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Workers' power and the failure of communism

Rose, John

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Workers' power and the failure of communism

John Rose

PhD

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Abstract

In the *Communist Manifesto*, Karl Marx and Frederick Engels wrote that the first step towards communism was for the working class to become the ruling class by taking control of all the instruments of production. Here this first step is designated as workers' power. The argument is that the twentieth century's version of communism – Soviet Communism – was the antithesis of communism because workers' power was reversed and then eliminated. It tests this claim by analysing the decisive role of three independent workers' movements in the struggles to overthrow tyrannies, Poland, South Africa, Iran, 1979-89, in the shadow of Soviet Communism's impending implosion in 1989. It argues that communist aspirations, based on workers' power, were implicit in these workers' movements. But they were thwarted by the influence of Soviet Communism in the first case by its satellite Polish Communist state and in the second and third cases by its satellite Communist parties. The hypothesis gains its credibility from primary source interviews with key actors, former workers' leaders and the political activists closest to them, supported by secondary sources, contemporary with the period, and later scholarly studies as well as personal memoirs. The research investigations in the three countries, with very different political and cultural histories, on three different continents, constitute case studies which form the three core chapters of the thesis. In each case, the studies of Poland's Solidarity workers' movement, the "workerist" movement as part of the struggle against apartheid in South Africa in the 1980's and the workers' "shoras", (workers' councils), which appeared in the first few months following the Iranian Revolution in 1979, yield results all showing workers challenging for control of the productive process, in some cases very successfully, if only temporarily. The potential significance of these developments has been previously overlooked, buried by political outcomes which fell far short of the expectations of the millions of people mobilised for fundamental political transformations.

Introduction¹

“What’s Left?” asked the headline on a discussion of centenary books in 2017² on the October 1917 Russian Revolution. Not much, concluded reviewer Sheila Fitzpatrick, also a historian of the revolution. The agonising of Eric Hobsbawm, arguably one of the last century’s greatest historians, served as Fitzpatrick’s guide. The Russian Revolution had been the central event of the 20th century for Hobsbawm, “far more profound and global” than that of the French Revolution a century earlier. Fitzpatrick argued that before 1991, this was a fairly standard view, even among historians who, unlike Hobsbawm, were neither Marxists nor Communists. But finishing his book on the ‘short’ 20th century, running from 1914 to 1991, and the world the Russian Revolution had shaped, Hobsbawm noted it was now a “world that went to pieces at the end of the 1980s”. It was a lost world - now being replaced by a post-20th-century world whose outlines could not yet be discerned. Today we might conclude that the outlines are now signalling something rather ominous.

Fitzpatrick quipped that nothing fails like failure, and for historians approaching the revolution’s centenary the disappearance of the Soviet Union casts a pall. “The revolution, stripped of the old Marxist grandeur of historical necessity, turns out to look more or less like an accident. Workers – remember when people used to argue passionately about whether it was a workers’ revolution?... Socialism is so much of a mirage that it seems kinder not to

¹ **Acknowledgements:** I would like to thank my PhD supervisor, Stathis Kouvelakis, for his tremendous support, intellectual stimulation and patience over the last three years, my partner, the Iranian academic and writer Elaheh Rostami Povey for her support, intellectual stimulation and patience, Professor Alex Callinicos, editor of the journal *International Socialism* for encouraging me to start this PhD, Andrzej Zebrowski of *Pracownicza Demokracja (Workers Democracy)* in Warsaw, Poland for guidance on locating professional Polish language translators and our intensive discussions about the politics and history of the Solidarity period, Professor Kate Alexander, Research Chair in Social Change, University of Johannesburg, for appointing me Research Associate for the period of the PhD and helping me locate vital primary and secondary sources and my friend Peyman Jafari, Iranian scholar and expert on the role of the Iranian oil workers in the 1979 Revolution, again for helping me locate vital primary and secondary sources, Dr Stephanie Cronin, Iran specialist, for reading and commenting on the Iran chapter. Finally, thanks to Palestinian Professor Nur Masalha and Iraqi scholar Sami Ramadani for their professional support for my original PhD application.

² London Review of Books, vol.39, No.7, 30 March 2017. Review of *October: The Story of the Russian Revolution* by China Miéville Verso, 2017. *The Russian Revolution 1905-1921* by Mark D. Steinberg Oxford 2017, *Russia in Revolution: An Empire in Crisis, 1890 to 1928* by S.A. Smith Oxford 2017, *The Russian Revolution: A New History* by Sean McMeekin Basic 2017, *Historically Inevitable?: Turning Points of the Russian Revolution* by Tony Brenton Profile 2016

mention it.” She reports wanting to distance herself from this consensus even though she admits to being part of it, identifying herself as a contrarian. She warms to the one possible contrarian in the pack, science fiction novelist and former member of the Socialist Workers Party, turned, at least for this October ‘moment’, popular historian, China Miéville. Yet we find even Miéville is a little half hearted. The world’s first socialist revolution deserves celebration, he writes, because “things changed once, and they might do so again.” “Liberty’s dim light” shone briefly, even if “what might have been a sunrise [turned out to be] a sunset.” In any case, Miéville is uneasy with the revolution’s leader, Lenin, unable to deny his centrality but still keen to identify his mistakes and leaving a lingering sense of Lenin’s possible undemocratic instincts. Now in 2017 was anyone ready to defend, uncompromisingly, not just the Russian Revolution but its acknowledged leader, Lenin? Well, yes, there was, Tariq Ali. And it is a great pity that Sheila Fitzpatrick didn’t include Tariq Ali’s book in her review.

Tariq Ali is the great survivor. Forever identified with the 1968 ‘revolution’ in Britain, he has stayed the course, standing by its principles, not least still ready to defend “October 1917” as a faltering step forward for humanity, whatever its defects. In his book, he was determined to restore this humanity both to the revolution and its principal leader, Lenin, as well as offering plausible explanations for its failure. The book’s unlikely title signals this intention³, its contents resisting both Lenin’s monstrosity in the west, as well as Stalin’s sanctification of him in the east: cynical selections of his words given quasi-theological significance, providing a shroud concealing Stalin’s counter revolution. Both the Guardian newspaper and the New York Times recognised the book’s originality, each allowing the author a full page for a selected extract from the book. I reviewed it for International Socialism Journal.⁴ I am a 1968 contemporary of Tariq Ali. My first memory of him is sharing a platform appealing for opposition to the US war in Vietnam. I was a student at the London School of Economics, increasingly drawn to IS, the International Socialists, led by Tony Cliff, forerunners of today’s Socialist Workers Party. Tariq was a member of a ‘rival’ organisation, the IMG, the International Marxist Group, part of the Fourth International, led by Ernest Mandel. IS and the IMG were the backbone of the Vietnam Solidarity Campaign in the UK which led huge student demonstrations against the Vietnam war, most famously in battles with the police in Grosvenor Square, in front of the US embassy in 1968.

IS and the IMG had differing interpretations about what had gone wrong with the Russian Revolution. But both began their criticisms with Leon Trotsky’s *Revolution Betrayed* and the

³ (Ali: 2017) See bibliography.

⁴ <http://isi.org.uk/rescuing-lenin/>

IMG was not unsympathetic to the IS 1968 slogan: Neither Washington nor Moscow but International Socialism. I was particularly interested in how Tariq Ali would frame these criticisms in his new book after all these years. International isolation and the civil war that followed the revolution devastated the post- revolutionary economy. We have Lenin warning at his 50th birthday party celebrations in 1920 (which he did not want) that the gloating and posturing about the civil war victory in the Bolshevik Party had to stop. Stalin was one of the worst offenders. Lenin appealed for modesty, a recognition of how little the Bolsheviks understood not just about industrial reconstruction but about industrialisation itself. Marxism contained no magical solutions for addressing the Bolsheviks' crisis, he warned. He attacked the petty privileges and indeed the outright corruption afflicting the growing party bureaucracy. Lenin's defence of bourgeois culture and his disdain for claims of a proletarian culture were part of his wider argument. Ali comes close to linking Lenin's repeated strokes, which would eventually kill him, to his increasing realisation that the continuing isolation of the revolution would destroy it. And in a passage that serves as an important marker for this thesis, we learn that the Bolsheviks' worker cadres had disappeared. Those who had not perished "were interspersed in the party and state bureaucracy...workers' control in the factories had to be abandoned." (Ali 2017: 311-12)

Van der Linden has described the events of 1968 as part of "one great transnational cycle of contention", which began in the late 1960's and continued to the mid 1970's. He agrees with Giovannii Arrighi and others who have likened 1968 to 1848 – revolutions which failed but nevertheless leaving legacies which changed the world: increased self-confidence of former colonial peoples in the southern hemisphere, the wave of democratization which put an end to many dictatorships, the increased assertiveness of workers' movements worldwide and the diminished power of "dominant status-groups" over "subordinate status-groups", youth, women, ethnic minorities. (Van der Linden 2003: 117) The revolutions I describe in Poland, South Africa, Iran, 1979-89, fit this pattern very well but one very troubling legacy has to be included. The democratization wave was a factor in the implosion of Soviet Communism and its satellite states in 1989. But was the very idea of communism also a victim of this implosion? And are we not still grappling with *this* legacy today? We will have to return to these questions.

As the International Socialists began to grow amongst the would-be revolutionary students at the LSE in the late 1960's, organised by the university Socialist Society, familiarly known as LSE SocSoc, Tony Cliff became an ever more frequent visitor. He held a particular fascination for

me because of his self-identity as a Palestinian Jew who had eschewed Zionism. I was a British middle class Jew who took Zionism for granted. Cliff, real name Ygael Gluckstein, had been born into a well-established prosperous European Jewish Zionist settler family in British-controlled Palestine in the early part of the last century. His remarkable journey from this start-point to leading what became, in the latter part of the last century, his leadership of Britain's largest Trotskyist organisation, cannot concern us here.⁵ Nevertheless my encounter with him led to one of two turning points at the LSE which would set me on a life-time path in both the theory and practice of revolutionary socialism.

The first turning point came when LSE SocSoc organised a debate in response to the June 1967 war between Israel and Egypt. Jewish students sympathetic to LSE SocSoc were shocked. The debate took for granted that Israel was the villain, so the debate centred on whether Nasser, Egypt's world famous anti-imperialist leader, would prosecute the war effectively by mobilising the Arab masses, workers and peasants, across the Middle East or would be compromised by his dependence on the Soviet Union. Tony Cliff argued the latter point, predicting correctly that Nasser would lose the war. His main protagonist, Ronnie Kasrils, simultaneously a mature LSE student and secret underground operative for the ANC, the African National Congress, the banned national liberation movement fighting South African Apartheid, was far readier to defend Nasser. But it wasn't this argument that startled me the most, (startling though, it certainly was for a wannabe socialist who had worked enthusiastically on Israel's 'socialist' kibbutz system the summer before), as much as the fact that Cliff and Kasrils were both Jews. Over the next few months as I became friendly with both of them, I discovered both to be completely at ease with their Jewish heritage. I was about to join their tiny, but nevertheless not un-influential, internationalist unofficial club of anti-Zionist, pro-Palestinian Arab Jews.⁶

The second turning point was France, May 1968, when the student revolt, and particularly the fierce fighting with the police in Paris, triggered the ten-million strong workers' occupation of

⁵ His biographer, Ian Birchall tells it extremely well and thoroughly. Ian Birchall, *Tony Cliff, a Marxist for His Time*, (London, Bookmarks: 2011)

⁶ I first told this story in some detail in the *Socialist Worker*, weekly newspaper of the SWP, on the fortieth anniversary of the June '67 war (9/6/2007). Birchall republished it in his biography of Cliff (Birchall 2011: 279-80). I developed it further in "Memories of Ronnie Kasrils at LSE" in Ken Keable (ed) *London Recruits The Secret War Against Apartheid* (London: Merlin Press, 2012: 45-7). When I left LSE in 1969 I briefly worked for Ronnie Kasrils, who had recruited several LSE students for secret underground work in South Africa. In the *London Recruits* book we tell the full story and it will appear as a film later this year. Ronnie and I have remained friendly over the years, despite his membership for most of that time of the Central Committee of the SACP, South African Communist Party and indeed the post-Apartheid neo-liberal ANC Government where he held several governmental ministerial posts. Ronnie is a key interviewee for the South Africa chapter of my thesis where his more recent rejection of both the SACP and the ANC, and his subsequent reflections on his past political role are particularly relevant.

French factories. “Students of the World, Ignite!”, “Autogestion!”, self-management, were amongst the many slogans which caught the mood of that incredible moment. It was also the moment that I joined the International Socialists. Tony Cliff was fond of repeating to his student followers one of Marx’s most famous aphorisms that the emancipation of the working class was the task of the working class itself. In my head what had seemed an abstraction, to use the jargon, had suddenly become “concrete”. Cliff’s enthusiasm for this statement was very much rooted in his anti-Stalinism. Workers’ self-activity was counter-posed to reliance on great leaders. For sure workers needed leaders but workers would choose and test leaders through their own struggles, democratic accountability being absolutely essential. Two words, “workers’ control”, summed it up for Cliff. Workers’ control of their own organisations, trade unions and workplace committee delegates tasked with negotiations with management, workers’ control of their own political parties and, ultimately, workers’ control of the means of production, with or without management,⁷ and workers’ control of the state. Cliff viewed the disintegration of workers’ control, described by Tariq Ali, during the civil war following the October 1917 Revolution in Russia, as a fundamental weakening of the revolution, paving the way to its bureaucratisation and reversible only by its internationalisation, especially in Germany.⁸

In fact the aphorism and its application to the “French May” raised more questions than it answered. The French working class did not emancipate itself in 1968. One reason was the conservative role played by France’s most left wing mass-based political party, its Communist Party which had long abandoned any perspective of socialist revolution. But that argument, in turn, raised the question of the role of a Marxist political party in the self-emancipation of the working class. Alongside that question, the workers’ occupations of the French factories had raised another. Were we witnessing the first act of a socialist revolution, preparing the way for the formal seizure of the means of production by the working class? Certainly, as I discuss in much detail in Chapter One of my thesis, with one especially important qualification, this may be a legitimate application of a vital argument in Marx’s and Engels’s 1848 Communist Manifesto. And, indeed, the slogan of “Autogestion!”, self-management, appeared to support this perspective. But that qualification raises the role of the state. Unarmed workers’

⁷ This raises the wider question of the role of the professional managers and the technicians and other professionals essential to organising production as well as the capitalists themselves. The thesis attempts to explore thoroughly all of these aspects.

⁸ See my discussion of the failed German Revolution In International Socialism Journal, (Rose: 2015, Rose 2016, Rose, 2017)

occupations of factories face the prospect of a stand-off not just with the riot police but also with the army.⁹

As I was to learn over the following few days, weeks, months - for good reason LSE was earning the reputation as the University of Revolution, hundreds of its students engaged daily in hours of intense discussion in the bars, canteens, corridors, streets, often overflowing into the classroom whether the lecturers liked it or not – workers occupying their factories in the Hungarian Revolution of 1956 faced Soviet Russian tanks. Those tanks returned to demolish the “Prague Spring” in the Soviet Communist satellite state of Czechoslovakia in 1968. This was the antidote to the “French May” and it left 1968 very much as unfinished business.

But the International Socialists had taken off. High levels of activity were complemented by high levels of theoretical discussions. What amounted to a theoretical challenge to liberate Marxism from its Stalinist straightjacket was as exhilarating intellectually as the constant round of student sit-ins, demos and increasingly visits to striking workers’ picket lines, were exhilarating politically. The questions which were raised in the last paragraph were debated almost daily, remain partly unresolved, and form the basic intellectual framework of this thesis. Amongst the LSE students, the International Socialists’ Chris Harman was the most talented, intellectually and politically. Tragically he died aged 66 in Cairo, Egypt, following a cardiac arrest. Michael Rosen, Oxford University student 1968, poet, broadcaster and former Children’s Laureate, knew him well, and his Guardian obituary (9/11/2009) gives good insight into Chris’s under-recognised significance.

“In 2005 Chris Harman was writing about how the 30-year project to publish the collected works of Marx and Engels was done. It is 50 volumes long and he was reviewing Vol 50, having read the previous 49 one by one as they had appeared. Of course, he had read them all. Harman was never satisfied with second-hand summaries.

I remember hearing Chris speak at LSE, one moment alongside Danny Cohn-Bendit, the next with a shop steward from the occupation of the Renault factory in France, another at a demonstration against the Vietnam war. At one meeting, I recall how it seemed incredible to some that he could support Vietnam's fight against the US but be critical of Ho Chi Minh's

⁹ I return to this question in the Conclusion, following Gramsci and his response to the wave of factory occupations in Italy in the early 1920’s, proposing that the idea of syndicalism and its limitations is an extremely helpful guide not just to the French 1968 events but also to understanding the weaknesses of the three workers’ movements in Poland, South Africa, Iran 1979-89. For the last three years my PhD supervisor Stathis Kouvelakis has repeatedly suggested that I take the syndicalist tradition more seriously. Belatedly, I came to the conclusion that he was right.

Communist party. The events in Paris and the rest of France, he would claim, proved the point: existing parties claiming to be Marxist were unwilling and unable to make a revolution.

Everything Chris did over the next 40 years was geared towards creating a political party that was able and willing. With IS and its successor, the Socialist Workers party, he spent his life speaking, writing, editing, organising and campaigning. He was editor of the International Socialism Journal from 2004 and had previously edited Socialist Worker for more than two decades. In conversation his eyes would move between the middle distance and the floor, his ears picking up on every word, his replies indicating that he was relating what you were saying to the library in his head.

He didn't finish the PhD but produced a constant stream of articles, editorials and books: the book that would become *Class Struggles in Eastern Europe* (originally published in 1974 as *Bureaucracy and Revolution in Eastern Europe*), which developed the theory that the Soviet bloc was "state capitalist"; a history of the German revolution in *The Lost Revolution: Germany 1918 to 1923* (1983); and the Marxist classic *A People's History of the World* (1999). At various times, his articles, which mostly homed in on the economics of the moment, coagulated into books: *Explaining the Crisis* appeared in 1984, and this year he produced *Zombie Capitalism*.

His style of speaking was rapid but analytic, good on irony and contradiction; his lifestyle frugal in the extreme. He was never tempted by academe or celebrity. It was always a regret and an irritation to me why newspaper and TV debates about wars or the state of global capitalism did not call on him."¹⁰

In 1968 Chris Harman had grappled with what seemed to be 1968's spontaneous call for a student-worker alliance, following France's May '68. Yet it was notoriously short-lived and, in any case, arguably, it failed. Yet the idea had caught the imagination. Chris addressed it in a pamphlet essay, *Party and Class*, (Harman: 1999), which also deserves to be ranked as a classic 1968 text. He argued that the best way to unite workers and students was in a new revolutionary party where the interaction between students and workers would benefit both groups. He built a powerful case for the creation of worker-intellectuals, juxtaposing and

¹⁰ As van der Linden has noted, Harman was one of the first former revolutionary socialist students to notice the collapse of 1968 activism by the mid 1970's, citing Harman's 1968 book. Non-stop activism "was fine when the movement was going from strength to strength. When the forward march was checked, much of the activity seemed to lose its point" (Harman 1998: 346, van der Linden 2003: 133).

dovetailing several celebrated passages about the crowd in history, from the writings of Italian Marxist philosopher Antonio Gramsci.¹¹

Chris also contributed to a document which definitely does rank as a classic 1968 text, The ‘*Open Letter to the Polish Communist Party*’ by Jacek Kuron and Karol Modzelewski. Kuron and Modzelewski were young Communist dissidents in one of Soviet Communism’s most strategically important military outposts in Eastern Europe, its Warsaw Pact ally Poland. Their *Open Letter*, written in 1964, was a closely argued critical Marxist analysis of Polish society. It identified bitter social class divisions, with the Polish “Communist” state bureaucracy playing the equivalent role of a capitalist ruling class, extracting surplus value from Polish workers on shockingly low pay and terrible working conditions with no control either of the work process or the product of their labour. In 1965 Kuron and Modzelewski were thrown into jail for this “provocation”, the Polish government thereby dramatising the prestige and authority of the *Open Letter*. It began its travels across the Polish border, in various forms, to an increasingly receptive audience on both sides of the so-called iron curtain.

In Britain, the International Socialists enthusiastically welcomed the *Open Letter*. Its analysis was strikingly similar to the state capitalist analysis of Stalin’s Russia, pioneered by the IS founder Tony Cliff (Cliff: 1988). Cliff had argued that Stalin’s industrialisation drive in Russia in the 1930s not only consolidated his very personalised totalitarian dictatorship but also that the state bureaucracy became “an extreme and pure personification of capital”. (Cliff 1988: 168) The need to catch up with the West, both economically and especially militarily, exerted competitive pressure to accumulate, similar to the competitive pressure on capitalist firms. Accumulation of capital by the state, based on the forcible extraction of surplus value from workers, at the expense of their consumption needs, was also dependent on the crude “expropriation of the peasantry” (Cliff 1988: 50-55). In *Capital*, Marx had called this process “primitive accumulation...a history...written...in letters of blood and fire” when describing it in Britain (Cliff 1988: 54). Cliff noted that “Stalin accomplished in a few hundred days what Britain took a few hundred years to do” (Cliff 1988: 54). The language of “Socialism in One Country” masked the genocidal exploitative processes unleashed. Lenin had explicitly warned against

¹¹ I use one of these Gramsci passages introducing the idea of worker intellectuals in Chapter 1. Gramsci scholar, Peter Thomas, (Thomas: 2010), recognised Chris’s contribution to the development and promotion of Gramsci’s thought, post 1968. In a note to me Thomas wrote. “Point out that I reference one of Chris’s texts on Gramsci...as an antidote to post-Marxist readings... Chris and I also spoke together at an International Socialism day school on Gramsci in 2007, and I was pleased to see that we were in agreement on central issues” (Rose 2013: 137 fn33).

any attempt at socialism in one country¹² (Cliff 1988: 144-45). The IS published an English language version of the *Open Letter* in 1966.¹³ Confirmation of the group's most iconic political perspective could hardly have sprung from a more authoritative source. It helped enhance IS's reputation and influence in the UK student movement. Chris Harman wrote an introduction to the *Open Letter* and helped its promotion among students. It helped intensify the already infectious campus arguments, with several questions reoccurring: why had "Communism" failed to live up to its ideals? How can "Communism" be an answer to the failures of capitalism and the barbarities of its offspring, imperialism? The *Open Letter* provided a platform in the search for answers.

In the 1970's I worked as an unpaid then paid full-timer for the International Socialists. I helped build a workplace IS branch amongst the engineering and maintenance workers at Heathrow Airport. I also worked as a journalist on the Socialist Worker and was briefly one of the paper's editors during the upheavals which afflicted all the post-1968 revolutionary groups in the late 1970's, as it became apparent that the much awaited revolution had, shall we say, been postponed...¹⁴ In the 1980's I tried my luck as a free-lance journalist writing regularly about the 1984-5 miners' strike for the *New Statesman*. But I needed a proper job and drifted into teaching sociology at a further education college. In fact I was becoming more and more pre-occupied with the Israeli oppression of the Palestinians. For the next twenty years I was to become in effect the SWP's 'Comrade Anti-Zionism', its Jewish 'expert' on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.¹⁵

¹² For how Cliff developed his theory of state capitalism, which involved a break with Leon Trotsky's view that, however bureaucratically distorted, Russia was still some kind of workers' state, see (Birchall 2011:88-127), (Callinicos 1990: 73-79). Van der Linden describes how Cliff dealt with his "dilemma" over Trotsky. He quotes Cliff. "I had to choose between what Trotsky said...(about)...the self-activity of workers or the form of property..." Workers' self-activity took precedence, workers' did not control the state (van der Linden 2009: 119). In 1956 the KGB, Russia's secret police, commissioned a special translation of Cliff's book (Birchall 2011:117). See also the Poland chapter of the thesis fn98 referencing Stalin's favourite British banker who also argued that Stalin was building a state capitalist economy.

¹³ Titled a *Revolutionary Socialist Manifesto: written in a Polish prison*. In fact the title made an error. They were sent to prison for writing it. It wasn't written in prison. I recently wrote about Chris, 1968 and the *Open Letter* for the '1968' fiftieth anniversary edition of International Socialism Journal (Rose: 2018). Chris's '1968' book is also an essential text for understanding the period (Harman: 1998). A thorough discussion of the *Open Letter* and the subsequent political evolution of Kuron and Modzelewski as leaders of Solidarity, Poland's ten million strong mass workers' movement, is central to the Poland chapter in my thesis. In 2017. I had the good fortune to interview Karol Modzelewski, as part of my research, at the University of Warsaw. He was delighted to see, for the first time, the English language edition of the *Open Letter*. Sadly, he died in early 2019.

¹⁴ See also fn9.

¹⁵ I was by no means expert but I thought I had better try and become one by enrolling for a Masters' Degree in Jewish Studies. It was an appropriate decision, resulting in my book *The Myths of Zionism*

But in the last few years I was to become increasingly frustrated with this political role. As the beginning of this Introduction suggested, 1989, and the collapse of Soviet Communism, transformed the political landscape. And whilst I contest the extreme pessimistic conclusions drawn, there is no doubt that the non-Stalinist Marxist Left took part of the hit and has been on the ideological defensive ever since. This was both proved and exacerbated by 2008 financial crisis which, whilst it may have lent itself to claims of the continuing relevance of Marx's theoretical analyses of the intrinsic crisis-prone character of contemporary capitalism, it in no way significantly revived Marxist influence on contemporary workers' movements. On the contrary, the much famed 'global elite' succeeded in imposing harsh austerity measures on the working class globally, making the poor pay for *their* crisis. This has allowed a spectacular rise of the far right, manipulating anti-globalisation sentiment, redirecting the legitimate popular hostility towards the 'global elite', by mobilising nation-state nationalism as the vehicle for opposition, often dragging along sections of workers, left rudderless by their traditional organisations, trade unions, and parliamentary labour and socialist parties alike.

A series of defeats for left wing movements especially in Latin America and southern Europe has exacerbated this situation. The most serious defeat, though, was that of the 'Arab Spring' which erupted in 2011. The revolt in Egypt was its spearhead and whilst Egyptian workers played a significant part, neither they nor the independent Marxist Left, (Alexander, Bassiouny: 2014), were able to provide leadership to the movement. One consequence of both the movement and its failure in Egypt was to test an important theory of the SWP's Tony Cliff in relation to the liberation of Palestine. Cliff had argued that the Palestinians could not defeat Israel alone, that they were ultimately dependent on the Arab workers and peasants simultaneously rising against their own despotic rulers. He popularised a slogan that the road to the liberation of Jerusalem ran through Cairo. Momentarily the 'Arab Spring' seemed to fulfil this prediction. Certainly the cry 'Free Palestine!' was a familiar slogan on the Arab street during the uprising. But this aspiration, alongside all the others, was crushed.

(Rose: 2004). See my Guardian newspaper article.

<http://www.theguardian.com/world/2005/apr/02/comment>

I also wrote the Introduction to *The Ghetto Fights* (London: Bookmarks, 2nd edition, 2014) by Marek Edelman, one of the leaders of the Jewish socialist workers' Anti-Zionist Bund in pre-war Poland as well as the Jewish Warsaw Ghetto resistance to the Nazi Holocaust, Poland 1943. I had interviewed Marek Edelman in 1989 in Lodz, Poland where he gave permission for the memoir's first-time publication in the UK. See my two-page article (Weekend Guardian 17/11/1990). I became a Visiting Lecturer, Israel Palestine conflict, BA/MA module, Middle East Studies, International Dept, Rhodes University, Eastern Cape South Africa, 2011, 2012 and contributor to *Holy Land Studies Journal*, edited by Palestinian Professor Nur Mashala (Edinburgh University Press).

These events alongside two massive internal crises in the SWP, which seriously weakened the organisation in the last ten years, brought me to the conclusion that a fundamental re-think was required on my part. Why was the Marxist Left in such a precarious state, especially when the proverbial crisis of capitalism, including its fossil fuel dependency posing an existential environmental threat to the very survival of humanity on the planet, was so serious? I began writing a series of articles for the International Socialism Journal revisiting a number of our basis arguments. This included inadvertently becoming embroiled in a sharp argument about Chris Harman's *The Lost Revolution Germany 1918-1923* when I challenged Chris's conclusion that socialist revolution had been possible in Germany in October 1923.¹⁶ Irrespective of the merits of that argument, it served as a warning about the institutionalisation of cadres in small revolutionary socialist organisations over such a long period of time. We can reinforce each other with a comfortable and relatively sophisticated world-view without it necessarily being subject to the kind of rigorous independent tests that must surely be essential at a time of such crisis.

One reason for pursuing this PhD thesis was to subject my '1968' assumptions to just such an independent test. The research project was partly designed with this objective in mind: three revolutionary upheavals against totalitarian regimes in the three countries, Poland, South Africa, Iran, on three different continents with three very different political and cultural histories at roughly the same time. Each one of these events made a major contribution not simply to twentieth century history, but, I would argue, both separately and together, to the shaping of modern history with at least the potential to expand the promise of the Enlightenment understood as the pursuit of human freedom. Each one of these events simultaneously opened an opportunity to test a prediction about industrial capitalism made in the *Communist Manifesto* by Karl Marx and Frederick Engels in 1848: that the class divisions of modern capitalist society, and its compulsion to exploit workers to extract surplus value, would force workers to organise themselves both to challenge capital's rule at the point of production and assert themselves as alternative rulers as the first step towards a communist classless society. In each of these countries, independent workers' movements did indeed play a decisive part in toppling the tyrannies. In addition, these workers' movements developed far-reaching aspirations for workers' control of production precipitating some remarkable if short-lived experiments. In each case Soviet Communism either through its satellite state, Poland, or satellite Communist Parties in South Africa and Iran, directly or indirectly, helped thwart these experiments.

¹⁶ See fn8.

Unravelling these complexities of course is the challenge. I sum it up in the research question: independent workers' movements played a decisive role in removing tyrannies in these countries but then lost the political initiative.¹⁷ But a further question is buried in the phrase "lost the political initiative". What does that mean? The implicit implication is that workers could have carried forward the political struggle in their own interests. But that would have required self-belief in such an audacious challenge to the new post-revolutionary status quo which, in different forms, emerged in all three countries, and in different forms capitulated to neoliberalism. Lenin argued that there can be no revolutionary movements without revolutionary theory. In each of the three countries, the revolutionary movements were dominated by revolutionary theories hostile to the ideas of communism summarised by Marx and Engels in the 1848 *Communist Manifesto*. Chapter 1 of the thesis explores these ideas, explaining how they, and, in particular, the organisational form they took, evolved, between 1848 and the Russian Revolution of 1917. It is argued that the organisational form is crucial, raising the question of what type of political party was required. The following chapters, addressing the revolutionary crises respectively in Poland, South Africa, Iran, argue that the failure to understand and learn the lessons from this earlier period was a major contributory factor to the workers' movements losing the political initiative.

An additional question raised by this argument is how workers develop the revolutionary socialist ideas they need for their struggles. What is it that makes them susceptible to join an appropriate revolutionary socialist or communist party. Chapter 1 emphasises the role of worker intellectuals stressed by Antonio Gramsci, the Italian philosopher and communist. David Mandel, discussing the revolutionary factory committees in the Russian Revolution in Chapter 1, also identifies individual worker intellectuals or worker cadres and how they emerged. He gives the example of A.Buzinov a member of the Social Revolutionary Party in Petrograd, "a self-made agitator" (Mandel 2017: 6). Self-made agitators tended to be drawn from the growing layer of skilled workers, especially in the metal working industries. Forced to think for themselves by the nature of their work, this spilled over into a growing self-awareness about their own role in workplace politics and in the wider society consumed by multiples crises. Mandel cites Buzinov.

¹⁷ The focus on the moment when these workers' movements lost the political initiative – and in each case I identify the month and the year, Iran - August 1979, Poland - March 1981, South Africa - August 1987, - concentrates much of the historical and political discussion around these periods. Whilst this weakens both medium and long term historical and political contextualisation, I don't believe that the core argument is undermined. In addition, the constraint of the official over-all word limit on the thesis imposed strict limits on chapter lengths.

“...Among the worker masses, one now (1906-7) heard the word ‘conscious’.” These were not necessarily members of political parties. They were far more numerous, ten times as many, says Buzinov. “Each was, in a way, a ‘legally reasoning individual’ capable of understanding everything around him...Life transformed them into the vanguard of the worker masses. Their native keen wit and worker sensitivity did not fail them when they exposed the hidden ends behind this or that manoeuvre of management...” Buzinov describes how these self-made agitators both reflected and encouraged “class separation”. “Life”, he says, “had hammered a wedge between workers and owners...This self-made agitator spoke of that which each worker had in his head but, being less developed, was unable to verbalise. After each one of his words, the workers would exclaim: ‘That’s it! That’s just what I wanted to say!’...” (Mandel 2017: 17-8). Mandel also cites a liberal journalist, S-skii, who became fascinated by the Petersburg workers led by the metal-working industry. Turners, founders, blacksmiths, mechanics, machinists, S-skii engaged them in conversations. “They are almost indistinguishable from our intellectuals. In my opinion, they are more interesting because their judgments are fresher, and their convictions, once established, are very firm...” (Mandel 2017: 14) Again, citing an unnamed observer, writing for a Russian periodical: “The spiritual process is an active one...the voice of an individual has begun to speak in the worker...(releasing a)...dynamism: the upper strata of the proletariat raise up the backward strata to their own level. Questions of honour and conscience are the first small bridges on which the proletarian shakes the hand of the semi-proletarian... (Mandel 2017: 19).

