracies.' To be sure the combination of parliamentary and council democracy is not entirely unprecedented in political theory - we find it in the works of the Austro-Marxist Max Adler and the English socialist Harold Laski. But while in their cases the issue was how to enrich parliamentary democracy, in Kuron's it became rather how to initiate a general program of democratization in which the monolithic implications of any version of democracy would be avoided. Only the Hungarian workers of '56 anticipated him here, but Kuron actually went further. Without parliamentary democracy he argued, direct democracy is at the mercy of the state. Of course, this is necessarily true if the party-state structure remains intact as in Yugoslavia - but to speak of Utopia is, would the argument apply even to a pure council democracy? The answer is yes, as long as such a system is constituted as a modern state. Kuron only implies this point, but consciously takes up another - the potentially authoritarian implications of pure council democracy in a truly modern society. Assuming a type of society which in fact was the goal of so much oppositional activity in Poland since about 1976, one organized in the pattern of a multiplicity of associations with different interests, values and ideologies, the integration of all these forms of plurality on the bases of an organization typical for one of them - the industrial workers - would be necessarily authoritarian, creating new patterns of selection and exclusion. Whatever parliamentary structures of representation have become elsewhere, only these according to Kuron

would be able to integrate through a necessary system of compromise a social plurality of a heterogeneous set of associations while giving some voice (unlike council democracy) even to those who are not themselves organized.

Let us make no mistake about it, Kuron never unlike some other East European intellectuals - mythologized Western liberal democracy. He is conscious of the fact that it too has its own exclusion rules, its own selectivity, its own monolithic potential. While he only implicitly assumes that without the corrective of direct democracy parliamentary democracy involves a structural differentiation of rulers and ruled and becomes merely formal, he states clearly enough that a democratic paideia, a democratic political culture can only emerge on the basis of actual and significant small scale participation. Furthermore in a manner again reminiscent of Laski he argues that since parliamentary democracy favors the interests of consumers, direct democracy is needed to represent producers' interests. In fact this argument implies that he is committed not only to the combination of central and local forms of participation, but also to that of territorial and functional principles of representation. The implications of this latter position were developed only in the heat of the struggles of 1980-81, during what turned out to be an unsuccessful search for formulas of compromise between social movement and regime. In this context the old idea of Laski and Adler of a second chamber of parliament, a chamber based on a pyramidal structure

of direct democratic organizations was revived, as a potential formula for institutionalizing in the state structure some democratic elements and creating a parliamentary framework of compromise while reluctantly preserving the monolithic structure of a part of power. But the idea was in Kuron's case at least also rooted in principle. A democracy of producers can be a corrective to a democracy of consumers only if both are nationally organized. It was of course the peculiarity of the Polish situation that the direct democratic corrective seemed already attainable when the thing to be corrected, parliamentary democracy was only a distant vision.

It may seem strange to Westerners accustomed to formal rather than direct democracy, that in Eastern Europe the institutionalization of direct forms seems more feasible than parliamentary forms. In fact all the major reform attempts since 1956 testify that this is the case. One may locate the reason, as does Hegedus, in the different political cultures of East and West, or as do Trotskyists in the supposedly deformed worker state character of the regimes. I would however argue rather differently. The organizational principle of authoritarian state socialism, its principle of desperately protected self-identity, excludes power sharing on the central level but not to the same extent, as the Yugoslav example shows, at the peripheries. In fact historically and particular in Poland after 1956, in industrial council forms, powerless against regime cooptation, have been used to disarm working class

