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# **Public opinion in Poland's transition to market democracy**

DAVID MASON

Public opinion research has changed dramatically in the last ten years in Poland, in terms of its methodology, scope, and role in political change. During the "first" Solidarity era (1980–81), the genie of public opinion was let out of the bottle, and even martial law could not entirely put it back. Public opinion polling in the 1980s became more sophisticated and more common, and began to tackle increasingly sensitive political issues. Public opinion came to play a role in the political process, and to give the Polish population a sense of its own purpose and values. It also revealed the depth of antipathy to the communist regime and leadership and, in doing so, further eroded the already fragile legitimacy of the regime. When, in the late 1980s, the regime realized it could not succeed at winning back the allegiance, or at least acquiescence, of the Polish population, it agreed to negotiate with the opposition. The result was the emergence of the first non-communist regime in Eastern Europe.

The increasingly more open political atmosphere in Poland has allowed more open discussion of the role, methodology, and influence of public opinion. The democratization of the political system has also raised some new concerns about the results of public opinion surveys; in particular, the extent to which the beliefs, values and attitudes of Polish citizens are conducive to a political and economic environment that will require participation, tolerance, compromise, competition and patience. The reforms of the new government also entail a reduced commitment to policies promoted by the previous communist government, including social welfare, full employment, and a relatively egalitarian structure of personal incomes. Popular acceptance of the new policies and political orientations are crucial to the success of the new government. Public opinion surveys can help to reveal the extent of such commitment.

## **The shallow impact of political socialization during the communist years**

The most astonishing feature of the 1989 changes in Poland (and Eastern Europe) was their thoroughness and rapidity. First in Poland, but later in elections in Hungary, East Germany, and Czechoslovakia, the communists were overwhelmingly defeated, despite their advantages of incumbency and their last minute efforts to change their images, policies, and even names. The scope of this popular hostility is especially surprising given the forty years of political socialization pursued so deliberately by the communist regime.

Even before 1980, however, it was apparent that the ideological principles of Marxism-Leninism had little acceptance in Poland. In 1958, only 13 per cent of Warsaw students identified themselves as Marxists; twenty years later, still only 18 per cent did (Jasinska-Kania 1982). Despite the rejection of Marxism, though, most Poles, before 1980, seemed to accept the general commitment to socialism, even if they felt the regime had not lived up to those ideals. Stefan Nowak reported widespread social acceptance of the

nationalization of industry, agrarian reform, economic planning, and the transformation of the prewar class structure (Nowak 1981). Poles also evidenced a strong egalitarianism, particularly regarding incomes.

With the crushing of Solidarity in 1981, and the continued deterioration of the economy in the 1980s, even this limited commitment to socialism began to wither away. This was recognized and admitted even by the regime. At a 1983 Party conference on ideological problems, one eminent ideologist bemoaned an "ideological crisis" manifested in "the undermining of the faith of a large part of the Polish society in the value of socialist ideals and socialism itself" (*Nowe Drogi*, October, 1983). Official publications complained of the lack of commitment from young people, especially given the resources lavished 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" (*Sztandar Mlodych*, November, 18 1983).

Support for Marxism, particularly among young people, had practically disappeared by the mid-1980s. A survey of Gdansk high school students in 1984 found only 2 per cent declaring themselves Marxists; and support was not much higher among university students (*Polityka*, August 11, 1984). The shift in attitudes was not restricted to young people. In a cross-national survey conducted in east and west Europe in early 1990, only West Germans (81 per cent) reacted more negatively to the term "communism" than did the Poles (80 per cent). And of all the countries, the Poles had by far the most positive response to "capitalism." Indeed, East Europeans in general responded more favorably toward capitalism than did respondents in the capitalist countries! (Riding 1990). The Polish attitudes toward capitalism and communism are a culmination of a trend that began in 1980, with increasingly large numbers of people favouring a market-oriented approach to the economic system, and a shift in emphasis from favouring equality toward favouring freedom. These tendencies will be discussed further below.