It was the equivalents of these men (and unfortunately far fewer women) that I wanted to interview in Poland, South Africa and Iran, as well as those activists and intellectuals who worked with them politically and knew them well, for my research into the revolutionary events in these countries. Of course there were obvious methodological limitations. Nearly forty years have passed transforming former young revolutionary firebrands into, in almost every case, far more conservative senior citizens. This undoubtedly compounded the problem of selective and fading memories. Nevertheless there are a number of mitigating factors. A wealth of secondary sources confirm, amplify and qualify these primary sources, in some cases tracking and recording the individuals during the period of their revolutionary interventions. In some cases the individuals had either written their autobiographies or recorded their experiences much closer to the period under examination with scholars and professional journalists. But a further factor is in play which I hadn’t anticipated but proved to be common to all the interviewees in all three countries, irrespective of the disappointing and, indeed, extremely demoralising political outcomes. This is the enormous pride in their personal

participation in the events, truly historical ground-breaking events, they describe. The experiences remain burned in their memories. This led to intriguing contradictions. It was suggested that I ignore for an interview a particularly important former bus drivers' leader of workers in a Solidarity region in Poland, despite his heroic role in the Solidarity underground after martial law had been declared in December 1981. It was advice which I, in turn, ignored. Today, he is a managing director of a private fleet of commercial vehicles. To put it discreetly, some of his current industrial relations practices are called into question by his critics. Whether this is true or not, his enthusiasm for the 'revolutionary' period of his life, which he continues to describe as revolutionary, remains undimmed, as will be noted both in the unedited interview and the extracts I used in the chapter. I could report almost identical experiences from all the former worker leaders, irrespective of their politics and social position today.¹⁸

Finally, I discover that I may be inadvertently making a contribution to what van der Linden describes as "an exciting transition to a truly Global Labour History" (van der Linden 2008: 1). Certainly, my research can in no way be described as "Eurocentric", one of the factors inhibiting such a transition in the past. It also identifies "global interconnections" essential to this approach (van der Linden 2008: 372). At the same time, I think my approach is simultaneously both less and more ambitious than that demanded by a truly Global Labour History. It is less ambitious in the sense that it does not devote enough attention to what van der Linden describes as the importance of what have been traditionally called, and too easily dismissed as, "the self-employed (part of the 'petty bourgeoisie') and poor outcasts (the 'lumpen-proletariat')." Van der Linden argues that these classifications simply do not apply in the Global South (van der Linden 2008: 10). I am not able to address this argument properly and certainly for Poland I provide no empirical detail about them. However these groups are absolutely essential in all three chapters. In Poland, the Solidarity workers' movement succeeded in uniting these groups behind the workers in the large workplaces organised in the newly independent trade union, including at an absolutely pivotal potentially revolutionary moment, rural peasant farmers. In South Africa and Iran the opposite was the case. At the risk of over-simplification, I designate these groups the urban poor. As we shall see, in the case of South Africa, there was tension between the newly organised black trade unions in the workplaces and the urban poor in the black townships. Similarly, in Iran there was tension between the workers' 'shoras', workers' councils, in the advanced modernised workplaces and

¹⁸ Unedited transcripts of all interviews are reproduced in alphabetical order in the Appendix. In the chapters, each one is referenced by the letter 'A' for Appendix, immediately followed by the initials of the interviewee's name.

the urban poor, unemployed, semi-employed or working in tiny traditional workshops in the bazaars. This tension had decisive implications for the politics of the period which I most certainly do address. And this brings me to where I think my project stretches beyond the limits of a Global History or at least has to insist on a tight focus on two dimensions of global politics in the latter part of the last century. The first one is the implications of revolutionary processes once unleashed in these three societies, comparing and contrasting the strategic central role of the organised workers' movements. The second one is the impact on the revolutionary processes of the conservatism of Soviet Communism as expressed through its satellite state in Poland and its satellite communist parties and organisations in South Africa and Iran.

In an earlier study, van der Linden writes about the limitations of making formal transnational comparisons. "Time and again researchers are discovering that, although formal methods are useful, it is in-depth ideographic knowledge that is decisive in the end." (van der Linden 2003: 189) I understand this to mean that the unique aspects of a social phenomena take precedence over aspects that might be comparable.¹⁹ But in a footnote, van der Linden proposes a solution to this problem. "...counterfactuals might also be important since each comparative hypothesis logically contains a counterfactual: if one believes Y is caused by X it follows that one presumes Y would not have occurred without X. One way in which a researcher can test the plausibility of his or her hypothesis is to convert the hypothesis into a counterfactual argument" (van der Linden 2003: 196fn76)

I interpret this argument to allow counterfactuals to make at least a limited contribution to a research investigation. To return to hypotheses already signalled in my research. I argue that Soviet Communism, manifest in different forms, is a conservative factor in the revolutionary processes unleashed in Poland, South Africa, Iran. This is not a counterfactual, I claim to provide empirical evidence to prove it. It follows that without the malign influence of Soviet Communism, different outcomes might have been possible. Framed in this way, the problematic aspect of counterfactuals, if presented as dogmatic certainties, is addressed. An alternative outcome is presented only as a possibility.

To make this 'concrete', I argue that one of the reasons why in each of the countries the organised workers' movements failed was because they were unable to build their own independent workers' political parties. Two counterfactuals are present. First, this failure was

¹⁹ <https://www.encyclopedia.com/social-sciences/dictionaries-thesauruses-pictures-and-press-releases/ideographic-versus-nomothetic-approaches>

contingent on the presence of already-existing communist parties. Second, independent workers' parties may have helped guide the workers' movements to reshape the outcomes following the removal of the dictatorships. But these are offered only as tentative possibilities, not certainties, hence, they have a legitimate place in the overall argument.

Chapter One: A workers' political party for a workers' revolution? From the 1848 Communist Manifesto to the world's first socialist revolution, Russia October 1917

This chapter develops the theoretical and historical framework and background to the three cases studies, Poland, South Africa and Iran which constitute the three core chapters of the thesis

Chapter Two: The Lost Revolution in Poland 1980-81

The chapter analyses in detail the rise and fall of the Solidarity workers' movement in these two years before martial law was imposed. It argues that its original aspirations for workers self-management were both legitimate and plausible.

Chapter Three: The black workers' challenge to South African apartheid in the 1980's: how the struggle was lost.

The chapter analyses the role of the independent black trade unions in the struggle against apartheid in South Africa in the 1980's. It focuses particularly on the "workerist" movement and its aspirations for workers control.

Chapter Four: How workers helped make and then lose the Iranian Revolution 1979

The chapter notes that oil workers' strikes played a strategically central role in the Iranian Revolution which overthrew the shah in 1979. "Shoras" (workers' councils) then surfaced in the oil industry and throughout the modernised industrial sector. Analysis focuses on their role in attempting to resist the consolidation of the Islamic regime.

Conclusion

Chapter 1

A workers' political party for a workers' revolution? From the 1848 Communist Manifesto to the world's first socialist revolution, Russia October 1917

Introduction

The Communist Manifesto written by Karl Marx and Frederick Engels must rank as one of modernity's greatest historical documents. Published on the eve of revolutionary upheavals that swept across Europe in 1848, over one hundred and fifty years later it has lost none of its vitality. Its indictment of the capitalist system retains an extraordinary contemporary relevance. True, its call to arms for the working class to overthrow capitalism is likely today to generate caution, scepticism, even cynicism, in the shadow of the apparent failure of communism in Russia in the last century. The reforms also in the twentieth century seemed to ameliorate at least some of the more grotesque excesses of capitalism that Marx and Engels had identified. Yet an intense curiosity lingers about the roots of Marx's and Engel's most audacious prediction. Was *The Communist Manifesto* a manifesto aimed directly at the workers' movements in the 1848 revolutions or for a political party that would intervene in these movements? Both the questions and the answers evolve over time. The chapter attempts to track the process. *The Communist Manifesto* provides strategic and tactical guidelines for accomplishing the ultimate goal of a classless society. Marx's and Engels's insights here, developed in many of their earlier and later voluminous writings, chart a route to a unique post Enlightenment vision of human freedom, justice and economic, social and political equality. And yet the decisive mechanism of the role of political organisation remains under developed in their writings. The nineteenth century's greatest communists never satisfactorily resolved how to create an organisation that both attracted and created fellow communists. Nor did they satisfactorily resolve, either in theory or practice, how such an organisation would enhance the revolutionary potential of the working class. This chapter will attempt a fuller understanding.

It will trace how Marx and Engels responded to a number of decisive events as industrialising capitalism transformed nineteenth century Europe and a working class political and trade union movement began to emerge as a permanent outcome of this process: the Chartist movement in the UK of the 1830's and 1840's - the world's first mass revolutionary workers' movement, the 1848 revolutionary upheavals in Europe, the Utopian Socialists, the launch of the First International in the 1860's, the Paris Commune of 1871, the emergence of the

German socialist party in the 1870's – the world's first mass-based workers' political party. All of these events helped shape and consolidate what appeared to be a particularly important, even conclusive, achievement of Marx and Engels towards the end of the nineteenth century, the founding of the Second International. Here was an internationally based working class political party, insisting that it spoke in the name of Marx and Engels following their deaths in this period. It had even helped invent and promote a new word and then proudly declare itself to be its living expression: Marxism. Here, then, was the political instrument that would help achieve the international socialist or communist working class revolution in the twentieth century, so confidentially predicted by the Communist Manifesto, the century before.

Alas, the opposite turned out to be the truth. In 1914, the Second International would face its greatest test. Britain and Germany were about to plunge the world into an unprecedented bloody carnage, literally, the world's first world war. The cause was well understood by Marxists. Britain and Germany were the two principal imperialist countries. They were about to go to war over colonial possessions. Millions would perish. The Second International had a clearly defined responsibility to try and halt the slaughter before it began. That, after all, was the purpose, the *raison d'être*, of the International, to defend the interests of the international working class against the warring national interests of the capitalist class in each country, in each nation state. Workers should refuse to become soldiers, if they were already soldiers, they should refuse to fight. All eyes were on the German socialist party and its leading Marxist theoretician, Karl Kautsky, together they were a decisive influence in the Second International. But Kautsky and the parliamentary party had for some time been expressing illusions in the German national state and the prospects for reform. There was a grim logic in their support for the war. But that made their decision no less shocking, a capitulation of such magnitude that it would inevitably shatter the Second International.

Two of the most famous names in twentieth century Marxist history would now attempt to pick up the pieces, Rosa Luxemburg and Vladimir Lenin. The latter part of the chapter will trace how Lenin in particular, and to a much lesser extent, Luxemburg now responded to the calamity. Luxemburg was already the German party's most outspoken critic, hostile to its illusions in the nation state and the parliamentary process as an agency of change, and the increasing institutionalisation of the trade unions as a curb on workers' self-activity. Luxemburg would remain in the German socialist party, but by 1916 had formed with Karl Liebknecht, the anti-war Spartacus faction within it. They would both be jailed for their anti-war resistance. Lenin continued to build his anti-war Bolshevik (Communist) Party amongst

workers and soldiers in the conspiratorial circumstances dictated by conditions of Tsarist Russia. Both Luxemburg and Lenin predicted correctly that the war would trigger revolutionary upheavals across Europe. But they differed about the type of political party that was now required. Kautsky's approach, the German socialist party and the Second International had been the taken-for-granted model for both of them. Lenin famously returned to the great nineteenth century German philosopher Hegel, who had so influenced Marx, in his effort to identify the flaws that had wrecked the Second International. Later his *State and Revolution* would complement the *Communist Manifesto* as one of the great founding documents for international socialism in the twentieth century. Both Russia and Germany did indeed experience revolutionary upheavals as the carnage of the first world war dragged to its bloody conclusion. Lenin and his Bolshevik Party would lead a successful socialist revolution in Russia, based on workers' and soldiers' and peasants' councils, the soviets. Luxemburg, originally unconvinced about the need for an independent Communist Party, helped form one too late for intervention in the workers' and soldiers' councils in Germany in 1918. The lessons to be learned from Lenin's Bolsheviks' victory in the 1917 Russian Revolution, before it was engulfed by civil war, will conclude the chapter. In particular, there is an attempt to unravel a well-worn shibboleth on the revolutionary left – nationalisation under workers control. This is nothing less than a summary of a famous passage from the *Communist Manifesto*.

the first step in the revolution by the working class is to raise the proletariat to the position of ruling class...to centralise all instruments of production in the hands of the state ie the proletariat...and to increase the total of productive forces as rapidly as possible (Marx Engels 1998: 60).

This is sometimes also described as 'workers power' and for a few months it was a reality in revolutionary Russia – a precious historical moment demanding the closest attention both for its own sake, but also for the light it throws on later revolutionary working class upheavals – not least the three case studies under investigation here. Common threads too often ignored in so much of the discourse that passes for serious scholarly commentary on the apparent failure of communism. Democratically elected rank and file workers' leaders at the point of production with mandates to pursue deepening aspirations for workers' control – self-management, 'autogestion', the slogan particularly associated with the 'French May events' of 1968 - that accompany all these revolutionary upheavals. Workers' leaders as well as many of their militant supporters, already revolutionary cadres, involved in constant discussion about the theory and practice of socialism and communism, prospects and challenges. As we shall see, with good reason, Antonio Gramsci, the famous Italian communist philosopher and political leader, insisted that these were worker intellectuals. An intellectual of a new type,

that the older intellectuals from the middle class professions, even if they were on the Left, had to understand, engage with, learn from, as well as encourage, helping to raise the worker activists' newly discovered intellectual self-confidence. But their workplace committees at the high points of revolution had to be linked to the wider revolutionary movement engulfing the rest of society. Workers' self-emancipation, the foundation for a communist society as Marx and Engels understood it, cannot be restricted literally to the point of production. Economic power had to be accompanied by political power and this meant control of the state, a workers' state displacing the capitalists' state. Even workers seizing control of the means of production and creating their own state is an insufficient condition for its success. A workers' political party, already understanding this 'line of march', is an essential ingredient. As we shall see in this chapter, Lenin's Bolsheviks fulfilled these conditions. Alas, in the three case studies, the three chapters that follow this one, the revolutionary upheavals in Poland, South Africa and Iran with independent workers' movements centre stage, the Communists, who claimed the mantle of Lenin's Bolsheviks, undermined them. A disconnect, arguably the single most important, and least understood, development of the twentieth century, had occurred between Soviet Communism, its satellite states and communist parties, and the original vision of the 1848 Communist Manifesto.

i. The 1848 Communist Manifesto, the working class and the role of a communist party

Marx and Engels regarded workers power as the essential pre-condition for establishing the foundations for a communist society, as is clear from the passage from *The Communist Manifesto*, cited above. But *The Communist Manifesto* itself was a pre-condition for workers power. The Communists had to "publish their views, their aims" in "a manifesto of the party itself" (Marx Engels 1998: 34). The Communists were indispensable to the revolutionary development of the working class,

The most advanced and resolute section of the working class....theoretically, they have...the advantage of clearly understanding the line of march, the conditions, and the ultimate general results of the proletarian movement (Marx Engels 1998: 50-51).

There had been since the French Revolution of 1789 differing interpretations of Communism. But it was the interpretation of Marx and Engels, with the launch of their *Communist Manifesto* by the Communist League, on the eve of the 1848 Europe-wide revolutionary wave, which would come to dominate the Communist perspective in the growing workers' movements around the world. A formulation from Marx and Engels's *Communist Manifesto*

appears to interpret working class organisation and political party organisation as interchangeable “...This organisation of proletarians into a class, and consequently *into a political party...*” (Marx, Engels 1998: 46)

This is conditioned by another passage.

All previous historical movements were movements of minorities, or in the interest of minorities. The proletarian movement is the self-conscious, independent movement of the immense majority, in the interests of the immense majority. The proletariat, the lowest stratum of our present society, cannot stir, cannot raise itself up, without the whole superincumbent strata of official society being sprung into the air (Marx, Engels 1998: 49).

The last quotation could be interpreted to imply that the proletariat spontaneously erupts and overthrows its oppressors. Except that we have the phrase “self-conscious”. Is this self-consciousness or class consciousness developed through struggle alone or is there a decisive role for a party, “the Communists...(who understand) the line of march”? As we shall see Marx and Engels never satisfactorily resolved this question. It’s true they ask.

“In what relation do the Communists stand to the proletarians as a whole?”

But the answer is ambiguous.

The Communists do not form a separate party opposed to other parties. They have no interests separate and apart from those of the proletariat as a whole. They do not set up any sectarian principles of their own, by which to shape and mould the proletarian movement (Marx Engels 1998: 50).

In his excellent discussion of Marx, Engels and their concept of the party, Monty Johnstone argues that they left no systematic theory of the party. They tended to evolve their ideas about the proletarian party as they went along, relating them to their analyses of very different historical situations (Johnstone 1967: 121). This is a helpful approach providing we recognise two underlying trends, even if contradictory, that remain consistent in Marx and Engels’s thinking about ‘the party.’ Firstly, that the principal theoreticians, the Communists who most fully understood the line of march, were Marx and Engels themselves. Marx and Engels “presented themselves and the Communists as the theoretical vanguard of the class” (Johnstone 1967: 123). They maintained consistency in this position even when they were detached from any form of workers’ organisation and, confusingly, continued to describe themselves as ‘a party.’²⁰ This brings us to the second principle. The “theoretical vanguard”

²⁰ Nimtz (2000: 155) cites the example of their departure from the Communist League in 1848 to edit the ‘bourgeois’ liberal democratic newspaper, *Neue Rheinische Zeitung NRZ*, in Cologne. They believed

does not organise “the working class to constitute itself as a political party.” It seeks to influence, to become an organic part of, whatever political form mass-based working class organisation takes. The mass-based working class organisation then itself becomes ‘the party’.

Marx had the Chartists²¹ in mind when he wrote against the French philosopher Proudhon’s hostility to strikes in *The Poverty of Philosophy*. Marx described how workers in struggle first formed trade unions and then a “large political party under the name of Chartists” (Marx 1955: 194). This informed that sentence in *The Communist Manifesto* “...This organisation of proletarians into a class, and consequently *into a political party*...” (Marx, Engels 1998: 46, Johnstone: 124). Or as Kouvelakis has put it recently, “(the) ‘communist party’, that for Marx and Engels is not...a separate organisation but rather a tendency within the labour movement considered as a whole (the ‘class party’)” (Kouvelakis 2016: 82). But this still begs the question about how Marx and Engels conceived of “the Communists”. Marx and Engels never settled it. Certainly their ambivalent relations with the Communist League, discussed in part iv offered little clarity. This crucial question is only finally and convincingly addressed in the twentieth century by both Lenin and the great Italian revolutionary and philosopher, Antonio Gramsci. Lenin describes *purposive workers*. “Genuine heroes”, says Lenin, who show a “passionate drive toward knowledge and toward socialism” (Lih 2008: 344-45). These were the worker cadres of the Bolshevik Party. We might even describe them as worker intellectuals.

This is an argument developed by Gramsci drawn partly from his experience in the Italian city of Turin as editor of *L’Ordine Nuovo*, 1919, “the paper of the factory councils”, as Gramsci described it (Fiori 1990: 120). Gramsci’s knowledge of the flourishing of workers’ soviets or councils in the early stages of the 1917 Russian Revolution, allowed him to intervene directly in the Italian factory council movement. He and the paper became very popular with the workers, speaking regularly at their meetings. This dynamic of interaction between intellectual and worker helped propel the movement forward, both on a learning curve. The expectation was nothing less than the workers replacing the capitalists and organising production. (Fiori: 119) Gramsci explains.

L’Ordine Nuovo worked, week by week, to develop certain forms of new intellectualism and determine its new concepts...The mode of existence of the new intellectual can no

this was the best method of advancing the workers’ cause in Germany 1848, to prioritise the ‘bourgeois’ democratic revolution, modelled on the French Revolution of 1789. They would later, as we shall see, strongly repudiate this position, but the point here is they saw themselves acting on behalf of the ‘party’, as the most advanced theoretical section of the organised working class.

²¹ See (ii) *Marx and Engels and the world’s first workers mass movement: The Chartists*, p28. The Chartists demanded universal suffrage which they hoped would result in a workers’ parliament.

longer consist of eloquence, the external and momentary arousing of sentiments and passions, but must consist of being actively involved in practical life, as a builder, an organiser, 'permanently persuasive'... (Gramsci 2016: 122).

These permanently active persuaders are "*cadres* (his emphasis) of intellectuals of a new type who arise directly from the masses through remaining in contact with them" (Gramsci 2016: 73). Nothing less than changing the "ideological panorama" of an age is at stake. At the same time Gramsci accepts that a "hierarchy of intellectual competence" is inevitable.

This "may culminate in one great individual philosopher, if he is capable of re-living concretely the ideological community of the masses...and so succeeds in formally elaborating the collective doctrine in a way which is most akin and appropriate to the modes of thought of a collective thinker" (Gramsci 2016: 73).

This passage requires close inspection. The phrase "hierarchy of intellectual competence" and the introduction of "one great individual philosopher" at first sight seems to reflect the old order re-appearing in the workers' movement, directly at odds with Gramsci's perspective. In part this may be about some deliberate obfuscation, Gramsci shielding himself from the prison censor, these are, after all, writings from his prison notebooks. But a stronger explanation is necessary. Firstly, it is a statement of the obvious. There is inevitably a hierarchy of intellectual competence, reflecting capitalism's division of mental and physical labour, with particularly inspired and inspiring intellectuals, not least Gramsci himself (though he probably had Lenin mind), for whom philosopher and political leader are interchangeable, displaying outstanding leadership roles. But, secondly, attention needs to be paid to the last sentence. The objective is to develop the modes of thought of "a collective thinker." This suggests dynamic interaction with the intention of minimising the effects of hierarchy, working together to equalise thought and action, where the workers' experience fuses with the greater knowledge of the more developed intellectual to the benefit of both. We have an interesting example with the role played by *L'Ordine Nuovo*. Gramsci explains why workers loved the paper. "They found something of themselves, their own better selves." The paper "was permeated with their own spirit of self-searching." It endeavoured to answer all questions in a manner that avoided "cold intellectual construction but flowed out of our own discussions with the best workers..." (Gramsci 2016: 24). The "collective thinker" is *The Modern Prince*, the workers' political party, (Gramsci 2016: 146). Gramsci also issues a warning about the isolated workers' leader who lacks this organised political and intellectual support.

The active man of the masses works practically, but he does not have a clear theoretical consciousness of his actions... Rather his theoretical consciousness may be historically opposed to his actions. We can almost say that he has two theoretical consciousnesses (or one contradictory consciousness), one implicit in his actions, which unites him with

all his colleagues in the practical transformation of reality, and one...which he has inherited from the past and which he accepts without criticism...this is ...not without consequence...it can reach a point where the contradiction of his conscience will not permit any action...and produces a state of moral and political passivity (Gramsci 2016: 66-7).

Gramsci goes on to describe the struggle between two 'hegemonies' in the worker's mind: the pull of a vision of the future, and its potential strategies and tactics, constantly being fashioned and re-fashioned with his comrades, tested in struggle, as part of a collective thinking and highly practical process: and the pull of the past inducing passivity.

Critical understanding of oneself, therefore, comes through the struggle of political 'hegemonies', of opposing directions...culminating in a higher elaboration of one's own conception of reality. The awareness of being part of a determined hegemonic force...is the first step towards a further and progressive self-consciousness in which theory and practice finally unite (Gramsci 2016: 66-7).

As Thomas has put it, the permanently active persuaders are in an "organic integration with the masses, in a reciprocal relationship...where they are at least as often 'the educated' as 'the educators'...working out...principles and problems which the masses have posed in their own practical activity" (Thomas 2010: 436). The result is "a theory that, coinciding and identifying itself with the decisive elements of the same practice, may accelerate the historical process taking place rendering practice more...coherent...setting it to work..." (Gramsci 1995: 384, Thomas: 380).

This is a re-working of *revolutionary practice*, key to Marx's Third Thesis in the *Theses on Feuerbach* (Marx, Engels 1996), which Thomas argues exerts an enormous pull on Gramsci's thinking. The argument is underlined with the stunning image of the 'Aeolian harp', invoked by the young Marx: "a sounding board that absorbs the cacophony of existing contradictions and attempts to 'tune' them or reorganise them into more harmonious forms" (Thomas: 435).

Here, as in revolutionary Russia, we have worker cadres or worker intellectuals. But were they also the cadres of the Chartist movement who influenced Marx's and Engels's thinking about communism? And were they also the cadres who led the revolt that formed that early experimental form of communism, the Paris Commune in 1871? Individual workers' leaders will be briefly tracked here, observing whether they anticipate 'communist' cadres in what with hindsight we might describe as the Marxist and Leninist pre-Stalinist communist party tradition.

ii. Marx and Engels and the world's first workers mass movement: The Chartists²²

The Chartists demanded universal suffrage as well as vastly improved pay and conditions, its methods of struggle, strikes, led to the general strike of 1842. Its most famous national leaders were not drawn from the vast mass of the new factory workers, but most of its rank and file local leaders were. The most talented amongst them became nationally known not least through the pages of the extraordinary Chartist newspaper the *Northern Star*. Furthermore, some of them equated universal suffrage with workers power replacing the competitive economic system and its private owners. Generally, though, the politics of Chartism were contradictory, its leadership divided and unstable. Here is one of these local leaders, Richard Pilling, power loom workers' leader in Lancashire, well known throughout northwest England, addressing a 6000 strong workers' meeting in Stockport. His speech was scrambled by the police reporter taking notes but the thrust is still clear:

Had the working people been in the legislature by their Charter this Nation would now have been the most prosperous Nation in the world. The working people as the origin of the arts, improvements, ingenuity and wealth, of the empire are the only fit persons to govern this or any other nation (Chase 2007: 230-1).²³

There is no ambiguity here. Pilling is indeed calling for transformed social relations with workers, as the wealth creators, in power. Pilling's speech at his trial in 1843, after the failed general strike, (59 defendants facing charges which included conspiracy and sedition) is well known to historians. Chase argues that here at least he was more effective than national Chartists' leader, Feargus O'Connor. It concluded with the words: "the masters conspired to kill me, and I combined to keep myself alive" (Chase: 233).

Kirk insists that the speech was nothing less than "an indictment of the factory system run on capitalist lines." Pilling detailed, on the basis of personal experience the evils of the system:

overproduction; intolerably long hours of labour; competition and the beating down of wages; unemployment and poverty in the midst of plenty; the employment of child and juvenile labour and the break-up of the family; lack of independence and control; the

²² As we have already noted it was the Chartists that informed the sentence in *The Communist Manifesto* "...This organisation of proletarians into a class, and consequently into a political party..." (Marx, Engels 1998: 46) (Johnstone 1967: 124) also (Gilbert 1981: 53) The intriguing failure of Marx and Engels explicitly to acknowledge the Chartists cannot be addressed here. There may have been some unstated or unresolved ambiguity about the Chartists. Marx was very dependent on Engels's knowledge of the Chartist movement. At the same time, Engels's pre-marxist 'utopian socialist' theoretical approach to the Chartists had ill-equipped him to fully comprehend it (Kouvelakis 2003: 222-29). The utopian socialists will be discussed shortly. Draper argues Marx had previously misunderstood the Chartists' movement and the defeat of their general strike in 1842 (Draper 1977: 176).

²³ See also Charlton on the prospects in the 1840's for a workers' parliament (Charlton 1997: 86).

reification of human beings under commodity production; tyrannical and hypocritical actions of the cotton manufacturers – their insensitivity to the sufferings of the operatives, blind adherence to the tenets of orthodox political economy, opposition to combination amongst workers, their frequent victimisation of labour activists and their abhorrence of Chartism.. (Kirk 1985: 19, Charlton 1997: 49).

This is Kirk's interpretation of Pilling's speech. Remarkably a version of the transcript of the trial has survived.²⁴ It seems reasonable to conclude that Pilling was a potential cadre, worker intellectual. Kirk adds that these arguments were common amongst many of the other defendants. And that there is a broad consensus amongst Chartist historians, including Dorothy Thompson, that the grievances articulated by Pilling lay at the heart of Chartism's appeal to the factory population of the North of England.

The early influence on the Chartists of James 'Bronterre' O'Brien deserves exploration. The Irish radical was main "mentor" (Foot 2005: 94) to George Julian Harney, one of the very few Chartist leaders, at least for a period, close to Marx and Engels. Harney published the first English translation of *The Communist Manifesto* in November 1850 (Fernbach 1973: 22). We catch an important glimpse of O'Brien in E.P.Thompson's classic study *The Making of the English Working Class*, "a theorist of stature to define the working class predicament" (Thompson 1968: 903). "He sought with considerable genius, to twist together the tradition of ultra-radicalism with that of Owenism,²⁵ into a revolutionary Socialism," demanding "the expropriation of the propertied classes, and a network of Owenite communities." O'Brien identified with Babeuf and Conspiracy of Equals, the extreme left wing of the radical republicans of the French Revolution (Thompson: 903). His writings are a central thread through the abundant agitations of the early 1830's..."(Thompson 1968: 905). When Chartist leader, Feargus O'Connor launched what would become the movement's most famous newspaper, the *Northern Star* in 1837, O'Brien was its editor (Foot 2005: 97). Thompson goes so far as to suggest that Chartism's revolutionary intellectuals like O'Brien explicitly anticipate Marx.

When Marx was still in his teens, the battle for the minds of trades unionists, between a capitalist and a socialist political economy had been (at least temporarily) won...'What is capital?' Asked a writer in the *Pioneer*. 'It is reserved labour!'... A 'Parliament'...could be formed, delegated directly from the workshops and the mills... (Thompson 1968: 912).

²⁴ posted on the internet by a modern Chartist enthusiast

http://www.archive.org/stream/trialfeargusoco00ocogoo/trialfeargusoco00ocogoo_djvu.txt

²⁵ Robert Owen, Utopian Socialist, see next section.

But O'Brien turned out to be politically unstable.²⁶ By 1842, the year of the general strike, O'Brien was no longer a revolutionary, preaching conciliation instead (Foot 1968: 123-4). There can be no doubt about the revolutionary potential of the world's first mass workers' movement – with some ideological sense of challenging fundamentally the emerging capitalist order. But there most certainly is a case for doubting its value as a model for a working class political party.²⁷

iii. The Utopian Socialists

Engels's pamphlet *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific*,²⁸ introduced and promoted by Marx, though published much later, highlights one of the most influential political traditions that immediately preceded 'Communism' as Marx and Engels would develop it. In different forms it would continue to offer a competitive challenge, ultimately justifying conciliation between the social classes and thus contributing to the reformist socialist tradition which would so powerfully take root in the twentieth century. Nevertheless Marx and Engels were keen to acknowledge the achievements of the utopian socialists, before explaining their criticisms. They were particularly complimentary about England's most famous utopian socialist, Robert Owen. Owen had broken with his class, turning his back on

on getting rich quickly...From 1800 to 1829 he directed the great cotton spinning mill of New Lanark in Scotland. He transformed a population, which originally consisted of...very demoralised elements into a model colony, in which drunkenness, police, magistrates, lawsuits, poor law relief...charity were unknown (Engels 1993: 70).

Owen is even praised as one of the first genuine communists.²⁹ But Engels, at the same time, develops the argument that first appeared in *The Communist Manifesto*'s criticism of the utopian socialists. They saw the working class as a "suffering" class (Marx Engels 1998: 73),

²⁶ reinforcing Kouvelakis's view of the nascent reformism of the 1789 French Communist and utopian socialist tradition and its impact on Chartism (Kouvelakis 2003: 222-29).

²⁷ With hindsight we can speculate that it needed a communist leadership, training and debating with its cadres, coherent strategies, tactics and objectives, responsive to fast moving and changing economic, social and political circumstances, but utopian to impose that backwards on Chartist history.

²⁸ The pamphlet was part of a wider critique, *Anti-Dühring*. Dühring was a Berlin academic influential in the German socialist party in the mid 1870's. Marx and Engels dismissed what they regarded as his crude claims about science and society. Their criticism of him was an opportunity to reinforce their own theories of socialism and communism as having firm scientific foundations.

²⁹ Some of the most powerful ideas in *The Communist Manifesto* were first developed by the utopian socialists. It was Louis Blanc who first coined the egalitarian slogan, "from each according to his capacities, to each according to his needs." The Enlightenment and the French Revolution and its extreme left wing of radical republicans both contributed to demands for communist interpretations of Equality, Liberty, Fraternity. But the revolutionary communism of Blanqui, arguably the most important of the inheritors of the French Revolutionary tradition, would be imposed from above thus sharing the elitism of the Owenites (Callinicos 1983: 47-51).

unable to act on its own behalf. In its infancy, they argue, that might have been true, but the “progressive historical development” of the working class, meant that it can and does fight for its own interests. Communists had to place their visionary ideas, their talents at the disposal of the movement and not see the working class as dependent on them, leading inevitably to a new form of elitism. Marx and Engels drew the following distinction. “Therefore, although the originators of these systems were, in many respects, revolutionary, their disciples have, in every case, formed mere reactionary sects...The Owenites in England...oppose the Chartists...” (Marx Engels 1998: 74-75)

iv. 1848, “Springtime of Peoples”³⁰, *The Communist Manifesto* and the Communist League

A spectre is haunting Europe – the spectre of Communism. All the powers of old Europe have entered into a holy alliance to exorcise the spectre (Marx Engels 1998: 34).

With these famous lines at the start of *The Communist Manifesto*, Marx and Engels fired the opening polemical shots of the 1848 “Springtime of the Peoples”. The Pope and the Russian Tsar, notorious Austrian and French statesmen were identified in the alliance. But interestingly so were “French Radicals.” Perhaps unwittingly, Marx and Engels here had also identified the potential strength of the alliance and the weakness of the Communist “threat”. “French Radicals” symbolised the radical bourgeoisie and their political and intellectual representatives. But weren’t they supposed to be on the revolutionary side of the barricades? *The Communist Manifesto* often surprises first time readers with its many early pages appearing to celebrate the achievements of capitalism: “...during its rule of scarce one hundred years, (it) has created more massive and more colossal productive forces than have all preceding generations together” (Marx Engels 1998: 40). The bourgeoisie is even presented as a revolutionary class which “cannot exist without constantly revolutionising the instruments of production, and thereby the relations of production, and with them the whole...of society...” (Marx Engels: 38). In one of the most brilliant passages, which has stood the test of time like perhaps no other part of the *Manifesto*, we learn that

all fixed, fast frozen relations, with their train of...prejudices and opinions, are swept away...All that is solid melts into air, all that is holy is profaned, and man is at last compelled to face with sober senses, (the) real conditions of life...(Marx Engels: 38-9).

In his biography of Marx, Sperber makes the interesting observation that in the original German version of this passage “elements of the society of orders evaporate” (Sperber 2013: 206). It is the economic power deriving from the capitalists’ steam engines that will

³⁰ (Hobsbawm 1977: 21).

“evaporate” or “terminate the anachronistic society of orders that Friedrich Wilhelm IV and his supporters idealised,” (Sperber: 207) the world before the 1789 French Revolution (Sperber: 206). Sperber highlights these revolutionary expectations of Marx and Engels on the eve of the European-wide 1848 revolutions. A decisive revolutionary democratic breakthrough by the bourgeoisie is anticipated in alliance with the proletariat which will then, in turn challenge bourgeois dominance. This is because

...modern industry also created the proletariat, not only increasing in number, but becoming concentrated in greater masses, its strength grows, and it feels that strength more...workers begin to form combinations (trade unions) against the bourgeois; they club together to keep up the rate of wages...

