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Apathy and the Birth of Democracy: The Polish Struggle

By: David S. Mason, Daniel N. Nelson, and Bohdan M. Szklarski

Apathy, from the Greek words meaning "without feeling," is at once a term denoting an individual's impassivity or indifference and a form of collective political behavior. Our concern is the latter form of apathy in Poland from the Solidarity period of 1980-81 to the present.

Political apathy is the lack of psychological involvement in public affairs, emotional detachment from civic obligation, and abstention from political activity. But it is not any of these things alone, and these may be regarded as necessary, but not sufficient, components of political apathy. Political apathy is evidenced in mass, collective behavior but has its origins at the level of the individual psyche. In the aggregate, political apathy is revealed by attitudes and an absence of expected activity. When people cease to care about political life, withdraw from obligations to civil society, and perform entirely nominal or rote acts-or none at all-in political institutions or organizations, apathy is indicated.

In the course of the 1980s, the Polish United Workers' Party was forced to relinquish power through incremental compromises and its own failure to maintain legitimacy. Our Concern here is the presence of apathy in a system undergoing political and social change, and the potential for such apathy to derail democratic processes.

Low Psychological Involvement

The presence of political apathy requires low psychological involvement, detachment from civic obligation, and political inactivity. Following Verba, Nie, and Kim, "psychological involvement" refers "co measures such as awareness of politics, interest in politics, information, attention to the media, and so forth." ¹

One would expect the awareness of formal political institutions and policies emanating from them to have been high in Leninist party systems. For decades, these regimes exerted considerable effort to socialize and mobilize the populations. The long-term effects, however, seem to have been minimal. While data on political awareness is scant, it appears that a

¹ Sidney Verba, Norman Nie and Jae-on Kim, *Participation and Political Equality* (Cambridge, 1978). p.71.

surprisingly large number of Poles were not aware of even major political issues and events. Surveys done in the mid-1970s showed that generally less than twenty percent of the residents of six cities could name the president, the first party secretary, or a single representative in their electoral district. From thirty-five to fifty percent claimed not to know anything about a major administrative reform that was to revise the administrative units in the country. In another survey by the official Center for Public Opinion Research (OBOP), seventy percent of the respondents asserted that they could not understand what was happening in politics.²

In August 1988, during the second wave of strikes which forced the government into talks with Solidarity, many people were unaware of this decision. Despite extensive coverage of the preparations for, and the process of, the Round Table talks, surveys showed limited public recognition of the participants. With the exception of the main protagonists—Wałęsa and Kiszczak who received 92.9 and 79 percent recognition respectively—much of the public failed to identify its other participants on both sides. Even supposedly well-known opposition figures, like Jacek Kuroń (62 percent) and Adam Michnik (49 percent) were familiar to less than two-thirds of the respondents. Future Prime Minister Mazowiecki was known by only 20.9 percent of respondents.³

In the 1970s, for the highly visible and widely promoted elections to the national parliament (Sejm) and to local and regional peoples' councils, only about one-half to three-quarters of the population could identify correctly what bodies were being elected. The results were somewhat better for the people's council elections in June 1984, when about seventy-five percent correctly identified the councils being elected. Yet, only 57 percent were *entirely* correct in their responses, identifying all of the bodies being elected and no others.⁴ Even in the realm of ideology, where propaganda and socialization are particularly intense, political knowledge has not been very high. One official survey among young people found that only 44 percent could identify "historical materialism," a key concept in Marxist ideology.⁵

This relatively low level of political awareness was present in Communist-ruled Poland despite rather high levels of attention to the media. In 1977,

² Krzysztof Jasiewicz and Aleksandra Jasinka, "Problem zaspokajania potrzeb i funkcjonowania władz lokalnych w percepcji mieszkańców," In Jerzy Wiatr, ed., *Władza Lokalna A Zaspokajanie Potrzeb* (Warsaw, 1981).

³ Stanisław Kwiatkowski, "Dowcip Brarkowskiego," in *Polityka*, January 7, 1989, p.7.

⁴ Krzysztof Jasiewicz, "Orientacje polityczne Polaków," in Władisław Adamski, Krzysztof Jasiewicz, and Andrzej Rychard, eds., *Polacy '84: Raport z Badania* (Warsaw, 1986), pp. 572-73.

⁵ *Polish Situation Report*, Radio Free Europe Research (hence RFER), June 5, 1986.

for example, 97 percent of the population occasionally watched informational programs on television, and 67 percent regularly did; 84 percent occasionally read the daily press (which is almost all "informational") and 52 percent regularly did.⁶ A poll taken after the dramatic tenth Central Committee Plenum in January 1989, which eventually opened the way for the talks with the opposition, showed that a substantial minority either did not even know about it (27.5 percent) or paid only superficial attention to (or merely noted) the event (50.5 percent), while only 21.5 percent could say that they followed the developments.⁷

Both anecdotal evidence and fragmentary survey data indicate that the levels of confidence in the official mass media was *never* very high. In 1981, when Solidarity was first legal, the Party monthly reported the results of an official OBOP poll on trust in the media, showing the Solidarity media in first place (trusted by 86 percent) and the official press in last place (61 percent), just behind *foreign* radio (63 percent).⁸ In 1984, after the banning of Solidarity and its press, only 24 percent of workers, and 12 percent of intellectuals expressed confidence in the official mass media.⁹ The main beneficiaries of this distrust were BBC, Radio Free Europe, and Voice of America, all of which have broadcasts in Polish: in 1977, 15 percent occasionally listened to foreign radio; in 1981, 56 percent did and in 1982, 65 percent.¹⁰

The first sixteen-month legal period of Solidarity, of course, was a highly unusual era, breaking the pattern of political inattention. With the crushing of Solidarity, however, the old patterns in politics reemerged. An official poll in 1985 found that only fifteen to seventeen percent of adult citizens were "interested in politics" and about half of those were party members.¹¹ In a corresponding survey in the fall of 1988, one-third of the respondents admitted to apathetic attitudes towards political developments, and to not

⁶ Zbigniew Bajka, *Zmiany W Strukturze Czytelnictwa Prasy* (Kraków, 1982); Włodzimierz Piekarski, "Dosłepność i Wykorzystanie Telewizji w Społeczeństwie Polskim," in *Przekazy i Opinie* (No.2, April-June, 1977); Stefania Dzieciołowska, "PopuJarność Programów Telewizyjnych," in *Przekazy i Opinie* (No.2, October-December, 1975).

⁷ Jerzy Głuszczyński, "Nowy wizerunek," 10 *Polityka*, April 1, 1989, p.1.

⁸ *Życie Partii*, September 16, 1981.

⁹ Jerzy Bartkowski, "Robotnicy i inteligencja o sytuacji społeczno-ekonomicznej kraju," In *Biuletyn CBOS* (No.3. 1985).

¹⁰ Bajka, *Zmiany W Strukturze Czytelnictwa Prasy*, p.5.