State socialist societies are sometimes referred to in the West as "mobilized" societies, in that the regimes in those countries attempt to foster high degrees of political awareness and political participation, albeit controlled participation. Thus in Poland as in other East European states, there were numerous mass-membership organizations, such as the party itself but also youth organizations and other special interest groups. Furthermore, formal participation in the political process, both in terms of voting and in the number of people who serve in elected office, was very high compared to pluralist societies.

Despite the regime's efforts at political mobilization, however, such participation by Poles has been ritualistic, at best. Poles neither participated much in politics, nor even evinced much interest in politics, and this abstention from political activity increased during the 1980s. Even in "normal" times, a surprisingly large number of Poles were not aware of even major political issues and events. Surveys done in the mid-1970s showed that less than 20 per cent of the residents of six cities could name the president, the first party secretary or a single representative in their electoral district (Jasiewicz and Jasinska

1981). An official poll in 1985 found that only 15-17 per cent of adult citizens were "interested in politics" and about half of those were party members (Kwiatkowski 1986). This lack of political interest and involvement turned into a major embarrassment for the regime in a November, 1987 referendum on the economic reforms. Too few people voted to enable the government to win the required majority of all eligible voters. The government proceeded with the reforms anyway.

This political disinterest continued even through the remarkable events of 1988 and 1989. In August 1988, during the second wave of strikes which forced the government into talks with Solidarity, as many as 44 per cent of people admitted to being unaware of this decision; a third of the respondents admitted to apathetic attitudes toward political developments, and to not paying any attention to them. And during the Round Table talks, despite extensive media coverage, most Poles had little knowledge of the participants. Even supposedly well known opposition figures like Jacek Kuron (62 per cent) and Adam Michnik (49 per cent) were recognized by less than two thirds of the respondents. Future Prime Minister Mazowiecki was known by only 20.9 per cent of the respondents (Kwiatkowski 1989).

There are many ways to explain this political apathy and erosion of acceptance for the regime's norms. The most straightforward, perhaps, is simply the frustration and disgust that most Poles felt at the regime's martial law crackdown on Solidarity. For many people, this was the last straw and proved that the regime was incapable of reforming itself; fewer and fewer people believed in "state-controlled democratization of the state" (Magala 1988). There was also increasing recognition and rejection of the privileges and corruption associated with the political leadership. But there are longer term, more fundamental, reasons as well. Lena Kolarska-Bobinska, a sociologist at the Academy of Sciences, argues that in the 1970s, people came to depend on the state as a provider of basic economic, social, and educational needs. By the 1980s, as the economy continued to deteriorate, many perceived the state as failing at this function, and gave up on it, often trying to fulfil these needs outside the public sector, either legally (the private market) or illegally (the black market) (Kolarska-Bobinska 1989).

### **The decline of political legitimacy**

No political regime, democratic or authoritarian, can last long without a political socialization process that breeds at least some support for the government's basic values and institutions. In Poland, as we have seen, the political socialization process seems to have broken down altogether, particularly after the declaration of martial law at the end of 1981. This led to a further erosion of the already debased legitimacy of the communist regime. In Poland, as in the rest of Eastern Europe, political legitimacy had increasingly come to rest on the satisfaction of basic economic and social needs. There was a kind of "social contract" (Hauslohner 1987) or "social accord" (Kolarska-Bobinska 1989, p.126) in which the populace left politics to the politicians and in return the state provided economic growth and social services and did not demand much in the way of

commitment or effort from the population. Indeed, some surveys suggested that Poles accepted this as the proper, even desirable, function of the state.