Now and then the workers are victorious, but only for a time. *The real fruit of their battle lies, not in the immediate result, but in the ever expanding union of workers...* This organisation of proletarians into a class, and consequently *into a political party* is constantly being upset by the competition between the workers themselves. *But it ever rises up again, stronger, firmer, mightier. It compels legislative recognition...Thus the Ten Hours Bill was carried* (Marx Engels: 45-6).

Legislative recognition was a double-edged marker. It would sap revolutionary energies³¹ but it was also a symbol of the potential power of the working class, workers “rising up again, stronger, firmer, mightier.” And it was the latter that terrified not only the anachronistic feudal rulers like Friedrich Wilhelm IV and their hangers-on across Europe but much more importantly the would-be “revolutionary” republican bourgeoisie. As Count Cavour of Piedmont, the future architect of united Italy, observed in 1846 that if the “social order were to be genuinely menaced...many of the most determined republicans would be...the first to join the ranks of the conservative party” (Hobsbawm 1977: 28). The barricade fighting that gripped Paris for three days in February 1848 ended with the overthrow of the monarchy and the proclamation of the republic. “Electrifying” the whole of Europe, (Sperber: 214), it appeared to signal the much anticipated European-wide revolutionary upheaval. Marx and Engels headed for Cologne which would simultaneously be a centre for the Communist League to organise workers and for Marx to edit the ‘bourgeois’ liberal democratic newspaper, *Neue Rheinische Zeitung, NRZ*. Cologne had a particularly active communist-led workers’ movement as well as what appeared to be a vibrant middle class agitating for full democratic rights. Marx and the *NRZ* would be the bridge between the two movements. *NRZ* would call

for the creation of a revolutionary German republic, a German version of France 1792-94, the ‘bourgeois revolution,’ in Marx’s terminology. The nationwide network of

³¹ “Legislative recognition” carried with it unanticipated and far reaching political implications and risks which have dominated the movement from then until now. That capitalism could absorb working class protest and split the movement between reform and revolution.

workers associations would support such a revolutionary initiative, but it would also prepare for the next stage...the communist workers' revolution (Sperber: 217-8).

However there was a problem. The CL in Cologne was led by 'True Socialist' Andreas Gottschalk (Sperber: 220). In the *Communist Manifesto*, Marx and Engels had devoted a whole section exposing, as they saw it, competing tendencies or strands of misleading socialist and communist thought and organisation. No less than three pages were devoted to the German based strand of 'True Socialism', associated with their former comrade, Moses Hess. The most damning accusation was that by opposing bourgeois demands like "freedom of the press...liberty and equality" (Marx Engels 1998: 68) it served the interests of reactionary German governments "as a welcome scarecrow" (Marx Engels: 68), "a weapon" for the reactionaries to "fight the German bourgeoisie" (Marx Engels: 69). Although Gottschalk's opposition to liberals and democrats appeared to come from the left, his refusal to cooperate with them in constituent assembly elections, even refusing to stand communist candidates in these "bourgeois farce" of elections (Sperber: 220-21), the main beneficiaries were the conservatives. Again, on the one hand Gottschalk called for a workers' republic, on the other hand he insisted that no action was necessary to bring about such a republic. This was the echo of his mentor, Moses Hess who had argued that the vast majority of the population could be won by argument to these ideas. (Sperber: 221) This also echoed the earlier 'utopian socialist' Engels's writing about the Chartists (Kouvelakis: 228) mentioned earlier.³²

This led Marx to concentrate all his efforts on *NRZ*. The paper campaigned for full democracy, damning the Prussian Constituent Assembly in Berlin and the German National Assembly in Frankfurt for failing to bring Germany's authoritarian monarchies under control. *NRZ* demanded a 'German Republic, one and indivisible', "a telling phrase from the slogan of the Jacobins during the Reign of Terror in the French Revolution" (Sperber: 225). However Marx found himself a victim of the old English proverb warning of the impossibility of changing horses in midstream. When *NRZ* campaigned in defence of the "June Days" in Paris 1848, taking the workers' side in the fierce barricade fighting with the republican government and predicting communist revolution, Cologne's democrats rounded on him. Uncharacteristically Marx performed a political somersault and repudiated his own writings (Sperber: 227). Everything was to be subordinated to an all class alliance aimed at destroying authoritarian Prussian rule. It was a strategy that would come to haunt Marx, again in the shadow of 1789.

³² Footnotes, 22, 26..

The complex series of events, well beyond the scope of what it is possible to analyse here, (Sperber: 227-236), that then followed didn't alter the fundamental character of what became the failed 1848 revolutions. The problem Marx faced was rooted in the accuracy of the Italian Count's prediction, cited earlier. In 1848 the working class movement that erupted, in different forms and with differing degrees of intensity, across Europe wasn't strong enough to make a revolution in its own interest, but was sufficiently strong to unnerve the bourgeoisie who came to regard this would-be ally with deepening suspicion and hostility, preferring in the end to rally to the conservative authorities, hoping for some meagre gains.

Two very different and immensely authoritative documents authored by, or contributed to, by Marx, find him grappling with the consequences of 1848. In the first one, the *March 1850 Address to the Central Committee of the Communist League*, Marx and Engels cast doubt on their 1848 strategy. The Address opens with criticism of the way the workers' movement had become subordinate to the (failed) democratic revolution. "This situation cannot be allowed to continue. The independence of the workers must be restored" (Marx 1973: 320).³³ But Marx goes much further than this. Using a concept later developed by Trotsky, he closes the Address by calling for "Permanent Revolution" (Marx 1973: 330).

Workers must be armed and organised...they must try to place themselves not under the orders of the state authority but of revolutionary local councils set up by workers...(Marx 1973: 326).

Marx appears to be anticipating a form of *dual power* similar to the period between the February and October revolutions in Russia where democratic workers' assemblies, the soviets, co-existed with the constituent assembly. Independent workers' candidates would also stand for the constituent assembly. Where ever possible they should be members of the Communist League (Marx 1973: 327). Even when there was no prospect of winning the election, they should stand "to gauge their own strength and to bring their revolutionary position and party standpoint to public attention" (Marx 1973: 327). A range of demands would be placed on the constituent assembly. For example, workers can demand

the concentration of as many forces of production as possible – means of transport, factories, railways etc – in the hands of the state....if purchase is proposed, workers must demand railways and factories be confiscated without compensation...if the democrats propose...a moderate progressive tax, workers must demand a tax...so steep...that big capital is ruined by it (Marx 1973: 329-30).

³³ Fernbach argues convincingly that this is unstated self-criticism (1973: 53).

The Address concludes by recognising that German workers “cannot come to power...without passing through a protracted revolutionary development” and “by informing themselves of their own class interests” (Marx 1973: 330). The distinction between the workers learning for themselves and their party, the Communist League, accelerating the learning process, is blurred. The role of the party is not here made explicit, though it could be argued there is an implicit assumption about its role. But, in any case, and crucially, the argument seems to expect a lengthy period of co-existence with the constituent assembly.

Finally do workers take power in the revolutionary councils or in the constituent assembly? And do they take power through their party, the Communist League? Gilbert interprets Marx, anticipating the Paris Commune, by saying “in effect, the armed workers and...councils would become the real power. Though the formal state structure would remain in the hands of the democrats, (it) would lose its cutting edge and dwindle into a political shadow...” (Gilbert 1981: 243). Again, that is a legitimate assumption but Marx and Engels nowhere explicitly exclude the possibility that workers take power by forming an electoral majority in the constituent assembly, in other words by taking over the existing state administration. As we shall see it is only with the experience Paris Commune that they call openly for workers to establish their own state administration, a “dictatorship of the proletariat”³⁴ (Callinicos 1983: 155-162).

In the second document, the pamphlet *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, “a literary masterpiece...a drastic example of Marx’s practice of engaging in self-criticism through the criticism of others,” (Sperber: 286-7), Marx analysed the defeats of the 1848 revolutions with a focus on the Napoleonic pretender who seized power in France in 1852. The stunning one-liner showing how the traditions of the past can be “like a nightmare on the brain of the living” (Marx 1967 b: 10) applied to Marx himself, as he had joined most of the other 1848 revolutionary intellectuals, partly cloaking the 1848 events in the mantles of 1789. The 1789 revolutionaries had before them adopted “Roman costumes and Roman phrases,” similarly “Cromwell with the English people had borrowed speech, passions, and illusions from the Old Testament for their bourgeois revolution” (Marx 1967 b: 11).

Marx notes the problem with this.

The social revolution of the nineteenth century cannot draw its poetry from the past, but only from the future. It cannot begin with itself before it has stripped off all

³⁴ See the later sections on the *Paris Commune* and the *Critique of the Gotha Programme* for a discussion about how Marx and Engels used this concept.

superstition in regard to the past. Earlier revolutions required recollections of past world history in order to drug themselves concerning their own content, the revolution of the nineteenth century must let the dead bury the dead. There the phrase went beyond the content; here the content goes beyond the phrase (Marx 1967: 13).

The poetry of the future, *The Communist Manifesto* had noted, depended upon the “Communists...theoretically...clearly understanding the line of march...”

This passage fits in an interesting way with the passage from Gramsci cited earlier about the contradictory consciousness of workers’ leaders.

The active man of the masses works practically, but he does not have a clear theoretical consciousness of his actions... Rather his theoretical consciousness may be historically opposed to his actions. We can almost say that he has two theoretical consciousnesses (or one contradictory consciousness), one implicit in his actions, which unites him with all his colleagues in the practical transformation of reality, and one...which he has inherited from the past and which he accepts without criticism...this is ...not without consequence...it can reach a point where the contradiction of his conscience will not permit any action...and produces a state of moral and political passivity (Gramsci 2016: 66-7).

“Theoretical consciousnesses...implicit in his activity and which in reality unites him with all his collaborators in the practical transformation of reality” is only strengthened decisively against the conservative consciousness “inherited from the past” by a vision, “poetry”, of the future, “the line of march,” constantly subjected to debate and discussion “with all his collaborators in the practical transformation of reality” and how it informs the immediacy of strategy and tactics. That is the role of the revolutionary or communist party.³⁵

vi. Marx and the First International, the “Great Lever”³⁶

How does the birth and development of the First International, the *International Working Men’s Association*, in 1864 fit in with this argument? Marx, in his *Inaugural Address* to the International, speaks of “numbers...united in combination and led by knowledge” (Marx 1974a: 81). Here Marx was “broadly paraphrasing his party concept of the fusion of Socialist theory with the labour movement,” (Johnstone 131), and hence adopting the broad concept of party. There is a strong hint that Marx sees the International as “the party.” We’ll return to this argument later. Defeat and impoverishment had stalked the fledgling workers’ movement both in England and throughout Europe since 1848. Alternative political tendencies competed

³⁵ Gramsci’s *Modern Prince*. As mentioned in the Introduction, Chris Harman, one of the most theoretically gifted of the leaders of the revolutionary student movement in 1968 in the UK, developed this argument, using Gramsci’s insights, and others in combination with Lenin, to argue how students could unite with workers in a revolutionary socialist party (Harman 1996: 28).

³⁶ Collins and Abramsky 1965: 84.

with Marx and Engels's vision of communism and the means to achieve it. The International had to accommodate them.³⁷ One of the most interesting was the persistence of the Owenite inspired co-operative movement – also influential with some of the English trade union leaders, “the backbone” (Sperber: 357) of the IWMA - Marx in his *Inaugural Address* begins by praising it.

But there was...a still greater victory of the political economy of labour over the political economy of property³⁸...the co-operative factories raised by the unassisted efforts of a few bold ‘hands’. By deed, instead of by argument, they have shown that production on a large scale, and in accord with...modern science, may be carried on without the existence of a class of masters...³⁹ like slave labour, serf labour, hired labour is but a transitory and inferior form, destined to disappear before associated labour plying its toil with a willing hand, and a joyous heart...

However

...co-operative labour, if kept within the narrow circle of the casual efforts of private workmen, will never be able to arrest the growth...of monopoly...to free the masses, nor even to perceptively lighten the burden of their miseries (Marx 1974a: 79-80).

Co-operative labour could only succeed if fostered “by national means” and that meant “conquering political power has therefore become the great duty of the working classes” (Marx 1974a: 80).

At the same time Marx stressed internationalism:

³⁷ It meant admitting to the International, Liberal sympathising leaders of the British trade unions, French, Italian and Spanish Proudhonists and the German Lassalleans (see p22-23) as well as Bakunin's (anarchist) International Alliance of Socialist Democracy. (Johnstone 131). Whilst proper exploration of these trends is not possible here, Marx and Engels's analysis of Proudhonism in *The Communist Manifesto* as “Bourgeois Socialism” (Marx and Engels 1998: 70) or “the Socialism of the small peasant and master craftsman” (Engels: 1968: 14) requires further comment because of Proudhonist influence on the Paris Commune. Proudhon accepted the market exchange of commodities as essentially fair, including labour as a commodity because of a focus on small scale individual property owners. Large scale industrial capitalism distorted market relations and either deskilled the artisan and/or forced his integration into a productive process where he lost individual control of his work. Proudhon's ‘market anarchism’ could appear extremely attractive to the traditional craftsman (Gluckstein: 61-2) (Gilbert 1981: 88).

³⁸ The earlier victory he refers to is the carrying of the Ten Hours Bill, the basis for one of his most famous chapters in *Capital* Volume 1, *The Working Day*.

³⁹ Also in *Capital* Volume 1: “On 26 May 1866, a philistine English periodical, the *Spectator* reported after the introduction of a sort of partnership between the capitalist and the workers in the ‘Wirework Company of Manchester’, the first result was a sudden decrease in waste, the men not seeing why they should waste their own property any more than any other master's, and waste is, perhaps, next to bad debts, the greatest source of manufacturing loss. The same paper finds that the main defect in the Rochdale co-operative experiments is this: ‘They showed that associations of workmen could manage shops, mills, and almost all forms of industry with success, and they immediately improved the condition of the men, but they did not leave a clear place for the masters.’” Marx adds an ironic exclamatory, *Quelle Horreur!* He notes the tradition of co-operatives in Rochdale, the first set up in 1844 “under the influence of utopian socialist ideas” (Marx 1990: 449 footnote).

...That bond of brotherhood which ought to exist between workmen of different countries, and incite them to stand firmly by each other in all their struggles for emancipation...

This was the pre-condition for emancipation. Disregard it and the efforts will be doomed. This, after all, was the purpose of an International (Marx 1974a: 81). Marx concludes re-enforcing this appeal for internationalism by praising the lead given by organised workers in England to the rest of Europe by taking sides in the US civil war and resisting the “infamous crusade for the perpetuation...of slavery” (Marx 1974a: 81). Working class solidarity was similarly required with the fighters for the liberation of Poland from the empire of Russia. Marx’s dispute with the Owenites also led to a bitter clash over their refusal to support strikes, their claim that trade unions were harmful, wages rises induced from trade union pressure would in effect be wiped out by price rises. Marx presented a paper to the General Council of the International, which later became the pamphlet *Wages, Price & Profit*, refuting these arguments.

He applauded trade unions “as centres of resistance against the encroachments of capital.” But the trade unions didn’t go far enough. “They fail partially from an injudicious use of their power...limiting themselves to a guerrilla war against the effects of the existing system, instead of ...using their organised forces as a lever for the final emancipation of the working class...” (Marx 1996: 120).

Class struggle was the only route to a genuinely communist society. The chapter *The Working Day* in the first volume of *Capital*, also published for the International, would describe it as “an antinomy of right against right...between equal rights, force decides.”

... the history of capitalist production, the establishment of a norm for the working day presents itself as a struggle over the limits of that day, a struggle between collective capital ie a class of capitalists, and collective labour, ie the working class (Marx 1990: 344).

Marx’s analogy of the “lever” in his formulation of his criticism of the trade unions - failing to use their power as “a lever for the final emancipation of the working class” - had an unintended consequence. It exposed both the strengths and weaknesses of his position in the IWMA and his alliance with the English trade unions. Based in London, together they effectively administered the IWMA.

On the one hand the English trade union leaders had enormous respect for Marx, his “erudition, powers of creative thought and political acumen” (Collins and Abramsky: 42). They had, after all, accepted the *Inaugural Address* and signed up to its *Provisional Rules* which began with the statement, “That the emancipation of the working classes must be conquered by the working classes themselves” (Marx 1974a: 82, Collins and Abramsky: 53). The *Inaugural Address* had made clear, as reported earlier, this meant the organisation of “production on a

large scale...without the existence of a class of masters employing a class of hands". Although how that was to be organised was "left deliberately open" (Collins and Abramsky: 53). These were words they could live with, the role of parliament, for example, was simply not discussed. In any case the "most effective actions of the IWMA, with the greatest public resonance and working class support, centred on labour disputes. The International raised funds from trade unionists across Europe to support the strike of Berlin printers and typesetters in 1865, Paris bronze workers in 1867 and Geneva construction workers in 1868...This intervention to prevent workers of one nationality from breaking strikes in another country was repeated on a large number of occasions" (Sperber: 358). At one level, the International more than justified both its name and existence, trade unionism was spreading across Europe as a direct result of its influence (Collins and Abramsky: 92).

On the other hand, at another level, it failed completely to live up to Marx's expectations for it. Marx fully understood the political limitations of his English trade union comrades on the GC, General Council, of the IWMA. Whilst the working class "through the trade unions had acquired a certain degree of maturity and universality," Marx wrote in a confidential note, they also "lacked the spirit of generalisation and revolutionary ardour" (Marx 1934: 107, Collins and Abramsky: 85). However his intervention in the GC in combination with anticipated revolutionary upheavals in Europe, the note continued, would make the trade unions "a great lever of proletarian revolution" (Marx 1934: 106-7, Collins and Abramsky: 85), with the General Council providing leadership. The industrial analogy of the "lever" came with another one, the "great engine." Again, prefaced on the expectation of renewed revolutionary outbreaks in Europe, Marx had told Engels that the GC and the IWMA was a "powerful engine in our hands" (Marx, Engels: 1975, Collins and Abramsky 1965: 78, 98). It wasn't just when the anticipated revolution burst in Europe in 1871 in the entirely unanticipated form of the Paris Commune, the International most certainly did not fulfil Marx's expectations for it. It was already clear that his English trade union comrades were far more pre-occupied with the Reform League and even with Gladstone's Liberal Party. This culminated in the 1867 Reform Act which, for all its limitations, enfranchised a working class majority (Collins and Abramsky: 146). These developments highlighted the limited support for the IWMA. By now hundreds of thousands of workers had joined trade unions, but only a minority affiliated to the IWMA. This factor seriously restricted its fund raising capacities. "What our party lacks is money." Marx wrote to Engels (Marx, Engels 1985: 455, Collins and Abramsky: 88). The remark revealed both the IWMA's weakness as well as emphasising Marx's blurring of his own role, the IWMA and his idea of the party.

The English trade union leaders of the International were not revolutionaries. If they were willing to support revolutions abroad it was because they wanted to see the internationalisation of the few democratic and trade union rights that they had secured at home (Collins and Abramsky: 153-4, 291). The politics of the most left wing workers' leader on the GC of the IWMA, Robert Applegarth, Secretary of the ASCJ, Amalgamated Society of Carpenters and Joiners, formed earlier out of a bitter building workers' strike, are briefly worth exploring to illustrate Marx's dilemma. Applegarth was one of the very few trade union leaders on the GC of the IWMA to support, albeit hesitatingly, Marx's perspective on the Paris Commune. Was Applegarth, then, a potential 'marxist' cadre? Marx and Engels certainly regarded him as one of their closest comrades. He had publicly supported their views on land nationalisation. They were delighted when Applegarth was invited by both houses of parliament, as a leading representative of trade unionism, to offer advice (Collins and Abramsky: 173). Yet Applegarth lacked consistency as an international socialist. A sometimes narrow view of trade unionism could spill over into dangerously reactionary politics. He lent public support to the launching of the Emigration League which sought "to remove by emigration the superfluous hands from the labour market...and strengthen the British empire through the extension of prosperous colonies..." (Collins and Abramsky: 173).

This lack of consistency, instability of opinion, went to the very core of his politics. He might have agreed with Marx's lines in the *Inaugural Address* denying the need for "a class of masters employing a class of hands." Yet in the 10th annual report to his union the ASCJ in 1870, he praised both employers and workers for meeting as equals, settling their differences through arbitration and together introducing reforms like technical schools for the building trades (Collins and Abramsky: 176). But lack of consistency is a limited explanation. What we are witnessing here is a development, in embryo, that would become only too familiar in the twentieth century: trade union leaders, as well as the parliamentary representatives of organised labour, who believed they were socialists, even Marxists. Yet they staked their futures, and that of the trade unions, on reforming capitalism rather than overthrowing it. It was a development that would make Marx and Engels increasingly uneasy but they never fully understood it, and certainly never attempted to theorise it. As we shall see it was Rosa Luxemburg, the first Marxist of the stature of Marx and Engels, to fully comprehend it.

vii. Marx and Engels, the International and the Paris Commune

In his *Address to the General Council of the IWMA on the Civil War in France, 1871*, Marx provided the International with documentary evidence from the Paris Commune which in

pamphlet form complements *The Communist Manifesto*. We now had the first example of working class revolutionary practice overthrowing capitalism, at least in one city, and laying the foundations, however rough and incomplete, for a communist society. But we also saw the limitations of the IWMA, the International, as a facilitator of that process.⁴⁰ Marx could only comment with hindsight on what he believed to be the first major mistake of the communards.

...the (National Guard) Central Committee made...decisive mistake...not at once marching on Versailles, then completely helpless... (Marx 1968: 48).

The complicated politics of the outcome of the Franco Prussian war, the capitulation of France to Bismarck, which had precipitated the siege of Paris, and the Commune as a response, are beyond our scope here. Nevertheless a case can be made that the weak and defeated French government, propped up by Prussia, and based at Versailles, was susceptible to an immediate military advance by the Communards. This was the position recommended by Duval (Gluckstein 2011: 118), a young iron founder, established popular local working class leader and Blanquist (Lissagaray 1976: 60).⁴¹ But the Blanquists' conspiratorial and elitist political history put them at odds with the spirit of the Commune which wanted mass participatory democracy. The tension between the military and political objectives of the Commune was never satisfactorily resolved. Duval was clearly a Commune cadre but not a communist cadre in the tradition that would develop in the twentieth century from the ideas of Marx and Engels. The National Guard may have made a mistake but nevertheless it came to symbolise the new politics that the Commune represented. "*The first decree of the Commune was the suppression of the standing army, and the substitution for it of the armed people.*" This was now the National Guard, "the bulk of which consisted of working men" electing its own officers (Marx 1968: 53).

The Commune was formed of the municipal councillors, chosen by universal suffrage...revocable at short terms.⁴² The majority of its members were naturally

⁴⁰ At the core of the IWMA was the co-existence of competing working class political tendencies but with no satisfactory means of resolving the differences. In this very important sense, it cannot be considered as an international political party. This had made the International in the Commune important symbolically but unable to move beyond the particular influence of its very different component parts, Blanquism, Proudhonism, Jacobinism etc. In addition the English trade union centre of the IWMA acted as a conservative break.

⁴¹ Lissagaray, Hyppolite, Prosper, journalist, editor of *Le Tribun du Peuple*. Author of the best known contemporary history – *The History of the Paris Commune* - exiled to London where he knew Marx. The book was translated into English by Marx's daughter, Eleanor (Gluckstein: 228).

⁴² It meant they were subject to immediate recall.

working men,⁴³ or acknowledged representatives of the working class. The Commune was to be a working, not a parliamentary, body, executive and legislative, at the same time. Instead of continuing to be the agent of Central Government, the police was at once stripped of its political attributes, and turned into the responsible, and at all times, revocable agent of the Commune. So were the officials of all other branches of the Administration. From the members of the Commune downwards, the public service had to be done at *workmen's wages* (Marx 1968: 53-4).

Marx had earlier underlined the significance of this development: “that the working class cannot simply lay hold of the ready-made state machinery, and wield it for its own purpose” (Marx 1968: 50). The state had to be overthrown. The Commune “breaks the modern state power...” (Marx 1968: 55). This led Marx and Engels to make a rare change to *The Communist Manifesto*, the preface of the 1872 edition, after the Commune had been crushed. That single sentence was also the inspiration for Lenin’s *State and Revolution* (Hobsbawm 1998: 10). It was a “dictatorship of the proletariat” or “proletarian dictature” as Marx would describe the Commune during a speech at a special dinner in London on the seventh anniversary of the International in October 1871, just a few months after the bloody destruction of the Commune (Marx 1974b: 272).⁴⁴

The Commune “aimed at the expropriation of the expropriators...” It wanted to transform “the means of production, land and capital...into mere instruments of free and associated labour. – But this is...Communism!” (Marx 1968: 57). Here Marx is distinguishing between the Commune’s intentions and what it could achieve in its brief two months of existence.

If co-operative production is not to remain a sham and a snare; if it is to supersede the capitalist system; if united co-operative societies are to regulate national production upon a common plan, thus taking it under their own control, and putting an end to the constant anarchy and periodical convulsions which are the fatality of capitalist production – what else would it be but...communism (Marx 1968: 58).

⁴³ “Marx did not recognise the...weakness. The exclusion of women... is especially striking in the light of the magnificent role played by the working women...in the Commune” (Callinicos 1983: 159). See the discussion later of the Commune’s Women’s Union.

⁴⁴ Nimitz questions the validity of this interpretation because it is based on a report of the speech – the only record we have - in a New York newspaper which had misquoted Marx in the past (Nimitz: 218-19). Nevertheless Engels forcefully used the term to describe the Commune (Callinicos 1983: 156-7). There is, however, a further difficulty – interpreting the remarkable letter Marx sent to Domela Nieuwenhuis, an anarchist in the Hague in 1881. Here he seemed to repudiate at least parts of his earlier analysis on the Paris Commune. He writes that “...the majority in the commune was in no sense socialist, nor could it be. With a small amount of sound common sense, however, they could have reached a compromise with Versailles useful to the whole mass of people – the only thing that could be reached at the time. The appropriation of the Bank of France alone would have been enough to dissolve all the pretensions of the Versailles people in terror etc etc.” Stathis Kouvelakis alerted me to this letter. https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1881/letters/81_02_22.htm Engels also discusses this – see later in this section.

This is a call for socialisation of production under workers control and the Commune did offer some examples where it occurred. Lissagaray writes of the postal system under Albert Theisz, a manual worker and prominent member of the International. He “found the service quite disorganised, the divisional offices closed, the stamps hidden away or carried off...Theisz acted with promptitude and energy...” He opened discussions with the employees “and the direction of the services was entrusted to the head clerks...in 48 hours the collection and distribution of letters was re-organised. (Lissagaray 1976: 176) (Gluckstein: 9). Lissagaray writes of other departments including the Telegraph and National Printing Press “ordinarily reserved to the great bourgeoisie...managed with skill and economy...by workmen, subordinate employees; and this is not the least of their crimes in the eyes of the Versailles bourgeoisie.” (Lissagaray: 177-78) Yet “its special measures could but betoken the tendency of a government of the people by the people” (Marx 1968: 62). The Commune used a range of measures against the “expropriators”. Private employers were subject to the equivalent of what Marx had called on earlier occasions “legislative interference,” but imposed by a workers’ government not a capitalist government. Night work was abolished for journeymen bakers. Employers were banned from finding excuses for reducing wages. Associations of workers replaced those employers who had abandoned their workshops or factories (Marx 1968: 62). Nevertheless the Bank of France remained untouched.

The hardest thing to understand is certainly the holy awe with which they remained standing outside of the Bank of France...the bank in the hands of the Commune...would have been worth more than ten thousand hostages. It would have meant pressure of the whole of the French bourgeoisie on the Versailles government in favour of peace with the Commune... (Engels 1968: 14).

What we can conclude though that despite the mass democratic Communal pressures on both Blanquists and Proudhonists, the dominant political tendencies, which curbed or even reversed their “doctrines” (Engels: 14),⁴⁵ the Commune leadership lacked of clarity political objectives. Eugene Varlin, who had led a book binders’ strike in 1864 and became one of the International’s best known representatives in the Commune and part of its leadership, personified the problem. A ‘Left Proudhonist’, influenced by, and in communication with, Marx, (Nimtz: 214), and ready to criticise Proudhonism as “abstract scientific sociology”

⁴⁵ “The founding documents of the International – Marx’s *Provisional Rules* and *Inaugural Address* – transcended the limitations of Proudhonism and Blanquism...The *Rules*’s famous first statement, ‘That the emancipation of the working classes must be conquered by the working class themselves’ was acceptable to Proudhon but anathema to Blanqui.” (Whereas)...the Address calls for the working class ‘to conquer political power...’ “Proudhon rejected this... whilst Blanquists applauded it” (Gluckstein: 72). But it must be emphasised that this interpretation of the founding documents did not translate into decisive political influence in the Commune.

(Gluckstein: 74). Yet as assistant delegate for Finances in the Commune he, too, opposed seizing the Bank (Gluckstein: 143). Varlin is a good example of a potential 'communist' cadre, a cadre in embryo, unstable in opinion.⁴⁶ Lissagaray went so far as to write that the Commune leaders were "without a military plan, without a programme, without general views" (Lissagaray: 154). His concluding poetic flourish exposed even more the political vacuum - "O Revolution! Thou dost not wait the well timed day and hour. Thou comest suddenly, blind and fatal as the avalanche. The true soldier accepts the combat wherever hazard may place him..." Engels would write "the Commune was the grave of the Proudhon school of Socialism...The Blanquists fared no better..." (Engels 1968: 15). For Engels, Elizabeth Dmitrieff, "the spiritual daughter of the International,"⁴⁷ personified the Commune's potential. A Russian, one of the tiny number of "Marxists", with evolving ideas about the emancipation of the peasantry⁴⁸, she represented both Marx and the International in the Commune. Her lasting achievement in the Commune was the founding of the Women's Union, "the Commune's largest and most effective organisation...the Union envisioned a full re-organisation of womens' labour and the end of gender-based inequality." (Ross 2015: 27-8)⁴⁹ Dmitrieff also personified Marx's insistence that the Commune was "emphatically international," admitting "all foreigners to the honour of dying for an immortal cause"(Marx 1968: 61).⁵⁰

viii. Marx and Engels and the world's first workers mass political party: Germany's Socialist Party

The defeat of the Paris Commune was, in effect, also the trigger for the disintegration of the First International. Marx's *Address to the General Council of the IWMA on the Civil War in France* had made Marx famous, indeed infamous. It was seized upon by all of the Commune's enemies as proof of an international insurrectionary conspiracy inspired by Marx and 'his' International. This was amplified by the media of the day and had the, no doubt intended, effect of undermining the weak coalition ties that held together the IWMA. Bismarck even

⁴⁶ Unfortunately we cannot explore here the role of Louise Michel who "embodied the proletarian character of the Commune" (Lissagaray: 169), who had the potential to organise a communist womens' cadre alongside Elizabeth Dmitrieff, (about to be mentioned).

⁴⁷ Ross 2015: 27.

⁴⁸ Ross's commentary on implications of Dmitrieff's discussions with Marx about the Russian peasantry: (76-89). The Commune told the French peasantry that "its victory was its only hope" (Marx 1968: 59).

⁴⁹ Also Gluckstein: 23-24, Lissagaray: 239

⁵⁰ Ross's enigmatic book is particularly strong on the Commune as a *Universal Republic*, also giving Dmitrieff pride of place. Dmitrieff's support for the International partly grew from her disgust at the Russian suppression of the Polish rebellion in 1863. (Ross: 25) Marx may have been exaggerating when he wrote, "The Commune honoured the heroic sons of Poland by placing them at the head of the defenders of Paris," (Marx 62) but the statement was firmly rooted in Commune principles. Incidentally, Frankel, also a 'marxist', the Commune's 'Minister of Labour' was Hungarian.

proposed a European alliance against the International (Fernbach 1974: 43). It was a phantom. Marx may have helped make the International a symbol for the Commune but it had most definitely not been able to provide it with political leadership, indeed a vital missing ingredient. Marx and Engels recognised the weakness. It helped inform Resolution IX, drafted by Marx and Engels in 1871, for the September conference of the IWMA, the First International, once more calling for the working class to organise itself as a political party.

This resolution was also precipitated partly by the bitter battles with the anarchist Bakunin over the future of the International. The fight with Bakunin and his supporters would consume a huge amount of time and energy of Marx and Engels and, arguably, contributed to the International's demise.⁵¹ Amongst the exchanges of bitter polemics, one in particular, stands out. Engels's *On Authority*, a challenge to Bakunin and the anarchist assertion that all authority, even the authority of workers' democratically elected representatives, must inevitably become authoritarian. Engels's argument is particularly relevant because he locates it in the workplace. Engels asks the question, suppose a social revolution has dethroned the capitalists "and the instruments of labour have become the collective property of the workers who use them. Will authority disappear or...only change its form?" (Engels: 1978). Engels describes how in a cotton spinning mill several technical and mechanical operations are required to transform the cotton into thread, and that these operations, for the most part, take place in different rooms. Steam is the energy source. And "the workers...are obliged to begin and finish their work at the hours fixed by the authority of steam, which cares nothing for individual autonomy." So how do the workers control the productive process?

The workers must first come to an understanding on the hours of work; and these hours, once they are fixed, must be observed by all..." In addition "particular questions can arise in each room," concerning the technical process, "which must be settled by a decision of a delegate placed at the head of each branch of labour, or, if possible, by a majority vote, the will of a single individual will always have to subordinate itself, which means that questions are settled in an authoritarian way.

Authority is essential for the successful operation of the mill but it has been democratised. Workers have taken part in and have agreed the framework for the minute by minute, productive operations. Engels leaves open the question whether it is the elected delegate, or majority voting, that establishes the framework for agreeing the procedures. Indeed the majority may well decide to trust their delegate with the day to day decisions, using the *Paris*

⁵¹ Recent scholarship suggests a more nuanced approach. Marianne Enckell argues that the "federalist" anarchist wing of the International associated with Bakunin lasted longer than the "centralist" wing associated with Marx and Engels, that it was "genuinely proletarian and internationalist", and the moment of anarchism's breakthrough into modern politics (Enckell 2018: 364).