¹¹ Stanisław Kwiatkowski, "Polling Center Looks at Support for Opposition," in *Polityka*, February 1, 1986, translated in Joint Publications Research Service, *East Europe Report*, May 16, 1986.

paying any attention to them. The percentage of those who displayed participatory and responsive attitudes was found to be only 18 percent.¹²

Another important survey in 1985 concluded that one of the two major trends in public opinion was a growth in political apathy, with a "disinclination toward efforts to change the political status quo." More people were unwilling or unable to express political opinions one way or the other, contributing to the growth of a "silent minority" estimated to have reached a third of adults by the mid-1980s.¹³

This lack of psychological involvement was also extending increasingly to Solidarity and other elements of the political opposition. Successive national polls showed fewer and fewer people identifying themselves as having belonged to Solidarity, from 37% in 1981 to 22% in the fall of 1985.¹⁴ The success of the waves of strikes in the summer of 1988 did not translate into an immediate rise in Solidarity membership. In fact, the percentage of Poles who expressed willingness to join the union in December 1988 was almost equal to that in March of 1989, just a month prior to official registration—that is, around thirty percent. At the same time, 47 percent of those polled declared that they had no intention to join Solidarity.¹⁵

This attitude was, in the mid-1980s, partly due to a reluctance or fear to reveal one's past affiliation with the then-illegal Solidarity. Yet, there was also a waning interest in politics generally, including that of the opposition. Both official and unofficial polls indicated declining support for and confidence in the opposition. Two different surveys conducted in 1985 found, respectively, that only about eleven percent expressed confidence in the Solidarity underground and that only about twenty percent were "sympathetic" to the political opposition.¹⁶ Even among Solidarity activists, "the underground opposition" was rated favorably by a bare majority of the respondents in 1985.¹⁷

On the other hand, the apparent reluctance to affiliate with Solidarity can be attributed to the general relaxation of the regulations concerning associations. While in 1980-81 Solidarity was the umbrella organization

¹² Jerzy Baczyński, "Polskie Szachy." (Rozmowa z doc. S. Kwiatkowskim) *Polityka* 20:41 (1988), p. 3.

¹³ Krzysztof Jasiewicz, *Polacy '84—z półtorarocznej perspektywy* (Warsaw, 1986).

¹⁴ Jasiewicz, *Polacy '84—z półtorarocznej perspektywy*.

¹⁵ Głuszczyński, "Nowy wizerunek," p. 4.

¹⁶ Jasiewicz, *Polacy '84—z półtorarocznej perspektywy*; Kwiatkowski, "Polling Center Looks at Support for Opposition."

¹⁷ *Słowo Podziemne* (May 27, 1984), as cited in *Polish Situation Report*, RFER (January 23, 1985).

which housed and gave protection to a wide variety of political orientations, by the late 1980s (particularly in 1989) the political system became more open and permitted small groups and political parties to surface and operate on their own, attracting people who might otherwise have joined Solidarity.

The registration figures for all types of political, ecological, social, and cultural organizations seem to support this thesis. In 1986 there were eighty new associations registered, in 1987 another 179, in 1988 over five hundred.¹⁸ The character of these new organizations became more openly political. Parties no longer disguised themselves as intellectual debate clubs like "Dziekania" (Social Democrats) or KIKs (Catholic Intelligentsia Clubs-the Christian Democrats). Although no accurate data are available at the moment, such new organizations remained elitist in character, with most members drawn from the urban intelligentsia, and few gained national significance. Nevertheless, they provided an outlet for political activism among the most conscious and best informed citizens who, as one might expect, would otherwise have constituted a part of Solidarity's leadership.

Attitudes of withdrawal and lack of support, pervasive in the moment of defeat, gradually gave way to a partial and cautious rebirth of confidence in the opposition in the late 1980s. The approval rating for Solidarity and Wałęsa grew steadily from less than twenty-five percent in May 1988, to just over seventy-five percent in March 1989.¹⁹ In the same period the perception of Solidarity as an institution beneficial to society grew from 18.2 percent to 67.2 percent.²⁰ One must bear in mind that, throughout the Round Table talks and in the June 1989 elections, Solidarity once again became (as in 1980/81) the representative for many varied anti-Communist orientations. Solidarity's triumph in the June 1989 elections can be attributed to the growth of confidence in the Polish opposition and in its political program. Yet, the election's plebiscitarian character led Wałęsa to admit that people cast votes as a form of "getting even" with the Communists rather than a conscious choice between political and economic platforms.

The disinterest in politics had become even higher among young people in the mid-1980s. A government survey on "Polish Youth, 1985" found, surprisingly, that only three percent were "very keen" about "sociopolitical activity" and concluded that the chief characteristics of young people were passivity and apathy.²¹ A survey of Gdansk high school students in 1984 found only two percent declaring themselves Marxists; and support was not

¹⁸ Barbara Olszewska, "Rejestracje i odmowy," In *Polityka*, October 15, 1988, p.4.

¹⁹ Głuszczyński, "Nowy wizerunek," p. 4.

²⁰ *Polityka*, April 3, 1989.

²¹ *Polish Situation Report*, RFER, June 5, 1986.

much higher among university students.²² Official publications complained that young people "distance themselves verbally from the socialist system and question its achievements."²³ They bemoaned the lack of commitment from young people, given the resources spent on their political education: "What has happened to the hundreds of millions of zlotys that were spent on seminars, camps, conferences, competitions, meetings, and all of the other forms of political training [?]. All that money seems to have been completely wasted."²⁴

Detachment From Civic Obligations

This low level of psychological involvement in the system, evident in the 1980s, was accompanied by a detachment from civic obligations, reduced concern for ideological and societal goals, a decline in civic pride, and a retreat into private affairs and family life. While all of these phenomena were present, and probably on the rise in the 1970s, they became even more evident in the 1980s during and after martial law.

In an article entitled "Political Alienation in Poland" in the weekly *Polityka*, the psychologist Janusz Reykowski attempted to explain the problem:

certain major social groups. . . consider the social order here to be unjust [and] at the same time inefficient as regards ensuring economic progress. They do not feel any solidarity with the state in its present form. [They] approach it from detached positions and sympathize with those who actively oppose it.²⁵

As we will see below, Reykowski exaggerated the connection between antipathy and disaffection with the regime and support for the opposition. The former was much more widespread than the latter. Yet, Reykowski was on target in noting that the root of alienation in the 1980s was the popular perception that the regime had failed both politically and economically. As a study by the official Center for Research on Social Opinion (CBOS) found in 1985, fully two-thirds of the population thought that the government's policies were *not* helping the country emerge from the economic crisis. The center's director, Stanisław Kwiatkowski, probably understated the problem in saying "at least half of society is critical about the state of the economy,

²² *Polityka*, August 11, 1984.

²³ *Głos Szczeciński*, July 2, 1984.

²⁴ *Sztandar Młodych*, November 18, 1983.

²⁵ *Polityka*, April 6, 1985.

the methods of government, and about politics in general." ²⁶ While in December 1986 50.1 percent of Poles perceived the inadequacy of economic performance, three years later the share of dissatisfied citizens grew to 63.6 percent and only 15.4 percent of respondents found the economic situation good.²⁷

This led to a mood of futility and detachment that was summed up at the time by the columnist "Kisiel" in the Catholic weekly *Tygodnik Powszechny*: "all I want is for them to please leave me in peace." One may be overwhelmed by "immobilism," but at least this "gives one inner peace, enabling one to focus on the most important things, on problems of life and death, on matters which pass and those which remain." ²⁸

After 1981, young and old alike began to turn away from officially sponsored organizations. By 1984 and 1985, only the Catholic church enjoyed widespread confidence (eighty percent). Among official institutions, only the army (sixty-five percent) and the Sejm (sixty-one percent) were trusted by more than sixty percent of the population. Yet *all* institutions, official or not, suffered a decline in trust from 1981 to 1984. The three most trusted institutions in 1981 all showed substantial declines: the church from 94 percent to 82 percent, Solidarity from 91 percent to 13 percent, and the army from 89 percent to 65 percent.²⁹ By January 1989, there had been a further slight decline for the church and the army, but Solidarity's ratings, as already indicated, were on the rise.³⁰

Trust in *individuals* in public life was not much higher in the mid-1980s. Pope John Paul II was far and away the most trusted, by 97 percent, and Józef Glemp, the Primate of the Polish Catholic church, was second with 81 percent. According to this survey, the most highly trusted official figure was Party leader Wojciech Jaruzelski, a distant third with 54 percent. No other person, official or unofficial (even Lech Wałęsa) was trusted by more than half of the population. The only major change in this scale of public trust by early 1989, as measured by CBOS, was the increase of support for Wałęsa to

²⁶ Stanisław Kwiatkowski, "Criticism and Credibility," in *Polityka*, July 27, 1985, cited in *Polish Situation Report*, RFER, September 13, 1985.