Though the population may not have expected much from the regime in terms of political rights, it did hold sizeable expectations in the economic and social realm. As Stefan Nowak put it in 1981, most Poles held the state responsible for "the equalization of life opportunities, for the development of the potential of all citizens, as well as for the satisfaction of their basic needs" (Nowak 1981). In addition, in the 1960s and early 1970s, there was a high degree of social mobility (both real and perceived) in the country that allowed a sense of constant improvement. With the slowdown in social mobility in the 1970s, and then the slowdown in the economy itself, the government became increasingly unable to deliver on its part of the "compact." By 1980, polls showed that Poland had three times as many dissatisfied people as there were, on average, in eight western nations. Ironically, Poles had especially bad ratings for social services (which is supposed to be the strength of socialist societies), such as medical care, housing, the environment, and egalitarian policies (Inglehart and Siemienska 1988). An analysis of the "Polacy" surveys in the mid-1980s concluded that only about a quarter of the population could be counted as "pro" regime (Jasiewicz 1988).

In capitalist democracies, the government is not always held responsible for economic slowdowns, which are often seen as an inevitable consequence of the market. In state socialist societies, however, since the government controls the economy, the government gets the blame when the economy falters (Gucwa-Lesny, forthcoming). As long as the economy was improving, legitimacy was preserved. With the collapse of the economy, even this source of legitimacy disappeared. The Jaruzelski regime searched desperately for alternative sources of legitimacy, for example in appeals to Poland's national traditions (Burant 1987) and by seeking support from the Soviet Union. But with the accession of Mikhail Gorbachev to the Soviet leadership in 1985, even this external legitimation began to dry up. The Polish communist party regime was doomed.

The declining faith in the system was reflected in more concrete ways in diminished trust in official institutions and public figures, in increasingly outspoken resentment about privileges and corruption, and in increasing support for a more pluralistic political environment. The most obvious aspect of this was in declining confidence in institutions. When the government, and then Solidarity, first began publishing such polls on trust in institutions in 1981, these consistently showed that the unofficial institutions, especially the Church and Solidarity, were much more highly rated than official ones. The Polish United Workers' Party (PZPR) always fared badly in such polls, usually ending up in last place. In the 1980s, however, the levels of trust in virtually all institutions, official and unofficial, steadily declined, though the relative rankings remained about the same. While the Party continued to fare poorly (with only about a quarter expressing trust in the Polacy '88 survey), the regime's newly created institutional structures didn't do much better: the Patriotic Movement for National Rebirth (PRON) had the confidence of only 40 per cent in the 1988 survey, and the new trade unions of only 34 per cent (Adamski and Jasiewicz 1989). Confidence in the Party was even lower among urban workers. A December, 1988 survey of 1200 persons in seven industrial enterprises in

Warsaw showed only 6.8 per cent expressing trust in the PZPR-probably less than the total number of party members in those enterprises! These results and others led the authors of this Warsaw study to conclude that "the political system is questioned or even rejected at all its levels: at the level of the main organs of the state, at the level of industrial organizations in which the respondents work, and at the level of individual behaviour" (Cichomski and Morawski 1989).

This lack of trust in the party, and the party's sharply decreasing legitimacy, led Poles to increasingly question the necessity of maintaining the Party's "leading role" in society. The Polacy '81 survey showed that over half of the sample were in favour of a system without such a role for the party, and followup Polacy surveys in the 1980s showed similar results (Jasiewicz 1988). The Polacy '88 poll, conducted at the end of 1987 and the beginning of 1988, revealed only about a third of the respondents favouring maintaining the power of the party. Another third was in favour of reducing the power of the Party, and the remaining third were undecided or uninterested (Rychard 1988).

Curiously, though, this antipathy toward the party did not, through much of the 1980s, translate into a desire to fundamentally transform the system. Even during 1981, according to the Polacy '81 survey, only a quarter of the respondents favoured constituting new political parties, apart from the PZPR and its satellite parties, the Social Democratic Party and the United Peasant Party. There was also little support for the proposition that Solidarity should create a political party to operate alongside the union. Only 20 per cent of the overall sample, and 23 per cent of Solidarity members, favoured this idea (Adamski 1982, p.207). During the middle 1980s, similarly, most people seemed to be more interested in improving the economic situation rather than fundamental political change. When asked in CBOS polls about what was the main thing need to be done to improve the country's situation, the largest numbers of people mentioned "inducing people to work better" (50 -60 per cent in various polls) or to "reform the economy (40 -57 per cent). Many fewer suggested "changing the government" (5 -17 percent) or "changing the political system" (5-15 percent) (Kwiatkowski 1989. p.221). This "apolitical" response was probably due to the resignation and apathy that characterized Polish society after the imposition of martial law.