protest. For this reason demands for industrial self-management did not emerge during the first phase of the 1980 movement. Even such old defenders of council communism as Kuron were originally evasive on the subject. The creation of a class wide, territorially organized institution of interest representation, a labor union, seemed to be a far greater priority because it was less open to regime manipulation. Interestingly enough in Hungary in 1956 workers who initially organized in the forms of workers' councils also demanded independent unions to defend the workers as employees against themselves as employers. In Poland the reverse was to happen, with the same theoretical result. The existence of the unions now became the political guarantee that organs of self management could remain truly autonomous. Kuron and some members of the Solidarity national commission close to KOR as well as several rank and file movements realized early that the economic reforms that were generally recognized as necessary even if involving drastic austerity measures could become justifiable to workers only if there was a tradeoff in terms of industrial democracy. As the possibilities of large scale political compromise were blocked, the ongoing plans of economic reform gave an opportunity to the movement both in theory and in actual industrial experimentation to channel its democratizing energies in the direction of programs of self management. But it is crucial that the organizational separation between Solidarity, territorially and nationally organized, and the agencies of self management, locally and in part functionally organized was always strictly

preserved, and possibilities of conflict between the two were recognized and considered beneficial. Such a project, while not fully anticipated by any theorists of the democratic opposition, represented in fact a practical filling out of ideas originally formulated in the abstract by Kuron, as early as 1976.

When we turn from visions of the plurality of democracies to strategies of democratization, the picture of course darkens. This is unfortunate, because some of the best creative energies of people like Kuron and Michnik and on a more practical levels the experts and leaders of Solidarity including Walesa were expressed on this strategic level. The key to all the best strategic conceptions of the democratic movement is the idea of self-limitation. We must be careful though: the idea of self-limitation also involved normative principles. This can be first of all articulated by the movement's project of the reconstruction of civil society, which I have discussed elsewhere and have no time to review now. In face of the authoritarian state the Polish democratic opposition has articulated a program of the defense of all independent societal forms and of the expansion of those already in existence by the social movement in the direction of institutionalized forms of free association such as Solidarity itself as well as alternative forms of public life. However it has become axiomatic for many theorists of the opposition and especially Kuron (who in this respect anticipated Touraine and Gorz in the West), that the democratic movement should not aim at becoming a new form of state power,

which would mean that society would lose its new found forms of self-defense and self representation. Only when society is thoroughly organized should some of its organizations, but only some, directly participate in the reorganization of state power - other conditions permitting. The Polish opposition in other words understood the state strengthening logic of modern revolutions and sought to avoid it. Secondly, for a long time the workers' movement was seen both in theoretical conceptions and in actuality by its own militants as only one movement among many or within a larger, looser movement for the liberation of society. This too involved self-limitation which took the form of helping to organize the movements of others that could be potentially in conflict with it: e.g., Rural Solidarity, the organization of peasants. Finally, both the workers' movement and the theorists of the democratic opposition conceived of economic reform as the liberation of properly speaking economic principles from statist politization without seeking the "reembedding" of economic activity in social institutions including the workers' collectives. This meant the emancipation of economic actors not only from state controls, but in part from their own direct control as well - worker's self-management was conceived as a kind of representative democracy with elected managers who would maintain a definite degree of autonomy.

All in all these self-limitations in principle do not subtract much in the context of a Soviet type society from the democratizing impact of a political philosophy such as Kuron's,

which was more or less equivalent to the ultimate goals of the program adopted by Solidarity and its September-October 1981 Congress. One might indeed ask how anyone could after the disastrous outcome of the Hungarian Revolution and the Czech Reform hope to realize such a program that was evidently more radical than its predecessors? The strategic self-limitations worked out in the Polish opposition's various programs in fact involved some serious reflection on these previous experiences. According to the reasoning of the main theorists of KOR, Kuron and Michnik, the Hungarian and Czech attempts failed because through their different methods they hoped to transform the whole of their social systems. The concept of the reconstruction of civil society, which appeared in Poland under many guises, allowed one to in effect argue that it is possible to democratize whole sectors of society while leaving the system's principle of identity intact in the all crucial state sphere. This of course meant that democratization would have to be conceived as a complicated and perhaps long process in which the full democratization of the state could only be a last step. This difficulty was in part turned into a theoretical advantage as already argued, because it allowed one to focus on societal democratization - something rather unusual in the history of democracy. But much would depend on (1) whether the boundaries between state and society could be convincingly drawn, (2) whether some kind of balance between these spheres with two organizational principles could be established, and (3) whether the system's identity could be maintained if restricted to the state sphere alone.