²⁷ Marek Henzler, "Fala za fala," in *Polityka*, July 27, 1985.

²⁸ Zdzisław Morawski, "Challenging Those 'Different Moods'," in *Zycie Warszawy*, April 28-29, 1984.

²⁹ David S. Mason, *Public Opinion and Political Change in Poland, 1980-1982* (Cambridge, 1985), p.118; Jasiewicz, , *Polacy '84—z półtorarocznej perspektywy*, p. 71. Another official survey conducted in 1984 found even lower levels of trust in official institutions, with all but the army scoring lower than 45% confidence among workers and under 35% among intellectuals; see Jerzy Bartowski, "Robotnicy i inteligencja o sytuacji społecznoekonomicznej kraju," *Biuletyn CBOS*, (No. 3, 1985).

³⁰ Głuszczyński, "Nowy wizerunek," p.4.

65.7 percent, with Primate Glemp still ahead at 89.6 percent and trust in General Jaruzelski slightly declining to 47.8 percent.³¹

A major feature of this post-Solidarity sentiment in the mid-1980s was a turning away from public figures and institutions of every kind. The June 1989 elections and the formation of a government headed by non-Communists brought a re-evaluation of the attitudes towards established political institutions. As might be predicted, from January to December 1989 the institutions associated with the old regime witnessed a decline in support by about ten percent (PUWP, from 22.7 percent to 17.4 percent; the official unions—OPZZ—from 50.3 percent to 39.8 percent, and the Militia from 41.2 percent to 31.7 percent). None of these organizations could count on "strong support" from more than ten percent of the public. In late January 1990, during the Extraordinary Eleventh Congress of the PUWP which dissolved the old party and replaced it with a new organization—Social Democracy of the Republic of Poland (SdRP)—only five percent of Poles declared readiness to vote for such a party.³²

Institutions of government, however, began to regain considerable trust among the population in 1989 after free elections in June. The Sejm was leading with 83.5 percent of those surveyed saying they trusted it, while the Cabinet jumped from around fifty percent trust in January 1989 to over eighty percent by mid year. Respondents were able to name all the members of the Mazowiecki cabinet, implying a tremendous increase in public awareness of current developments.³³ While one cannot escape the conclusion that the Poles have changed their attitude toward the government and political institutions, the shift should be seen as a re-allocation of hopes *rather* than a substantive evaluation of these institutions' performance.

It remains to be seen whether this support can be translated into patience, and how far the population's willingness to endure economic hardships can be stretched. The radical economic program introduced on January 1, 1990, aimed at producing rapid recovery, removes numerous aspects of the Communist welfare and egalitarian state (price subsidies, guarantee of employment and wages). More than ever in Poland's post-World War II history, the survival of a political regime, despite its unquestionable legitimacy, depends on its economic performance.

³¹ Głuszczyński, "Nowy wizerunek," p.4.

³² *New York Times*, January 29, 1990, p. 6.

³³ Stanisław Nowicki, "Polska I Polacy" (Ośrodek Badań Prasoznawczych Report), in *Polityka*, December 23/30, 1989, p. 7.

The signals coming from Poland are mixed as to the possibility of turning silent support into active participation. On the one hand, despite several work stoppages by miners (for example, in Wałbrzych and Bogdanka) and railway workers in May 1990, workers have abstained from widespread strikes.³⁴ Yet, productivity rates remain low. The prime minister's call to miners for a sixth day of work met with lukewarm support. Polls indicate that, in the absence of any real alternative to the radical economic plan, and with a command economy entirely discredited, the population earnestly hopes for success this time. In September 1989, the support for the government of Tadeusz Mazowiecki was overwhelming; 90.6 percent of the respondents expected him to succeed.³⁵ However, when the economic plans became more precise, and the inevitability of further hardships was realized, future assessments grew gloomier. In a December 1989 survey for example, 23.8 percent expressed the hope that improvements would come, 30.4 percent had more fears than hope for the future, and 28.5 percent saw Poland sinking further into chaos and crisis.³⁶ These kinds of data prompted the government to accelerate its program for radical economic overhaul and the implementation of IMF austerity measures. Finance Minister Balcerowicz openly admitted such links between popular sentiment and economic policy.

While the lack of support for official institutions was disturbing for the Communist regime, the decline in acceptance of the official political ideals turned out to be more de-stabilizing.³⁷ Even during the first legal Solidarity period, most Poles expressed support for at least the idea of socialism, complaining only that the reality of Poland did not accord with the ideals. Youth surveys conducted in 1977 showed 78 percent supporting the proposition that "the world ought to develop in the direction of socialism." When the same question was asked in 1983, however, only 43 percent supported the idea.³⁸ Other surveys in the late 1980s evinced further declines in support for socialism and socialist principles among young people, and a dramatic drop in the number of young people identifying themselves as Marxists. The same phenomenon was evident in the population at large. Between 1987 and 1989, for example, popular approval of socialism declined from 63 percent to 45 percent.³⁹ Further, the central

³⁴ *Polityka*, January 7, 1990, p. 2.

³⁵ *Gazeta Wyborcza*, July 2, 1984.

³⁶ Nowicki, "Polska i Polacy," p. 7.

³⁷ Daniel N. Nelson, "Non-supportive Participatory Involvement in Eastern Europe," in *Social Science Quarterly* 67 (September, 1986), pp.636-44.

³⁸ Mason, *Public Opinion and Political Change in Poland*, p. 74; *Polish Situation Report*, RFER, June 5, 1986.

³⁹ *Polityka*, March 4, 1989, p. 2.

value of egalitarianism, which until the mid-1980s was widely accepted in Poland, became much less important.⁴⁰

The declining commitment to the institutions and ideals of the political system naturally was reflected in diminished support for the overall system. A large national survey conducted in 1984 found that "not more than a fifth of the adult population" supported a political "model" based on centralization and domination by a single party.⁴¹ In December 1988, 62.2 percent of a national sample said that the political system needed big changes or had to be overhauled totally.⁴² Even pride in Poland's past accomplishments diminished sharply. In 1974 and 1979, large majorities (74 percent and 85 percent) thought historians would rate Poland's post-war accomplishments as positive; by 1984, only 56 percent thought such an assessment would be positive.⁴³

This detachment from civic affairs has been due, in large measure, to a retreat into private affairs, the family, and religion. Poles have always placed much emphasis on the importance of the family, and this increased in the 1980s, particularly among young people. A report of the Primate's Social Council on the Situation of Young People in 1984 found among youth feelings of helplessness, isolation, and apathy, and that this was manifested in "an overwhelming and increasing passivity on the part of most young people who, tormented by futile anger, turn away from the pressure of schools and organizations and seek refuge in individualism and in the passivity and exclusiveness of small groups of friends."⁴⁴ From the Church's point of view, this brought both good and bad results. There was an increase in the percentage of believers among young people (to 83 percent), but a rising incidence of dishonesty, selfishness, and opportunism was also evident.