In the latter half of the 1980s, however, this attitude began to change, and Poles came increasingly to favour democratizing and pluralizing changes in the political system. A survey conducted by the Academy of Sciences in 1985 found overwhelming support for "respecting freedom and the political rights of the citizen" (90.5 per cent) and for "participation by citizens in the making of basic state decisions" (82 per cent) (Gebethner and Uhlig 1988, p.139). This began to be translated into more concrete demands as well. In this same sample, 65 percent agreed that elections must involve "competition of various political parties." By 1988, support for a similar proposition, that "citizens should be able to choose between candidates of various political views", was even stronger, supported by over 72 per cent. In the 1984 Polacy survey, the sample was about evenly divided on whether opposition groups should be legalized. By 1988, many more Poles

favoured a legal opposition (47.3 per cent) than opposed it (26.1 per cent) (Rychard 1988).

This increasing commitment to the principles of democracy was connected with a revival in support for and confidence in Solidarity. In the early 1980s, Solidarity, like all institutions, suffered a sharp drop in popular confidence; from over 90 per cent support in 1981 to only 11-13 per cent in 1984 and 1985. But by 1988, this started to pick up, with the Polacy '88 survey showing confidence in Solidarity up to 25 per cent (Jasiewicz 1989). Solidarity's approval rating increased sharply over the next year, to 75 per cent in March of 1989 (Gluszczynski 1989). In the same period, the perception of Solidarity as an institution beneficial to society grew from 18.2 per cent to 67.2 per cent (*Polityka*, March 4, 1989).

There seem to be numerous reasons for the turnaround in Polish public opinion the late 1980s. First of all, the period of frustration and apathy caused by the martial law crackdown had begun to mellow a bit, as Poles, especially younger ones, increasingly came back into the political arena. Many of the strike leaders in 1988, for example were different, and younger, than those who had led the strikes in 1980. Secondly, there was increasing popular frustration and disillusionment with the reform efforts of General Jaruzelski and his government. The "Second Stage" of the economic reform was continuously revised and delayed, and meanwhile the Polish economy, and Poles' standards of living, continued to decline. While Poles had seemingly put their hopes in a non-political approach to change, this no longer seemed to work. This leads to the third point, which is an increasing awareness that serious economic changes were not possible without accompanying changes in the political realm. Fourth, despite the lack of real success with the market-oriented economic reforms, the population came increasingly to accept the regime's own rhetoric in support of the market in the economy and democratization in the polity. Finally, there is the impact of Gorbachev. At an increasing pace, especially from 1987, the Gorbachev leadership began to introduce reforms in the Soviet Union, some of which were ahead of change in Central Europe. Increasingly, too, Moscow began to back away from the principles of the Brezhnev Doctrine, to pressure the East European leaders to push ahead with their own reforms, and to promise noninterference in the internal affairs of those countries. This had the effect of reducing the element of fear of change in Poland, and of undercutting the strength of the conservatives in the leadership who resisted change. It greatly widened the "limits of the possible" in Poland.

### **From socialist egalitarianism to market justice**

These changes in popular consciousness were a necessary prerequisite for the new government's plans to apply "shock therapy" to move Poland from state socialism to capitalism. It also required some rethinking of the concept of social justice, which was such a key element in Marxist theory and in the political legitimacy of the communist regimes. In the Soviet Union and other communist states, the achievement of social justice was treated as something of a *fait accompli* that came with the transfer of the



ownership of the means of production. Social and economic equality was considered by party ideologists and politicians to be one of the major advantages of socialist states over capitalist ones. The persistence of some types of inequalities, especially in income, was justified by citing both Marx and Lenin that in the first stage of communism, i.e. socialism, people would be rewarded according to their labour rather than their needs. The adverse effects of such differences, however, were to be mitigated by "social consumption funds" in the form of free education and medical care, etc. and by guaranteeing jobs to all able-bodied citizens (Mason and Sydorenko 1990).