Commune principle, if s/he betrays their trust s/he can always be replaced. Certainly, in Engels's example of the ship, he warns, especially in times of danger on the high seas, "lives of all depend...on obedience", the immediate response to instructions from the person charged with the ship's management. Engels adds "if man by...his...inventive genius, has subdued the forces of nature, the latter avenge themselves upon him, by subjecting him...to a veritable despotism independent of all social organisation. Wanting to abolish authority in large scale industry is tantamount to wanting to abolish industry itself, to destroy the power loom in order to return to the spinning wheel." At the same time, he makes the interesting observation. "Authority and autonomy are relative...whose spheres vary with the various phases of the development of society. If the autonomists confined themselves to saying that the social organisation of the future would restrict authority solely to the limits with which the conditions of production render it inevitable, we could understand each other..." This helps define the route to one of communism's most inspirational objectives, cited in *The Communist Manifesto*: "association, in which the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all," (Marx Engels 1998: 62), the complementary freedoms dependent on the development of the immense potential of socially controlled modern productive forces. First, though, we have to make the revolution: "A most authoritarian thing..." (Engels: 1978).

Here is a direct challenge to the anarchists. How will your revolution avoid any exercise of authority? A revolutionary upsurge may begin spontaneously. But it quickly comes up against well organised conservative forces. Our side needs to organise in response. There will be a range of different views on the best strategies and tactics. Organisation is required for these strategies and tactics to be thoroughly and fairly discussed: even more so when a strategy is agreed upon and then implemented, especially if this requires the use of force, and rapid on-the-spot decision-making. The anarchist equates authority with authoritarian. Engels is playing with this equation almost satirically, confident, unlike the anarchists, that authority and organisation can be exercised democratically. If objective circumstances momentarily impose constraints on democratic practice, say, an anticipated military attack, then an ingredient between democratically elected leaders and led comes into play, misunderstood or perhaps never understood by the anarchists: trust.

Meanwhile, the roots of the world's first mass-based working class political party were already being laid in Germany, quite independently of the International and the Paris Commune. They were planted not by Marx and Engels but by an extremely eccentric indeed dangerous follower of theirs, Ferdinand Lassalle. Lassalle was the founder of the General German Workers'

Association in 1863. Marx had been suitably impressed, (Sperber: 353), although wary of Lassalle's obsessive leadership cult (Johnstone: 136). They had worked together on the *Neue Rheinische Zeitung, NRZ*, in 1848 (Sperber: 338). Lassalle combined support for Marx with support for, and even secret meetings with, the Prussian dictator, Bismarck (Sperber: 353-4). Nevertheless, Lassalle's initiative was historically unprecedented. Rosa Luxemburg's quite extraordinary tribute in 1913 gives us a sense of his continuing impact even into the early years of the twentieth century.

The emergence of an independent class party of the proletariat was a historical necessity...(That it)...appeared at the gates with such radiance and splendour fifty years ago, more than two decades before all other countries, and acted as a role model for them, is thanks to Lassalle's life work and his maxim: 'I dared!' (Luxemburg: 1913)

Lassalle's early death in a bizarre duel in no way diminished his influence, or weakened the dispute of principle between Marx and the leadership of the new workers' party. German national unity, yes, said Marx, but it "could only be achieved by a German revolution...sweeping away the Prussian dynasty," (Sperber: 362), not allying with it. Marx looked instead to two of his most ardent supporters, Wilhelm Liebknecht and a young August Bebel⁵² who, by taking control of the federation of German workers' educational societies in Saxony, provided the base for a second German workers' party (Sperber: 367). But here too was almost a mirror-image Lassallean problem. Liebknecht was ready to support the anti Prussian monarchs in Hanover and Hessen (Sperber: 368). Both groups were fixated on the *national* state.

German unity under Bismarck in 1871 superficially resolved, or rather shelved, the problems. The two workers' parties came together for a unity congress in the German city of Gotha in 1875. But Lassalle's posthumous influence weighed heavily. Hence Marx's famous *Critique* (Marx: 1974 c) of the Gotha unity programme,⁵³ and, at first, a refusal to support the new party. Here was the major dilemma for Marx and Engels in the shadow of the First International. They would not stay with a given organisational form if they thought the real movement had outgrown it and it had become a "fetter" on its further development. They could not save the First International but it "did help provide the political and organisational principles for the new parties that were to emerge..." (Johnstone: 135). And they, in turn, provided the basis for the Second International formed in 1889. Yet these were national

⁵² Often mistakenly described as a woodworker, Bebel was in fact an "artisan and entrepreneur," (Schmidt 2019: 17-28), "manufacturing doors and window knobs out of buffalo horn." (Schmidt: 25).

⁵³ *Critique of the Gotha Programme*, Marx described the *Critique* as "critical marginal notes" (Marx 1974 c: 341) and they were not published at the time.

parties with a political orientation on existing national states. At the same time Marx recognised in a letter about the *Critique* “Every step of a real movement is more important than a dozen programmes...” (Marx 1974 c: 341). But that didn’t resolve the dilemma and Marx’s *Critique* was harsh. He saw Lassalle’s influence stamped all over the programme, Liebknecht and Bebel had effectively capitulated to the idea of a national state. According to the Gotha Programme, “the working class must initially work for its emancipation *within the framework of the present day national state...*” (Marx c: 349, emphasis in original)

Marx thundered in response. “In contrast to the Communist Manifesto (which Lassalle knew by heart) (Marx h: 349)...Lassalle approached the workers’ movement from the narrowest national point of view – and this after the work of the International!” (Marx c: 350)

German nationalism tainted the new party. “Bismarck’s *Norddeutsche*⁵⁴ was perfectly right when it declared to the satisfaction of its master, that the German workers party had renounced internationalism in its programme” (Marx c: 350-1). Indeed Lassalle had effectively ignored the workers’ movement altogether by substituting the national state as socialism’s agent, opposing the trade unions in favour of state sponsored workers’ co-operatives (Sperber: 526). The Gotha Programme also reflected Lassalle’s reactionary and exclusive focus on the capitalist component of the ruling class alone, deliberately ignoring the landlord component. It states that “the capitalist class has a monopoly of the instruments of labour.” Wrong, and as Marx pointed out this was because “Lassalle only attacked the capitalist class and not the landowners.” (Marx c: 343) Lassalle “wanted to extenuate his alliance with the absolutist and feudal opponents of the bourgeoisie” (Marx c: 349).

Dunayevskaya has noted.

The *Critique*...is not just a criticism of a programme, but a comprehensive analysis of Lassalle’s doctrines. It contains a theory of the state and, more importantly, of the non-state-to-be (as he (Marx) called the Paris Commune), which was to be the model for the future breakup of the capitalist state...Not only was capitalism a transient stage, but so was the ‘revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat’ which was to replace it (Dunayevskaya: 156).⁵⁵

Sensing the danger, prophetically as it turned out, that the new party would lose sight altogether of communist objectives, Marx felt compelled to spell them out, sometimes in passages which outline a communist society, in ways not previously attempted (Callinicos 1983: 170) (Dunayevskaya: 157). After the state had withered away,

⁵⁴ *Norddeutsche Allgemeine Zeitung*, editorial mouthpiece for Bismarck.

⁵⁵ She adds that Lenin’s *State and Revolution* was based on these two principles.

...in a more advanced phase of communist society, when the enslaving subjugation of individuals to the division of labour, and thereby the antithesis between intellectual and physical labour, have disappeared; when labour is no longer just a means of keeping alive but has itself become a vital need; when the all-round development of individuals has also increased their productive powers and all the springs of co-operative wealth flow more abundantly – only then can society...inscribe on its banner: From each according to his abilities, to each according to his needs!(Marx c: 347).

However the new united party proved to be a great success. In the 1877 national elections it doubled the vote of the previous socialist parties “and emerged as a significant political voice against Bismarck” (Sperber: 528). Marx and Engels, in any case, had withdrawn their threat to disown the new party. The press viewed it as genuinely socialist, even revolutionary. More importantly, so did workers. Engels noted, “It is this circumstance alone which has made it possible for Marx and myself not to dissociate ourselves publicly from a programme such as this” (Engels, Marx-Engels Correspondence, 1875, Blackledge⁵⁶ 2014: 91). They even began referring to it as “our party” (Engels: 1891, Johnstone: 137). Though, Marx always blamed Liebknecht for compromising with the Lassalleans (Sperber: 528).

Nevertheless, the influence of Marx and Engels on the new party made its mark. Bismarck certainly thought so and “unleashed his fury” against it as the party appeared to become “really receptive to Marxism” (Schorske 1983: 3, Blackledge: 91).⁵⁷ This coincided with the publication of Engel’s *Anti-Dühring* (1878).⁵⁸ And, rather like the *Critique of the Gotha Programme*, *Anti-Dühring* deliberately contained a more detailed, though inevitably speculative, vision of a future communist society both as an innovation in itself, but also as propaganda weapon. Consolidation of what would become known as *Marxism* in the new party accelerated, especially after Marx’s death in 1883.⁵⁹ Although Engels welcomed the revised party programme at the Erfurt Congress of 1891 as an improvement on Gotha, he identified the same fundamental weakness – ambiguity about the role of the state in the transition to socialism. He raised objections that Rosa Luxemburg would build upon in her later criticisms. He warned against “forgetting the great principal considerations for the momentary

⁵⁶ Blackledge’s essay referenced here, see bibliography, is based on his *The Split in the International and the Origins of War* in Shannon Brincat ed, *Communism in the Twentieth Century*, Volume 2, *Wither Communism* (Praeger 2014).

⁵⁷ Blackledge cites Schorske as one of the most authoritative histories of German Social Democracy.

⁵⁸ *Anti-Dühring* would become the “bible” of the Second International: Kouvelakis, personal communication.

⁵⁹ Sperber reports an extraordinary episode when the party leadership, in order to avoid Bismarck’s partial ban on the party, proposed starting a daily newspaper in Switzerland. Marx and Engels were furious to discover that the editors intended to renounce violent revolution, advocate reforming capitalism, rather than introducing socialism, class cooperation instead of class struggle. Edward Bernstein, who would become the principal architect of reformism in the German party, was on the editorial board (Sperber: 528-31).

interest of the day...regardless of later consequences, this sacrifice of the future of the movement for its present, may be 'honestly' meant, but...it remains opportunism..."(Engels: 1891, Blackledge: 92). He reminded comrades that socialism could only be realised by a revolutionary regime similar to the Paris Commune. "Our party and the working class can only come to power under the form of a democratic republic. This is even the specific form for the dictatorship of the proletariat" (Engels: 1891, Blackledge: 92).⁶⁰ Schorske points out that the Erfurt Programme contained two related messages distinguishing revolutionaries from reformists. To the revolutionary left it said be "patient." To the reformists it said, "reforms are the first task, pursue them" (Schorske: 6, Blackledge: 92). But the die was cast and the question that Rosa Luxemburg would force to the surface was raised, even though, at the time, she didn't answer it. Can reformists and revolutionaries co-exist in the same party?

The economic boom of the 1890's simultaneously gave rise to increased living standards, momentarily eased tensions between reformists and revolutionaries, and, above all, saw a massive expansion of trade unionism. The leaders of the unions began to play an increasingly important role in the party. They represented in some ways the late nineteenth century German equivalent of the English trade union leaders who had so shattered Marx's revolutionary illusions in them in the First International. They certainly strengthened the social base of reformism within the German party. Rosa Luxemburg, in one of her most famous pamphlets, *The Mass Strike, the Party and the Trade Unions*, published in 1906, would describe the trade union leaders as part of the "opportunist tendency" which wanted to reduce "the political struggle of the working class to a parliamentary contest" to turn "the revolutionary proletarian party into a petty bourgeois reform one" (Luxemburg 1906). She attacked the

specialisation of professional activity (of the trade union leaders. They had developed) a restricted horizon which is bound up with disconnected economic struggles in a peaceful period, (it) leads only too easily, to bureaucratism and a certain narrowness of outlook...There is ...the overvaluation of organisation, which from a means has gradually been changed into an end in itself...From this comes that openly admitted need for peace which shrinks from great risks...to the stability of the trade unions....

...from the concealment of the objective limits drawn by the bourgeois social order, there arises hostility to every theoretical criticism which refers to these limits in connection with the ultimate aims of the labour movement.

⁶⁰ There is however, arguably, ambiguity in this statement by Engels. Coming to power in a democratic republic is, presumably, through parliamentary elections. See also Engels's *Introduction* to the French edition of Marx's *The Class Struggles in France*. (Engels: 1895) Discussion of whether, and if so how, both Marx and Engels viewed the prospects of workers taking power via parliamentary elections will not be possible here.

Instead we are asked to accept the prospects for unlimited success “of economic progress of the trade union struggle within the capitalist system.”

Adding to this major threat to working class democracy in the movement, another loomed, nothing less than a counter “revolution in the relations of leaders and rank and file. In place of the direction by colleagues through local committees...there appears the business like direction of the trade union officials. The initiative and power of making decisions thereby devolve on trade union specialists...and the more passive virtue of discipline upon the mass of members....The dark side of officialdom...” (Luxemburg 1906)

In fact Luxemburg under-estimated just how damaging would be this undermining of rank and file workers’ democracy with the concentration of bureaucratic control in the hands of both parliamentary and trade union leaders. She believed the conservatism would be broken by a revolutionary mass strike movement.

Whether they stand aside or endeavour to resist the movement, the result of their attitude will be that the trade union leaders, like the party leaders...will simply be swept aside by the rush of events, and the economic and political struggles of the masses will be fought out without them (Luxemburg 1906).

But the 1918 German Revolution proved the opposite. The eruption of mass strikes and mass-based revolutionary Workers’ and Soldiers’ Councils were immediately and successfully undermined by the reformist political and trade union leaders. (Hoffrogge: 2014)

Undoubtedly, Luxemburg’s faith in the spontaneous creative capacities of the masses was one of her great strengths and a refreshing contrast to the nightmare bureaucratic politics of official German Trade Union and Nation State Socialism that had tied it to the Kaiser’s War Machine. Yet there was a fatalism built into this perspective. Arguably, it reflected both the legacy of party organisation, and even an analytical weakness about the class struggle itself, left by Marx and Engels, a degree of fatalism about the dynamics of the working class movement. (Callinicos 1983: 153)

Marx’s *Capital* had encouraged the fatalism. In its closing chapters in Volume 1 we read, “But capitalist production begets, with the inexorability of a natural process, its own negation.” (Marx 1976: 929)

This encouraged the inter-changeability perspective of working class and political party, common to Marx, Engels and Luxemburg. It was one of the reasons why it took such a long time for Luxemburg to break with the German socialist party. This has led Le Blanc to formulate the division between Luxemburg and Lenin over the legacy of Marx and Engels’s conception of the party in the following way.

Lenin saw “the party not as *embracing* the working class, but as *interacting* with it for the purpose of influencing it in a revolutionary direction. For Luxemburg...the point is to blend into the working class as it exists, the better to contribute to its organic development as a revolutionary force” (Le Blanc: 1999 95-6).⁶¹

ix. Lenin’s *State and Revolution*: theory

1914 also shook Lenin, the leader of the world’s first socialist revolution in Russia October 1917, to the core. Famously, it forced him to return and re-examine the basic roots of Marxism including a return to Feuerbach and especially Hegel. Lenin would come to emphasise more forcefully that subjective practical activity lay at the centre of the “objective” world, and that social scientific laws should not be “fetished” as things distinct from conscious human activity but instead recognised as “necessarily, incomplete, and approximate” and open to attempts to frame political intervention (Kouvelakis 2007: 174, 186, Blackledge 102-3). Kouvelakis quotes a Lenin marginal note on his re-reading of Hegel.

Man’s consciousness not only reflects the objective world, but creates it (Kouvelakis 2007: 193).

The result is Lenin’s intervention to change the course both of the war (or at least Russia’s involvement in it) and the revolution that erupted as a result of the war. “...a mass initiative under proletarian leadership aimed at the conquest of political power, that is, breaking the existing state apparatus and replacing it with a contradictory state...” (Kouvelakis 2007: 195).

Lenin’s pamphlet *State and Revolution* provided the theoretical framework, although his conception of proletarian leadership, and the way the Bolshevik Party would relate to the wider workers’ leadership, would evolve in response to the way the revolutionary process unfolded, especially at the point of production. One further qualification must be added. *State and Revolution* was never intended to provide theoretical perspective for an exclusively *Russian* revolution. It was a challenge to all the socialist parties linked to the Second International, especially the German one. “But this revolution as a whole can only be

⁶¹ See also Molyneux. Should the revolutionary party of the working class seek to represent the working class-as a-whole or just that minority, in non revolutionary situations, open to revolutionary socialist ideas, prioritising its growth in gains made through its intervention in the class struggle, in particular strikes, against the employers, and other grassroots mass-based social movements against different forms of oppression, over electoral gains? (Molyneux 2003: 33-35).

understood as a link in a chain of socialist proletarian revolutions being caused by the imperialist war.” (Lenin 1917a: Preface)⁶²

The structure of the pamphlet is based upon Lenin re-visiting two of Marx’s writings – on the Paris Commune as developed in his *Address to the General Council of the IWMA on the Civil War in France, 1871* and his *Critique of the Gotha Programme* – both of which emphasise the necessity of a complete revolutionary break with the existing nation state, indeed all the warring imperialist national states. Lenin’s direct quote of a single sentence from Marx’s writings on the Paris Commune dominates the discussion of the subject in *State and Revolution*: “that the working class cannot simply lay hold of the ready-made state machinery, and wield it for its own purpose.” (Lenin 1971a: Chapter III) As Lenin notes this had led Marx and Engels to make a rare change to *The Communist Manifesto*, the preface of the 1872 edition after the Commune had been crushed. Lenin attempts to summarise Marx’s arguments⁶³ and project them on to the anticipated international socialist revolutions.

We, the workers, shall organize large scale production on the basis of what capitalism has already created, relying on our own experience as workers, establishing strict, iron discipline backed up by the state power of the armed workers. We shall reduce the role of state officials to that of simply carrying out our instructions as responsible, revocable, modestly paid "foremen and accountants" (of course, with the aid of technicians of all sorts, types and degrees)...Such a beginning...will of itself lead to the gradual "withering away" of all bureaucracy, to the gradual creation of an order...bearing no similarity to wage slavery...under which the functions of control and accounting, becoming more and more simple, will be performed by each in turn, will then become a habit and will finally die out as the special functions of a special section of the population (Lenin 1917a: Chapter III).

This, of course, is an immensely ambitious projection – on a heavily concertinaed timeline. It should be understood as providing flexible principles or guidelines, inevitably to be conditioned by the real historical circumstances of the actual revolutions, not least the isolation that would be the fate of the Russian Revolution. Nevertheless there is clarification of a much-misunderstood and controversial formulation: dictatorship of the proletariat.

Simultaneously with an immense expansion of democracy, which for the first time becomes democracy for the poor, democracy for the people, and not democracy for the money-bags, the dictatorship of the proletariat imposes a series of restrictions on the

⁶² As Trotsky put it in his discussion of *State and Revolution* in his own *History of the Russian Revolution*. “Lenin...regarded the very conquest of power in Russia primarily as the impetus for a European Revolution...incomparably more important for the fate of humanity than the revolution in backward Russia ” (Trotsky 1967: 124).

⁶³ There is in addition a complex and implicitly critical clarification of how Engels understood and interpreted these two writings of Marx which cannot concern us here.

freedom of the oppressors, the exploiters, the capitalists. We must suppress them in order to free humanity from wage slavery... (Lenin 1917a: Chapter V).

This is the one of the rare occasions where we have a hint, a projection, about the role of capitalists in the transition phase. Capitalists, and hence capitalism, are to be suppressed by “a series of restrictions”: not eliminated either as individuals or even as capitalists. Later in the chapter, Lenin returns to this point where he equates “the expropriation of the capitalists, with the establishment of workers' control over the capitalists” (Lenin 1971a: Chapter V, Part 4).

In other words dictatorship of the proletariat is not about a general society-wide dictatorship over the entire population that would become so associated with the Stalin period. It is about dictatorship over the remnant of the capitalist class whose functions cannot be eliminated overnight but must be forced to serve the interests of the vast majority. We also have in this section, the first mention of how the dictatorship of the proletariat will express itself: the Soviets of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies.

Naturally, the exploiters are unable to suppress the people without a highly complex machine for performing this task, but the people can suppress the exploiters even with a very simple “machine”, almost without a “machine”, without a special apparatus, by the simple organization of the armed people (such as the Soviets of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies, we would remark, running ahead) (Lenin 1917a: Chapter V).

Lenin would learn very quickly that this ultra-optimistic forecast of “a very simple (state) ‘machine’, almost without a ‘machine’” was misplaced. Nevertheless his interpretation of Marx's outlines of “the transition” would still provide elementary ground rules for the phase immediately after the October Revolution in 1917. In September 1917, just before the October Revolution, Lenin wrote a pamphlet, *The Impending Catastrophe and How to Combat It*. Arguably it translates *State and Revolution* into a transitional programme for the immediate post-revolutionary period, similar to the programme in *The Communist Manifesto*.⁶⁴ The title signals Lenin's recognition of the appalling circumstances that threatened the revolution from the start. The impending catastrophe was a spreading famine exacerbated by capitalists “deliberately...sabotaging production” (Lenin 1917b). The transitional programme was about the new state, the ‘workers' state’, imposing urgent measures to seize control of the economy but not necessarily displacing the previous private owners, rather compelling them to co-operate. Interestingly, it also shows Lenin pre-occupied with the question of the peasantry

⁶⁴ Proposed by Tony Cliff in *Lenin: Revolution Besieged*. (Cliff 1978:62) *The Impending Catastrophe and How to Combat It* is one of the key documents in the 1917 collection of Lenin's writings put together by Slavoj Žižek in *Revolution at the Gates*. (2002).

from the start. Here were the revolution's allies, indispensable both to the revolution's victory as well as resolving the food shortage catastrophe. However peasant support for a workers' dictatorship could not be taken for granted. The peasant question overshadowed the demand to nationalise the banks. The language surprises.

The advantages accruing to the whole people from nationalisation of the banks—*not* to the workers especially (for the workers have little to do with banks) but to the mass of peasants and small industrialists—would be enormous...The availability of credit on easy terms for the *small* owners, for the peasants, would increase immensely.

There is no ambiguity here. The market will continue to operate. However, at the same time the state would for the first time be in a position first to *review* all the chief monetary operations, which would be unconcealed, then to *control* them, then to *regulate* economic life, and finally to *obtain* millions and billions for major state transactions, without paying the capitalist gentlemen sky-high "commissions" for their "services."

Nevertheless, Lenin expected co-operation from the displaced – overthrown - social class, albeit under coercion.

Nationalisation of the banks has only to be decreed and it would be carried out by the directors and employees themselves...It would be enough, for example, to organise the poorer employees *separately* and to reward them for detecting fraud and delay on the part of the rich for nationalisation of the banks to be effected as smoothly and rapidly as can be (Lenin 1917b).

We have an insight here into how Lenin conceived nationalisation or socialisation under workers control. In a later section headed *Compulsory Association*, Lenin describes how manufacturers and industrialists in every branch of production would be amalgamated, this included the "big shareholders (for they are the real leaders of modern industry, its real masters)."

Yet the approach to them was to be double edged. On the one hand

They shall be regarded as deserters from military service, and punished as such, if they do not work for the immediate implementation of the law...workers and their trade unions...(will) institute the fullest, strictest and most detailed accountancy, but chiefly to *combine operations* in the purchase of raw materials, the sale of products, and the *economy* of national funds and forces. When the separate establishments are amalgamated into a single syndicate, this economy can attain tremendous proportions, as economic science teaches us and as is shown by the example of all syndicates, cartels and trusts.

On the other hand

And it must be repeated that this unionisation will not in itself alter property relations one iota and will not deprive any owner of a single kopek. This circumstance must be strongly stressed, for the bourgeois press constantly “frightens” small and medium proprietors by asserting that socialists in general, and the Bolsheviks in particular, want to “expropriate” them—a deliberately false assertion...

Again Lenin is conscious of the peasant looking over his shoulder. The very next sentence reads. “Socialists do not intend to, cannot and will not expropriate the small peasant *even if there is a fully socialist revolution.*” Nor is the underlying revolutionary principle the immediate abolition of the capitalist class.

In point of fact, the whole question of control boils down to who controls whom, i.e., which class is in control and which is being controlled (Lenin 1917b).

Herein lies the meaning of the dictatorship of the proletariat in the transition period following the socialist revolution.

x. Lenin’s *State and Revolution*: practice ‘All Power to the Soviets!’ ⁶⁵

Orlando Figes’s ferociously anti Bolshevik *A People’s Tragedy, The Russian Revolution 1891-1924* has been a dominant text in the post 1989 scholarship on the subject.⁶⁶ Eric Hobsbawm, arguably the most able and certainly the most famous Marxist historian of the late twentieth century, gave the book the most extraordinary and virtually unqualified stamp of approval. “*A People’s Tragedy* will do more to help us understand the Russian Revolution than any other book I know of written since the end of the Soviet Union.”⁶⁷ What interests us here is that the serious scholar in Figes is compelled to concede the main argument in 1917 of Lenin and the Bolsheviks: the main argument, indeed, of *State and Revolution*.

⁶⁵ Lenin’s article headline in the Bolsheviks’ paper *Pravda* July 18, 1917 (Lenin 1917e) - the Bolshevik’s main slogan following Lenin’s *April Theses*, “...the necessity of transferring state power to the Soviets of Workers’ Deputies...” (Lenin 1917d)

⁶⁶ Translated into 28 languages.

⁶⁷ London Review of Books, October 31, 1996. Hobsbawm had a simple solution to Figes’s peculiar and contradictory blend of genuine innovative scholarship, creative invention and lies, which simultaneously recognises the brief flowering of the soviets and workers power whilst at the same time monsterring Lenin and the Bolsheviks. He ignored it. Hobsbawm endorses Figes’s view that this was essentially a peasant revolution, whilst sliding over Figes’s views on its roots in the intensity of backwardness. Figes borders on racism in his contempt for *Russian* backwardness – with its medieval aristocracy incapable of reform, its reformers gross in their incompetence, its revolution, led by leather jacketed thugs and fanatics, turning in on itself and drowning in blood, terror and cannibalism.

The rising fortunes of the Bolsheviks during the summer and autumn (of 1917) was essentially due to the fact that they were the only major political party who stood uncompromisingly for Soviet power (Figs 1997: 460).

Although Figs claims that the October insurrection was a coup he insists that it took place “amidst a social revolution which was centred on the popular realisation of Soviet power as the negation of the state and the direct self-rule of the people...”(Figs: 460)

The popular demand for Soviet power had never expressed itself in a preference for the dictatorship of any particular party. The torrent of resolutions, petitions and declarations from the factories, the army units and the villages in support of a Soviet government after the Kornilov crisis⁶⁸ invariably called on all socialist parties to take part in its establishment, and often displayed a marked impatience with the factional disputes between them...The dominant sentiment was one of anger and frustration that nothing concrete had been gained, neither peace, nor bread nor land, six months after the February Revolution...

What the workers saw in Soviet power, above all, was the chance to control their own factory environment. They wanted to regulate their own shop floor relations, to set their own wages and working conditions, and combat the ‘sabotage’, the conspiratorial running-down of production by profit-conscious employers, which many workers blamed for the industrial crisis... In this heightened atmosphere of class war, impatience was growing with the Mensheviks’ leadership⁶⁹ of the labour movement: their policies of mediating labour disputes and conciliating the employers had failed to stop the rising tide of unemployment. Many workers, especially those under the influence of the Bolsheviks, saw the solution in the sequestration (or nationalisation) of their factory by a Workers’ State., called ‘Soviet Power’, which would then set up a management board of workers, technicians and Soviet officials to keep the factory running.⁷⁰ It was part of the growing political consciousness of workers, the realisation that their demands could only be met by changing the nature of the state itself (Figs: 461).

Figs reports on the deepening strike wave involving far wider groupings, “unskilled labourers and semi intelligentsia ...hospital, city and clerical workers.” And the strikes were far more political. “...no less than a battle for control of the workplace and the city economy as a whole...they spilled on to the streets and sometimes even ended in bloody conflicts between workers – armed , trained and organised by the Red Guards (the Bolsheviks’ militia) - and government militias.”

⁶⁸ Discussion of the Kornilov crisis – the failed military coup against the provisional government of Kerensky – is not possible here. But the significance of this point is that the crisis decisively weakened the authority of the constituent assembly thus strengthening the demand for soviet power.

⁶⁹ ie the main reformist socialist party

⁷⁰ As Figs observes, “this was roughly the import of the Bolshevik Decree on Workers’ Control passed on November 14” almost immediately after the October Revolution. A more detailed discussion of this decree will follow shortly.

If employers resorted to lock-outs, their factories would be stormed and occupied by workers. "Some strikes spread to involve residents of whole urban districts in attacks on bakeries and shops...whom the crowd suspected of hoarding food" (Figs: 462).⁷¹

Remarkably, at this point in his narrative, Figs adopts, what is in effect, an explicit pro-Bolshevik analysis. Figs even concedes through gritted teeth, that Lenin, though, according to Figs, always harbouring an ultimate desire for a one-party (one-man ie Lenin) dictatorship, also favoured soviet power through a soviet coalition of all the socialist parties (Figs: 466).⁷²

The mass of workers and peasants were moving inexorably towards their own localist conceptions of Soviet rule. Only a Soviet government could hope to command any real authority in the country at large. This had been the case since the February Revolution. But time and again the (non Bolshevik) Soviet leaders had chosen to ignore it – their dogmatic faith in the need for a 'bourgeois stage of the revolution' had tied them to the hopeless task of trying to keep the coalition going⁷³ – and every time the streets had risen to the cry of Soviet power they had chosen to cover their ears" (Figs: 464).⁷⁴

Steve Smith's *Red Petrograd* (Smith: 1983) remains one of the most important studies of 'workers power' in the months immediately before and during the October 1917 Russian Revolution, at least in its main industrial centre, Petrograd.⁷⁵ At its core were the democratically elected factory committees, which challenge, with increasing intensity and ambition, management's right to manage at the point of production from the February Revolution onwards.⁷⁶ Workers in Russia had added a further potentially explosive demand to

⁷¹ Figs also has here a lengthy description of the intensification of the peasant war against the landed estates.

⁷² The similarity here between Figs's description and many passages from Trotsky's *History of the Russian Revolution*, Volume Three, 'The Triumph of the Soviets', is quite remarkable. (Trotsky:1967)

⁷³ That was a coalition with openly capitalist parties in the constituent assembly.

⁷⁴ This passage, without making it explicit, concedes Trotsky's perspective of 'Permanent Revolution', by-passing the need for a 'bourgeois' or capitalist revolutionary stage, and adopted by Lenin in his famous *April Theses* (Lenin 1917d). There is, though, an important qualification. Figs appears to believe that the reformist socialist parties could have exercised soviet power to isolate the Bolsheviks whilst adopting their initial programme of Land, Peace and Bread. This would have opened the possibility for Russia to become "a socialist democracy rather than a Communist dictatorship; and as a result, the bloody civil war...might have lasted weeks rather than years" (Figs: 464). The rest of this chapter in his book is a condemnation of the "political bankruptcy" (Figs: 467) of the non-Bolshevik socialist parties for failing to pursue this path (Figs: 464-473).

⁷⁵ See also (Mandel: 2018).

⁷⁶ Figs explicitly endorses and references Smith's argument that the factory committees simultaneously wanted workers' control and nationalisation (Figs: 369).

the elementary liberal democratic demands.⁷⁷ Democratise the factory order! (Smith 1983: 54).⁷⁸

Factory committees dealt with every aspect of life, as an examination of the minutes of any factory committee will reveal. In the first two weeks of its existence the committee at the 1886 Electric Light Company dealt with matters as diverse as food supplies, the factory militia,⁷⁹ arbitration of disputes, lunch breaks, overtime and the factory club. In a typical week the committee in the gun shop at Putilov dealt with the hiring of workers, wear-and-tear of machinery, wage fixing, financial help to individual workers and the experiments of a worker-inventor trying to invent a new kind of shell (Smith 1983: 85).

Smith investigated diverse areas of factory committee policy and practice, including food supply, labour discipline and campaigns against drunkenness. They illustrate a paralysed management increasingly dependent on the factory committees. Smith's conclusion on food supply illustrates not just this point but the sheer scale of what Lenin described as the "impending catastrophe".

The factory committee initiatives were "puny compared to the colossal scale of the food crisis...worse(ing) through the winter of 1917-18 until mass starvation drove hundreds of thousands out of the capital. Nevertheless, one day's dinner meant a great deal to a hungry worker...that the factory committees did all in their power to provide such meals, immeasurably enhanced their prestige..." (Smith 1983: 88). Hunger, absenteeism, petty theft, drunkenness, disruptive behaviour, an understandable desire to ease the pace of production: issues that the factory committees did not evade. But their efforts to resolve them were infused by the spirit of mass democratic control. After all, their authority depended upon the rank and file worker, hence "disciplinary measures were agreed by a general meeting of the

⁷⁷ Unlike the Bolsheviks, especially after Lenin's return in April, the other socialist parties believed that 'bourgeois' liberal democracy was the only achievable objective of the revolution, at least in the short term.

⁷⁸ In his most recent book, Smith reinforces his argument about the way both "class" and "socialism" became mass-based inspirational ideas driving the revolution, however vaguely defined (Smith 2017: 133-38).

⁷⁹ Smith later comments on the workers' militias: "...a major achievement of the February Revolution, which guaranteed workers' power and in the society at large. Workers, in general, never accepted that there were 'bourgeois' limitations on the February Revolution...it was a 'popular-democratic' revolution, which was potentially threatened by the bourgeoisie. It was crucial that workers organise independently to defend the democratic gains of the revolution, and it was thus inconceivable that the workers' militias should be absorbed into a civil militia under the control of the middle classes...The militias were closely linked to the factory committees and underpinned workers' power in production. Later, the campaign to establish Red Guards became intimately bound with the campaign to establish workers' control of production..." (Smith 1983: 102).

Here is the root of Lenin's confidence in a "state power of the armed workers."

workforce” (Smith 1983: 91). Also, despite the claims of enemies of the Bolsheviks that they had so poisoned the psychology of workers that they were corrupted by sheer idleness, “the Bolshevik dominated factory committees seem to have been just as concerned as committees dominated by moderate socialists to maintain labour productivity – even before October.” Nevertheless there was one important difference, put bluntly by Yu Larin⁸⁰ in the Bolshevik press. “Whoever talks about labour discipline and does not demand workers’ control of capitalist enterprises is a hypocrite and a windbag” (Smith 1983: 92).