The orientation toward material aspects of life was another form of retreat into privacy. When salaries and wages failed to keep up with the growing demands and inflation, young people in particular turned to travel and illegal work in the West as a solution. It was not uncommon even for university graduates to operate as one-man export-import agencies taking advantage

⁴⁰ Elżbieta Gorajewska, "System społeczny i polityczny kraju w ocenie młodzieży szkolnej," In *Biuletyn CBOS* (No. 3, 1985); Adamski et al., eds., *Polacy '84: Raport z Badania*, p. 655. The authors of the *Polacy '84* report suggest that, in 1980, the support for egalitarianism was a means of seeking greater justice within the existing system, whereas the non-egalitarianism of 1984 reflected aspirations for changes in the system itself (p. 653).

⁴¹ Adamski et al., *Polacy '84: Raport z Badania*.

⁴² Marek Henzler, "Poczucie chaosu," in *Polityka*, October 24, 1988, p. 3.

⁴³ *Życie Warszawy*. December 5, 1984.

⁴⁴ *Tu i Teraz*, September 15, 1984.

of the shortages on the market and the high black market exchange rates for hard currencies. In 1988, about forty percent of the population either thought about or actually partook in this procedure.⁴⁵ A year later, in December 1989, the willingness to take a job in the West was expressed by almost sixty percent of the population.⁴⁶ The prevalence of this tendency cannot be attributed solely to the economic crisis. It also reveals a materialistic pessimism and, more ominously for the new government, it shows that Poles had distanced themselves from current problems by seeking private solutions abroad. As an official pollster complained: "We are dealing with a different kind of social danger. It is no longer a case of rebellion, nor is it apathy, but a retreat to privacy according to the principle 'everyone for himself'." ⁴⁷ Kwiatkowski errs, however, in distinguishing between apathy and privatism; the two are part of the same phenomenon.

Political Inactivity

As might be expected, the low level of psychological involvement and detachment from the civic culture resulted in very low levels of political activity as well. The measurement of this phenomenon posed difficulties in Communist Poland because political involvement was only partially voluntary. A major goal of such a regime was to assure widespread, even if nominal, involvement of the population in public organizations and rituals (such as voting and May Day parades).⁴⁸ In this way the regime could produce a stratum of involved citizens one might call "fillers." ⁴⁹

In Poland during the 1980s, many of these problems of measurement were swept away because many people *did* refuse to join organizations or to lend their presence to officially sanctioned organizations and activities. The most dramatic changes of this kind have taken place in national parliamentary elections. Before Solidarity, according to official figures, 98-99 percent of eligible citizens voted in the Sejm elections; such results were typical throughout the Communist bloc.⁵⁰ In March 1980, the last election before Solidarity, 98.87 percent were said to have participated.

⁴⁵ Henzler, "Poczucie chaosu," p. 3.

⁴⁶ Nowicki, "Polska i Polacy," p. 7.

⁴⁷ Stanisław Kwiatkowski, "Na recznym hamulcu," in *Polityka*, March 21, 1987.

⁴⁸ Daniel N. Nelson, "Development and Participation in Communist Systems: The Case of Romania," in Donald Schultz and Jan Adams, eds., *Participation in Communist Systems* (New York, 1981); Daniel N. Nelson, "Leninists and Political Inequalities," *Comparative Politics* 14 (April, 1982).

⁴⁹ Daniel N. Nelson. "Citizen Participation in Romania," in Daniel N. Nelson, ed., *Local Politics in Communist Countries* (Lexington, MA, 1980).

⁵⁰ Charles Taylor and David Jodice, *World Handbook of Political and Social Indicators* (New Haven, 1983), pp.76-78.

Normally, Sejm elections are held every four years, but the regime apparently felt that "normalization" had not proceeded far enough for elections to occur in 1984, so elections were postponed until the next year. The government, in an effort to attract interest in the elections and infuse the Sejm with more legitimacy, developed a new electoral law that allowed two candidates for most seats. The "social consultations" on the new law, however, attracted little public interest. Stanisław Gebethner, a Warsaw professor of politics, observed that the public debate had been marked by "social apathy and an absence of any wide public interest."⁵¹

The focus of the 1985 election campaign became, for both the regime and the opposition, the number of people that would vote. In the 1984 peoples' council elections, the authorities claimed seventy-five percent of registered voters had voted; the opposition, which had conducted its own monitoring of the elections (by watching polling stations from adjoining apartments, for example), claimed a much lower turnout of sixty percent. The results of the 1985 election were a modest victory for the government, with official returns showing a 79 percent turnout and Solidarity claiming 66 percent, but both figures were higher than the corresponding ones for 1984. The turnout for the economic reform referendum in 1987 was 67 percent. The "victory" for the government, however, in both instances, could be seen as positive only in the context of the new political environment. The turnout was far lower than ever before in Poland or, for that matter, in any other Communist state. Despite the pressures to vote, as much as a third of the electorate refused or simply neglected to do so.

As we have seen above, however, even that 79 percent figure greatly exaggerates the level of commitment to or involvement in the political system. In the June 1989 elections, although conducted in a totally different political climate, turnout fell far short of expected levels. Both sides had thought eighty percent would participate, but it is apparent that not much more than 62 percent of the electorate voted.⁵² By 1989 standards, citizens' participation was disappointing, despite overwhelming victory for the opposition. Runoffs in June, as well as the by-election for the opposition Senate seat in October, attracted less than fifteen percent of voters.⁵³ In local elections in Spring 1990, which were completely free, only 42 percent of eligible voters participated.

⁵¹ *Życie Warszawy*, December 5, 1984.

⁵² Marek Henzler, "Prognoza wyborcza czytelników 'Polityki'," in *Polityka*, June 10, 1989, p. 3.

⁵³ *Polityka*, October 14, 1989, p. 2.

Knowledge about and interest in politics has not been very high in Poland, either before Solidarity's first legal period or after. Surveys on political consciousness conducted in 1979 led the researchers to conclude (even then) that "people understand 'political life' as a subject of information and commentary, but not as an arena for their own participation." People *talk* about politics, but they do not participate in it.⁵⁴ After the Solidarity period, this tendency grew. At a Warsaw party committee session in 1984, it was revealed that over seventy percent of workers surveyed in the capital were not interested in becoming involved with any official organization inside or outside of the factories.⁵⁵ The Communist party (PUWP) itself began to lose members, dropping from 3.1 million in 1980 to less than 1.5 million by January 1990. In the latter half of 1989 the Party was losing members at the rate of ten thousand a month.⁵⁶

The officially sponsored youth organizations of the Communist regime lost more than half of their membership between 1980 and 1984, and less than a third of people aged sixteen to twenty-eight belonged to any of the regime's youth groups in 1984.⁵⁷ As a prominent sociologist noted in the mid-1980s, students have "more calm and balanced" views of the events of 1980-81, but "these more balanced judgments are not being accompanied by the desire to participate actively in the country's sociopolitical life".⁵⁸

The Communist regime had somewhat more success in attracting members to the new trade unions, constituted in 1982 to succeed Solidarity. At first reluctant to join the new unions (OPZZ) more workers joined as these unions were given more resources, and they retained a fairly steady membership of about six million through 1989. By comparison, however, the pre-Solidarity branch unions totaled some twelve million members, and Solidarity itself attracted about nine million in 1981. Furthermore, even among those who joined the new unions, there was a noticeable lack of enthusiasm for them. A CBOS survey in 1984 revealed that, even among members of the trade unions, only thirty-seven percent expressed confidence in them.⁵⁹

Sensitive to the lack of popular participation in official institutions, the regime tried to elicit controlled participation through numerous "social consultations", that is, grass roots meetings to discuss forthcoming events or decisions. But when the *Polacy '84* pollsters asked about participation in

⁵⁴ Franciszek Ryszka, *Zmiany W Świadomości Politycznej Polaków* (Torun, 1985), p. 23.