In Poland, as elsewhere in the Soviet bloc, people came to accept the regime's commitment to egalitarianism, and even to favour a more radical egalitarianism than the government wished to pursue. They also came to rely on the many social benefits provided by the state. Despite the government's profession that it was not in favour of a total "levelling" of incomes, the gap between rich and poor declined dramatically in the postwar years. The ratio of the top ten percent to the bottom ten percent of incomes in Poland fell from 41.1 (that is, the richest 10 per cent earned 41 times as much as the poorest 10 per cent) in 1945 to 13.8 in 1947 and steadily declined to 3.7 in the early 1970s (Mason 1983, p.405). Public opinion polls in the 1960s and 1970s showed high support for wage egalitarianism as well as other forms of equality. A March, 1980 survey, based on the Rokeach scale of values, found equality ranked second, behind only the family. A national survey conducted in the fall of 1980 found widespread support for the study's "egalitarian model," which included proposition on limiting wages for the highest wage earners (90 per cent support), realizing a policy of full employment (77 per cent) and insuring more or less equal incomes to every citizen (70 per cent) (Adamski et al. 1981, p.106-109; Mason 1985, p.62-66).

During the 1980s, however, this egalitarianism began to weaken. As Krzysztof Jasiewicz points out, a whole series of surveys during this period points to a "slow but steady shift in societal preferences from "equality" ...to "freedom"—an acceptance of various forms of economic, social and political activity and the differing consequences of that activity" (Jasiewicz 1989). A similar conclusion could be drawn from the survey of workers in Warsaw enterprises. When asked in which type of society they would prefer to live, the most frequent response was "a free society" (36.5 per cent) and a "rich society (21.1 per cent). The responses for the kind of society promoted by the communist regime were much lower: for a "just" society, 20 per cent; for one "based on friendship and solidarity", 12 per cent; for one that "provides personal safety, 8 per cent; and for one with a good welfare system", only 3 per cent (Cichomski and Morawski 1989).

There are two sides to this movement: one away from equality; and the second toward freedom. As to the former, Poles exhibit a dramatic move away from egalitarianism during the 1980s. One sees this most clearly in the Polacy surveys, where from 1980 to 1988 there is a dramatic decline in those "decisively" favouring limiting the highest earnings (from 70.6 per cent to 27.5 per cent) and in those strongly favouring a policy of full employment (50.6 per cent to 25.3 per cent) and a sharp increase in those favouring high differentiation in wages based on qualifications (from 25.8 per cent to 40.4 per cent). There is also an increase from 1984 to 1988 in those favouring expanded

possibilities for the private sector, from 59.5 per cent to 73 per cent (Kolarska-Bobinska 1988, p.115 -116). Ewa Gucwa-Lesny refers to this as a shift "from supporting the equity in poverty policy toward one of supporting a just inequality based on the clear criteria connected with the efficiency of work" (Gucwa-Lesny). These changes in popular consciousness are reflected in the policies and stances of Solidarity, which became increasingly less egalitarian by the time of the Roundtable talks in 1989.

### **The obstacles to democratization and stability**

The changes in public opinion in the late 1980s in Poland were part of a thorough going rejection of the existing system of "real socialism." The elections of June, 1989 gave the population the opportunity, for the first time, to demonstrate this in a legal and irrefutable fashion. The combination of attitudinal change and structural change (with the formation of a non-communist government) marked a revolutionary transformation in Poland: the old system, its values, policies and institutions, was swept away. This provided a kind of clean slate on which the new Mazowiecki government could write its economic and political revolution.