Smith notes, apart from the Bolsheviks, it was axiomatic in 1917 that workers “did not possess a level of culture adequate to establishing their hegemony throughout society” (Smith 1983: 94). The factory committees saw it as their responsibility to rise to the challenge implied, establishing cultural enlightenment commissions. The Putilov works committee encouraged evening classes with an appeal to “gain scientific knowledge...We need not only to catch up with the classes with whom we are fighting, but to overtake them...” (Smith 1983: 95).⁸¹ At the Baltic works the education commission sponsored theatre, arranged for women workers to be given some teaching by women students, gave financial help to the apprentices’ club and to a school for soldiers and sailors. At the Sestroretsk works the commission gave the house and garden of the former director to local children as a kindergarten. Similar examples alongside musical, theatrical and wider artistic endeavours and experiments sprang up everywhere, though the line dividing education from entertainment was sometimes the source of bitter controversies. But binding all sides in these arguments was a democratic awakening of poor people who suddenly felt both the power and now taken-for-granted moral right to take part in such debates. No longer just the victims of history, they were helping to shape it (Smith: 95-98).

Smith devotes a chapter analysing the relations between factory committees and trade unions, (Smith: 103-139), introducing the Bolsheviks’ most senior worker activist cadre, metal workers’ union leader, Alexander Shlyapnikov.⁸² Shlyapnikov played a pivotal role during this period

⁸⁰ Larin is a particularly interesting observer, a former Left Menshevik who joined the Bolsheviks in the summer 1917 and became known as one of a group of ‘moderate Bolsheviks’, openly critical of many of Lenin’s perspectives (Rabinowitch 2007: 3, 45-49, 89-90).

⁸¹ The problem was often finding intellectuals to assist. Intellectuals generally were moving to the right, hostile to the Bolsheviks and their perspective of all power to the workers’ soviets (Mandel 2018:243-49).

⁸² Shlyapnikov was a particularly impressive example of a workers’ cadre, learning his Marxism from books and pamphlets as a fourteen year old metal workers’ apprentice. He was also steeped in Russian classical literature and, because he worked in factories in different parts of Western Europe before the revolution, was fluent in several European languages. As we shall see shortly he was less of an enthusiast than Lenin for workers control (Allen: 2016).

negotiating the metal workers contract, a model for all industries and particularly notable for achieving unity between the skilled men (and they were nearly all men) and the *chernorabochie*, the appallingly low paid, semi and unskilled men and women workers. The *chernorabochie* had been understandably tempted to form their own union. This would have had dire, deeply divisive consequences not just for the burgeoning trade union movement but also for the factory committees which tended to be dominated by skilled workers. Smith devotes justifiably much attention to just how Shlyapnikov and his comrades managed to bind the *chernorabochie* to a single contract for all, reducing but by no means eliminating wage differentials. This included confrontation with particular layers of skilled workers, the “small trades” like welders where “particularism” and “craft consciousness” was quite ingrained. (Smith 1983: 129) But the “one united contact” approach won the day which Smith attributes to “class unity” overwhelming “craft particularism” (Smith: 129).

What about relations with the *sluzhashchie*, white collar workers, also experiencing rapid trade union growth and militancy? Clerical to technical personnel, sometimes including foremen as well as highly qualified professionals, like accountants were involved. But tension between the *sluzhashchie* and manual workers was never satisfactorily resolved. The Putilov works committee warned against “the erroneous view that people not engaged in physical labour are...basically drones and parasites. Comrades who argue this lose sight of the crucial fact that in industry, in technical production, mental labour is as indispensable as physical labour” (Smith: 137). Though there were some outstanding examples of unity between the two sectors, Smith cites the Skorokhod shoe factory and the Petichev cable works, the problem remained. It would later compound the crises for the fledgling Bolshevik administration, leading to short term improvised – and as Lenin saw it, retrograde solutions, “bourgeois” salaries for “bourgeois” specialists.⁸³

Smith (154) notes the limited significance that Lenin accords to workers control in his *The Impending Catastrophe and How to Combat It*. Yet it is the economic breakdown and the catastrophe of fuel and food shortages that, as it stimulated Lenin to write the pamphlet, separately deepened the urge of the factory committees to take control of production. In fact although the factory committees developed independently of the Bolsheviks, and reflected a wide range of political opinion from anarchist to Menshevik, Bolshevik influence grew as they grew. The factory committee movement had increasingly recognised the need to link their demand for workers control to soviet state control. This was reflected in a key clause in the

⁸³ See p67.

Bolshevik resolution passed by the First All-Russia Council of Factory Committees (ARCFC), immediately following the October Revolution.

The workers control being implemented in the localities through the factory committees must be organised into a state-wide system...A majority (2/3) for the organs of control must be workers, delegated by the factory committees, trade unions and the Soviet of workers' deputies. As well as workers' representatives, there must be scientifically-educated technical personnel (engineers, technicians etc)⁸⁴ (Smith: 157).

In fact it was pressure from Lenin who helped make explicit and unambiguous the ARCFC October Revolution position on workers' control (Smith: 209) by publishing the *Draft Regulations on Workers Control* (Lenin 1917f).

This ...decree on workers' control...breaths a spirit of libertarianism which reflects Lenin's profound faith at this time in the creativity of the masses. It recognised the right of workers...to control all aspects of production...to bind employers by their decisions...This awkward fact makes nonsense of the claim in Western historiography that, once power was in his grasp, Lenin, the stop-at-nothing centraliser, proceeded to crush the 'syndicalist' factory committees. In fact, the reverse is true. (Smith 1983: 209-10)⁸⁵

Control was envisaged as taking place at both state level and factory level and local initiatives were to be organised into a hierarchy of local and regional Councils of National Economy...topped by the Supreme Council of National Economy (Smith: 212).

Lenin saw the factory committee as the "organisational cell" for the new revolutionary soviet state system. Economic organisational planning must emerge from the masses' "own experience...We must begin immediately from above and from below."⁸⁶

Mandel's more recent archival research reinforces Smith's perspective. The TsIK, the All-Russian Central Executive Committee of Soviets of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies adopted a law on workers' control unanimously (24 in favour, 11 abstained). Guidelines based on the law, published in December, show just how far reaching it was intended to be.

⁸⁴ An attempt to involve the critically important layer of professionally trained, scientific industrial personnel.

⁸⁵ "Shlyapnikov later recalled that he worked closely with Lenin on the first decree on workers' control and that it reflected Lenin's aim that as many workers as possible participate in economic management. Nevertheless, there were crucial differences in their views on workers control, which were reflected in the two different draft decrees. Radical Bolsheviks aligned with the factory committees and moderate socialists in the trade unions disagreed on workers' control. Lenin perceived the danger that the moderate Bolsheviks would join forces with moderate socialists in the trade unions. He tried to undermine them by throwing his support to the radicals, so his draft decree on workers' control reflected the wishes of factory-committee activists" (Allen 2016: 111).

⁸⁶ Smith quoting Lenin from *Polnoe Sobranie Sochinenii*, 5th ed, vol 32 (Moscow 1962) p438 (Smith: 156).

Workers' control of industry, as an integral part of control over the entire economic life of the country, should not be understood in the narrow sense of simple inspection but, on the contrary, in the broad sense of *intervention* into the disposition by the entrepreneur of capital, inventory, raw materials and finished goods in the enterprise; (it should be understood) as *active monitoring* of the correctness and expediency of the fulfilment production orders, the use of energy and of the work force and (in the sense of) *participation in the organisation of production itself on a rational basis*...(emphasis in the original) (Mandel 2018: 399).

There were accusations of anarchism and anarcho-syndicalism, not least by the trade unions. Mandel dismisses them as disingenuous since every conference of factory committees before and after October had insisted that workers' control had to be exerted within the framework of state regulation exercised on a national level. In other words, centralisation of economic authority was taken for granted, (except by the real anarchists). The problem was implementation of such a major undertaking in such devastating conditions – conversion of military industry to peacetime production with increasingly scarce fuel and raw materials. The factory committees, far from resisting state regulation, saw themselves as its representatives until such time as implementation was feasible (Mandel: 401). It was just such a principle that was adopted by the Sixth Petrograd Conference of Factory Committees in January 1918. The need for regional economic councils, including regional soviet and trade union representation, was accepted to help frame factory committee policy. And while the factory committees would continue to execute the will of the workers' general assembly, Conference agreed "at the same time, it...answers to government authority...for the rational conduct...of the enterprise, in accordance with the needs of the entire working people and also for the integrity of the property of the given enterprise" (Mandel: 401-2). N.A.Skrypnik, a Bolshevik and member of the Central Council of Factory Committees, observed. "Workers' control is not yet socialism but only one of the transitional measures that bring us closer to socialism" (Mandel: 405). Tseitlin, from the Kersten Knitwear mill, (incidentally partly representing unskilled workers, including women workers, often considered far less politically active than the skilled workers, (Mandel: 26-38)), delegate to the First Conference of Petrograd Factory Committees in June came up with a novel solution to the relations between the factory committees and the state. "We need a strong centre of factory committees that will be the Ministry of Labour of the proletariat of all of Russia" (Mandel: 171).

The Opticheskii factory committee reported taking over the main functions of management in September 1918, an independent initiative but one ultimately dependent on support from the new revolutionary state administration. During the war, the factory's optical operations were diminished to make way for the production of grenade detonators. But when the time came to

demobilise in January 1918, the supply of electricity was cut. The factory committee reacted by building its own generating plant. Meanwhile, it worked on the development of new models of cinematographic equipment. Eventually, the factory obtained contracts to build projectors for the Commissariat of Education. The factory committee report stated that

taking management of production into their hands, knew that they were overstepping by several degrees all the guidelines issued by the higher organs of power to workers' organisations...Feeling their strength...they were able...to create discipline, to organise production on a new basis, and to save the treasury of the People's government many millions in funds that, had the workers' organisation not been up to the task, would have floated away into the pockets of the foreign imperialists, as happened in many other cases...Based on all the foregoing, the factory committee and the control commission...declare that the time has come...to take fully into the workers' hands the enterprise that they have put in order, and for that they have people who are prepared to assume the tasks of managing (Mandel: 414-5).

The phrase "take fully into workers' hands" is understood as the completion of workers' control, generalised from the workplace to the state. As M.N.Zhivotov, a Bolshevik electrician at the 1886 Electric Lighting Co explained at the January 1918 conference of factory committees. "A series of requests are being received from factory committees on the need to take the factories into the workers' hands, and so unexpectedly there arises the practical question of nationalisation of enterprises." He went on to explain that the requests were made in response to the owners' refusal to recognise workers' control or to their refusal to run their factories for other reasons (Mandel: 416).

Alas, this revolutionary creative fusion of liberated local rank and file initiative and centralised state necessity was to be effectively stillborn. The post-revolutionary crises proved too deep and intractable and immediately so, partly anticipated by *The Impending Catastrophe and How to Combat It* but much, much worse. Smith describes it as nothing less than "economic catastrophe" and "the dissolution of the working class" (Smith 1983: 242-45).⁸⁷ Exacerbated by the threat posed to Petrograd in particular, both by the German military high command, and the eruption, or as some would argue, the intensification,⁸⁸ of civil war.

⁸⁷ "The conditions of absolute scarcity and of political-military emergency made it very difficult, probably impossible, to find a suitable compromise between centralism and workers' self-management, both of which are necessary elements of socialism" (Mandel: 421).

⁸⁸ "Scholars disagree as to when the civil war began, but it seems sensible to see it building up gradually from Kornilov's rebellion and intensifying after what many saw as the illegal seizure of power by the Bolsheviks" (Smith 2017: 154).

"The exalted hopes unleashed by the October insurrection lasted until the beginning of 1918" (Smith 1983: 246).

Implementing the demand for 'peace' was given added urgency by the literal threat of a German military occupation of Petrograd at the beginning of 1918. Thousands of workers, already facing job losses as a result of the agreed running down of the war industries, now faced a cut in the bread ration so serious that "mass starvation" threatened. The metal section of the newly formed Council of National Economy reported. "The workers hurried...to get out of Petrograd as quickly as possible, to escape starvation and the threat of invasion."⁸⁹ In the first six months of 1918 over a million people left Petrograd (Smith 1983: 243).

Within a matter of months, the proletariat of Red Petrograd, renowned throughout Russia for its outstanding role in the revolution, had been decimated. By April 1918 the factory workforce of the capital had plummeted to about 40% of its January 1917 level, and it shrank still further thereafter (Smith 1983: 243).

Civil war added to the exodus. Many of the most committed Bolshevik workers, some of whom could have stayed in the remnants of the factories, nevertheless chose to leave "in order to serve the new soviet government."

They enlisted in the Red Army, assumed posts of responsibility within the government and party apparatuses, or joined food detachments...⁹⁰ Young workers, fired by revolutionary elan and without family commitments, were especially eager to quit the factories in order to defend soviet power...by April the proportion of youths in the factory workforce was only half of that the previous year...It would seem...that at least the keener Bolsheviks among the 'cadre' of workers left the factories in the early months of 1918 (Smith 1983: 244).⁹¹

The Brest-Litovsk peace treaty that the Bolsheviks felt compelled to sign with Germany in March 1918, and which produced one of the deepest splits in the Bolshevik Party's history, consolidated the trap that now ensnared the beleaguered regime. "It was massively punitive: the Baltic provinces, a large part of Belorussia, and the whole of the Ukraine were excised from the former empire, with the result that Russia lost one third of its agriculture and railways, virtually all its oil and cotton production, three quarters of its coal and iron" (Smith 2017: 157). So punitive, that another contemporary scholar of the Russian Revolution has concluded that

⁸⁹ Many went "to their native villages, in the hope of qualifying for some of the land that was being distributed" (Smith 1983: 243).

⁹⁰ That some of these detachments would become notorious for their violent methods of requisitioning food from the peasantry deepened the sense of catastrophe. Its consequences, leading eventually the NEP, New Economic Policy for the peasantry, cannot concern us here.

⁹¹ "Beginning in late November...thousands of Petrograd Bolsheviks, Red Guards, Baltic Fleet sailors, and ordinary workers...joined the rag-tag Soviet forces bound for the south" where the threat of "this first episode of the Russian civil war" was deemed most threatening. (Rabinowitch 2007: 59).

“by the summer of 1918, Soviet Russia had shrunk to the size of the medieval Moscovy state and had lost almost all grain producing regions” (Murphy 2007: 64).

That the Red Army would reverse these defeats and rescue the revolution was an astonishing achievement. But a very heavy price was paid. At the 1921 Third Congress of the Communist International (Comintern), Trotsky, the Red Army’s founder, reported its demobilising, following the civil war victory. “I can now reveal this secret...During the period when we were fighting on four fronts, our army numbered 5,300,000 men, of which no less than three-quarters of a million were skilled workers. That was an extremely heavy and unbearable loss for the economy” (Trotsky 2016: 117).

Trotsky could have added that it was also an unbearable loss for the revolution. The factory committees and soviets’ workers’ cadre had been the willing conscripts which formed this Bolshevik workers’ backbone of the Red Army. But it had left a political vacuum in the shrivelled industrial base of the economy, now dependent on newly recruited workers with little or no trade union and political experience. This is why Isaac Deutscher, Trotsky’s principal biographer, titled his chapter on the civil war victory, *Defeat in Victory*.⁹² And it is why the biography later contains one of the most damning indictments of the immediate post-civil war period: Shlyapnikov’s taunt to Lenin at the Tenth Congress of the Bolshevik Party, 1921. “Permit me to congratulate you on being the vanguard of a non-existing class.” (Deutscher 2003: 12fn10)⁹³

On several occasions in this period, Lenin effectively conceded Shlyapnikov’s underlying argument.

Our enemy...in the present period is not the same one that faced us yesterday. ..He is everyday economics in a small-peasant country with a ruined large-scale industry. He is the petty-bourgeois element which surrounds us like the air, and penetrates deep into the ranks of the proletariat. And the proletariat is declassed, i. e., dislodged from its class groove. The factories and mills are idle—the proletariat is weak, scattered, enfeebled... (Lenin 1921).

This is the context for understanding Lenin’s abrupt change in policy as early as March –April 1918. “Lenin quickly became aware of the impossibility of saving the country from the rapid slide toward economic ruination through authentically socialist forms of administration....as it became increasingly clear to him that the European revolution, which he had expected as an

⁹² Deutscher 1970: (Chapter XIV, 486-523).

⁹³ Shlyapnikov was by now a member of the banned faction the ‘Workers Opposition’. Trotsky, at the time approving of the ban, would later regard it as the moment that “brought the heroic history of Bolshevism to an end and made way for its bureaucratic degeneration” (Le Blanc 1993:307).

almost immediate repercussion of the Russian Revolution, was not maturing as expected.” (Harding: 188) Or to put it more bluntly, the context was increasingly to be a “burnt out proletariat” (Cliff 1978: 112-15).

Lenin and the other Bolshevik leaders were forced into compromises with capitalism far beyond anything he had imagined in his effort to adapt Marx’s transition phase, and Marx’s understanding of the *dictatorship of the proletariat*, in the *Critique of the Gotha Programme*. This was less about workers controlling those remnants of the capitalist class deemed necessary for socialist reconstruction of the economy and more about a state partnership with capital, however unwillingly conceded, and however much its temporary character was to be emphasised.

Here is an unexpected Lenin writing in late April 1918. It’s ‘turnabout’ political character speaks for itself, including Lenin’s quite intriguing warning that workers are not ready for nationalisation because they are not yet ready for workers’ control.

I told every workers’ delegation with which I had to deal when they came to me and complained that their factory was at a standstill: you would like your factory to be confiscated. Very well, we have blank forms for a decree ready, they can be signed in a minute... But tell us: have you learnt how to take over production and have you calculated what you will produce? Do you know the connection between what you are producing and the Russian and international market? Whereupon it turns out that they have not learnt this yet; there has not been anything about it yet in Bolshevik pamphlets, and nothing is said about it in Menshevik pamphlets either.

The situation is best among those workers who are carrying out this state capitalism⁹⁴: among the tanners and in the textile and sugar industries, because they have a sober, proletarian knowledge of their industry...They say: I can’t cope with this task just yet; I shall put in capitalists, giving them one-third of the posts, and I shall learn from them (Lenin 1918b).

“The enlistment of bourgeois experts by means of extremely high salaries” also became essential, though it was “a retreat from the principles of the Paris Commune” (Lenin 1918a).

Without the guidance of experts in the various fields of knowledge, technology and experience, the transition to socialism will be impossible, because socialism calls for a conscious mass advance to greater productivity of labour compared with capitalism...Had our proletariat, after capturing power, quickly solved the problem of accounting, control and organisation on a national scale (which was impossible owing to the war and Russia’s backwardness) then we... would also have completely

⁹⁴ This was a particular definition of ‘state capitalism’ Lenin was using at the time to emphasise the workers’ state’s necessary partnership with some capitalists.

subordinated these bourgeois experts to ourselves...It is...*a step backward* on the part of our socialist Soviet state power (Lenin 1918a).

Expertise also meant introducing the novel American capitalist technique known as Taylorism for raising labour productivity.

The Russian is a bad worker compared with people in advanced countries. It could not be otherwise under the tsarist regime and in view of the persistence of the hangover from serfdom. The task that the Soviet government must set the people in all its scope is—learn to work. The Taylor system, the last word of capitalism in this respect, like all capitalist progress, is a combination of the refined brutality of bourgeois exploitation and a number of the greatest scientific achievements in the field of analysing mechanical motions during work, the elimination of superfluous and awkward motions, the elaboration of correct methods of work, the introduction of the best system of accounting and control, etc. The Soviet Republic must at all costs adopt all that is valuable in the achievements of science and technology in this field (Lenin 1918a).

One-man management was also introduced. Here, though, Lenin seeks to, or rather hopes to, retain some revolutionary principles.

Given ideal class-consciousness and discipline on the part of those participating in the common work, this subordination would be something like the mild leadership of a conductor of an orchestra. It may assume the sharp forms of a dictatorship if ideal discipline and class-consciousness are lacking. But be that as it may, *unquestioning subordination* to a single will is absolutely necessary for the success of processes organised on the pattern of large-scale machine industry. On the railways it is twice and three times as necessary... (Lenin 1918a).

Lenin, though, seeks a democratic mandate for these changes which he hopes will retain mass worker democratic principles, reminiscent of Engels's *On Authority*.

The “mania for meetings” is an object of the ridicule...of the bourgeoisie, the Mensheviks...But without the discussions at public meetings the mass of the oppressed could never have changed from the discipline forced upon them by the exploiters to conscious, voluntary discipline. The airing of questions at public meetings is the genuine democracy of the working people, their way of unbending their backs, their awakening to a new life, their first steps along the road which they themselves have cleared of vipers (the exploiters, the imperialists, the landowners and capitalists) and which they want to learn to build themselves, in their own way, for themselves, on the principles of their own *Soviet*... to the conscious appreciation of the necessity for the dictatorship of the proletariat, to unquestioning obedience to the orders of individual representatives of the Soviet government during the work (Lenin 1918a).

Lenin still hoped “to draw *the whole of the poor* into the practical work of administration...*every* toiler, having finished his eight hours’ “task” in productive labour, shall perform state duties *without pay*; the transition to this is particularly difficult, but this transition alone can guarantee the final consolidation of socialism” (Lenin 1918a). Alas, it proved wishful thinking in the context just described: the decimated former workforce, its

leadership enlisted in the Red Army, now a rump, surly, hungry, diminished workforce, often newly recruited, desperate for work, disillusioned with the revolution.

Conclusion

In his 2017 centenary book on the Russian Revolution, Steve Smith describes how “the idea of the working class as the agent of socialist revolution gave way gradually to the party and the Red Army as the guarantors of the workers’ state” (Smith 2017: 380). This observation implies a major distortion of the original principles underpinning the route to communism, that the emancipation of the working class is the task of the working class. Political parties and revolutionary armies are supposed to be part of that process, not substitutes for it. The isolation of the Russian Revolution built in this distortion to communist development almost from the beginning. It set the seal on what would become Official Communism for the rest of the twentieth century. But a ‘Communism’ that claims to speak and act on behalf of the working class, without their active participation, cannot be the same communism that Marx, Engels and Lenin originally intended.

Yet, at the same time, we shouldn’t lose sight of the unique historical breakthrough that had been momentarily achieved, nor of the decisive role of Lenin’s Bolshevik Party and its worker cadres. Red Petrograd at the centre of an experiment in workers power, rooted in a workers’ state based on soviets or workers’ councils. The humble factory committee at the point of production, democratically elected, organisational cell of the soviet, played a strategically central role. The resurfacing of the factory committee in later revolutionary upheavals in the twentieth century is the subject of this investigation.

Chapter 2

The Lost Revolution in Poland 1980-81

Introduction

In the sixteen months from August 1980 to December 1981, one of the least understood revolutionary upheavals of the twentieth century came close to toppling the so-called Communist government of Poland, part of the Warsaw Pact constellation of satellite countries tied to the former Soviet Union. Was this an anti-Communist revolution, a Polish nationalist revolt against Soviet Russian domination? Or, controversially, the beginnings of a genuine communist revolution as Marx and Engels would have understood it, fulfilling predictions made in their famous *Communist Manifesto* of 1848? Certainly it would become a major contributor to the implosion of 'Soviet Communism' in 1989. That this was indeed a revolution remains the view of many former leaders of the Solidarity movement. This is forcefully expressed in interviews I carried out with some of them, illustrated in the chapter, in September and November 2017.

Part I of the chapter analyses the importance, and relevance to the Solidarity movement, of the *Open Letter* to the Polish Communist Party written in 1964 by two dissident Polish communist students, Jacek Kuron and Karol Modzelewski. Applying Marxist assumptions, it challenged Poland's communist credentials, identifying a class-divided society with a state bureaucratic ruling class oppressing and exploiting its workers. They were thrown in jail for their efforts. This remarkable document, rarely given the attention it deserves by historians, might even lay claim to be the basis for a *Communist Manifesto for the late Twentieth Century*. Certainly a claim can be made that it predicted the emergence of the Solidarity workers' movement a generation later. The second claim is complicated by the fact that both Kuron and Modzelewski, although they became very important leaders of Solidarity, had, by then, rejected, in its entirety, the highly innovative (some would say 'Trotskyist')⁹⁵ Marxist premises of the *Open Letter*. Kuron, in particular, opted instead for what he described as a self-limiting revolution, believing that the Polish 'Communist' state could be reformed and should not be overthrown. This argument, and its flaws, goes to the heart of this chapter. It finds its expression in the role of KOR, *Komitet Obrony Robotnikow*, the Workers' Defence Committee, analysed in Part II. KOR was decisive in both helping to initiate and then shape Solidarity's development.

⁹⁵ See footnote 165.

Part II goes on to discuss the rise and fall Solidarity's brief but spectacular history before the imposition of Martial Law in December 1981. This includes the movement's high point, its 'October' moment, at the Polish city of Bydgoszcz, in March 1981, when the revolutionary seizure of power came tantalisingly close. Solidarity would not recover. Martial law completely destroyed its revolutionary potential. Karol Modzelewski did not join KOR. Although no longer a revolutionary, unlike Kuron, he maintained a much stronger identification with the workers' movement long after it was fashionable for intellectuals to do so.

An outstanding passage from his autobiography⁹⁶ captures the essential significance of this history, and with it the demand for workers' self-management, both of the workplace and the wider society.

During the first 'Solidarity', (the) crowds' attitude towards the leaders was very emotional, too. But there was no blind trust. On every level the activists – from the workplace to National Commission, and following their suit, ordinary unionists – wanted, more than anything, to self-manage. They would never trust anyone, not even Walesa, with their lives. In order to effectively manage this movement we had to continuously intercommunicate with the crowds who wanted, above all, to direct and rule themselves, the unions and Poland.

In January 1990 in Wrocław's Hydral conference room I saw with my own eyes that this spirit of self-governance vanished completely. This 'Solidarity' was different. It is not even about the fact that 80% of former members never rejoined the movement when it was reactivated. The main reason for this is the fact that this powerful spirit of self-determination was crushed by a violent force⁹⁷ in December 1981 and it never came back. The extraordinary phenomenon of sovereign, collective activism of millions of people has been irretrievably destroyed. The myth survived, and it manifested itself in the strikes of 1988 and triumphed during the June 1989 elections. When 'our'

⁹⁶ Modzelewski, Karol, *Zajeżdżimy kobyłę historii - wyznania poobijanego jeźdźcy*, *We'll ride the mare of history into the ground - confessions of a bruised rider* (Wydawnictwo Iskry, Warsaw 2013)

In the Epilogue, Modzelewski writes.

"This book's title is inspired by Mayakovsky's poem *The Left March*. Mayakovsky was a genius poet – a futurist, who devoted his great talent and charisma to serving Bolshevik revolution; and in 1930 ended his life with a suicidal gunshot. *The Left March* is not one of his best poems, but the metaphor 'We'll ruin the jade of the past'*** is an excellent description of the Marxist philosophy of history. Every revolution attempts to mount and tame this horse ['jade of the past'], however it is a dangerous ride. 'The jade of the past' is a wild, unbroken mustang. We can jump on her back and even ride for some time, yet it is impossible to keep a tight rein on her – eventually, the horse will always take us somewhere, where we never desired or expected to be. This is how – in a nutshell – I see my own life experience." (***) quoted translation of *The Left March* is by Alec Vagapov). I would like to thank Ela Bancarzewski and Maciej Bancarzewski for reading and translating passages from Modzelewski's autobiography. I also interviewed Modzelewski at the University of Warsaw in September 2017 – discussed later in the chapter.

⁹⁷ The imposition of martial law

government was formed, the righteous 'flag-bearer' had to become 'our' prime minister and his team. But the myth does not express the crowd's pursuit for self-decision making; it does not provide the control instruments or a will to control. Where the myth is strong, its depositaries have the free rein. Their decisions are never resisted (Modzelewski 2013: loc. 7265-75).

Was there an alternative strategy? Part III analyses the importance of the rising threat of "active strikes" between March and December 1981, pioneered by workers in Poland's second largest city, Lodz., and in particular by Lodz's bus driver worker leader Andrzej Slowik and the revolutionary socialist intellectual Zbigniew Kowalewski. "Active strikes" were seen as a response to catastrophic food shortages in the city where tens of thousands of women had taken part in a Hunger March. It raised the question of workers taking control of food production and distribution in the city and had the potential to spread across the country. But Solidarity nationally was unable to unite around the demand for "active strikes" at its one and only National Congress in the autumn, despite Congress committing itself to "Workers Self-Management in a Self Governing Republic". Zbigniew Kowalewski concludes Part III with a powerful analysis of Solidarity's theoretical, strategic and tactical weaknesses. Those weaknesses were exposed by the breakdown of relations between Solidarity's workers and intellectuals, examined in Part IV, following the imposition of Martial Law. This provided an opening for Polish nationalism to fill the vacuum when the Soviet inter-state system imploded in 1989.

The conclusion, Part V, returns to the *Open Letter* and observes that despite its rejection by its authors, Kuron and Modzelewski, it had provided the framework for an alternative strategy for Solidarity. To be sure, the *Open Letter* required some major amendments following the failure of the revolutionary wave in 1968. In particular, it required an adaptation of its economic analysis to Poland's deepening crisis in the 1970's. Poland's state bureaucratic ruling class was increasingly relying upon Western capitalism and especially its banks for its very survival. This suggests that the economic crisis that precipitated the eruption of Solidarity in 1980 was, in part, a response to a Western economically induced recession, intensifying the pressures that would implode the entire Soviet 'Communist' satellite state system. In other words Solidarity needed much greater ideological clarity at the outset: an explicit anti-capitalist, as well as anti-Soviet 'Communist' perspective which, paradoxically, the rejected premises of *Open Letter* could have provided.

(I) *An Open Letter to the Party* by Jacek Kuron and Karol Modzelewski

Jacek Kuron and Karol Modzelewski were young Communist dissidents in one of Soviet Communism's most strategically important military outposts in Eastern Europe, its Warsaw Pact ally, Poland. Their *Open Letter*, written in 1964, was a closely argued critical Marxist analysis of Polish society. It identified bitter social class divisions with the Polish 'Communist' state bureaucracy playing the equivalent role of a capitalist ruling class. It extracted surplus value from Polish workers on shockingly low pay and terrible working conditions with no control either of the work process or the product of their labour. In 1965 Kuron and Modzelewski were thrown into jail for this "provocation", the Polish government thereby unwittingly dramatizing the prestige and authority of the *Open Letter*. It began its travels, in pamphlet form, across the Polish border, to an increasingly receptive audience on both sides of the so-called Iron Curtain, which divided Soviet Communist dominated Eastern Europe from Western Europe and North America. Though they don't use the term, the analysis of Kuron and Modzelewski is similar to the *state capitalist* analysis that has surfaced at different times, following Trotsky's break with the Soviet regime.⁹⁸

In the opening paragraphs of the *Open Letter*, Kuron and Modzelewski expose the gulf between the ruling Communist Party in Poland and the country's working class. State nationalisation of the means of production serves to consolidate that gulf, undermining the ideological pretence that state nationalisation is by definition the equivalent of a workers' state.

In our system, the Party elite is...also the power elite; all decisions relating to state power are made by it...(it) has at its disposal all the nationalised means of production; it decides on the extent of accumulation and consumption, on the direction of investment, on the share of various social groups in consumption and in the national income; in others words, it decides on the distribution and utilisation of the entire social product. The decisions of the elite are independent, free of any control on the part of the working class and of the remaining social classes and strata. The workers have no way of influencing them, nor have Party members in general...This Party-state power elite...we shall call the *central political bureaucracy* (Kuron and Modzelewski, KM 1966: 7).⁹⁹

⁹⁸ For example, Raya Dunayevskaya and C.L.R. James (James, Dunayevskaya, Lee: 1986) who worked with Trotsky during his final exile in Mexico as well as Tony Cliff also developed the theory of state capitalism (Cliff: 1974). Ivan Maisky, the Soviet Ambassador to Britain during the war recorded in his diaries Stalin's enthusiasm for a leading British Conservative banker, J. Gibson Jarvie, who praised Stalin's Five Year Plan. But Maisky writes that Stalin always ignored Jarvie's insistence that Russia was practising state capitalism. (Gorodetsky: 2015: 37). See also fn 165 on *Trotskyism*.

In his book comparing and contrasting how Western Marxists have attempted to analyse the Soviet Union and its satellite countries, van der Linden prefers to associate Kuron and Modzelewski's analysis with the "New Class" theory of Yugoslav dissident Milovan Djilas rather than with the state capitalist comparison (van der Linden 2007: 164-71). A thorough comparison of the similarities and differences between the "New Class" theory and the state capitalist analysis is not possible here.

⁹⁹ The full text is online. See bibliography for reference.

Later this argument is strengthened, making explicit the ruling bureaucracy as a ruling class.

To whom does the worker...sell his labour? To those who have at their disposal the means of production... the *central political bureaucracy*. On account of this...it is a ruling class. It has at its exclusive command the basic means of production. It buys the labour of the working class. It takes away from the working class by force and economic coercion the surplus product and uses it for purposes which are alien and hostile to the worker in order to strengthen and expand its rule over production and society.

It is said that the bureaucracy cannot be a class, since the individual earnings of its members do not come anywhere near the individual earnings of capitalists...This is quite wrong...the property of the bureaucracy is not of an individual nature, but constitutes the collective property of an elite which identifies itself with the state...its class character (depends) only on its relationship – as a group – to the means of production (KM 1966: 15).

Discussing the origins of the system in the context of the outcome of the second world war, and the ceding of Poland (and other Eastern European countries) to Stalin's sphere of influence as part of the post war settlement, the *Open Letter* identifies Poland's post-war industrialisation drive as the mechanism which created this new state-based bureaucratic ruling class.

...the nature of the task of industrialising a backward country called to life as a ruling class a bureaucracy which was able to achieve this task, since it alone, through its class interest, represented the interest of industrialisation under the conditions – production for the sake of production (KM 1966:27).¹⁰⁰

The *Open Letter* had an additionally good reason for predicting the emergence of a mass-based revolutionary workers' movement, resulting directly from its class analysis of 'Communist' Polish society (KM: 50-1). There was a famous historical precedent. Although not on the same scale as Hungary 1956,¹⁰¹ Polish workers in that year not only went on strike but developed democratically elected workers councils which, momentarily at least, appeared also to challenge the authority of the Polish state-system. However the state would, partially, at least successfully neuter them by integrating them into its own industrial power arrangements.