⁵⁵ *Polish Situation Report*, RFER, February 19, 1985.

⁵⁶ *Polityka*, January 7, 1990, p. 2.

⁵⁷ *Polish Situation Report*, RFER, June 14, 1984.

⁵⁸ *Odrodzenie*, September 1, 1985.

⁵⁹ *Związkowiec*, January 27, 1985.

such consultations, the results were abysmally low: only 5.2 percent participated in the consultations on prices (actually price increases), 8.7 percent on the electoral law, and 6.8 percent on the wage system.

Low levels of participation in official activities did not translate into high levels of activity in support of the opposition. A combination of rigorous, sometimes brutal, police repression of such demonstrations, and increasing popular fatigue and frustration with them, led to a considerable drop-off in the numbers who would engage in protests and demonstrations. As noted above, both official and underground polls showed that less than half the population provided even vocal or moral support for the opposition by the mid-1980s. According to the *Polacy '84* survey, only 39 percent of the population favored legalizing the activities "of groups and organizations of an oppositional character," while an equal number opposed such an idea.⁶⁰

Positive attitudes towards the opposition, if OBOP data are to be believed, decreased to a low of 18.2 percent in 1987. However, with the wave of strikes in 1988 and the conciliatory position of the government, support for the legalization of Solidarity grew to 47.6 percent at the beginning of the Round Table process, to 67.2 percent in May 1989, and culminated in the June elections. Even after the formation of the Solidarity government, the union structures maintained a very high approval rating of 75.8 percent at the end of 1989.⁶¹ The rate of support, however, did not translate into actual membership. The 2.2 million members which Solidarity had attracted by the summer of 1989 was seen as a defeat and was interpreted by some analysts as a consequence of focusing on elections and coalition formation at the expense of union building and membership-oriented activity. The apparent separation of the Citizen's Committees as electoral units from the Solidarity cells as actual union structures was confusing for potential members. After a decade of Solidarity as an umbrella for all opposition activities, people are confronted with factional struggles, a lack of programmatic unanimity, and the distancing of the Solidarity *government* from the *union*.

Willingness to engage actively in public protest is an important indication of popular attitudes. A 1984 underground poll on opposition strategy (among Solidarity supporters) showed only thirty percent favoring street demonstrations and twenty-one percent supporting strike actions.⁶² As another underground publication observed, "the emotions and spontaneous protests are now burnt out."⁶³ An August 1988 national poll showed split opinions about strikes, with forty-seven percent in support of them as

⁶⁰ Andrzej Rychard, "Poglądy polityczne," in Adamski et al., eds., *Polacy '84*, p. 726.

⁶¹ *Polityka*, March 4, 1989; Nowicki, "Polska I Polacy." p. 7.

⁶² *Słowo Podziemne*, May 27, 1984.

⁶³ *Myśli Nieinternowane*, January–February, 1984.

efficient means for political pressure and forty-one percent disapproving of such methods.⁶⁴ A year later, 60.8 percent of respondents saw strikes as offering little help in the dramatic political and economic situation.⁶⁵

Such measures of political inactivity, taken individually, are not surrogates for apathy. Non-voting, for example, does not equal apathy for the obvious reason that a decision to not vote may, in fact, be a purposeful decision to withhold symbolic support. Yet, it is apparent that a combination of indicators of political involvement—voting, party membership, and mass organization membership—connote a distancing of individuals from the political sphere.

A Descriptive Portrait of Political Apathy in Poland

Psychological involvement in Poland's public life diminished significantly in the 1980s. Although there was always a reservoir of low psychological involvement in Polish politics since the Communist regime came to power, the data also suggest a diminution of "feeling" about public affairs even when the 1980s are compared to the Gierek decade. Awareness, interest, attentiveness—all these appear to have decreased within Polish citizens' political consciousness. Even the events of 1989 did not provoke the fervor of political activism that may have been expected by those who remembered 1980. The attitude of the public, as survey data indicate, is apprehensive, cautious, and abstaining at the same time.

Self-interest and familial concerns were likewise two pairs of a strong trend during the Post-Solidarity period, forming the core of widespread detachment from civic obligation. The institutions of Polish society, with the church being the only exception, had, until mid-1989, little or no meaning for Poles; it was a society turned inward, because there was no other plane through which to find fulfillment.

Multiple indicators of political activity—voting, party membership, and mass organization membership—convey a third dimension of political apathy. Whereas Communist states were once thought to be able, via their authoritarianism, to ensure compliant behavior, it is now clear that a fundamental alteration in elite-mass relations occurred that ended the party's dominance of political involvement. While repression (such as martial law in December 1981) could halt some kinds of political activity, coercive measures offered no assurance that supportive political involvement would

⁶⁴ Baczynski, "Polskie Szachy."

⁶⁵ *Gazeta Wyborcza*, August 25-27, 1989, p. 1.

return. On the other hand, there is also no direct relationship between the absence of coercion and political involvement.

The phenomenon of political apathy can thus be traced empirically, as Poles mentally "disengaged" from thinking about politics, turned towards self and family and away from civic obligations, and abandoned political activity.

Analysis

General Considerations

What explains political apathy in the environment of the Polish case?
To what extent will its presence affect the prognosis for democracy?

Gabriel Almond and Sidney Verba introduced the three-tiered distinction among political cultures by referring to parochial, subject, and participant cultures. Each of these was, in their view, denoted by "the frequency of different kinds of cognitive, affective, and evaluative orientations toward the political system in general, its input and output aspects, and the self as political actor."⁶⁶ A political culture can be "apathetic," according to Almond and Verba, if it exhibits a high frequency of awareness (cognitive orientation) simultaneous with high frequencies of indifference toward affective and evaluative orientations.⁶⁷ Such a condition, they appear to say, could be present in any political culture.

We think that different conditions were present in the Leninist party states of post-World War II "Eastern Europe." An environment that may have been particularly "apathy-producing" was that in which the norms for mass political behavior advocated and enforced by the authorities adhered rigidly to the model of a subject political culture, while popular sentiments had become participatory-demanding pluralism and a wider access to power.

In that condition, apathy becomes a behavioral manifestation of caring and evaluating, *but being unable to play a meaningful political role*. Apathy as a mass political behavior may, thus, begin in people who (to recast Almond and Verba's formulation) exhibit high levels of cognitive, affective, and evaluative orientations—that is, people who are aware, care, and judge political objects—but who confront their own lack of efficacy and systemic sanctions. Apathy, in a sense, *protects* the psyche when the regime is illegitimate, but there is no alternative to it or to its policies. Severe limits

⁶⁶ Gabriel A. Almond and Sidney Verba. *The Civic Culture* (Boston. 1963), p. 16.

⁶⁷ Almond and Verba, *Civic Culture*, p. 21.

on pluralism and rigid policy orthodoxy, when coincident with extreme popular disaffection, would be a spawning ground of apathy. These are the conditions of futility.

In Poland, pluralism was an anathema to those in power for over four decades. Consequently, individuals with differing interests were first prohibited from maintaining autonomous organizations and, if a collective organization nevertheless persevered, the group was prohibited from acquiring control over resources needed for action (for example, labor power, goods, weapons, votes, and so forth).⁶⁸

The lack of collective organization with a capacity to act on behalf of a group's interests, or the unavailability of collective control over resources needed for action, can be gauged in Poland. To the extent that such conditions prevailed coincident with high levels of public disaffection, apathy expanded. One must, however, be careful not to confuse inaction by collective organizations with apathy. Collectively, as Tilly points out, a group may organize and mobilize resources, but never have the opportunity to act because of situational constraints.