There is, however, a darker underside to these changes. The old system having been swept away, a new system needs to be put in place. This requires the rebuilding not only of the political and economic structure, but also of the structure of values, attitudes and patterns of behaviour. In normal circumstances, in any society, these are passed down from one generation to the next, at least partly through the process of political socialization. As we have seen, however, this process had already broken down, even before 1989, and it may take a while before a new process takes its place. This entails, among other changes, the restructuring of the educational system, the rewriting of textbooks, and a new role for the mass media.

Thus, as in any revolutionary situation, the necessary changes are complex, deep, and wide, and they will not be accomplished within just a few months or years. Just looking at the political system, for example, students of the process of democratization suggest that it takes twelve years or more for authoritarian states to make the transition to a "consolidated" democracy (Schmitter 1989). The transitions from state socialist to market economy and from "subject" to "participant" political cultures may take even longer. In the meantime, the fledgling democratic government in Poland, lacking the stability and legitimacy that is purchased by time, will have many challenges and obstacles to overcome.

Among these problems are some aspects of the existing Polish political culture that may not be favourable to the years of patience, tolerance, and compromise necessary for the consolidation of democracy and the market. These phenomena include a continuing sense of cynicism, pessimism and apathy, a remaining commitment by many to egalitarianism and socialism, and a relatively weak sense of, and experience with, democracy.

We have discussed above the long-term and increasing sense of apathy and frustration that characterized Polish society in the 1980s. The events of 1989 and 1990 temporarily reversed this trend, but despite the formation of a Solidarity-led government in the fall of 1989, there remains a surprisingly high degree of apathy and pessimism. The signature of the Roundtable agreements in April, 1989 occasioned little celebration or popular fanfare, and the streets of Warsaw on the following day were surprisingly normal. Polls in March, 1989 showed only about 30 percent of the population willing to join Solidarity, and 47 per cent saying they had no such intention (Gluszczyński 1989). When Solidarity was finally legalized after the Roundtable Agreements, only about 2.2 million people joined the union by the summer, far short of the nine and a half million members in 1981. In the June, 1989 elections, turnout was far lower than expected. Both sides had thought 80 per cent would participate, but only about 62 per cent did so. The runoff elections two weeks later attracted less than 15 per cent of the electorate (*Polityka*, October 14, 1989, p.2). In the first completely open and contested elections, for local government councils in May, 1990, only 42 per cent of eligible voters participated. This was not the same fervour and activism seen in 1980-81.

This continued political apathy and lack of participation was due in part to the continuing frustration and pessimism regarding the economy. Negative evaluations of the economy and pessimism regarding its future had grown sharply during the 1980s, becoming almost universal by the end of the decade. This trend, too, seems to have been reversed, at least temporarily, with the election of a Solidarity government. Initially, people overwhelmingly supported the new Mazowiecki government and expected it to improve the economy. But in a December, 1989 poll, only about a quarter of the respondents expressed hopes for improvements, with 30 per cent having more fears than hope for the future, and 29 per cent expecting Poland to sink further into chaos and crisis. Almost 60 per cent of the respondents expressed a willingness to take a job in the West (Nowicki 1989, p.7). During the first half of 1990, monthly public opinion polls showed a steady decline in public confidence for all political leaders and institutions (*Rzeczpospolita*, July 25, 1990; *Polityka*, June 30, 1990). These were not hopeful signs, and indicate how thin was the reservoir of support for the new government. Further economic difficulties were likely to lead to a revival of pessimism, apathy and withdrawal.