While many different strategic suggestions emerged in relation to these problems, for the theory of the democratic opposition and for the development of Solidarity two turned out to be most significant: Michnik's 'New Evolutionism' and Kuron's 'Self-limiting Revolution.' What the two strategies had in common was the focus of all their efforts on the emancipation of societal institutions and the concessions of the hegemony of the ruling party in the state as well as that of the Soviet Union over Poland's foreign and military affairs. But while to my knowledge (based on German, French, English and Hungarian translations) these two leading figures of KOR did not (until perhaps very recently, in prison) even explicitly indicate disagreements between them, their conceptions almost always were and are now significantly different, within a common family to be sure. The reconstruction of society in Michnik's 'new evolutionism' has implied above all the creation of some important organized centers anticipating a future democratization yet would be capable of putting pressure on the state. The historical model for this was of course that of the church in Poland. According to Michnik the immediate aim of democratization should be the legalization of already existing forms of social organization and alternative forms of publicity; the method was seen as that of a compromise between society and state that was to be ultimately beneficial to both sides. While Michnik addressed his proposal to what he called independent public opinion, his solution presupposed a rational

calculation of the pragmatic interests of a ruling party that will always manage to checkmate its own efforts at economic reform until compelled from below to carry them out. Michnik appealed furthermore to the common interest of all Poles and the Soviet leadership as well to avoid a bloody Polish-Soviet military confrontation. Kuron's self-organized civil society on the other hand was one to be thoroughly organized by all forms of movements constituted by and through associations, cooperatives, unions, organs of self management, free forms of intellectual life, etc. It was not so much the anticipation as the actual realization in the present of a vast part of what has been called here the plurality of democracies. Instead of putting pressure on the regime this proposal involved bypassing it and presenting it with an enormous number of accomplished facts. Kuron seemed to put, at least till the summer of 1981, far less emphasis than Michnik on legalization and compromise. His appeal to the rational interests of his opponents was confined to those of the Soviet Union, which presumably would benefit greatly from Poland's economic recovery, which could no longer be managed by a Soviet type regime. Again the point was made that Soviet interests would be irreparably damaged by a Polish-Russian war, the result of intervention. While Kuron too conceded that the ruling party could not be overthrown, the conception of the self-limiting revolution had in fact no function for it. For the steering of social processes Kuron postulated the need to create what he called a "system of society," and even foreign and military affairs were conceded to the party only in its capacity as agent of the Soviet Union. Thus while Michnik's

position seemed to have postulated only the emergence of a new, more socially emancipated version of authoritarian state socialism, Kuron's tended toward what he himself called "Finlandization," i.e., an evident rupture with the existing social formation with the exception of its overall imperial structure.

Kuron in fact had one powerful argument against all positions more gradualist than his, implicitly including Michnik's. According to him the danger was not only repression from above, but also being swept away from below. Kuron was in fact about the only Polish intellectual to anticipate the magnitude of the movement of 1980-81. If the organized movements stopped too soon in the context of the impending social and economic collapse, uncontrolled spontaneous outbreaks would everywhere emerge and a bloody confrontation with Soviet power would be unavoidable. What he sought therefore was a program that both went far enough but not too far. It is however a question whether or not he actually managed to answer both of these criteria. The model of society he projected in fact needed according to his own overall conception a parliamentary mediation, and he was forced to covertly sneak in such a conception under the heading of a 'system of society.' This however transgressed the idea of self-limitation, especially since it was always unthinkable that the Soviet Union entrust the representation of its interests in Poland either to an agency that is socially powerless or to a constellation of forces open to constant popular pressure. I believe the proof of this criticism is provided by Kuron's