Components of a Model: A Preliminary Discussion

Both apathy and dissent are political behaviors that can derive from an individual's disaffection from the political system. By "disaffection" we mean one's feeling of aversion for, or hostility towards, the norms, institutions, and policies of a state in which the public is largely excluded from politics. To explain apathy or dissent requires an explanation of disaffection, as well as the conditions that lead to the behavioral path of apathy as opposed to dissent.

The decline of system performance after a sustained period of improving conditions, measured principally by increasing socio-economic inequality and diminished economic growth, have been seen by scholars since de Tocqueville as contributing factors to evaporating public support, declining legitimacy, and political instability.⁶⁹ The public perception of such a weakened systemic performance must be present as well. Objective conditions of crisis, of course, can be concealed for some time by a regime through manipulation of deficits, borrowing, superficial "reforms" that create an aura of systemic responsiveness, and an expansion of roles for

⁶⁸ Charles Tilly, *From Mobilization to Revolution* (Reading, 1978), p. 7.

⁶⁹ James C. Davies, "Toward a Theory of Revolution," *American Sociological Review* 27 (1962), pp. 5-19; Samuel Huntington, *Political Order in a Challenging Society* (New Haven, 1968).

manipulated or mobilized involvement accompanied by such phrases as "self-government" and "socialist democracy." But, if a public perception of crisis is present, then citizens' evaluation of the capacity of official institutions to end the crisis become critical. Do people believe that institutions can solve problems and meet demands? Do they trust the authorities to *try* to alleviate the crisis?

All of these elements—performance crisis, public perception of it, and a pessimistic and/or cynical evaluation of official institutions' capacity to deal effectively with the situation—*must* be present for disaffection to develop. At an individual level, of course, predicting who would think what is beyond the capacity of our data; education, prior political identity, demographic variables, and other factors would have to be considered. However, the aggregate measures available for Poland may allow us to investigate the explanatory potential of basic elements in this model.

Yet, disaffection is not simply the "product" of the several attitudinal variables described above. Its metamorphosis into apathy (or dissent) is contingent on the effects of individuals' sense of efficacy and competence in politics as well as limits placed on political activity by the system such as strict control of organizations and the application of coercive measures. In terms of a preliminary model of political apathy, then, both personal limits and systemic limits mediate the relationships that may exist between the apathy-dissent nexus and performance crises, citizens' perceptions, and citizens' evaluations.

Studies in social psychology by Adam Podgorecki, a Polish émigré who now teaches at Cambridge, conceptualized the anomic relationship between citizenry and authority as social disorganization ("społeczna wichrowatość"). Such an attitude is characterized, according to Podgorecki, by lack of trust, apathy, and negation of authority. This attitude develops as a consequence of citizens' exposure to inconsistent, ad hoc, and conflicting stimuli that do not lead to the attainment of socially defined goals. In away, social disorganization is a defensive reaction against social mismanagement. It is not difficult to see the forty years of Communist rule as such a period of extended manipulation. By means of appeals, campaigns, and pledges, the citizenry was mobilized to pursue the goals of economic development and social egalitarianism under the umbrella of Communist ideology, while in actuality the authority was seeking perpetuation of its domination. Gradually, peoples' reaction to government appeals became more apathetic, accidental, and even negative. In the Polish case, according to Podgorecki, such reactions found fertile ground in traditional emotionalism.⁷⁰

⁷⁰ Adam Podgorecki, "Społeczna wichrowatość," *Polityka*, November 4, 1989, p. 10.

Generally, we expect that a decline in system performance, a growing public perception of crisis, and an increasingly pessimistic or cynical view of official institutions' and actors' capacities to resolve the crisis will, taken together, contribute to disaffection. Disaffection, per se, is suggested indirectly by the attribution of socio-economic and political crisis to "the system"—the one-party Communist regime and centrally planned economy of state socialism. Repeated surveys reveal that a vast majority of Poles held "negative opinions about the socio-political system," believed that "socialism" was not working well, would have preferred (long ago) to have free elections in which other parties (for example, conservative or peasant-oriented parties) were options, and would favor overwhelmingly the United States in a war. This combination of indicators suggested a fundamental aversion to the Communist system.⁷¹

Such disaffection is not, itself, either apathy or dissent, but is the raw material out of which nothing good (from a nondemocratic regime's standpoint) would develop. All things considered, however, authoritarian systems including Communist ones are likely to prefer apathy as the immediate consequence of disaffection; apathy connotes less of an imminent threat to political stability.

The Polish Communist regime was rather successful for several decades at erecting systemic limits to "deflect" disaffection from the path towards dissent. Overt coercion (arrest, incarceration, or exile of dissidents) and covert penetration of intellectual, artistic, labor, or other circles were used over decades to deter the organization of dissent. Where the organization of dissenting groups could not be entirely eliminated, Polish authorities sought to deny resources to them—so they could not publish, could not speak out, could not travel, and so forth.

Personal limits were encouraged by Polish Communists as well. The sense of personal efficacy in the political sphere has been ignored purposefully in the educational processes of these states.⁷² Yet it has been reinforced constantly at the workplace.⁷³ The notion of individual initiative, even at the local level,

⁷¹ Radio Free Europe, East European Area Audience and Opinion Research, "Party Preferences in Hypothetical Free Elections," August, 1981; idem, "Trends in Hypothetical Party Preferences," November, 1981; idem, "Eastern Socialism—Western Democracy, and the Functioning of the Two Systems," November, 1981; see also results from a 1983 poll revealing that France, Hungary, and the U.S. were Poles' best friends while the USSR, GDR, and Czechoslovakia were their three "worst enemies" as reported in *Biuletyn Informacyjny*, 1983, see also Mira Marody, "Collective Sense and Stability or Change of the Social Order," University of Warsaw, Institute of Sociology, 1987, manuscript.

⁷² Paul Neuberger, *The Hero's Children* (New York, 1973), pp. 196-201.

⁷³ Miklos Haraszci, *A Worker in a Worker's State* (New York, 1978), especially pp. 66-70.

was resisted for more than four decades in East European systems. There is little doubt that few people living under Communist party rule, save citizens of Yugoslavia perhaps in the 1964-72 period, believed that a vote, attendance at a meeting, joining a group, or any other sanctioned political behavior would affect any public policy.⁷⁴ Further, the record of dissent—whether violent and anti-Soviet as in Hungary in 1956, or peaceful and involving the party as in Czechoslovakia in 1968—was decisively negative. Learned helplessness among the people they rule was, in face, cultivated by the ruling parties of the region.⁷⁵

The failure of Poland's Communists to develop alternative sources of legitimacy meant that the sole criterion for popular support was systemic performance. The maintenance of economic growth and the distribution of resources such that social welfare was guaranteed (employment, health care, subsidized housing, food, and transportation prices, for example), were basic requisites of public support in Communist Europe. Although it was possible to offer substitutes for socio-economic performance in the short term, we maintain that the "bottom line" for East European ruling Communist parties was their ability to provide "socio-economic goods" since they could provide few "political goods."⁷⁶

But the perception of a performance crisis is not automatic, and any authoritarian regime would seek to control the dissemination of information about social malaise or economic downturns. Using such information control, European Communist party states tried to underscore the sense of political inefficacy and incompetence already common to their populations. To the degree that indicators of systemic performance crisis were associated with negative public assessments of socioeconomic conditions in Poland, we expect the perceptions of crisis were followed by rising pessimism about the capacity of a regime to solve critical problems.