¹⁰⁰ Chris Harman applied Cliff's theory of state capitalism to Poland in the mid 1970's. He identified the competitive military pressures between the two Cold War power blocs as the key mechanism driving accumulation. "...accumulation soon exhausted the raw materials to hand...Imports were necessary to sustain it. But imports could only be obtained if exports were increased...a situation not appreciably different to that of any western capitalist...To survive they have...to subordinate the internal development of their economies to the needs of external competition..." (Harman 1976: 26)

¹⁰¹ In 1956, there was a popular uprising in Hungary, following a speech by Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev in which he attacked the period of Joseph Stalin's rule. Workers occupied their factories and established a society-wide network of independent workplace organisations with the capacity both to halt production and then re-start it under their own terms and conditions. Although Soviet military intervention finally broke the resistance, a precedent had been established of organised workers challenging Soviet Communism. See also fn145.

Kuron and Modzelewski called on this experience not simply to demand genuine workers democracy in Poland but to locate the demand very specifically in the lessons of 1956. The following passage from the *Open Letter* is particularly remarkable because it also unwittingly pinpoints with extraordinary accuracy the key debate in Solidarity in late 1981 about workers control in the workplace, workers democracy and state power.

Workers' democracy cannot limit itself to the level of an enterprise. For when economic and political decisions, the actual rule over the surplus product, and the labour that creates it, do not belong to the working class, then participation of the workers in managing the enterprise must also become fictitious. Workers' self-rule in an enterprise, therefore, requires full workers democracy in the state. The working class organised under such conditions will set the goals of social production, guided by its own interest, the interest of the people living today at subsistence level. The goal of production will then be, of course, consumption for the broad masses. This signifies the overthrow of existing production and social relationships and, with them, the bureaucracy's class rule (KM 1966: 22-3).¹⁰²

Finally, again based on the 1956 experience, and again in extraordinary anticipation of potential weaknesses in the Solidarity movement, the *Open Letter* called for workers to organise their own independent political party.

The so-called October Left – a political current made up in large measure of the natural leaders of the working class, youth and intellectual opinion – could have been a substitute for the political vanguard of the mass working class movement. The October Left differed from the liberal current, especially in its views on the Workers' Councils, in which it saw the basis for new production relationships and the nucleus of a new political power. But it was not a uniform movement. The Left did not separate itself from the technocratic current in the Workers' Council movement (the demand that factories be run by the Councils did go beyond the programme of the technocracy) nor from the liberal bureaucracy, in the political showdown on a national scale. It did not set itself apart from the general anti-Stalinist front as a specifically proletarian movement. In this situation, it was evidently unable to formulate its own political programme, to propagate it in an organised manner among the masses, to create a party. Without all this, it could not become a politically independent force, and therefore, had to transform itself into a leftist appendage of the ruling liberal bureaucracy (KM 1966: 45).¹⁰³

The legacy of the *Open Letter* and the legacy of the events of 1968 or *the class of '68* (Ash: 22)¹⁰⁴ have become deeply intertwined. Unravelling this process is essential both to

¹⁰² This statement is also extremely relevant to both the 'workerist' view of workers control in the struggle against apartheid in South Africa and the workers' shoras (councils) in the immediate aftermath of the revolution in Iran 1979. The *Open Letter* develops a detailed programme for implementation in its concluding pages (KM 1966: 59-66).

¹⁰³ This is also extremely relevant to the conclusions in the South Africa and Iran case studies, chapters 3 and 4.

¹⁰⁴ From now on to be described as just 1968. 1968 – a year, certainly, but also a mood, an expectation, a world, it seemed, bursting with a promise of revolutionary possibility. A world-wide student

understanding the birth of Solidarity, Kuron and Modzelewski's roles in the movement and their rejection of the Marxist premises of the *Open Letter*.

Modzelewski provides the link in his autobiography.

The *Open Letter* was better known abroad than in Poland. I have held in my hands French, Italian, German, Swedish and Japanese copies, there were many more I have only heard about (Czech or English) or other I had no idea even existed. Our pamphlet was mainly, if not exclusively, published by ephemeral radical left publishers in the years of 1966-69. It was the time of the youth revolt in Europe and America. The movement was raging against both – the conformism of middle-class societies and the authoritarian conformism of bureaucratic communist parties and their Muscovite Mecca (Modzelewski 2013: loc. 2123-2127).¹⁰⁵

Modzelewski identifies "Adam Michnik's circles"¹⁰⁶ for its international promotion in 1968. It had originally been published in Polish in August 1966 by the *Instytut Literacki*, Literary Institute in Poland. "(It) then reached the readers of 'Kultura' magazine."¹⁰⁷ These circles were quite small in numbers, consisting of highly influential in opinion-forming and critical of the system Polish intellectuals." (Modzelewski 2013: 2114-2122)

The manifesto of two insurgent Marxists from Warsaw was getting a lot of interest and support from the Western contesters. Daniel Cohn-Bendit,¹⁰⁸ ...questioned during his trial for disturbing public order...(gave) his name replied proudly: 'Kuron-Modzelewski'...For the youth, who in 1968 and 1969 were building barricades on the streets of the main university towns and cities of Western Europe, the 'Open Letter' was a compulsory reading. When I thought about it I was envious – why there and not here, at home? (Modzelewski 2013: 2127-2133).

The obvious and entirely understandable pride that Modzelewski exhibits for the *Open Letter* illustrates a wider truth about its impact on 1968. It is arguably the single most important historical document of both movement and its year of climax. Yet Modzelewski's comment here ends on a negative note. This is because the *Open Letter* also proved a failure that year. It

movement, world-wide street demonstrations against the US war in Vietnam, the Black Power movement in the US, a widespread sense of cultural dislocation amongst young people, the 'Prague Spring', symbolising protest against Soviet Communism. And above all, a focus provided by the unprecedented students' and workers' demonstrations in France which climaxed in May 1968 when ten million workers occupied their factories and de Gaulle, the French President, temporarily, fled the country.

¹⁰⁵ I showed him a copy of the English version during our interview.

¹⁰⁶ Adam Michnik would become the best known of the student activists in Poland 1968.

¹⁰⁷ See the opening paragraph in the discussion of KOR, *Komitet Obrony Robotników*, p.9-10, Part II.

¹⁰⁸ The widely recognised leader of the student revolt in France, 1968, but did Cohn Bendit properly read the *Open Letter*? It is not addressed in his 1968 book (Cohn-Bendit: 1968). This was a wider problem. It became a flag, a 'red rag' to the Stalinist bull, of symbolic protest. Its sharp incisive analysis was too easily glossed over. Modzelewski would interpret this response as the *Open Letter's* moral appeal. Cohn-Bendit's response and his anarcho-libertarianism helped spawn *Anti-Politics*, arguably, a very unhelpful part of the 1968 legacy (Ost: 1990).

had no impact in Poland, as noted by Modzelewski, where anti-Semitism was explicitly used by the regime to drive a wedge between students and workers.¹⁰⁹ The *Open Letter* had also played down – almost to the point of explicitly denying the possibility of Soviet tanks destroying incipient revolutionary uprisings against Soviet power.¹¹⁰ If the student uprisings and the ten-million strong workers' occupations of factories in France in May proved to be the highpoint of 1968, then the outcome of what is sometimes called the "Prague Spring" proved its low point, when Soviet tanks moved in to crush the mass-based student-led insurgent movement for democratic reform in Czechoslovakia.¹¹¹ A literal interpretation of the *Open Letter* could not be defended.

After the experience of crushing the Prague spring through the involvement of the Soviet Union and five countries of the Warsaw Pact, including Poland, as well as the earlier experience with the Hungarian revolution, I stopped imagining that when a revolution starts in one country, its flames could be spread to other countries immediately, especially in case of the Soviet Union (A-KM: 270).¹¹²

Herein lies one of the roots Solidarity's appeal for a *self-limiting* revolution, the vital qualifying restriction imposed by Solidarity leaders on their movement. Discussing the background to the recognition of Solidarity by the Polish authorities over ten years later, Modzelewski concluded.

I thought that the most important thing for us, as we already had some recognition, some sort of authority, was to prevent Soviet military intervention in the event of any

¹⁰⁹ Student leader Adam Michnik, son of Jewish Communist parents, was a deliberately singled out target. For reflections on his "shock" at this development see (Michnik 1987: 203-5). Attempts to link students and workers in Poland, 1968 are described by Andrzej Gwiazda and Joanna Duda-Gwiazda. (Supplementary interview Appendix p250). The Gwiazdas discuss their opposition to anti-Semitism (Gwiazdas 2008: 50-56). Andrzej Gwiazda as a Solidarity leader is discussed later in this chapter.

¹¹⁰ "It is said that an eventual revolution in Poland would inevitably lead to Soviet armed intervention, the result of which, from the military point of view, is not open to doubt. Those who advance this view assume that everything takes place in 'one country in isolation' which, by way of exception is torn by class struggles while in neighbouring countries there are no classes but only regular armies...planes and tanks" (KM 1966:55-6).

¹¹¹ Kuron and Modzelewski had been released from prison and together with Adam Michnik, in the name of the *commandos*, issued a famous and classic 1968 leaflet *Time and again great powers preserve the existing social order using tanks*.

"Vietnam's cause is our cause. A right to a revolution, abolish social slavery... freedom from exploitation...from Great Powers' dictatorship over small nations. We – the Polish left – cannot be silent... Because we remember...the foreign interventions, stifling the Hungarian Revolution. ..Che Guevara laid down his life for the thousands who die every day in Latin America and Vietnam...Fighting for a sovereign and socialist Vietnam means fighting for sovereign and socialist Poland. A nation cannot be free if its government oppresses other nations... We send our solidarity to the American left, whose fight for peace and freedom for Vietnam means fight for human rights and democracy in their country. We send our solidarity to the Soviet left. We send our solidarity to West German students, French left and Czech intellectuals. Alien to us, the great powers, trading in Vietnamese nation's blood. Alien to us, the provocative politics of the Chinese bureaucracy. To all who trample the sovereignty of working people in any country, we follow the Spanish antifascists: NO PASARAN.'" (Friszke 2010: 493)

¹¹² What was needed was an updated *Open Letter* after 1968. What that might have looked like is the subject of the concluding sections.

revolutionary movement. Such an invasion was still possible...no revolutionary movement would have withstood it. And that would have been tragic for our country (A-KM: 270).

Yet he remains ready to link the *Open Letter* to the rise of Solidarity. Some of the 'Kultura' magazine intellectuals, referred to earlier

co-operated with KOR, the Workers' Defence Committee in the '70s,¹¹³ and many later took part in the...'Solidarity' movement. In the years 1980-81 the movement was imbued with the idea of workers and intelligentsia collaboration and fraternity. If what Jacek Kuroń and I wrote managed to show to the world back then in 1964-65, influenced – in any way – 'Kultura' magazine readers' attitudes towards the biggest workers movement in Polish history, our efforts and all those years in prison weren't for nothing. The question of longevity of this influence still remains unanswered (Modzelewski 2013: 2114-2122).

But this begs the question that goes to the heart of this chapter. The *Open Letter* is based on Marxist premises. "Workers and intelligentsia collaboration and fraternity" in 1980-81 explicitly rejected this perspective, imposing ideological limits of the *self-limiting* revolution. Two of the key authors of this alternative approach were Kuron and Modzelewski. Kuron was quite explicit at a Solidarity meeting. "Marxism 'was a nineteen-century philosophy...and is long outlived'. He told a general assembly of delegates of Solidarność of Lodz region, in the last months of 1980."¹¹⁴

Modzelewski came to regard the *Open Letter* as "utopian," because he began to reject Marxism as utopian.

...any vision which is sort of a radical contestation of the existing order is by definition utopian. Just as every other intellectual tradition in Europe, Marxism as well, Marxist philosophy has Christian roots. ..Utopia can be compared to eschatology...The kingdom on earth in the Christian sense is – was – necessary in order to formulate a radical criticism of the existing...order at the time. By the same token, the utopia...set out in the *Open Letter* was an axiological condition necessary in order to formulate a radical criticism of the existing social and economic regime at the time (A-KM: 271).

This seems to be an attempt to re-fashion the *Open Letter*, indeed Marxism itself, as a moral appeal, moreover a moral appeal in a Christian context. But it weakens it. The *Open Letter's* greatest strength and most obvious characteristic is its closely argued Marxist economic

¹¹³ KOR, *Komitet Obrony Robotników*, the Workers' Defence Committee, (see Part II).

¹¹⁴ Zbigniew Kowalewski e mail communication 10/9/2017: Kowalewski, a Lodz Solidarity regional leader and the movement's most prominent revolutionary socialist. "I told the story of Kuron mocking me and dismissing the *Open Letter* in the journal, *Nowy Robotnik*, no. 7 (22), July-August 2005. He said. I am "a shnook (frajer) that still believes in the follies/foolishnesses/stupidities/idiocies (głupstwa) we wrote, Karol and me, in the *Open Letter*." Kowalewski's interview with me is based on informal conversations then followed by e mail exchanges Appendix (A-ZK: 258-269). He is fluent in English.

analysis of Stalinism as a class-divided capitalistic system and its accurate (indeed prophetic) prediction of a workers' revolt.¹¹⁵

Nevertheless, the assertion of an alleged Christian and utopian context provides a powerful insight into the political trajectory then followed by Kuron and Modzelewski, and Kuron in particular. It finds its expression in KOR, *Komitet Obrony Robotnikow*, the Workers' Defence Committee, the movement which preceded and helped precipitate Solidarity. The roots of Solidarity's *self-limiting* revolution, and ultimate defeat, are to be found in KOR.

(II) KOR, *Komitet Obrony Robotnikow*, the Workers' Defence Committee and the Rise and Fall of Solidarity

In 1970, price rises precipitated mass strikes and demonstrations in the Baltic coastal shipyard cities of Gdansk and Szczecin. The security forces responded with unrestrained brutality, killing hundreds of workers. Leszek Kolakowski, at that time considered Poland's most prominent exiled dissident Marxist philosopher, wrote a seminal article *Theses on Hope and Despair* for 'Kultura'¹¹⁶ in 1971. In it, he chastised potentially critical Polish intellectuals for "allowing themselves to be convinced of the total rigidity of the shameful system under which they live." This led to the "passivity which they manifested at the time of the dramatic struggle undertaken by Polish workers in December 1970." Kolakowski had been an influential figure with Poland's 1968 generation. He had been expelled from the Polish Communist Party for speaking in solidarity with the 1956 revolt in Poland at Warsaw University on the occasion of its tenth anniversary. A number of students were suspended for attending and taking part in the discussion, including Adam Michnik (Lipski 1985: 15).¹¹⁷ Michnik, along with Kuron, was one of the key founders of KOR in 1976. Kolakowski, in exile, was also one of its founding signatories (Lipski: 114).¹¹⁸ Michnik attributes two of KOR's founding values to Kolakowski, the

¹¹⁵ This gave it a scientific as well as a moral foundation. See Conclusion Part V for how this might have been developed. The assertion of a Christian context for Marxism has its roots in the intellectual journey from Marxism to Christianity of Poland's most famous dissident, the former Communist, Leszek Kolakowski. For a very useful discussion about Kolakowski and his influence, see the interview with Andrzej Friszke, arguably Poland's foremost historian on the Solidarity movement. <https://www.eurozine.com/leszek-kolakowskis-political-path/>

Jacek Kuron and Adam Michnik would attempt a similar journey in the 1980's – see later.

¹¹⁶ This Polish dissident magazine was produced in Paris. The article was republished by the French dissident Communist journal "Politique Aujourd'hui". Stathis Kouvelakis kindly provided me with an English language extract from the article.

¹¹⁷ The source here Jozef Lipski, one of KOR's founders, a dissident with roots going back to the Polish Socialist Party before world war two, his book is the most comprehensive history of KOR (Lipski: 1985).

¹¹⁸ Another KOR founder, Antonio Macierewicz, cannot be given the attention here he deserves. He represented the Polish scouting tradition which had a unique political role in Poland's long and troubled history of national resistance to foreign occupation. Macierewicz's scout movement, the wonderfully

need to live in “dignity...striving not so much for a better tomorrow as for a better today” (Michnik 1987: 148). And, rather revealingly, “inconsistency” (Michnik 1987: 89)¹¹⁹, a value transferred to Solidarity that would contribute to its chronic instability at its most critical test at Bydgoszcz in March 1981.

This emphasis on KOR’s founding *values* reflects the new movement’s assertion of the primacy of morality over politics. Its activities “would appeal above all...to general moral standards rather than political attitudes” (Lipski: 44). The personal but deliberately very public and open activity of KOR activists would exhibit behaviour of the highest moral standards and would seek to confront the “opportunist” (Lipski: 44) passivity of the intellectuals that Kolakowski had identified. This approach would be combined with attempts to stay within the law (Lipski: 45), always to tell the truth (Lipski: 68) and renounce violence (Lipski: 70). Lipski cites a remarkable essay by Kuron, KOR’s most prominent spokes-person, *A Christian Without God*, written under a pseudonym, where Kuron embraces Christian ethics, rejects ethical relativism and views ethical values “as if they were transcendent” (Lipski: 75). But there was a glaring contradiction built into this movement from the outset. Kuron had rejected Marx, an apparently out-dated nineteenth century philosopher, only to turn to two thousand year old biblical fables about a preacher called Jesus who, as well as leading an exemplary personal life, made a virtue of helping the poor because the poor could not help themselves. However let’s for a moment concede the profound political as well as moral significance of the dramatic public appearance of intellectuals, rallying to the workers’ cause, fearless of any personal risk to themselves. And that this did indeed immediately mark them as targets for the security forces which made life hell for them.¹²⁰

It was the strikes at the Ursus tractor complex in Warsaw in 1976 and in the city of Radom that provided take-off for KOR. It supported the striking workers at their trials, raised funds and publicised the cases of victimised workers. As a sporadic strike movement developed between 1976 and 1980, in response to the deepening economic crisis, KOR would widen the scope of its intervention breaking the state’s censorship monopoly and providing news of workers struggles. KOR would also break the state’s monopoly over education. Its contribution to the

named, *Band of Vagabonds*, would play a progressive in KOR at the beginning. (Lipski: 18, 48) but its nationalist roots would eventually precipitate a hardening of attitudes to the left. (Lipski: 202-3)

¹¹⁹ Michnik here references a Kolakowski essay *In Praise of Inconsistency*.

¹²⁰ Lipski testifies to the relentless daily persecution of KOR activists in every way possible. Constant police beatings, as well as ‘anonymous’ beatings, arbitrary arrests over fictitious crimes, reckless and wrecking house searches, occasional unexplained murders, harassment and victimisation at work, harassment of KOR family members. Regardless of the politics, the immense courage of KOR activists is beyond dispute.

impressive initiative known as the Flying University, providing lecturers like Michnik and Kuron, used supporters' homes as unofficial classrooms. Topics such as the History of the People's Poland would explicitly challenge the official 'line' (Lipski: 208). Government efforts to disrupt the Flying University were complicated by the intervention of the Catholic Church which attacked restraints on "the human spirit freely creating cultural values" (Lipski: 212). In Cracow, home base of the Polish Pope, the church offered to accommodate the lectures. This coming together of the "Christians without God" with the traditional church found its very personal and public expression in the much acclaimed visit of the Polish Pope John Paul II to Poland in October 1978. Michnik would quote Tadeusz Mazowiecki in his essay of celebration for the visit, *A Lesson in Dignity* (Michnik 1987: 160-168). Mazowiecki was editor of a liberal Catholic magazine who would become one of Solidarity's leader Lech Walesa's closest advisors, (Ash: 20), and Poland's first non-Communist, and indeed neo-liberal, prime minister in the 1990's. According to Michnik, Mazowiecki captured the intellectual and spiritual moment of the Pope's visit by grasping the way the Pope fused the teachings of Jesus Christ "with the most important values of European culture" and so becoming "for everyone the source of moral norms and the light of hope" (Michnik: 166).¹²¹ Some militant workers were drawn towards KOR's activities leading to the production of underground leaflets and newspapers, the most important of which was Robotnik (Worker). The demand for a Free Trade Union movement had already begun to grow. KOR's influence on this development was thus well rooted – including its theory of a self-limiting revolution.

The glaring contradiction is this. Perhaps the suffering poor of biblical times could not help themselves. But when KOR activists rallied to workers it was when by striking they were beginning to help themselves. KOR's support was most welcome but as the workers' movement developed they demonstrated a capacity for self-help that would ultimately bypass KOR. Certainly the workers' movement needed their own intellectuals but the ideology, masquerading as a non-ideology, an eclectic mix of barely concealed Christian values, of the KOR intellectuals would prove itself to be backward and a drag on the movement. There is an uncanny reminder here of Marx's and Engels's *Communist Manifesto* criticism of the utopian socialists in the nineteenth century.¹²²

¹²¹ Michnik's and Kuron's journey towards Catholicism would end in unmitigated disaster. See Michnik's *Introduction, The Church and the Left* in (Ost: 1993).

¹²² The utopian socialists saw the working class as a "suffering" class unable to act on its own behalf. In its infancy, Marx and Engels argue, that might have been true, but as it developed, working class fought for its own interests. Communists had to place their visionary ideas, their talents at the disposal of the movement and not see the working class as dependent on them. This leads Marx and Engels to make

Sociologist David Ost makes a convincing case that the non-ideology was indeed an ideology which he labels *Anti Politics*. And that it very successfully, and arguably, disastrously, laid down guidelines for *Solidarity* in 1980-81. “When KOR and Solidarity claimed they were not ‘political’ movements, what they meant was that they did not want to challenge the Party’s control of the state” (Ost 1990: 1).¹²³

The class of ‘68...thought they discerned a new way forward...‘bureaucratic socialism’ would not be transformed from above...its internal contradictions made it susceptible to pressure from below...this autonomous ‘civil society’ would reassure Soviet leaders, whose control of Poland’s foreign and defence policy would not be challenged. This strategy was elaborated in a series of essays by KOR members like Jacek Kuron and Adam Michnik...Kuron’s slogan ‘Don’t burn down the Party committees, found your own!’ could hang as a motto over all the workers protests in 1980 (Ash: 22-3).

Ost captures the contradiction that would doom this strategy very well.

Unlike revolutionaries...their goal was not to seize state power, but to secure conditions in which they could interact with the government. They had to act illegally, but their goal was to have independent institutions exist legally...Yet the oppositionists, aware that the state could not be ignored, nonetheless kept emphasising that it should be ignored... (Ost 1990: 71, 72).

This made Kuron and Michnik extraordinarily cautious from the beginning. When faced with the prospect of the mass-based independent workers movement at Gdansk in 1980 that might threaten the state and the ruling Communist Party’s monopoly control of it, they opposed it. KOR’s conservatism was immediately exposed. Not for the first time in history, the workers were far in advance of the intellectuals¹²⁴...As Michnik would concede in a remarkable statement.

Jacek, like me, was very uneasy about the situation in Gdansk...The ‘wildest’ idea was...that independent and self-governing trade unions could be formed. Jacek knew

the following distinction. “Therefore, although the originators of these systems were, in many respects, revolutionary, their disciples have, in every case, formed mere reactionary sects.” Chapter 1 p14.

¹²³ “And this was more broadly the banner under which a lot of “dissidents” from the Eastern bloc fought. It can also be seen as a reaction to the top-down “politicization” of all social spheres imposed by the ruling bureaucracy. The literary texts of the period also bear testimony to this trend (withdrawal into the ‘private sphere’, importance of individual and moral issues etc)” Stathis Kouvelakis, e mail communication (19/04/19).

¹²⁴ And the women were in advance of the men. Solidarity was born in Gdansk in part due to the solidarity strikes from non shipyard workers. A tiny minority of Gdansk women workers in solidarity with other women strike leaders like bus and tram drivers’ leader, Henryka Kryzwonos, halted an exclusive agreement for the Gdansk shipyard workers only. “Walesa...smelt the anger and swiftly changed his mind” (Ash: 41). The full story is told in Polish writer and director, Marta Dzido’s magnificent film about the Women of Solidarity, *Kobiety Solidarności*. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tAmcnAw4Cu0> (English language subtitles) The film includes fascinating interviews with Henryka Kryzwonos as well as Andrzej Gwiazda and Joanna Duda-Gwiazda.

this was impossible in a communist system...I was supposed to go to Gdansk...Since I was known and rather liked there... perhaps I might have convinced them. Fortunately, I was arrested...and so Solidarity was created...That's how Solidarity arose, without us and against us, although we always considered it to be our [KOR's] child. An illegitimate one, you might say" (Ost 1990: 77).

In 1980 KOR dissolved. With the launch of Solidarity, it believed its work to be complete (Lipski: 452-6). But, of course, its key activists became part of the Solidarity leadership helping to shape Solidarity's political outlook. The breakthrough had come at the Baltic port city of Gdansk. Anna Walentynowicz, who would become internationally famous as the militant crane-driving grandmother in the shipyard, had helped produce Coastal Worker, a KOR newspaper. She was sacked. A strike movement erupted which not only closed the giant, unfortunately named, Lenin Shipyard, but began spreading to workers across the city. It seemed as though the moment to turn the idea of a 'Free Trade Union' movement into a reality had arrived. A strike committee was formed which included Lech Walesa, previously sacked from the yard and who had climbed over the wall to address striking workers, along with Anna Walentynowicz.

The government was forced to negotiate. Political demands were added to the economic demands, the release of political prisoners, the erection of a monument at the shipyard gates to the workers murdered by the regime in 1970, which were conceded. Demands for full scale democratisation from the workplace and local communities to all the economic and political institutions of the state simmered just beneath the surface. Not all were agreed, nevertheless the final outcome was a humiliated government forced to recognise, for the first time in a 'Communist' country, a mass-based independent free trade union. In any case, the government understood, in no uncertain terms, that the dynamic of democratisation, sometimes referred to as self-determination and workers self-management, was now unstoppable. Implicit in the KOR strategy was the belief that the government could be forced to compromise, opening political space for democratisation. The outcome of the Gdansk negotiations seemed to endorse this perspective. But the newly born confident, independent, militant workers movement was in no mood for compromise.

Andrzej Gwiazda, a name virtually unknown in the West, was one of Solidarity's chief negotiators with the government. Along with his wife Joanna Duda-Gwiazda, Anna Walentynowicz and Lech Walesa, he had formed the Free Trade Union movement in Gdansk, independently of KOR. Tracking his political journey from Gdansk 1980 to Bydgoszcz 1981, both the high point and moment of defeat for Solidarity, gives us a unique political insight into

both the strengths but also the fatal political weaknesses of the new movement.¹²⁵ At Gdansk, Gwiazda symbolised the mood of no compromise, His extraordinary personal history, deported with his family to Siberia at the age of five at the beginning of world war two as a result of the Hitler-Stalin pact, had made him an implacable foe of the regime. Polish nationalism was one inevitable result of his hatred of Soviet Communism. But his commitment to an independent workers' movement also meant he was open to socialist ideas – providing they were untainted by Stalinism. In his own words:

If someone asked me in the 1950's, I would position myself as a right wing nationalist. And then we landed on the left – without changing our set of beliefs. At the moment, we're back on the right side.¹²⁶ So one can say our beliefs are constant, it's the political scene that's spinning around. But because of that spinning and our standing still, we're sometimes on the left, and sometimes on the right (A-AG: 249).

The liberal journalist and historian Timothy Garton Ash observed Andrzej Gwiazda's dominant role both in the negotiations and the early mass campaigning days of Solidarity. There had been an internal argument. Should the Interfactory Strike Committee, which would dissolve into Solidarity, insist on the release of all political prisoners, including the detained KOR activists? The argument was effectively decided by Gwiazda. "Of course we must get them free" (Ash: 65).¹²⁷ A last minute panic over the government's agreement formally to register Solidarity gave way to a bitter row between Lech Walesa and Andrzej Gwiazda over the call for a warning General Strike. Gwiazda added his own warning "...Walesa will have to go along with it if he wants to keep his position" (Ash: 82). Gwiazda also had an uncompromising view of workers' democracy which gave unprecedented power to rank and file workers, resembling the 'instant recall' principle of the Paris Commune.¹²⁸ Solidarity's strength rested on this approach, as Modzelewski also testifies.¹²⁹ Gwiazda argued that workers should not vote for "Franek or Gienek" but for a programme.

...that protective clothing should always be provided...or that proper cupboards should be fitted in the changing-rooms. And after six months people can say to Franek: What's happened to the cupboards? You made a promise...you haven't done anything, you

¹²⁵ I interviewed Andrzej Gwiazda and his wife Joanna Duda-Gwiazda, also a founder of the Free Trade Unions which preceded Solidarity, in November 2017 at their home, a tiny flat in a tower block, still overlooking the remnant of the port at Gdansk, Solidarity's birthplace – seen clearly in Marta Dzido's magnificent film *Women of Solidarity, Kobiety Solidarności* (See footnote 124).

¹²⁶ He means when I interviewed him in 2017. See my additional note, Appendix p 253, *Andrzej Gwiazda and Joanna Duda-Gwiazda, tragic symbols of Solidarity's crisis and defeat*.

¹²⁷ See also *Gwiazda, the toughest Solidarity negotiator with the government, Gdansk 1980* Appendix p256 on forcing the release of Kuron from prison.

¹²⁸ Marx on the Paris Commune, Chapter 1 p24.

¹²⁹ "On every level the activists – from the workplace...ordinary unionists – wanted, more than anything, to self-manage" p71.

creep. We're going to get rid of you...Gwiazda was not a natural practitioner of the art of the possible: if he had been, he would never have begun the struggle for what seemed to everyone impossible in the 1970's. He was a fighter for fundamental principles, with more than a streak of intransigence. Yet no one who travelled around the country in this week could doubt that Gwiazda was more closely in tune with the mood of the workers than the counsellors of caution (Ash: 77, 82-3).

Fast forward to March 1981 and we find Andrzej Gwiazda and Solidarity facing their biggest test – the crisis at Bydgoszcz, simultaneously the high point of the movement and the moment of its defeat. And we find Gwiazda, now the chief counsellor of caution, paralysed by indecision and inconsistency. Gwiazda speaking on behalf of Walesa, unilaterally abandoned the General Strike, which had been called to force recognition of Rural Solidarity and bring to justice all those responsible for the police assaults on Jan Rulewski and other Solidarity leaders. We will return to the Bydgoszcz moment shortly but first let us record and indeed celebrate the flowering of the revolution that was Solidarity's first few months.

The revolution had grown out of shipyard workers' strikes at the Polish port cities of Gdansk and Szczecin on the Baltic coast, which laid the foundations for *Solidarnosc*, Solidarity. At its height Solidarity, simultaneously a social and political mass movement as well as a trade union, could legitimately claim ten million worker activist supporters, backed by passive support of the vast majority of Polish society. The renowned Polish journalist Ryszard Kapuscinski was amongst the first writers to sense the importance of what was happening.

The workers on the Coast have smashed the old stereotypes of the 'dumb prole'...The young face of a new generation of workers has emerged: thoughtful, intelligent, conscious of its place in society, and most importantly, committed to drawing all the consequences of the ideological foundations of this system, according to which it is their class that plays the leading role in society.

Kapuscinski describes Gdansk and Szczecin as "cities in which a new morality took control. No one drank, no one caused trouble...Crime fell to zero, aggression disappeared. People became friendly, helpful and open to one another. Total strangers suddenly felt they needed one another." People were motivated not by 'wage demands', but 'the dignity of man'." Kapuscinski saw the 1980 events as "an attempt to create new relations between people, in every location and at every level...the guiding theme...the principle of mutual respect..." (Ost 1990: 9).¹³⁰

"The Lost Treasure of the Revolution"

¹³⁰ Ryszard Kapuscinski *Notatki z Wybrzeża (Notes from the Coast)*, in *Kultura* (Warsaw, September 14, 1980), reprinted in *Grazyna Pomian, Polska Solidarnosci (Solidarity's Poland)* (Paris: Instytut Literacki 1982) p76.

Former Solidarity leader and the movement's national treasurer, Jozef Pinior, also insists that 1980-81 was "a real revolution" (A-JP: 287).¹³¹ Like Modzelewski, Pinior sees the settlement in 1989 as a major defeat for the movement. Deep disillusion was the result, paving the way to the present "nationalistic, populist government, xenophobic and a hybrid of authoritarianism."¹³² "People, society, had in their mind that a real alternative works. It work(ed), in 1980, 1981." To understand the Polish revolution, Pinior recommends Hannah Arendt's *The Lost Treasure of the Revolution*.¹³³ Similarly "we lost treasure". In peoples' minds, something very precious was lost (A-JP: 287). "The degeneration of Polish politics today...is a result of this disillusion, that it was not possible to really provide this revolution...a real alternative not only to Stalinist regime but to global capitalism, markets" (A-JP: 287).

"an enormous thirst for knowledge"

Wladysław Frasyński is a former bus drivers' trade union leader from Wrocław also became leader of the city regional Solidarity.¹³⁴ After martial law, he led the Underground resistance in the city until his arrest in 1982 (Bloom: 400). He experienced the revolution as lifting the burden of ignorance.¹³⁵

Anyway there was an enormous thirst for knowledge, everyone at the time was seeking to learn more...something like a university operated and run like a trade union, it was actually founded at the workplace...the thirst for knowledge was just bursting on all

¹³¹ I interviewed Jozef Pinior in the Polish city of Wrocław in November 2017. Pinior, well known throughout Poland, famously concealed the union's funds, 80 million zlotys, just before martial law was declared in December 1981. It is the subject of a book in Poland, *80 Milionów: Historia Prawdziwa*, by Katarzyna Kaczorowska, Wrocław journalist with the city's newspaper, *Gazeta Wrocławska*. See reference Appendix p286 fn355 for an English language summary. I would like to thank Matthew La Fontaine for obtaining this electronic document for me. Matthew was my indispensable Polish language translator in Poland. Józef Pinior told me that the film of *80 Milionów: Historia Prawdziwa*, credited the book. This Hollywood-style film was a Polish candidate for the Oscars. Pinior became a leader of the Underground resistance to martial law before his eventual arrest (Bloom 2015: 405). Later as a member of the European Parliament, Pinior helped expose Polish government complicity in allowing NATO's so-called 'black sites', used for the 'rendition' programme of torture of terrorist suspects, on Polish territory. <https://www.economist.com/blogs/easternapproaches/2014/02/poland-and-rendition>

¹³² Modzelewski confirms Pinior's legendary status in the movement. See (A-JP: 287) (Modzelewski 2013: loc. 6513-18)

¹³³ See Stefan Auer *The lost treasure of the revolution*, *Osteuropa*, 25/10/2006 on Hannah Arendt and the fiftieth anniversary of the 1956 Hungarian Revolution and its Workers Councils. <http://www.eurozine.com/the-lost-treasure-of-the-revolution/> Auer concluded.