This political apathy, which is due in part to the many years of suffering authoritarianism, is linked to a relatively weak sense of democracy, also due in part to the lack of experience with democratic processes and institutions. The 1985 study on popular understandings of democracy found much higher levels of support for civil rights and even equal access to material goods than for institutional and procedural aspects of democracy such as a multiparty system, contested elections and a critical opposition. On this last issue, only 36 per cent "decisively" agreed that the Sejm should have a "legal opposition criticizing the government." Overall, the authors of this study found that only about 55 per cent of the sample had a "decisively pluralistic orientation" (Gebethner and Uhlig 1989. pp.139-140). The flip side of this weak commitment to democracy is a disconcertingly strong degree of support for "law and order" in Poland. The Polacy '88 survey, for example, found almost 78 per cent of the sample agreeing that Poland needed a "strong leader who would bring order to the country." In fact, more respondents agreed

with this statement than with the proposition that voters should be able to choose between candidates of various political views (73 per cent) (Rychard 1988, p.284). These data led Krzysztof Jasiewicz to characterize the Polish political culture as "sharply polarized" between "two contradictory syndromes of values: authoritarian-populist and democratic-liberal" (Jasiewicz 1988, p.95). Of course, these surveys were conducted before the 1989 revolution, but it remains to be seen if these syndromes have significantly changed since then.

Another potential challenge to the new government, though this more in terms of economic policy than politics, is the continuing strong strand of egalitarianism in Polish society. Numerous studies, including some alluded to above, point out the sharp decline in egalitarian attitudes among Poles. Furthermore, some have contended that the egalitarianism of the 1980s was primarily political in character—a reaction to the corruption and privileges of the political elite (Kolarska-Bobinska 1989, p.133 -34). Other studies, both national and local, have pointed to the increasing acceptance of the market, and especially of inequalities in wages and incomes (for example, Cichomski and Morawski 1989).

However, the other side of this issue is that the majority of Poles still (at least as of 1988) support some key egalitarian principles, especially regarding wages, incomes and prices. The Polacy '88 survey showed that 57 per cent supported limiting the highest wages and 60 per cent favouring a policy of full employment. These figures were far below what they had been in the early 1980s, but they were still high enough to suggest some opposition to the "shock" of the market introduced in January, 1990. On the other hand, there is strong popular support for other important aspects of the reforms, including private ownership of property (Morawski 1990).

Commitment to the market is stronger in some sectors of society than in others: as might be expected, unskilled manual workers, clerical workers and (to a lesser extent) farmers remain fairly egalitarian. Indeed, Poland's official trade unions (OPZZ) leadership tried to capitalize on this sentiment at the time of the January price increases: "we cannot agree to the policy of free prices and frozen incomes for working people," Miodowicz declared, that would lead to "further impoverishment of a considerable part of society" (*New York Times*, January 3, 1990). Perhaps the key question here is the following: if Polish egalitarianism was primarily directed against those in power, and those in power are increasingly being replaced, will Poles return to the more traditional economic egalitarianism of the 1960s and 1970s, which would stymie the market reforms, or will they be brought over to the economic inequality of the market? As the Balcerowicz program was put into effect during 1990, polls showed the continued ambivalence of the population on these issues. As reforms began to bite, in terms of increased inflation and unemployment, the percentage of those solidly supporting the program declined from 39 per cent in February to 26 per cent in July. In the fall of 1990, only about a quarter of the population expressed more hopes than fears about privatization (Centrum Badań Opinii Społecznej 1991). The real effects of the market, at least in the short run, were not as pleasant as many people expected. Further deterioration of living standards was likely to lead to renewed challenges to the government.

## **Conclusions: Polish political culture in comparative perspective**

The previous pages may have painted an overly pessimistic view of Poland's chances for the consolidation of democracy and the transition to the market. It has been customary for both Polish and Western social scientists to point to data on Polish public opinion and call attention to the high degree of cynicism and apathy, the continuing strands of authoritarianism, and the conflicting attitudes held by the same people. In the past, it may have been appropriate to view Poland in isolation from Western countries, partly because the system was so different, and therefore the political context of public opinion was so different from the West, and partly because the nature of survey research in Poland made it difficult to compare to surveys in the West. But as Poland moves more toward the West, these differences diminish and it becomes more important to place Poland in a Western context. It becomes more appropriate, and more relevant, to compare the political culture of Poland with that of Western countries: to compare, for example, the social conditions for acceptance of the market and democratic institutions. Such a comparison would shed further light on the potential for Poland's successful transit.