A transition from attitudes of pessimism and cynicism to disaffection requires the attribution of the crisis to the political system. More than being disenchanting with the current occupants of leading posts, and more than

⁷⁴ April Carter, *Democratic Reform in Yugoslavia* (London, 1982); Gabriel A. Almond and G. Bingham Powell, *Comparative Politics; System, Process and Policy* (Boston, 1978), p. 37.

⁷⁵ Marody, "Collective Sense and Stability"; M. Seligman, *Helplessness; On Depression, Development, and Death* (San Francisco, 1975).

⁷⁶ Stephen White, "Economic Performance and Communist Legitimacy," *World Politics* 38 (April, 1983), p.462-82; J. Roland Pennock, "Political Development, Political Systems, and Political Goods," *World Politics* (April, 1966).

dissatisfaction with a current ruling clique or group, disaffection connotes ascribing the crisis to the government.⁷⁷

Some disaffected people will be already so influenced by their own personal limits in the political sphere that apathy becomes a "natural" consequence of their disaffection. For such a category of disaffected citizens, there is no encounter with systemic limits, since their own sense of helplessness is a swift route to the apathy of futility.

The most likely path towards apathy, however, will be along a more arduous route through systemic *and* personal limits. Disaffection will, even if the individual does not then engage in dissident activity, raise the possibility—no matter how hypothetical—of overt behavior outside sanctioned channels. The disaffected citizen has, more likely than not, scanned and assessed the possibilities, at the enterprise, office, school, or work brigade, demonstrably to act out his disaffection. And, even with revolutionary changes and electoral consequences resonating throughout Central and Eastern Europe, the disaffected citizen still confronts obstacles to joining political groups. A residual nomenklatura still retains footholds of power in some cases, while decades of countervailing routine impede the autonomy needed for political activism.

Further, one who is disaffected will confront any personal limits he feels, all of which deepen the sense that nothing can be done. Ultimately, after the initial stimuli of performance crisis, perception of the crisis, and pessimism about the authorities' abilities to respond, these personal limits of inefficacy and incompetence are the strongest elements in an explanation of political apathy. While the repressive aspects of systemic limits have been lifted in Poland and no longer render most disaffected citizens unable to engage in dissent, the memory lingers and the sense of personal helplessness to affect anything in politics *pushes* the disaffected firmly towards apathy.

The Polish Case

The roots of political apathy in Poland, as we have seen, extend back before the Solidarity years. Whether they are to remain part of the Polish system in its post-Communist phase depends on the level of political and psychological involvement and a sense of civic obligation.

⁷⁷ Kenneth M. Coleman and Daniel N. Nelson, "State Capitalism, State Socialism and the Politicization of Workers," *The Carl Beck Papers* 304 (1984).

In comparison to previous years, 1988 brought an increase in optimism as to the future with "only" one out of five citizens predicting a worsening of conditions.⁷⁸ But, as OBOP surveys indicate, this momentary optimism quickly waned *despite* the installation of the non-Communist government. In December 1989, the ratio of optimists and pessimists concerning the next five years was 43 percent to 44.5 percent. With respect to expectations in respondents' private lives, the same ratio reveals pessimists outnumbering optimists by over eight percent (45.8 percent to 37.4 percent).⁷⁹

Such widespread uncertainty and fear about the future have had a negative effect upon people's willingness to tackle the mounting socioeconomic difficulties, and did not bode well for people's political activism and economic initiative which were the bulwarks of Mazowiecki's program.

Both Mazowiecki and Wałęsa confront a socio-economic collapse that was decades in the making. The failure of policymakers in the Communist era to identify impending dangers to the system have been analyzed more fully elsewhere, including a Polish government report that indicted the Gierek regime for many errors.⁸⁰ In general terms, all indicators showed a dramatic contraction of the Polish economy, beginning in 1979, accelerating in 1981 and 1982, and then becoming disastrous in 1988-89.⁸¹ Inflation rose to over one hundred percent in 1982, remaining in double digits during the 1980s until 1989 when it skyrocketed to over five hundred percent.⁸² Meanwhile, foreign trade collapsed, an already high debt continued to mount, the current account remained negative and debt service continued at unacceptably high levels.⁸³ These indications added a sense of urgency to Finance Minister Balcerowicz's successful negotiations with the Paris Club for a grace period in 1990 and generous rescheduling terms for the following five years.⁸⁴

Damage to the nation's social welfare, however, is unabated. With prices rising and wages failing to keep up, the proportion of families living below the poverty line (defined as two-thirds of average income) reached twenty-five percent in 1989. The 1980s saw an almost continuous increase in the share of foodstuffs expenses in the family budgets.⁸⁵ After the deregulation

⁷⁸ Henzler, "Poczucie chaosu," p. 3.

⁷⁹ Nowicki, "Polska i Polacy."

⁸⁰ *Polish Government Report on the State of the Economy* (Warsaw, July, 1981); *Sisyphus: Crisis and Conflicts: The Case of Poland, 1980-81* (Warsaw, 1982).

⁸¹ *Polityka*, August 31, 1989, p. 2.

⁸² *New York Times*, October 23, 1989; *New York Times*, December 30, 1989.

⁸³ Central Intelligence Agency, *Handbook of Economic Statistics, 1986* (Washington, 1987).

⁸⁴ *New York Times*, February 19, 1989, p. 7.

⁸⁵ Joanna Solska, "Nasza stopa," *Polityka*, August 20, 1989, p. 6.

of agricultural produce prices in August 1989, food expenses in family budgets certainly crossed the fifty percent mark.

Have these conditions been perceived as threatening to personal and national well-being? Public opinion on the economy increasingly has seen the circumstances as "poor"; in 1984, thirty-three percent said the economy was "poor", in 1985 thirty-eight percent gave that response, and by 1986 fifty-one percent felt that way.⁸⁶ Overwhelmingly, Poles believe that the current "crisis" began in the 1970s, and that it will continue for many more years. In a more personal dimension, the share of respondents who themselves felt economic hardship increased from fifty percent in 1986 to 63.6 percent by 1989, reflecting a continued economic decline after a brief respite in the mid-1980s.⁸⁷

Attitudes about democratization and trust in the government rose in 1989 and, with respect to economic programs, was seen in a willingness to endure temporary austerity measures by fifty-three percent of respondents. This was coupled with an overwhelming initial belief in the economic improvement under the non-Communist government (70.4 percent), while only a surprising 0.5 percent declared themselves as non-believers in economic progress.⁸⁸ Yet, by 1990, strikes began to suggest a possible diminution of public trust and positive sentiment.

Thus, in Poland, all three precursors of disaffection have been evident—performance collapse, a perception of crisis, and a generalized pessimism about what leaders and the government can or will do about it. The norms, institutions, and policies of the Polish Communist party state were indicted and viewed with hostility by "most" Poles—a sentiment that began to grow in the 1970s, and culminated in the rejection of the Communists in June 1989.⁸⁹

This rejection of the Communist political system in Poland took place primarily in a symbolic sphere rather than in the sphere of public action.⁹⁰ Even among the nine million or more original members of Solidarity, only a small proportion participated in protests or strikes.

⁸⁶ Kwiatkowski, "Na ręcznym hamulcu."

⁸⁷ Henzler, "Poczucie chaosu," p. 3.

⁸⁸ Nowicki, "Polska i Polacy," p. 7; *Gazeta Wyborcza*, September 13, 14, 1989, p. 1.