"It is useful to remind oneself of the open ended nature of all genuinely political projects, including our attempts at understanding revolutions. 'The lost treasure of revolution', to use Arendt's unforgettable phrase, (in *Between Past and Future* 5. Hannah Arendt) may never be found, but this should not prevent us from trying."

¹³⁴ See comments about him today in Appendix introductory remarks p232.

¹³⁵ See also his interview with (Bloom: 195).

sides amongst young people. And this of course came out during the period after the political transformation in a more free, liberated Poland...The key was understanding that in order for democracy to function there are certain tools that you need to be able to use...So very quickly in September 1980, we organised a sort of trade union university. And there were so many people that we couldn't fit them all even into a large concert hall. We took the decision to decentralise this education, to hold those courses in different places in order to give everyone the chance to participate and take the knowledge...(A-WF:234).

It was a tremendous revolution in an intellectual sense...During those 16 months...we had a stronger civil society, and compared to today when we have democracy, parliament and market economy... Polish society has never been so free as it was then, and free of complexes, as well, after the events of August 1980...

In Solidarity we didn't ask people where they came from, it was a place where people could come and gather and participate, because they all wanted to achieve something better...After 1989 this never happened again. When it comes to the martial law period, I don't have the biggest problem with the fact that I was a prisoner for 4 years and I was treated as one of the most dangerous people, and I was heavily beaten on several occasions, that's not the biggest problem for me. The martial law killed a sort of decency and positivity that had emerged among Polish society. And the martial law period taught me that poverty and suffering demoralised people, it wasn't a ground for any sort of noble attitude. Not in the sense that Catholic Church hierarchs would say it, but with August 1980 there was a kind of moral renewal of Polish society. Yes, I feel I am a representative of that moral revolution, moral renewal of August 1980...

There's one other thing that people would say about those 16 months, everyone calls it - the Carnival of Solidarity. Not because vodka was flowing down the streets. Because people were open, joyful, they wanted to learn about the world around them and beyond borders, and they believed that they were better, and they wanted to be better. After 1989 that never returned, never happened again (A-WF: 240-242).

Bydgoszcz – high point of the revolution

Both the high point and turning point of the Solidarity Revolution was at the city of Bydgoszcz, March 1981. This is where the leaders of private peasant farmers, representing three and a half million members, occupied the headquarters of the United Peasant Party (ZSL), widely understood as a government agency, demanding recognition of Rural Solidarity. (Ash 1983: 112,151) They were joined by regional Solidarity leader, Jan Rulewski. Negotiations were agreed but then abruptly adjourned. Later in the day, government officials asked the Solidarity group to leave the premises. When they refused two hundred uniformed policemen arrived to enforce the request. What followed was recorded on tape, including a suggestion from Rulewski that the police were like those in the West “who truncheon people at the bequest of the bourgeoisie” (Ash: 152). Finally they were dragged out of the building, some, indeed, pushed down a corridor of truncheon-wielding police, with a shout heard from police ranks: “Get Rulewski!” (Ash: 152). Rulewski and several others were badly beaten and hospitalised.

The pressure from below for an all-out general strike and workplace occupations was overwhelming. It became a moment of truth for Solidarity when the question of political power seemed tantalisingly within their grasp, as Jan Rulewski ruefully here recalls.¹³⁶

We had...a peaceful revolution, in mass and general scale, unknown in Poland, and probably in Europe...so utterly surprising, shocking...it had to surprise everybody and it did. It absolutely exceeded all our expectations here in Poland and internationally, and it can be compared, if to it only, the revolution in Iran.¹³⁷ During the revolution in Iran nobody listened to the king anymore.¹³⁸ Similarly in Poland, nobody listened to the government... The most important...moral result was the fight for human dignity...of the worker...who performs all the heavy work using machines, get his hands dirty up to his elbows. He is the one that the director needs. The Communists used to say, that he is a planning unit. We will throw people here, some materials there, we will mix them and then we will thrive. This is how the central planner managed things. The workers' ambitions, their imagination, their dreams, were just ignored...Because the first secretary of the party was the one who decided whether a worker could have any dreams, what is his right to have dreams, imagination, expectations, even moderate ones (A-JR: 290-1).

Rulewski then drew a parallel with Poland's new private capitalism today. Nothing had really changed. The state central planner had been replaced by the private owner, but in the workplace "the human being is not what he dreamed of". He is "a personalised business cost". Jan Rulewski was very keen to integrate his professional occupation with this opinion.

I was an engineer mechanic, a constructor in Romet Bicycle Works, a semi-scientific institution, a research and development centre. I voluntarily acted as the head of trade unions (A-JR: 289).

He was, and remains fascinated "for the general good of society, of developing a new concept of a bicycle, because the one we still use originates from the 19th century." He explained in some detail¹³⁹ how it was completely unsuitable for modern 21st century conditions. His commitment to developing a modern environmentally friendly bicycle is such a passion that continues his research part time, at the age of 73, as well as continuing his duties as a Senator in the Polish Sejm, Parliament.¹⁴⁰ I suggested a link between his revolutionary commitment to workers' human dignity and to a new bicycle design. That he worked alongside the workers who made the bicycles he designed, and in combination they were a very powerful technological innovative force that might have been a symbol for the Solidarity Revolution: a force which could design an economic model and find a way of not just producing, but also

¹³⁶ I interviewed Jan Rulewski in Bydgoszcz in November 2017.

¹³⁷ 1979-81, see Chapter 4.

¹³⁸ The Shah of Iran, deserted not just by the people, but by the police and army too. Finally, he fled the country in 1979, see Chapter 4.

¹³⁹ To be found in the full interview in Appendix (A-JR: 289-97).

¹⁴⁰ See the comment in biographical notes about his Senator's role today (A-JR: 297).

distributing to people's needs. This is neither the 'communist model' of the Soviet type, nor Western European capitalist model.

He replied *Tak, zgadza się*. Yes, exactly (A-JR: 297).

Rulewski fully expected Bydgoszcz to take the revolution forward. The proposed general strike was posing the question of political power for Solidarity. Lech Walesa understood this only too well and was resisting.

Andrzej Slowik, Lodz Solidarity workers' leader,¹⁴¹ and also a member of the negotiating team, recalls the historical significant moment only too vividly.

I took Gwiazda and Jurczyk, (another negotiator), on a side and made an agreement with them that we're not accepting the text, proposed by Wałęsa...Gwiazda walked away from us. And then I could see that down the hall TV cameras' lights were turned on...For a moment I was considering doing some kind of prank – jumping on a table and bringing cameramen' attention to myself. But eventually I joined the group surrounding Gwiazda, heard what he read and asked him why he did it. 'Because I can read' - that was his reply. Why he was earlier against? Till this day I cannot understand this...it was a crucial moment...we could not achieve such a degree of mobilization and determination any more (Warzecha 2014: 86-7).¹⁴²

And Gwiazda knew it. Almost immediately he sent Walesa an Open Letter, widely published throughout Solidarity, attacking the decision! "Not going into an evaluation of whether or not it was a just decision, we were not authorised to make such a decision." (Persky and Flam 1982: 171, 172)¹⁴³ Gwiazda described the decision as nothing less than a threat to Solidarity's *moral revolution*¹⁴⁴ in Poland. Superficially this seems to reflect the earlier KOR perspective. But there is an important difference. The workers' movement was not relying on others. It was generating both its own morality and crucially its own politics. This was seen in the preparations for the General Strike over Bydgoszcz when workers had begun to organise self-defence ready to combat a police and military intervention. Gwiazda continued. "Each shadow that falls upon the union painfully hurts the hearts of Poles. Internal democracy is our union's prerequisite" (Persky and Flam 1982).

¹⁴¹ I met Andrzej Slowik at Solidarity's Lodz office in November 2017. The planned interview didn't take place because of a misunderstanding over the strength of Andrzej Slowik's spoken English language. Nevertheless, we agreed to e mail exchanges with a Polish translator: and later a face to face interview in Warsaw.

¹⁴² Slowik's personal memoir: based on interviews with Polish journalist, Jaroslaw Warzecha. I would like to thank Jacek Szymanski for translating excerpts from this book. For discussion of book's title, see footnote 155.

¹⁴³ See also (Barker 1986: 92-93).

¹⁴⁴ This echoes Wladyslaw Frasyniuk's view of the revolution as "moral renewal",

And that internal democracy, described earlier, had led the union to a very advanced level self-organisation. Ash summed it up. "Workers power was at its height...popular mobilisation complete" (Ash: 297). Ash had earlier quoted Leon Trotsky's use of the idea of *Dual Power* which set the scene for just such a crisis (Ash: 99). US sociologist, Bloom also quotes Trotsky's *History of the Russian Revolution* on "revolutionary turning points" to emphasise the momentous implications of Bydgoszcz (Bloom 2015: 219-20). Solidarity's earlier 4-hour warning general strike, on Friday March 27, curtain-raiser for the threatened unlimited all-out version, had been a spectacular success. It was the largest strike in the history of the Soviet bloc (but not the longest – that was in Budapest in 1956 where the general strike lasted two months following the Soviet invasion, Ash: 157).

"For the Party leadership the most shattering feature...was the almost universal participation of Party members, against the explicit orders of the Politburo...the base of the Party was in open revolt..."(Ash: 157). The Church had put immense pressure on Walesa. The Pope sent him a special letter pleading for the General Strike to be called off (Ash: 159). The government thanked the Pope for his intervention (Barker: 55). Many of Solidarity's best activists publicly criticised the Church's role and afterwards its influence began to wane (Touraine: 69-70). Modzelewski summed up the dilemma now facing Solidarity's impending showdown with the Soviet state satellite system. On the one hand, maximum readiness on the Solidarity side, backed by the vast majority in Polish society including the bulk of the police and military. On the other, unambiguous signals that Soviet military intervention was underway. Just before the planned strike, Modzelewski and other members of the regional committee stayed and slept at one of the larger factories in Wrocław called PaFaWag. Around 11,000 workers worked there, also he visited many of the different factories and workplaces and shops in the city, to get a sense of the atmosphere.

And at these different facilities, there were gates. And the gates were open during the time of the warning strike. Generally they would be guarded by a sort of, say, state official guards. Industrial guards, we could translate them into English. These guards were relieved of their responsibilities, and the gates were guarded by workers from different organizations which were represented by armbands they were wearing. .. you can find, for example, there would be three workers, one would have an armband representing Solidarity, another with an armband of the government-aligned trade unionists, and yet another had an armband representing (Communist)Party membership. What this was a symbol that the government had no support, had no leg to stand on, that all of these different centres, all of these different groups were participating in the strike, against the government...It should be emphasized that the threat of Soviet intervention was not an empty one. Apart from two Czechoslovakian divisions and two East German divisions, also 14 divisions of the Soviet Army amassed on the Eastern border, and they were kitted out and prepared for war. They had field

kitchens, field hospitals, these were armoured divisions. This was a real and immediate threat at the time, one year before the imposition of martial law..... (A-KM: 274)¹⁴⁵

Nevertheless Jan Rulewski opposed calling off the strike. "Calling off... the trade union paid too high the price compared to what it achieved, hence I support the opinion...at the time, that this compromise...was a rotten compromise" (A-JR: 290). Rulewski also argues that the anticipated international consequences of a Soviet invasion acted as a deterrent (A-JR: 290).¹⁴⁶

For Joseph Pinior, Bydgoszcz

...was a climactic...revolutionary moment...There was a nuclear bomb shelter in the basement. I used this shelter because I was formally leader of a trade union...(here)...I organised a strike committee for this March mobilisation for all offices, all workshops around the old market. I even prepared food for three months. So I had everything prepared for these strikes...t was a classical dual power situation. There was still a state with military apparatus and police... But the real power, day by day, went to workers' factory councils. In the fall (ie Autumn) with Karol Modzelewski, we organised a plebiscite in the biggest factories in Wroclaw about who has the power to choose the director, manager, the Party or workers' councils? And in every factory we won this plebiscite...We had the power but gave way to "demobilisation" and "demoralisation" (A-JP: 284).

Again, Jan Rulewski agreed. He emphasised key demands within Solidarity's grasp - a guarantee of "the security of the trade union, the registration of peasants' unions, access to the media, some kind of control over security forces and the security apparatus" (A-JR: 291). With this last demand, Rulewski breaks with the self-limiting revolution perspective, a position he makes explicit in July 1981 (Ash: 193).

Andrzej Słowik backed Rulewski.

¹⁴⁵ Andrzej Friszke, Poland's most authoritative historian of Solidarity 1980-81, cites US Intelligence sources on how seriously the US government was taking the threat of Soviet intervention in Poland and the dangers thereby posed to 'Cold War stability' (Friszke 2014: 487).

¹⁴⁶ Moscow was in a far weaker position than at the time of Prague 1968. Its military intervention in 1979 in Afghanistan was having a profound demoralising effect. Like Poland's, its economy was destabilising from the unstoppable pressures emanating from the global economy. In any case, the Soviet military intervention in the Hungarian Revolution of 1956 provides some unexpected guidelines. Moscow had been in no hurry to dismantle by force the Hungarian workers' councils which had developed after workers had occupied their factories. Better to pressurise the Hungarian government to seek out conciliatory elements amongst the workers councils' leadership. Of course, Moscow may well have been playing for time before the arrests of the workers' leaders began. But the time lag is important. The 'stand-off' provided an opportunity for the workers councils to assert their strength. They controlled production, not the government. See the outstanding three-thousand word statement issued by the Central Workers Council of Central Budapest, confronting Soviet military forces, on December 6, 1956 (Harman 1988: 177). The outcome of a stand-off between a much weakened Soviet military and Solidarity in Poland's industrial centres, rallying almost the whole of Polish society behind it, was by no means a foregone conclusion.

He was one of 'radicals' - always sharp, loud, determined and fully convinced that he's right...As a leading 'extremist' Rulewski was not the authorities' favourite. I had a good working relationship with him.... One could count on Rulewski... (Warzecha 2014: 85).

Wladysław Frasyniuk took a very different view, supporting Lech Walesa.

We were prepared for confrontation in the workplaces. We looked for ways to prevent the tanks from getting in, we put oxygen bottles. We pulled up many different objects on the roof if we found them suitable for defence, among them these acetylene-oxygen bottles, because we are from the generation who served in military as conscripts.

But Frasyniuk say that the young workers were naïve, "no complexes" but also lacking "knowledge and a sense of threat."

He argues that the movement was

too weak...for a tough fight...Walesa's Bydgoszcz decision was an ultimate foundation for a different way of thinking about Solidarity...in terms of compromise, securing yourself with time, space, and opportunities for building a civil society. A ground breaking decision, and for that alone Walesa deserved a Nobel prize. Don't forget that we are brought up in Polish history. One unsuccessful uprising after another. These uprisings are deeply within us, and there is always a hero who ends up on the barricade. We were the first generation that said, 'Enough, we are going to draw the right conclusions of the lessons from Polish history' (A-WF: 237).¹⁴⁷

But perhaps the most telling remark came from none other than Jacek Kuron, who asked at Solidarity's National Commission in July whether the revolution should continue to limit itself. He was responding to mounting pressure, following the debacle at Bydgoszcz and a deepening sense that the government had lost control. If the ship is floundering, delegates demanded then why "not take over the running of the ship." Kuron appeared to agree. "On the model of previous European revolutions, they would have already have done. The revolutionary power would have taken over state power" (Ash: 183). Exactly the strategy he and Modzelewski had laid out in their *Open Letter*...

After Bydgoszcz, the next major focus for Solidarity was, what turned out to be, its one and only National Congress in the Autumn of 1981. Though its main resolution confirmed the continuing revolutionary potential of the movement, there was a sense that rhetoric was beginning substitute for strategy and tactics, exposing the movement's political weakness.

¹⁴⁷ The interview almost descended into farce. Frasyniuk seems to chastise Rulewski for not hitting the policeman back after the first police assault at Bydgoszcz, unready for the rough and tumble of working class life. Unlike street fighting boy, Frasyniuk, who declares himself "lumpen-proletarian", a self-portrait which I challenged. See the full interview in (A-WF:232-41).

Certainly the main resolution was very impressive. It is summarised in the following statement.

The fundamental unit of the national economy is to be the social enterprise, managed by the workers council and operationally led by the director appointed by the council on the basis of a contest and revocable by the former...The reform must socialise planning...True workers' self-management must be the fundament of the Self-Managed Republic (Ness, I. Azzellini 2011: 203).

Yet it found little inspiration amongst Congress delegates on the day that it was discussed. According Andrzej Friszke, Solidarity's most authoritative Polish historian,

The discussion lacked cohesion and clarity...Besides neither the union leaders nor – obviously the experts took part in the discussion. It was without doubt, one of the most boring days of the Congress; best reflected by the delegates themselves, who were not paying great attention, many left... (Friszke 2014: 962-3).

George Sanford, the only British historian to have observed and written about the Congress, noted that the programme had been hailed as Solidarity's *Magna Carta* (Sanford 1990: 21). But Sanford also expressed reservations about its potential impact, recommending as a "readable interpretation" Colin Barker's *Festival of the Oppressed, Solidarity, Reform and Revolution in Poland 1980-82*. "...the most cogent, if inevitably partisan, political analysis, establishing common ground with the radical Fundamentalist tendency within Solidarity itself..." (Sanford: 2).¹⁴⁸ Barker acknowledges that the programme was indeed "an inspiring even noble document", (Barker: 114) but "remained at the level of dreams...as long as the...issue of power (was) not openly addressed" (Barker: 117). Even the 'Fundamentalists' avoided the demand for Solidarity to take power or become a political party (Barker: 118, Ash: 217).¹⁴⁹ This decisive argument forms the focus of the concluding parts of the chapter.

That's not to say the Congress lacked real drama. As at Bydgoszcz, Solidarity President, Lech Walesa came under fire. Despite a Congress vote, a Walesa-backed deal allowed the regime to deny workers in defence and other 'key' industries the right to select top managers, possibly involving as many as half of Poland's workplaces: a breach of an absolute cornerstone of the entire workers' self-management strategy (Barker: 114). Walesa's re-election as National Chairman faced more radical opponents, including Andrzej Gwiazda and Jan Rulewski. Yet he hung on with 55% of the vote. His opponents had not "presented clear alternatives" (Barker: 119).

¹⁴⁸ The division between minority 'Fundamentalists' and majority 'Pragmatists' in Solidarity is usefully discussed by Barker (118-19). The Fundamentalists included independent Marxists who analysed Polish 'communist' society along the lines of the original *Open Letter* of Kuron and Modzelewski.

¹⁴⁹ The Fundamentalists' most important strand, the one demanding *active strikes*, is discussed in detail in the next section.

Nevertheless, perhaps we should be wary of dismissing too easily rhetorical intention – even if there is no defined strategy for moving beyond the rhetoric.¹⁵⁰ Policies to be agreed by Congress delegates were first discussed and debated in Congress Commissions. These were committees, given the time to thrash out the details of any proposed policy, and then make recommendation to Congress. One of the Commissions, Friszke argues, debated a position very similar to the *Open Letter*. “After a two-day session the common programme agreement was not reached and the Congress was to be presented with two variants: fundamentalist and pragmatic.”

According to Friszke, a marxist called Leszek Nowak was one of the leading fundamentalists.

Their proposal was characterised by stressing class aspects and the workers movement traditions: ‘The ideas and mottos that had led workers movement for centuries in their fight for social and economic liberation have been re-appropriated by the ruling system’. It was stressed that the party apparatus became the ruling class as it holds the main attributes of power: property, coercion measures and propaganda. ‘Instead of the promised classless society the most class-polarised society in the history was created; a society where one side of the social spectrum holds all the political, economic and ideological power over deprived powerless masses at the opposite extreme.’ These words strongly resemble the 1965 *Open Letter*...(Friszke: 919-921).

But Kuron now claimed that Solidarity had

crushed the party’s monopoly of power. Kuron kept stressing the latter on several occasions. The fundamentalists did not agree. ‘Defending the current regime, the ruling party cannot be a trustworthy partner for the society, and therefore for our Union’. This statement was, as it appears, unacceptable to the ‘pragmatists’, who took into consideration the need of seeking compromise, even if preceded by confrontations, with the government. Less disputable for the ‘Pragmatists’, nonetheless tactically problematic - was the demand of social and political pluralism: multi-party system and freedom of choice between different political programmes. The ‘Fundamentalists’ shared a belief in the need of ‘the real socialisation of the means of production through the transfer of the means of production in the hands of shop floor workers’, yet at the same time they supported the withdrawal of ‘party committees’ from the workplace, which, from the perspective of the PZPR, would have been a revolutionary postulate, therefore unacceptable for the ‘Pragmatists’.¹⁵¹ The ‘pragmatists’ group was bigger in numbers, but also more diverse. This included both commissions’ leaders, Modzelewski, Siła-Nowicki, Gwiazda, Lis, Seweryn Jaworski, Jan Strzelecki, as well as Kuron. They were quite divided, both in their ideological beliefs as well as the level of determination and proposed tactics (Friszke: 919-921).

¹⁵⁰ Josef Pinior and Zbigniew Kowalewski took the Congress programme very seriously and its demand for workers self- management (A-JP: 286-7), (A-ZK: 267-68).

¹⁵¹ Andrzej Slowik argues this position, removing the Communist Party, the PZPR, from the workplace.

Kowalewski has challenged Friszke's interpretation and the influence of Leszek Nowak. He also downplays the division between fundamentalists and pragmatists. However he agrees with Friszke that the ideas, similar to those of the *Open Letter*, seemed to be stimulating some Congress delegates. He offers a different explanation.

A more or less rough or crude idea of a new ruling class and a new class system was a popular idea among Solidarnosc militants and expressed the level of their spontaneous class consciousness. It is wrong to attribute it to this or another thinker; working-class militants were perfectly able to arrive to such an idea without theorists, intellectuals, and so on. There is a strong tendency among intellectuals writing about Solidarnosc (and about other mass movements) to attribute the production of ideas and the ideological leadership to intellectuals, but it is wrong: working-class militants are producing ideas, too, and during great working-class upheavals they are very active in this field.¹⁵²

Kowalewski's point here expresses one of core arguments of this thesis. That revolutionary workers' movements like Solidarity throw up their own leaders. Intellectuals who support the movement need to relate to them, not substitute for them.

(III) Was there an alternative strategy?

The threat of revolutionary "active strikes": an "active strike" is not really a strike at all. It is a far more revolutionary development where workers begin to reorganise production and distribution in their own interests. Zbigniew Kowalewski was a Solidarity leader in Lodz, Poland's second largest city, sometimes described as Poland's 'Manchester' because of its long association with textile manufacturing. It concentrated some of the largest numbers of women workers in the country. As reported earlier, Kowalewski identified with the Kuron's and Modzelewski's *Open Letter*, despite the hostility from Kuron for doing so. Hunger stalked Lodz in the summer of 1981, the city under siege from serious food shortages. Solidarity leaders including Kowalewski and workers' leader, Andrzej Slowik were compelled to develop a more radical strategy that went beyond the strike movement. A "hunger march" was called which attracted 50,000 women workers, many coming with their children. Placards and banners were made in the factories. Slogans included attacks on a 'Communism' where "socialism is the doctrine of hunger, poverty and filth." Some were warnings. "Hunger deprives people of reason. It can deprive you of power." (Kowalewski 1988: 25)¹⁵³ This was no idle threat. Slowik

¹⁵² E mail communication 15/2/18, A-ZK (This is a later e mail – not in Appendix).

¹⁵³ The description of the hunger march is from Kowalewski's book *Rendez-vous nos usines! (Give Us Back Our Factories!)*. English language translations and extracts, authorised by Kowalewski, were reproduced in pamphlet form by the group *Socialist Action* in the US in 1988, referenced here. (Kowalewski 1988).

warned the local authorities that Solidarity intended, as from now, to check on the food production and distribution process, implicitly hinting that they were ready to take it over themselves. As Kowalewski put it: This was to be “social control over distribution.” The government also understood this as a political threat. Deputy Prime Minister Rakowski responded. “He who controls the production of food... holds power. Your demand ...constitutes a programme for the seizure of power” (Kowalewski 1988: 27).¹⁵⁴

Nevertheless the Lodz Mayor found a legal pretext to respond to Solidarity’s demands. He issued authorisations for Solidarity to check on the city’s food production and distribution network. Wholesale centres in the countryside, the slaughterhouses, the depots, the retails establishments, all were inspected. “It was soon discovered that large amounts of meat left the central slaughterhouse for unknown destinations...”(Kowalewski 1988: 28). Data was presented to the Mayor which he said he was unaware of. He was thus forced to issue requests to central government directing stocks to consumption needs. In October Solidarity’s Lodz regional leadership raised the stakes when it introduced the idea of “Active Strikes”, (work-ins), where workers would independently re-organise production to meet urgent consumption needs, especially in response to food shortages. In response, local Solidarity was given control of the production and distribution of food ration cards, previously a state monopoly (Kowalewski 1988: 30). This represented a fundamental deepening of Solidarity’s encroachment on state power. Kowalewski insists that one immediate result was that food queues got shorter, and food supplies improved (Kowalewski 1988: 31).

Andrzej Slowik has described these developments as follows.¹⁵⁵

¹⁵⁴ There was a widespread belief in Solidarity that food shortages, at least in part, were the result of secret food exports to Russia. Jan Rulewski discusses this in the unedited interview transcript Appendix (A-JR: 289-97) where he also discusses his role in Solidarity’s own Food Commission.

¹⁵⁵ The first paragraph here is taken from Andrej Slowik’s interview – memoir. (Warzecha 2014), the rest is from my e mail interview (A-AS: 298-309).

Warzecha, Jarosław, *Nie Kracz Slowik, Nie Kracz* (Narodowe Centrum Kultury, National Centre of Culture, 2014)

"Nie kracz Słowik, nie kracz" means 'Do not caw, Słowik, do not caw'. It's a little ironic because 'słowik' means nightingale.

These are the last words recorded when the last meeting of 'Solidarity' National Committee was closed, late at night on 12th December 1981. Soon afterward the majority of the National Committee was detained by police as Martial Law was imposed.

In his book, Slowik says: “When the meeting of the KK (National Committee) was already closed the chairman Mirek Krupiński said: - ‘See you at the next meeting.’ ‘We'll see each other if we make it - I replied - because the next meeting would not come’. ‘Don't caw, Slowik, don't caw’, said Krupiński and these were the last words recorded on a reel from KK meeting before martial law” (Warzecha 2014: 135-136).

...the Hunger March was supposed to be seen as a warning and a last step before an active strike... (especially) in the meat industry. It was our original concept, prepared in details by Grzegorz Palka.¹⁵⁶ We proposed also to cover with trade union supervision purchasing of cattle, food factories, food distribution, transport and sales. For sure, it was a Bolshevik way, but no other one was available in that situation. We already experienced instances where goods in shops' storages didn't show up on shops' shelves...What we proposed was seen by the authorities as a threat. They accused us of trying to take over control. An active strike was not started, but me and Grzegorz Palka were considered...extremist activists. On top of that we presented our concept of kick out PZPR¹⁵⁷ from workplaces, and leaving there only trade unions taking care of workers' interests. A workplace is not a place for a political activity. And if one political party was supposed to be there, why not other ones? Such claims were...a kind of heresy, because a leading role of PZPR was written down in the constitution (Warzecha 2014: 111).

Nobody in Poland had ever tried it (an active strike) before..."We envisaged taking under our supervision the whole production cycle of selected goods, including securing delivery of raw materials and semi-finished fuels for transport purposes" (A-AS:299).

Slowik goes on to describe why an active strike was potentially much more popular than a traditional strike. Government propaganda was having some success convincing workers that strikes were the cause of shortages in the shops. Alright, he says, workers will stay at work, but we'll control production and distribution.

We treated the whole action and publicity about our preparations for an active strike rather as a form of propagandist pressure than a real threat to the authorities. The reason was that starting such an action would mean a necessity of gradual extension of the active strike, practically on the whole economy¹⁵⁸ (A-AS: 299-300).

In other words, it had the potential to undermine the economic and therefore the political power of the state. This point was grasped immediately when the active strike strategy surfaced at the National Congress.¹⁵⁹

Bogdan Lis¹⁶⁰ said that in regards to (the demands for) self-government all available means of exerting pressure would need to be used, but the tactic would have to be carefully thought

The passages which then follow are extracts from my e mail conversations with Slowik in January 2018 (A-AS: 298-303). Many thanks to Jacek Syzmanski for translating extracts of Slowik's memoir as well as the e mail interview-conversations with Slowik.

¹⁵⁶ "But not the formation, the idea was mine, and was elaborated entirely by me in the booklet signed by me individually, *On the Tactics of the Active Strike. O taktyce strajku czynnego*, Zakład Malej Poligrafii ZR Ziemi Łódzkiej NSZZ "Solidarność", Łódź, 1981. The idea - the text of the booklet - was approved by the Łódź regional executive. Both Slowik and Palka supported it firmly." Zbigniew Kowalewski, (e mail communication 16/02/18).

¹⁵⁷ Polish United Workers Party – governing Polish Communist Party

¹⁵⁸ Slowik also briefly discusses the role of women – a majority of the workers. For details – see Appendix (A-AS: 300). It is clear that the pressure for active strikes was coming directly from the women – bearing the brunt of the food and other shortages.

¹⁵⁹ The discussion here is based on translated extracts from Friszke (2013) .

through. An active strike, as proposed by Lodz- taking over control of factories and production by workers would, in reality, mean the seizure of power and the state of emergency would have definitely be declared. A pressure tactic needed to be developed as much as attempts of coming to an agreement with the government needed to be made. (Friszke: 704) The stakes were indeed high. Andrzej Gwiazda would urge “rationality” and warned that an active strike would mean rebellion and it would require recreation of the entire machinery of state. (Friszke: 1092-3) Frasyniuk spoke against the active strike that would needs huge structural resources, which Solidarity didn’t have. There was a choice: “either general strike, if the resolution is passed, or ..., or the government will take a step back and we will present our key political demands, or simply, if the government persists, the national uprising, and there is nothing else left to do in this situation.” (Friszke: 1269) Modzelewski thought the project of an active strike unrealistic. An active strike in national economy means taking over economical power. The union lacked apparatus to do that. “Let’s imagine that now; our Union has to – on the scale of national economy – divide resources and supplies. On the scale of national economy. Who will do this? Works councils? The Presidium of National Commission?’ He was also against the idea of tribunals. When it comes to this ‘we will decide, whether we choose the revolution way, appoint security watch, get armed with whatever we can and use physical force to smash all these institutions, or not. Because if not, let’s not play with power. Simple. The basic weapon our Union possesses, let’s not delude ourselves, is a strike, not an active strike.” (Friszke: 1270)

Andrzej Słowik wanted to test the strategy in the food industry in the Lodz region. Such a strike would result in “the government seeking opportunities to start talks with us.” (Friszke: 1332) However his motion for KK’s support of active strike in selected industry sectors was not accepted. (Friszke: 1354) Nevertheless, after Congress, the following plan was put forward by Solidarity’s National Commission, KK, at Gdansk on 22-24 October threatening traditional strikes over the food shortages with the warning of *active strikes* to come.

...on the 28th October 1981 at 12.00 in all workplaces in Poland work will be stopped, public transport will be stopped. Strike action will last for 60 minutes. At the same time we demand the government immediately:

- 1) makes all efforts – in accordance with provisions of ‘Solidarity’ – to increase the livestock purchasing
- 2) makes the level of meat ration supply equal all over the country.
- 3) stops any repression of union activists

¹⁶⁰ Bogdan Lis was a comrade of Walesa and Gwiazda from the Committee for Free Trade Unions in Gdansk that preceded Solidarity, also a Communist Party member (Bloom: 403).

4) recognizes and gives appropriate powers to the Social Council for the National Economy (Społeczna Rada Gospodarki Narodowej – SRGN) and the unions' social control commissions.

If these demands are not met by the end of the month, the union will be forced to prepare for an *active strike* across the selected sectors of the economy. The date and scope of strike will be decided by National Commission (KK). (Friszke: 1094-5)

In effect, despite the misgivings of the National Congress, Solidarity was giving every impression of preparing for a campaign of active strikes. Andrzej Slowik was amongst the most prominent of working class militants moving towards such a revolutionary position. In early December, just before the imposition of martial law, and after mass meetings in the twelve largest Lodz factories, he told Kowalewski.

After the Bydgoszcz provocation in March we entered a revolutionary situation, but we did not know how to make use of it. We reached a compromise and gave up the idea of a general strike. The situation is now once again revolutionary...This is what the factory workers told me today...This meant (Slowik) demanding the go-ahead from the National Commission for an active strike in his own region. It seemed that Lodz region would then draw other regions into an active strike (Kowalewski 1982: 28).

The stakes were now very high. Kowalewski cites General Jaruzelski warning against active strikes in the Sejm and quotes the party paper *Trybuna Ludu* attacking his pamphlet 'The Active Strike Tactic' as for preparing a scenario for a seizure of power by Solidarity. (Kowalewski 1982: 27).¹⁶¹ The following month, December 1981, General Jaruzelski, would impose Martial Law. Poland's Revolution would not recover.

There was nothing inevitable about Solidarity's defeat. Kuron's and Modzelewski's *Open Letter* explanation and remedy for the Polish workers defeat in 1956 provided the lessons and the guidelines for what was required by Solidarity in 1980. They wrote.

"The so-called October Left In 1956 – a political current made up in large measure of the natural leaders of the working class, youth and intellectual opinion...was evidently unable to

¹⁶¹ Slowik was hounded by the authorities. In our conversation in the Solidarity Lodz office in November 2017, despite the language difficulties, he told me how he has discovered, following the opening of the archives at the Institute of National Memory, the extraordinary level of surveillance (24/7) he was under in 1981. He also seems to have been deliberately singled out for punishment when he was jailed after Martial Law. His chilling description of what amounts to the torture he was subjected to - and his resulting hunger strike: (Warzecha 2014: 173). He has been pursuing a court case against a particularly brutal prison officer for the past fourteen years. (Details in e mail communication 30/1/18, A-AS) The first neo-liberal Solidarity government also recognised his immense prestige in the movement when they offered him a post as Deputy Minister of Labour to Jacek Kuron. Wisely, or otherwise, he accepted. He told me how his worst moment came when he faced a riot of the unemployed...

formulate its own political programme, to propagate it in an organised manner among the masses, to create a party” (Kuron and Modzelewski 1966: 45).¹⁶²

Here Zbigniew Kowalewski gives a detailed explanation of the difficulty of implementing this perspective.¹⁶³ He begins by explaining the importance of the impact that Andrzej Slowik, Lodz region’s workers’ leader, had on him.