Such comparisons are beyond the scope of this paper, but a few examples may illustrate the point. In the section above, we addressed some of the obstacles to change in Poland, including the widespread sense of apathy and pessimism, the low degree of political participation, and the continuing support for both egalitarianism and the market. But there are similar phenomena in Western democracies. Political apathy and low levels of participation, for example, are a continuing source of concern in the United States. Only about one half of Americans vote in presidential elections, and only about a third cast ballots for the highest state offices (such as governor) or in Congressional midterm elections, when the presidency is not at stake. Less than 10 per cent of Americans are active enough politically to attend party meetings or work in political campaigns. Americans are also abysmally ignorant about their political system: only about 40 per cent can name their two U.S. Senators, and less than a third know that the term of a U.S. House member is two years (Johnson 1990, pp. 193). By these standards, Polish political awareness and participation is quite high.

Similarly, we discussed above the cynicism and pessimism that is characteristic of the Polish political culture, and raised the question of whether this would eventually be directed at the non-communist government as well. It may well happen, but Western democracies are also characterized by high degrees of cynicism and mistrust. In the United States, for example, only 39 per cent believe that government is run for the benefit of all, while 55 per cent believe that government is run pretty much for a few big interests. A majority of Americans feel that the government wastes a lot of money and that you cannot trust the government to do right most of the time (Johnson 1990, p.221). Despite all this, most Americans express feelings of pride in the country and the system of government.

We also saw above that Poles have been highly concerned about what they perceive as excessive privileges and corruption within the political elite, but also about the degree of inequality within society generally. Here too, though, Polish sensitivities are not out of line with those in other societies. In the United States, over 40 percent of the population thinks that "quite a few people running the government are a little crooked." In Inglehart and Siemieniska's comparison of Poland with western countries, they found that while 72 per cent of Poles thought (in 1980) that some groups had unduly privileged positions in society, this figure was lower than in any western societies in the study (Inglehart and Siemieniska 1988. pA50). Another comparison of 3 socialist and 7 capitalist countries found that popular perceptions of inequalities were relatively high in Poland, but at levels similar to those in France and Yugoslavia (Cichomski and Morawski 1989). And while it seemed paradoxical that Poles would favour both a more market oriented economy and a commitment to full employment policies, the same is true in the United States, where 81 per cent favour guaranteed jobs so people could earn a decent income (Lane 1986, p.392).

In the end, the key task for the new government in Poland is to convince the population, either by rhetoric or action, that the new order is a just one, both legitimate and fair. In the past, justice has been promised, and to some extent delivered, by the polity, and people came to expect justice from the regime. When these expectations were shattered in the 1980s, people lost both confidence and hope. With the transition to a market economy, the government no longer will satisfy all the demands for justice—now the market will share some of that burden. In the United States, as Robert Lane has pointed out in his article, "Market Justice, Political Justice," people see the market as just, but have low expectations of political justice. Most people believe that in both market and polity people are animated by self interest: "in the market, however, self-interest is thought to be both fruitful for the common good and policed by competition, while in the polity self-interest is seen as neither fruitful nor properly constrained" (Lane 1986, p.392).

Since in the United States, expectations for the political system are not high, the widespread apathy, cynicism and distrust is not particularly threatening to the system.

In some ways, Poland is in an advantageous situation in that expectations have not traditionally been very high. and the post-communist government has tried to keep expectations under control with constant reminders of the difficult days ahead. Most of the warnings by the Mazowiecki and Bielecki governments, however, have been about the state of the economy. It may also be necessary to temper expectations for democracy. A democratic government will not cure all of Poland's problems, just as it has not cured all of the problems in North America or Western Europe. Furthermore, democracy is not a fact, but a process. It requires continuous work and adjustment. Poland still has a long way to go, in creating both a new government and a new economy. But it has begun, and Poles now have the chance to build the kind of society they want.

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