⁸⁹ Marody, "Collective Sense and Stability," p. 1; Nelson, "Non-Supportive Participatory Involvement in Eastern Europe," pp. 636-44.

⁹⁰ Mirosława Marody, "Antinomies of Collective Subconsciousness," University of Warsaw, Institute of Sociology, 1987, manuscript.

Nevertheless, after suppressing Solidarity in December 1981, martial law authorities sought intentionally to depoliticize the situation via the temporary prohibition of *all* political and organizational activity. Several thousand Solidarity activists were arrested, some held for two years, and others were detained periodically. Eventually, a number of organizations that had been born or revitalized during 1980-81 were banned by decrees of the Military Council for National Salvation (WRON), later "legitimized" by acts of the Sejm. WRON also attempted to deflect workers from political activity, promising an improvement in the economy and attempting to buy off certain strategically located groups such as coal miners with large wage increases and expanded fringe benefits. From the regime's point of view, political apathy was better than political opposition.

Such an "anti-involvement" tendency also affected the opposition, and now is a source of worry for the post-Communist government. Aware that the high level of initial support is partially a reaction to the rejection of the Communist party, the Mazowiecki government tried to capitalize on this attitude to muster more than verbal support for its austerity program. After only a year in power, signs appeared pointing to Mazowiecki's mounting difficulty in translating the verbal support to concrete actions. The productivity rate remained stagnant, economic strikes recurred despite Wałęsa's appeals, and the call to miners to resume work on Saturdays met with insignificant response.

The growing conflict between the politicians and trade unionists within both workers' and peasants' Solidarity undermined support for the Government's austerity program. The political climate in Poland is more that of reserved anticipation than active involvement. Given the Polish cultural tradition, it is too early to pronounce austerity efforts failed because single events have been known to alter the state of mind of Poland and snap the nation from lethargy. Further, there were initial positive signs in lower inflation, a declining interest rate and an improved trade balance. On the other hand, such emotionalism signifies the continuation of "mobilization ethics" practiced by the Communists—an ethos that is not conducive to the development of democratic institutions and free market economics which depend on stability and continuity.

Personal limitations, particularly a sense of political inefficacy, help to channel disaffection into apathy. Three-quarters of Poles surveyed said they valued being governed well *more* than participating in the process themselves.⁹¹ In Poland, people have felt they have little influence on matters either at a national level or in their surroundings. In a late 1983

⁹¹ Kwiatkowski, "Dowcip Bratkowskiego," p. 7.

poll, seventy-two percent felt that their social group had little or no influence on matters affecting the country. When asked "who currently rules in Poland?," only 5.8 percent answered "the working class."⁹² To the same question, asked in December 1989, 82.3 percent identified Solidarity, and 66.3 percent pointed to the church, as the actual rulers in Poland. The other political parties and OPZZ received only thirteen–fifteen percent affirmative answers.⁹³ One should not infer, by answering Solidarity, that people meant themselves as major actors in the political arena in Poland. Instead, these responses may be part of a growing rank and file dissatisfaction with undemocratic practices and top heavy organization of Solidarity. A voice for the church is, at the same time, hardly a manifestation of self confidence and participation.

Polish sociologist Witold Morawski has said that the main reason for "ineffectiveness of the system" [in Poland during the early 1980s] was the "prevalence of top-down mobilization mechanisms of articulation from below," which meant that "the interests and value of society [were] not sufficiently recognized in the political and economic system."⁹⁴ Surprisingly, such allegations could even be heard within Solidarity in 1980-81, and have recently resurfaced while the union is searching for its role in the post-Communist Poland. This lack of opportunity for political input is galling to Poles whether originating from Communist ideology or the hierarchy of other institutions. Władysław Adamski noted in the introduction to the *Polacy '84* survey that "the source of social conflict in Poland is the discrepancy between the aspirations and interests of society and the character of the political system and the effectiveness of the economy." The presence of aspirations and interests, in other words, that have long been excluded from the political system, even as that system failed to ensure socio-economic performance, reinforced the belief that no one could do anything to bring change.

Citizens may *still* feel more like observers than insiders in the political process, despite the introduction of representative institutions. Satisfaction with the electoral victory and reverence for the church may result in further abstention from civic duties and active involvement. Delegation of authority to the government, Solidarity leadership, and the Catholic church hierarchy are part of the longstanding helplessness imbued by the past regime. Economic hardship will only reinforce such positions until political alternatives to the current Mazowiecki government appear and a true political competition becomes a fact.

⁹² *Biuletyn CBOS* (No. 3, 1985).

⁹³ Nowicki, "Polska i Polacy," p. 7.

⁹⁴ Witold Morawski, "Samorząd pracowniczy a reforma gospodarcza," in Witold Morawski, ed., *Demokracja i Gospodarka* (Warsaw, 1983), p. 227

Embedded in Poles' sense of personal limits are, as well, sheer fatigue and accompanying depression. People have little time or inclination to be involved in politics when provisioning, transportation, and other "basics" consume inordinate amounts of personal resources. An inclination to engage in socially- or politically-directed activity or thought is weakened because one's time horizon is limited by the weight of daily existence.⁹⁵

Implications and Conclusions

Several dimensions of political apathy, and conditions that we expect have contributed to such a phenomenon, are thus present in Poland. Their presence in the same period does not allow us to infer that a causal path exists, but rather that political apathy and such conditions are coincident. A more sophisticated analysis—comparative and longitudinal in perspective—would be required to test precisely the relationships suggested in this discussion.

Yet, what we know about Poland, and the relationships that we have elaborated regarding the creation of political apathy in one-party authoritarianism may have important implications for the USSR, for countries of "Eastern Europe," and for other systems emerging from decades of Communist rule. Notwithstanding the strenuous endeavors of Communist regimes to ensure high levels of mobilized and manipulated political involvement, such activity had fragile bases. Party and mass organization membership or voting, as the most rudimentary acts of political involvement, were long trumpeted as exhibits of Communist regimes' ties to the populations they rule. But even these elementary symbols of popular approval disintegrated rapidly, accompanied by the mental disengagement of citizens from political life. Poles had been shutting out of their lives as much awareness, feeling, and judgment about political life as possible, although their fundamental disaffection continued and grew.

What became of the ruling party and the people it ruled? The Polish United Workers' Party "helped" to generate deep-seated disaffection by its own incompetence and corruption, and then used every means at its disposal to deflect such disaffection from a path leading to dissent. In one sense, the PUWP "succeeded," and consequently governed, more or less, a population that turned inward to personal or familial concerns and to an alternative society. The quiescence that the Jaruzelski regime achieved for a few years,

⁹⁵ Elżbieta Tarkowska, *Czas w Społeczeństwie: Problemy Tradycji, Kierunki Badań* (Wrocław, 1987).

however, was simultaneously its greatest enemy, for the political apathy it confronted meant that no one any longer cared enough to seek solutions to Poland's crises. Jaruzelski was unable to resuscitate Poland because he and the PUWP would not allow, much less encourage, individuals to become politically efficacious while removing systemic limits that disrupted pluralism and collective organizations.

The post-Communist fledgling democracy in Warsaw today is burdened with attitudes of social disintegration which undermine all kinds of authority, not only Communist. What the government needs now is help from the society. This help should come in the form of altruism, cooperation, and trust. But this passive, apathetic society will have to snuggle against itself to overcome the legacy of Communist rule. To muster up enough energy to see beyond immediate self-oriented familial goals, and thereby to revitalize the larger, abstract concept of a common good, is to be Poland's most severe test.