own development. During the first phase of Solidarity some version of the 'new evolutionism' also supported by DiP and the Catholic intellectuals predominated, and Kuron in this context rightly anticipated great popular pressures for further democratization. After the Bydgoszcz provocation by the apparatus a radicalization of the movement occurred and now with Kuron becoming perhaps the key advisor of Solidarity's leadership a version of the self-limiting revolution with its stress on social movements was adopted. When however given the regime's new strategy of disorganizing society by passively allowing the economic crisis to simply unfold with devastating results, many in Solidarity wanted to give up all self-limitation. Kuron instead became the defender of a program that resembled more and more the new evolutionism and which involved a tireless search for formulas of compromise between movement and regime. It was in this context that he fought for the idea of a second parliamentary chamber, seeking to institutionalize a part of the political power of the movement in a way that would help the government regain its freedom of action and create a new institution for social compromise. He further defended, alone among the leading figures of the democratic opposition, the participation of Solidarity and church as junior partners in a governmental coalition with clearly corporatist overtones in order to help relegate the regime and to prepare the ground for a stabilization that would allow the movement to preserve some of its gains.

We of course now have to assume that the really significant elements of the regime leadership and the party apparatus as well as the Soviet Union were not interested in any form of compromise. But what is crucial is that the framework of ideas of the social movement, notwithstanding all talk of self-limitation, also did not on the balance favor such an outcome. Kuron's development was as I have implied unique. A good deal of articulate opinion within the milieu of Solidarity tended to give up by the fall of 1981 on the very possibility of compromise with Communist power and more and more voices (mostly from the milieu of the right wing group KPN to be sure) called for an impossible unlimited revolution. In the present context I am interested only in the role of the theory of the democratic opposition in such an outcome as well as in the inability of the movement to anticipate the prerequisites of martial law. The last is all the more important since the democratic theorists' relative success in predicting Soviet inaction was fully matched by their failure to prepare for the possibility of internal Polish repression.

In one of his essays written in Bialoleka prison Adam Michnik maintained (without much explanation) that the failure of the democratic movement was also that of theory. I believe that he is right and that many of the opinions of the strategic conceptions just outlined can be traced to the theory that the post-Marxist democratic opposition, including Michnik, continues to

hold to this day: the theory of totalitarianism. The adoption of this theory to Polish society began by Kolakowski in the 1970s, and was always in contradiction with both the famous models of the 1950s and Polish realities. Kolakowski himself originally tended to speak only of a totalitarian tendency of the party-state which could be opposed by counter tendencies based on the reconstruction and defense of independent social life. In his own estimation the regime was becoming less ideological, and more dependent on an eclectic intellectual mix for legitimation - points at variance with the totalitarianism thesis of Friedrich, Brzezinski, Arendt et. al. More importantly, a whole series of Polish writers following the investigations of S. Nowak demonstrated in the 1970s the existence in Polish society of wide circles of small scale social life neither atomized nor penetrated by the values, rules and motivations proposed and required by the ruling institutions. I would argue therefore that in Poland the reasons for adopting the totalitarianism thesis were practical rather than theoretical, and were dependent on a construction of social reality quite characteristic for not only the Poland of the 1970s but for Polish history since the partitions. In no country, to make the point short, does the idea of society against the state have such a historical resonance; the preservation of Polish culture by a culturally unified society against three occupying states in the period of the partition and the defense of Poland by an underground society during German occupation both speak for this imagery. In the 1970s Polish writers of widely different political persuasions

found it meaningful to renew this language under the opposition not only of society against the state, but also nation against state, social order against political system, 'pays réel' against 'pays légal' or 'pays officiel,' public life against the state, private life against public life, and so on. While it is extremely important to note the immense significance of such imagery for popular mobilization, it should also be clear by now that speaking analytically this way of conceiving Polish social reality was also seriously misleading. Standing on the ground of an empirical-analytical systems theory rather than a normatively based action theory of society, Jadwiga Staniszkis - one of the few neo-Marxists in Poland - has pointed to the impossibility of assuming the unity of either state or society or for that matter their entirely sharp separation. In fact the very reemergence in the 1970s of new and heterogeneous forms of association, protest and public expression itself speaks against the postulated unity of society. To be sure the legalization and institutionalization of this plurality and its protection from state penetration remained tasks for the future: in this sense the reconstruction of civil society retained its normative importance. But the achievement of this reconstruction seemed to require the full unity of society which would be decreasingly given as the program actually progressed. The totalitarianism thesis was I believe for many the practical resolution of this difficulty: against a totalitarian state of course all social forces would have to be fully united whatever their potential differences in ideas and interests. While for social mobilization

this intellectual turn had surely its importance, in the process a theory was smuggled in the program of the democratic opposition that was both incompatible with the strategy of self limitation (especially its more dependable, new evolutionist version) and with an adequate theoretical assessment of the political situations facing the democratic movement. Let me list some of the major theoretical difficulties in an unavoidably schematic manner:

1. A modern society, and in particular the one projected by the Polish opposition requires the outputs of a state (legality, interest intermediation, socio-economic steering, sovereignty, etc.). A totalitarian state in Eastern Europe could not either by definition or in context of historical experience produce most of these. But since the Polish state could not be overthrown, the opposition in effect postulated a self contradictory strategy of social reorganization.
2. The theory of totalitarianism is incompatible with the idea that Soviet type systems can actually develop and can have distinctly different stages. Thus it implies an all or nothing relation to the existing system - ultimately its revolutionary overthrow. Little thought could be given in such a theoretical context to changing essential aspects of the system and yet allowing it to begin its principle of identity even though such was the

implication of the new evolutionism. Thus the existence of the independent union legally recognized had to seem just as anomalous (at least secretly) to the opposition as to the regime.

3. The theory of totalitarianism allows for only two modes of interest intermediation: monolithic from above and pluralistic from below. In fact plurality can take many other including various corporatist forms, and important sectors of Polish society, in particular the church and perhaps even parts of the regime in fact had various types of corporatist projects of compromise and stabilization. Such a solution could have been less incompatible with the principle of identify of the system than the pluralistic ideals of the opposition and could have constituted an important half-way house toward further democratization.
4. The theory of totalitarianism presupposes as I have argued the necessity of communication of all social forces vs. the state. This assumption turned out to be especially misleading in the case of the episcopate of the church which quite evidently has not for a long time treated the system as totalitarian. Thus while the democratic opposition operated with a theory that made compromises with the regime or

its parts very difficult, its presumed partner in the struggle for democratization could make its own compromises totally justified from its own point of view, as we have seen after martial law - but in fact should have known since 1956. The church must indeed struggle for some societal independence to operate where it is not a state church, but its definition of civil society is quite different than that of the democratic opposition, and the amount of societal independence it needs is also considerably more limited.

5. The ideology of society against the state reinforced by the totalitarianism thesis papered over deep differences in the social movement and in particular Solidarity itself. This made it more difficult both to deal with legitimate conflicts having to do with the internal democracy of the movement, and to defend the organization against the destructive tendencies of political fundamentalism and at times aggressive nationalism.
6. The theory of totalitarianism made the regime and the ruling party appear as more monolithic than they had to be. Thus the opposition found it difficult to exploit internal tensions and conflicts; above all no support was given to democratizing

forces during the party congress of June 1981. Even Michnik characterized (I believe wrongly) the language of the 'horizontal links' rank and file movement in the party as Marxist-Leninist "newspeak." Such an attitude of course weakened precisely those in the ruling structure ready for some kind of compromise - though their position was rather weak to begin with.

7. Paradoxically the same theory made the party-state regime appear also weaker than it actually was. The experience of Hungary in 1956 in fact spoke for the extremely rapid collapse under pressure of an apparently all powerful structure of power. Such a thing did not happen in Poland in 1980-81 as Krzysztof Pomian has forcefully argued. No longer caught up with a totalitarian identity, the structure did not collapse when its penetration of Polish society was drastically reduced. The identity crisis of the membership did not immediately lead to leadership splits - the overall institution was no longer cut from a single organization or even ideological cloth. The politically disruptive congress of the party was masterfully stage-managed through a good dose of formal democracy and the result was a coherent strategy.

8. It was a related and a complementary mistake to assume that the regime had no social bases whatsoever, another implication of the classical totalitarianism thesis. In fact while it could count on little active support, its passive support among some managerial and white collar strata, the officer corps, some workers and unorganized strata, especially in the case of a social stalemate, seems significant, even if it is still too early to systematically assess its extent and importance.
9. Even more important was the consequence of the synthesis of the totalitarianism thesis with the in itself not invalid conception of the Soviet system of states as an empire. The result was invariably the assumption because the Soviet Union was the totalitarian center of the whole complex, the Polish state had no independent sovereign power. To be sure the partial sovereignty of the Polish state in comparison to the Ukraine or Lithuania has been repeatedly noted by people such as Kolakowski and Michnik, as well as by the DiP reports. In the context of the emergence of Solidarity and the massive loss by the regime of even negative legitimation, it was assumed that this residual sovereign power had disappeared. In fact the decisionless stalemate promoted by the apparatus and played into by the fundamentalist tendencies and rhetoric of some of

Solidarity, led to a dramatic reconstitution of sovereign power.

10. Finally, the society against the state conception was identified with the symbolism of nation against the state, as I already said. This meant that in spite of Kolakowski's pointing out as early as 1971 that nationalism and *raison d'état* have become key legitimating principles of the regime, it was assumed that the national issue belonged entirely to the opposition. This was however not the case either for aggressive, anti-Semitic forms of nationalism promoted by sectors of the regime that may have had some appeal to groups in the parts of the movement mobilized by right wing groups such as KPN (Congress for an Independent Poland) or for the much more important defensive, organic forms of nationalism which in the hands of the church became an argument against any possible action that carried the slightest risk for the nation. While the regime's use of nationalist legitimation eventually favored the opposition's utilization of national symbols against the regime, the converse was also true to a lesser extent. While the party apparatus in particular had little success in clothing its actions in national symbolism; the situation was rather different for Jaruzelski and the officer corps. One should recall even Walesa's

repeated expressions of sympathy for the military before martial law. Several surveys before December 13 show that this attitude was very general indeed. In this context the defense of the early parts of Pilsudski's career by even people like Michnik seems to have been unfortunate in retrospect.

Let me conclude:

The normative intentions and strategic ambiguities of the Polish democratic opposition are not a matter only of yesterday. Today the vision of the plurality of democracies under the name of the "self-governing republic," the strategy of the new evolutionism, and the theory of totalitarianism remain basic components of the program of the Solidarity underground, as well as of the world view of a large number of Polish workers and intellectuals. Nevertheless it is today more of a mistake than ever to describe the regime as totalitarian - indeed the opposition might be facing the future self differentiation of a specifically Polish road of Authoritarian State Socialism. As J. Kis put it, the present regime is hard, yet full of inconsistencies and discontinuities. Its reliance on the army and the church is both a source of strength and a source of weakness. It is certainly in no position to violently reverse the immense development of the general political culture in a democratic direction. Unlike the Kadar regime in the 60s, it seems powerless to produce a workable solution of the economic crisis

This situation favors a strategy of the "long march" proposed by the two leaders of the underground, Bujak and Kulerski and seconded by Michnik from his jail cell, even if the idea of building a parallel, alternative society remains as problematic as ever. It does not seem to favor Kuron's call from his prison for a centralized organization working toward the rapid and perhaps violent overthrow of the regime. But all plausible strategies presuppose, as I tried to show, a better theoretical assessment of the situation than currently available to the opposition: in this sense even a self-limiting anti-Leninist revolution will continue to presuppose a critical social theory. In spite of its weak force for social mobilization, neo-Marxism may still have the best chance of providing aspects of such a theory that are screened out perhaps necessarily by post-Marxian democratic theory.