“Andrzej Slowik had a strong class instinct and class reactions to the situations, and I learned a lot from him, because I had a Marxist formation but, being an intellectual, I lacked the working class instinct.

Concerning intellectuals and Solidarity: the fact is that sectors of "intelligentsia" active alongside or behind Solidarnosc or trying to lead politically this workers' movement were not socialists and, often, were even anti-socialists. But, in itself, it is neither strange nor specific for Poland in 1980-81. The problem is that there was no socialist intelligentsia (if there was one before it disappeared during the two decades preceding 1980) and not only that there was no organised socialist political current, but also that there were no dispersed individual socialists you could try to group and organize. Or if there were individual socialists, they were extremely rare, extremely dispersed and isolated among them. It was a huge contradiction of this political situation: an enormous upsurge of the working class, and even a workers' revolution, but at the same time a total lack of any, even incipient socialist political organization.¹⁶⁴ There was no organization that could materialize a revolutionary programme and strategy. And it was impossible to form such an organization during the 16 months of Solidarity. I was a self-made or self-formed Marxist (Third Worldist and Althusserian) becoming Trotskyist,¹⁶⁵ but a Trotskyist without any contact with Trotskyists. I met first Western Trotskyists only in October 81, during the First National Congress of Delegates of Solidarity. And I joined immediately their organization, the Fourth International, FI, strongly engaged in the support for Solidarity and relatively well informed about our movement.

The level of Marxist theoretical knowledge of the Soviet bloc as social formation was pitiful. There was not even a Marxist knowledge of the forms and particularities of the exploitation of the working class in the societies of the Soviet bloc. There was not a serious Marxist

¹⁶² See the full quotation on p75.

¹⁶³ This is an edited version of my e mail conversations with Zbigniew Kowalewski, Appendix (A-ZK: 257-268) reproduced here as a continuous narrative.

¹⁶⁴ KOR filled this vacuum with disastrous results.

¹⁶⁵ The two ‘Trotskyist’ traditions dominant in the early 1980’s were the Fourth International led by Ernest Mandel and the International Socialism tendency led by Tony Cliff. For a thorough discussion of both see *Trotskyism* (Callinicos: 1990).

knowledge of the functioning of their economies and societies. There was not a serious theory of workers' democracy. Marxism was in crisis, but Marxists, with some rare exceptions,¹⁶⁶ were not aware of it. In those first 16 months, it was not possible to form a party or even an independent organisation for Solidarity's left wing. There was not a left wing. There was growing an elementary differentiation, not even between the left and the right, but only between radicals and moderates, between those looking for negotiation and compromise and those looking for mass struggle; those looking for a coexistence of an independent mass movement and the bureaucratic power, or (Kuron) a "self-limited revolution" and those tending (tending only, not even consciously) toward an overthrow of this power, without any idea about what to establish after the overthrow of this power. Ideas of a political organization were still rejected by the most radical militants of Solidarity, fundamentally as an effect of the generalized discrediting of the idea of a party by the regime. For them such an organisation was seen as divisive of the movement, manipulative, looking for minority power over the masses, etc. For this reason the first independent party we had in Poland in this period, the right-wing Confederation of Independent Poland (KPN), and the KOR, seen by many people as a secret party, were considered by the radical workers, including specifically people like Słowik, as "alien" to Solidarity: "alien" not due to their political orientation, but due to their (actual in the case of the KPN, and supposed in the case of KOR) party form.

I had been elected to the Lodz regional leadership of Solidarity and to its executive, together with the majority of members of this executive, on the base of a platform (with elements of an immediate programme) we presented for the internal regional elections. We, the militants regrouped around this platform, the most advanced collective paper produced in this time (the spring of 1981) inside Solidarity, by a group of its plant and regional activists, called ourselves Independents, because we declared that we would defend the independence of Solidarity from any political party (the ruling one, but it implied also the KOR, the KPN, and so on). It is obvious that radical militants needed to be regrouped in different manners, and this platform was one of such steps, but they needed also to overcome progressively, learning fundamentally from their own experience, their anti-party prejudices and understand that a radical left-wing political organization is not only necessary for them, but also compatible with and useful for their militancy inside Solidarity, as well as compatible with the independence of Solidarity from political parties. On the first level of the public discourse, there was a tacit agreement inside Solidarity to not speak the same language the ruling bureaucracy and its

¹⁶⁶ Some of the most important "rare exceptions" were associated with the two traditions outlined in fn 74.

party spoke: not to use terms appropriated by the official ideology. For these reason, in the programmatic resolution adopted by the First National Congress of Delegates of Solidarity, in October 81, we invented the term, "Self-Managed Republic". There was also a tacit agreement to not use, publicly and internally, an anti-Communist language. Of course, these consensuses were not universally respected, but in general it was the case, with the special (but, obviously, not a unique) exception of Kuron and his comrades from the KOR, who spoke about "Communist regime". The majority of leaders and militants avoided it.

On the second level, inside Solidarity, a lot of militants said: we struggle for a "true socialism", a "democratic socialism", or a "workers' socialism", and - in any case this is my personal experience - there were never hostile or negative reactions to it. In the fall and the beginning of the winter of 1980, I represented the Solidarity regional leadership at founding meetings of Solidarity in 40 factories and enterprises, and always I said there that we were fighting for a "true, workers' and democratic socialism", and later, when the movement for workers' self-management began, I said that we were fighting for a "workers', democratic and self-management socialism". When I presented myself as a candidate to the regional leadership of Solidarity, during the internal electoral campaign, in the spring of 1981, I said that I am "Marxist, supporter of workers' democracy, workers, power, workers' and democratic socialism, and, finally, a partisan of building a classless society, in Poland and elsewhere". There is an important document: "The Electoral Program of the Group, 'The Independents'", presented on May 7, 1981, by 14 candidates, including me, to the regional leadership of Solidarity. It was not a program of a political organization, but of a current formed inside the union. The first chapter was an "ideological declaration", where we explained why we are for socialism, why there is no socialism in Poland, and what socialism means for us. It stated: "It is our conviction that the regime we have until now cannot be considered as a socialist one. (...) The ideology of this regime affirmed that socialism means the passage of fundamental means of production to the society and the passage of political power to the working class. In reality, during the last 36 years, all political and economic power belonged to a centralized bureaucracy alienated from the society. The working class was submitted to a regime of factory despotism, an exploitation destroying it physically and morally, and a police repression, while the whole society was deprived of the right to self-determine its destiny. (...) What will spring from the social revolution initiated in August by the working class will be a truly humanist socialism (...) oriented toward the satisfaction of material and intellectual needs of the society, This revolution opens the road toward the self-organization and self-management of the society, ends with the omnipotence of the bureaucratic apparatus and breaks its

monopoly on the disposition of the means of production, and makes possible the establishment of political democracy. (...) We conceive the historical task ahead of Solidarity as a general union of working people and as a powerful social movement unequivocally: it consists in assuring the victory of the moral and social revolution, and thereby in realizing a true socialism.

Thus, 'The Independents' spoke openly about socialism. They were successful in this electoral campaign: finally four of them became members of the nine-person regional executive committee; all other members of the executive were elected individually, without a common platform. Even ideologically non sophisticated workers believing that the country was ruled by a communist regime had a manner to solve the problem: often they said that they wanted socialism, but without Communist dictatorship. But at the mass level the most important thing was not the terminology, but the overwhelming sentiment inside the working class that the factories belonged legitimately to this class. They didn't demand bureaucrats: give us your factories; they demanded them: give us back our factories. It is a critical difference."

Kowalewski was a revolutionary socialist leader, a lone voice, in Solidarity with some influence in the strategically important Lodz region of the movement. He struggled to find appropriate ways of developing genuine Marxist principles, strategies and tactics for a 'Left' position in Solidarity. But fighting a 'Communist' government made this task daunting, if not impossible. The very language needed to communicate ideas was sabotaged, or at least contaminated, by official Communist discourse. Promoting an argument for a new Marxist party, in the short time available, proved not possible, the idea of 'party' burdened by totalitarian implications. Accepted as a 'democratic socialist' activist committed to workers' self-management in a self-governing republic' probably pushed the limits of possibility.

(IV) Workers and Intellectuals

"From Fawning to Discarding", it's a memorable phrase, David Ost summing up the changing relationship between the intellectuals and workers in the 1980's, before Martial Law and then after it. (Ost 2005: 39)

With Solidarity's launch in 1980, the "intellectuals first proclaimed an inseparable connection of labour and democracy, thus establishing the claim they would spend most of the rest of the decade trying to dismantle."

For in 1980 Polish workers suddenly found themselves overwhelmed by the affection of intellectuals...In August 1980, intellectuals in the political opposition ¹⁶⁷ greeted the general strike in Gdansk with nothing short of awe... Gdansk seemed to lay to rest the pervasive image of worker as robot (the uncultured brute who cares only about his next drink), revealing instead a citizen who cared for dignity and autonomy-precisely the values that intellectuals saw as their own. Even more, the strike showed that workers knew how to win, too. The Warsaw intellectuals advising the Gdansk strikers famously urged them not to press the demand for free trade unions, and Solidarity came about only because the strikers ignored this advice... Workers, it appeared, had the courage and tenacity to bring about the changes that intellectuals only talked about. Gdansk set in motion a deferential exaltation... One can see it in the difference between Andrzej Wajda's two films, *Man of Marble* (1977) and *Man of Iron* (1981). The heroine of the first film is a young filmmaker who cuts through bureaucratic obstacles to learn the truth about the Stalinist past. In the second film, the same woman comes to realize that her struggles are nothing compared to those of the average worker. The intellectual gives up her craft to become a wife to the Gdansk shipworker valiantly fighting for social justice (Ost 2005: 39).

But the liberalism of the intellectuals would all too easily degenerate into neo-liberalism. Suddenly there is a change, a somersault, articulated most dramatically by Adam Michnik in 1985.

In 1980 we may have thought of them (worker activists) as sensible and rational actors. In fact, says Michnik, they are really irrational hotheads, hostile to reason and common sense, contemptuous of the notion of compromise, and incapable of recognizing the 'limits and realities' of the real world... Local Solidarity leaders...blinded by the ambition to become petty despots themselves...Michnik is particularly harsh on their meagre intellectual qualifications - they resorted to easy slogans in order to speak to the masses and win their support...the building blocks of a new totalitarianism. Michnik stands as a strong defender of Solidarity, but only if led by intellectuals. A Solidarity outside of their control, he suggests, is a dangerous one (Ost 2005: 41).¹⁶⁸

At the same time Michnik and Kuron were involved in a disastrous flirtation with the Catholic Church.¹⁶⁹

Ost's damning indictment is powerfully endorsed by Karol Modzelewski. The Kuron-Modzelewski partnership had broken up by the 1970's. Modzelewski was not involved in the founding of KOR. When he joined Solidarity in 1980 he remained friends with Kuron but there was a difference in their politics. Albeit ambiguously, he remained closer to the spirit of the *Open Letter* than Kuron, although he was as explicit in his public rejection of it – as is clear from my interview with him. Nevertheless, his distance from the KOR intellectuals gave him a critical eye on their capitulation to neoliberalism. He was appalled by their attitude towards their 1980-81 revolutionary workers' base. This is the context for his mildly ironic yet

¹⁶⁷ ie KOR

¹⁶⁸ Ost is here summarising Michnik, *Takie Czasy*, (Warsaw: Nowa 1986: 26-32) (Ost 2005: 41fn11)

¹⁶⁹ See Michnik's *Introduction, The Church and the Left* in (Ost: 1993).

courteous tribute to Kuron's supporters, and Kuron himself after Kuron's long overdue recognition, by the mid 1990's, that something had gone seriously wrong.¹⁷⁰

Some of them were Jacek Kuron's 'disciples' and were under the spell of his personality. Therefore it must have been even more painful, when Jacek (because of his role in post-Solidarity governments) reevaluated his views. He was beating his - never anyone else's - breast (unduly, in my opinion); and even managed to examine his conscience in multiple publications. In 1994 already, he wrote that the Solidarity movement (or rather its symbolic potential) 'had been destroyed by the government and state administration in the years 1989-1993. (...) The fall of the real socialism did not bring workers' freedom and empowerment. Quite the opposite, they not only lost their privileges but also esteem (loc. 7722-27).

What had gone wrong? "Betrayed and exploited", that is how the Solidarity's rank and file workers felt: exacerbated by "Solidarity 'reformers' using the myth of 'Solidarity' as a political shield...but nothing is free in this world. The myth has been completely exhausted." (loc. 7430-32)

They must have been asking themselves: 'How comes, we have won and yet my friends and I feel like losers. Who stole our victory from us? It's Them! They climbed to power over our backs, and then they engaged in shady deals with strangers¹⁷¹ and are robbing our nation's assets.' (loc. 7435-37)

Modzeleski expresses no surprise that workers start "frantically looking for the guilty party," (loc. 7715-17) even though this opened up the dangerous political route taken by the Gwiazda group.¹⁷²

Modzelewski spells out the perspective motivating him.¹⁷³

I have always considered the loyalty to the unknown shop-floor workers of the big state-owned factories more important than the loyalty towards my comrades and friends from the democratic opposition movement. The latter took over the government and treated the workers and their factories as a socialist scrap yard. I will not be lectured on who was right in that dispute... (loc. 7326-29).

'The logic of the situation' caused the reformers to see the shop floor...even (as) an enemy. The works councils, trade unions and the factory management were called 'the Bermuda Triangle', as they could cause 'the ship of great reforms' to get stuck or...disappear altogether. Works councils – the leftovers of our success in 1981 – prioritised shop floors' interests and tried to protect their workplaces. The reformers –

¹⁷⁰ The extracts that follow are all from (Modzelewski: 2013).

¹⁷¹ "Foreign capital" translator, from now on, tr.

¹⁷² See *Andrzej Gwiazda and Joanna Duda-Gwiazda, tragic symbols of Solidarity's crisis and defeat* (Appendix p253) Joanna Duda-Gwiazda explained in the film *Women of Solidarity, Kobiety Solidarności* "The Round Table (negotiations between the former Communist government and some of the former Solidarity leaders) was a huge success for the Solidarity elite who sorted out something for themselves, and sorted out something for the country. Free elections, freedom of the press etc. But if you look at it from the labour union's point of view, the Round Table was catastrophe." See fn124. Ascherson describes the "Gwiazda group" drifting towards the Polish nationalist right in the 1990's (Ascherson: 2005).

¹⁷³ The rest of this section weaves extracts from (Modzelewski 2013) into a single narrative.

were doing exactly the opposite. No wonder that workers' self-governance and organisation was targeted by the vice premier¹⁷⁴ and his team..." (loc. 7317-23).

The example of Kuczynski¹⁷⁵ is particularly eye-opening; closely involved (emotionally as well) in the workers' revolution of the 'first Solidarity'; and yet in 1989 he convinced (Prime Minister) Mazowiecki to make Balcerowicz responsible for the economic transformation...Waldek (Kuczynski) and I have known each other for a long time...I have every right to describe our relationship as friendly and I am entirely sure that the shift in his economic views was not opportunistic. Besides, I highly appreciate his stubborn fight for Polish democracy."

...Waldek had made an attempt to convince me of his (and the government's) rationale (the Balcerowicz Plan).¹⁷⁶ He felt so strongly about this cause, that he failed to see what turned me against it. He spoke passionately, almost as he was addressing himself, what a fantastic idea the super-normative wages tax was. It was to be a trap, preventing state owned enterprises to compensate the inflation with wage increases: if the management backs down under unions' pressure, 'the shop floor will bite their own asses'. I remembered this expression verbatim I was so shocked. Waldek has always been a bold speaker, but this time all I read from his words was a complete emotional chaos. During the times of the Great Solidarity our loyalty was sworn to the shop floor workers of the big factories. We were linked to them, as it appeared, with an infrangible 'anchor warp of unconditional loyalty'. In my case this loyalty went further back, long before 1980, shaped by my intricate history that I tell through this book. Waldek got involved in Balcerowicz's transformation; therefore the passive resistance of works councils, trade unions and the management of the big state owned factories was to him an irritating obstacle on the way to a great goal. (loc. 7301-17).

In the beginning of the 80s the term 'capitalism' still had negative connotations. The proponents of liberal reforms preferred to talk about the 'market economy', while the most aggressive of 'Solidarity's opponents attacked us with the propagandistic allegation that we were trying to restore capitalism. We treated these claims as mean slander. Ten or twelve years later the economists from 'our' government, and, after them, post-Solidarity columnists and journalists - were all striving for wider society to associate the word 'capitalism' with a bright future. (loc. 7141-45).

The overwhelming intellectual current of neoliberalism was flowing from the West to the East and was met with amiable interest even in the Jaruzelski's circles; where the vice premier Rakowski was a supporter of the free market reforms. The party reformer – professor Józef Kaleta from Wrocław, who in 1989 was my most serious adversary in the senate elections – couldn't hide his disappointment at the fact that Jaruzelski hadn't started the neoliberal reforms during the Martial Law. The...defeat of workers resistance

¹⁷⁴ in Poland - the title held by the minister of a key department; here: Minister of Finance Leszek Balcerowicz – Tr

¹⁷⁵ One of the twin brothers who would go on to lead the Law and Justice Party.

¹⁷⁶ "A series of economic measures –so-called shock therapy, a massive dose of IMF stabilisation, high interest rates, tight control on the money supply and government spending...Poland plunged into recession...unemployment...real household decreased by over 30 per cent for pensioners and more than 50 per cent for peasant households...pay cut in the public sector...The Polish Statistical Office surveys show large scale redistribution of income away from workers and farmers and in favour of entrepreneurs...an emerging picture of the rich getting richer, and...the working class getting poorer..." (Hardy: 28-30)

by the military gave Jaruzelski a possibility of radical economic liberalisation... (loc. 6582-89)

Among the people involved in this were of course shop floor workers as well, but the intellectuals – who now read, printed and distributed the works of leading liberal thinkers - held sway over the cause. Friedrich Hayek and Karl Popper lead their Polish readers through the paths of free thought, but not the revolution... (loc. 6531-35)

The Great 'Solidarity' of 1980-81 was a collective, egalitarian and, in its core, socialist movement. Two years after the Martial Law none of these expressions were suitable to describe the ideological stance of 'Solidarity' Underground. This is also true in the case of intellectuals, especially the economists who were advising our movement. They were still oriented toward 'Solidarity' or, to be more precise, what was left of it, but they were using a different language and had different ideas than in 1981 (when they co-authored our programme titled 'Rzeczpospolita Samorządna'.¹⁷⁷ Their compass was tuned to different azimuths...the era of Milton Friedman, Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan begun. (loc. 6201-6)

After all these years I have never changed my mind about this. On the contrary, from today's perspective, I see the compromise about the self-governance of factory workers and state owned enterprise legislation as the last true victory of the first 'Solidarity'. Additionally the fruits of this victory turned out to be exceptionally durable. During the Martial Law and after the Works Councils¹⁷⁸ established back then functioned on the very principles of this compromise, allowing many activists of the delegatised 'Solidarity' to continue our mission. All this was merely a bridgehead of the administrative reform we fought for, but the communist regime was unable crush them. Only Leszek Balcerowicz, as a vice-premier of the first non-communist government of the Republic of Poland and the architect of the economic transformation managed to destroy them. It's particularly ironic, that none other than Balcerowicz (as an adviser of 'Sieć Organizacji Zakładowych'¹⁷⁹) was an originator of the project of economic reform based on workers' self-governance. (loc. 5768-75)

For a highly appropriate conclusion, here is Andrzej Slowik, former Solidarity Lodz workers' leader.

The period of the martial law and after was a time of bureaucratization of the union's structures, of much slower pace of developments and regaining control by the government side. The authorities started then to select from so-called social side partners convenient for themselves. The final result of that process was the team which sat at the round table. The martial law was used to eliminate so-called extremists and radicals from a circle of potential negotiating partners. What started just after the martial law reached its apex by the round table when accusations of selling out workers' interests were raised on daily basis toward that side, which usurped for itself the right to

¹⁷⁷ Self governing republic Tr.

¹⁷⁸ Works councils include representatives of both management and workers. They can be used to incorporate workers' representatives into management planning. But if the workers' representatives are elected from the shop floor, and not appointed by management, they can maintain a degree of independence. Broue describes their progressive role in Germany after the defeat of the Workers and Soldiers Councils in 1918 – discussed in the Iran chapter, Chapter 4, as a possible unexplored route following the defeat of the workers' shoras.

¹⁷⁹ The network of Solidarity branches Tr.

represent the whole community in the negotiations. That claim was false because as I've mentioned all currents called by the government radical and extreme were removed. Here a mechanism repeated itself, which is known since the beginnings of human history. One can see it in slaves' uprisings in the Roman times, in the Reformation with Luther and peasants' rebellions, in the Spring of Nations, and then in the whole pseudo-revolution in Russia. In all cases the mechanism is the same: contain masses at the moment when they threaten those holding power – whether it's economic power and wealth, or political power. In order to do it and pacify masses, bogus leaders are created and concessions are made to bring some comfort, but the essence of exercising power remains unchanged. This is what happened in Poland. We were left without our workplaces, which were sold out in order to heal the ailing economy; without jobs, because our factories were sold out. Banks are in foreign hands, loans are going elsewhere, taxes are not coming to Poland because somebody made some kind of a deal and found a temporary way for making our system and country look better on the outside (A-AS: 306-7).

There is a tremendous irony here in Slowik's comments. Earlier in the interview he denies he is a worker intellectual. Now he proves himself to be one, albeit, and perhaps understandably, a pessimistic one.

(V) Conclusion

(i) "Poland: weakest link...of Russian bureaucratic imperialism"

Zbigniew Kowalewski approached the Bydgoszcz crisis in a very different way.

...you did not need suppositions about the inevitability, possibility or improbability of the Soviet military intervention, because both...could be reasonably supposed...what you needed was a good Marxist knowledge of the social nature and phase and tendency of development of the Soviet Union; you needed to know if this state was relatively stable on a long term or close to a collapse, and why. In the Marxist literature of this period you had practically nothing about it. What Marxists rather inertly...supposed...was a relative stability of the USSR. I said (it) in Poland in 1981, and it was one of the most important bases of my reflexion on strategic issues, intertwined with the idea that Poland was the weakest link in the international chain of domination of Russian bureaucratic imperialism. So the problem, for me, was how this chain can break in Poland, what can be expected as a result of this break for the whole chain, and how the fall of the bureaucratic rule can be combined with the rise of the workers' power establishing a regime of the workers' and socialist democracy (A-ZK: 260-61).

Kowalewski's perspective fits well with the argument developed by Callinicos that by the 1970's "globalisation of capital" was beginning to "leave the Stalinist states stranded." (Callinicos 1991: 45)¹⁸⁰

"What Chris Harman calls 'the shift from national capitalism to multinational capitalism' created powerful external forces threatening the USSR with stagnation, even collapse, until its closed economy was somehow broken up." (Callinicos: 46)¹⁸¹

Harman had been the principal student activist promoting Kuron and Modzelewski's *Open Letter* in the 1968 UK revolutionary student movement, writing the *Introduction* to the UK edition. Now he built upon the analysis in the *Open Letter*, a decade after Kuron and Modzelewski had abandoned it,¹⁸² to analyse the specific crisis in Poland which emphasised Poland as "the weakest link...of Russian bureaucratic imperialism", as Kowalewski had put it. It showed the astonishing penetration by Western capitalism, both its corporations and its banks, into the Eastern European economies, and Poland in particular. It showed that Polish 'Communism', increasingly morphing into a hybrid between the Western and Eastern systems, but with a dependency that was increasingly tied to the dangerously unstable rhythms of the global economy. The centre piece of the Polish government's next 'five-year plan' in the 1970's was to be the expansion of Polish copper production through a massive £250 million pound investment. This was to be provided by a consortium of Western banks but they have demanded as a condition for the loan the power "to demand changes in the copper export strategy as necessary." (*Financial Times* 5/12/75) (Harman: 1976) So we had the extraordinary spectacle of the classic model of Stalinist 'Command' economic planning, dictated not from Moscow but from the boardrooms of the Western banks!

The Wall Street Journal reported. "Foreign bankers are as happy to lend to Communist governments as to a family business. Happier. They've found in governments like Poland who will pay at rates western industrial powers would scorn." (7/12/81, Harman 1988: 255) Expanding trade with the West but also borrowing heavily from Western banks, might have benefited Poland from Western economic growth but the converse was also true. Western European recessions would now become exaggerated in the Eastern European economies, especially Poland. Just servicing the Western bank debt, which cost Poland nearly a quarter of its export earnings, triggered the red warning lights. At the start of the 1980's Poland's

¹⁸⁰ "The Contradictions of Authoritarian Reform" (Callinicos 1991: 40-50)

¹⁸¹ Callinicos cites Harman as the main source of his analysis here. (Callinicos 1991: 46 fn 80)

¹⁸² Or to be exact: he described his analysis as a "fusion of the analyses of Tony Cliff", (one of the original architects theorising Stalinism as state capitalism), "and Kuron and Modzelewski" (Harman 2009: 375).

production fell by nearly a third, prices increasing by 24% in 1981, 100% in 1982, as real wages fell by about a fifth. (Harman 2009: 206) The burgeoning mass movement of Polish workers that became Solidarity was a direct outcome of these circumstances. Confirming the implications of this analysis, Hardy cites a Polish source describing the *nomenklatura*, Polish state bureaucrats who managed the economic enterprises, benefitting from the partnership with Western capital by the late 1970's, just before eruption of Solidarity. "The communist doctrine was dead... the *nomenklatura* (were) getting rich." (Cieochinska 1992: 215, Hardy 2009: 25) KOR exposed the *nomenklatura* after a government censor fled the country to seek asylum in Sweden. The resulting publication of secret documents revealed a Polish government desperate to keep silent its cultivation of Western capitalism.¹⁸³

We have here an intriguing, frustrating and admittedly highly speculative glimpse of the implications, and the high stakes at issue, if Kuron and Modzelewski had developed this 1970's Marxist analysis. We might have had a recognition that Polish workers were in revolt against a fast-changing global capitalism, as well as the Polish state as simply an extension of the Soviet state satellite system. This just might have forced a reconsideration of political objectives, strategies and tactics. An open debate about global capitalism could have become part of the 'Polish' debate. And it might have made the embrace of neo-liberalism by the Solidarity leaders at the end of the 1980's, with the background applause from Reagan and Thatcher, far less likely. What we can conclude with confidence is that both Poland and the Soviet Union had entered that era of chronic political and economic instability, induced by globalisation, which would climax in the implosion of the entire Soviet state satellite system in 1989. This also contextualises the prospects for Soviet military intervention in Poland in response to Bydgoszcz in 1981 suggesting a far less certain outcome compared to Hungary in 1956, exactly the implication of the argument of Kowalewski.

(ii) Explaining Solidarity's defeat through the failure of the worker-intellectual relationship

Progressive intellectuals were amongst the leaders of the new workers' movements struggling with the emergence of industrial capitalism in the nineteenth century. In Chapter One, we saw Marx and Engels attempt to assert theoretical dominance amongst the several competing intellectual and political strands. Chapter 1 also argued that Lenin and Gramsci refined the approach of Marx and Engels, in the early twentieth century, following the polarisation in the workers' movements between the reform of capitalism and its revolutionary overthrow. A

¹⁸³ See Lipski's fascinating account of the *Black Book of Censorship in the Polish People's Republic*. (Lipski: 212-217)

different relationship was required between the revolutionary intellectuals and the most militant worker activists who had no illusions in the reformist alternatives. Chapter 1 introduced Gramsci's idea of the 'democratic philosopher' which insisted on breaking down the distinction between worker activists and intellectuals. Gramsci's newspaper *L'Ordine Nuovo*, 1919, "the paper of the factory councils" was one of the most important bridgeheads between worker activist and intellectual.¹⁸⁴

L'Ordine Nuovo developed "certain forms of new intellectualism...actively involved in practical life, as a builder, an organiser, 'permanently persuasive'..."(Gramsci: 122)

Worker activists would become not just leaders at work but intellectual and political leaders in the wider society, Lenin's "Tribunes of the People".¹⁸⁵ A united political organisation was essential. Appropriate political strategies and tactics would be developed together to maximise the effectiveness of intervention in the wider movement. In other words, the wider movement itself was no longer perceived as adequate to be the exclusive canvass, as it had seemed to be in the nineteenth century. Two levels of intervention were now required. Developing strategic and tactical foresight as an organised minority political and intellectual strand or political party was a condition for competing for political leadership of the wider movement. This perspective was reflected in the *Open Letter* of Kuron and Modzelewski. But when they rejected it, they seemed to return to the older nineteenth century approach of relating only to the movement as a whole.¹⁸⁶ But something unprecedented happened to its intellectuals during Solidarity's downward spiral following Bydgoszcz and the imposition of Martial Law. Some of Solidarity's former leftist intellectuals turned on the worker activists, their former comrades, with extraordinary hostility and ferocity. It not only set the seal on the outright victory for neoliberalism when 'Communism' finally imploded in 1989, it marked the route for Poland's rightward nationalist drift right up until the present day.

Dramatically underlining this process was the inability of intellectual left to theorise the failure of Soviet Communism in the twentieth century. This was essential and needed to be followed

¹⁸⁴ Ch 1 p25-7.

¹⁸⁵ In the most recently translated edition of *What Is To Be Done* (Lih 2008: 746) *Workers as the advanced fighter for democracy* (Lih: 744-759).

¹⁸⁶ KOR was dissolved but its intellectuals became some of Solidarity's most prominent leaders. See Chapter 1 p39. Lenin saw "the party not as *embracing* the working class, but as *interacting* with it for the purpose of influencing it in a revolutionary direction. For Luxemburg...the point is to blend into the working class as it exists, the better to contribute to its organic development as a revolutionary force" (Le Blanc 1999: 95-6). Luxemburg related to the working class as a whole, whereas Lenin saw the need to build a revolutionary party amongst the minority workers' leaders and activists developed in struggle, the most advanced and thoughtful layers. The party, all the time, intervening in the wider movement.

by a socialist perspective which demonstrated on the one hand, the unambiguous exposure and complete break with Soviet Communism, but on the other, a sophisticated adaptation of Marx's and Engels's perspectives, strategies and tactics for the establishment of communism in the late twentieth century.¹⁸⁷ Revitalising the ingenuity of Marx's and Engels's original shattering critique of capitalism, haunting the much famed but far from secure 'global elite' and its neo-liberal 'globalisation' strategy, even before its puncturing in the 2008 financial crash which seemed to flash straight out of the pages of Marx's *Capital*, was perfectly possible. Kuron and Modzelewski had seized upon just such an initiative with their *Open Letter*. It might indeed have laid the basis for a *Communist Manifesto for the late Twentieth Century*.

This remains an essential project. We need a *Communist Manifesto for the Twenty first Century*. The lessons of Solidarity's failed but potentially socialist revolution against 'Communism' would be central to it, alongside putting on the historical record, some of the experiences of its leading activists. Jan Rulewski's continuing pre-occupation, despite his Senator's duties, with technological innovation and his enthusiasm for it to be placed under workers' self-management, provides fascinating insight into a crucial aspect of what the contemporary content of a modern *Communist Manifesto* might look like. Equally, Josef Pinior's aggressive and very public internationalist exposure of NATO's frankly sinister 'black sites' in Poland, alongside his declared hostility to the usurping of Solidarity's legacy by a narrow national Polish populism illustrates the need for an internationalist and socialist counter claim on that legacy. As Pinior put it: "a real alternative not only to the Stalinist regime but to global capitalism." Unfortunately, demonstrable proof that Marxism has been liberated from its Stalinist straightjacket is a pre-condition for achieving this, and it is a marker of the continuing failure of the remnant of the internationalist Marxist left, that this remains elusive a generation later.¹⁸⁸

Paradoxically, Modzelewski, despite his protestations to the contrary that he rejected Marxism because he concluded that it was "utopian", and based on "myth" has seemed unable to shake off its influence - not least Marx's core postulate *that the emancipation of the working classes must be conquered by the working classes themselves*.

Consider again some of these Modzelewski autobiographical extracts.

¹⁸⁷ Kowalewski earlier laid the foundations for this approach.

¹⁸⁸ The climate change catastrophe also demands centre stage in a new communist manifesto - hinted at by George Monbiot. "Dare to declare capitalism dead - before it takes us all down"
<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2019/apr/25/capitalism-economic-system-survival-earth>

“On every level the activists – from the workplace to National Commission, and following their suit, ordinary unionists – wanted, more than anything, to self-manage.”

“The extraordinary phenomenon of sovereign, collective activism of millions of people...”

“I have always considered the loyalty to the unknown shop-floor workers of the big state-owned factories more important than the loyalty towards my comrades and friends from the democratic opposition movement...”

“During the times of the Great Solidarity our loyalty was sworn to the shop floor workers of the big factories. We were linked to them, as it appeared, with an infrangible ‘anchor warp of unconditional loyalty’. In my case this loyalty went further back, long before 1980, shaped by my intricate history...”

“The Great ‘Solidarity’ of 1980-81 was a collective, egalitarian and, in its core, socialist movement.”

Even more surprising is his veiled compliment to Lenin’s Bolsheviks, also from his autobiography.

“The myth of working class was in Marxist and communist ideology interconnected with the myth of proletarian revolution. The best example of which was Bolshevik Revolution (so I learnt during my ZMP¹⁸⁹ times). Based on this example we were taught that the proletariat becomes a force capable of overthrowing capitalism not of its own device but thanks to the missionary work of the enlightened intellectuals who bring revolutionary consciousness to workers. All this teaching paid off and guided our practical action when our own fight with communist dictatorship begun. In this case the indoctrination didn’t go down so well for the system.” (loc. 5768-75)

Read carefully, he doesn’t believe it to be a myth at all. On the contrary, despite the ironic undertone, this appears to be an application of Lenin’s principles of revolutionary organisation at least as Modzelewski has understood it. But there is a flaw. Modzelewski fundamentally misunderstands Lenin’s approach and the “missionary work of the enlightened intellectuals who bring revolutionary consciousness to workers.” This is of course some hyperbole here but it reflects the same mistaken principle that caused Modzelewski to write about the Solidarity worker mass movement.

¹⁸⁹ Związek Młodzieży Polskiej (Association of Polish Youth, abbr. ZMP) was a Polish communist youth organization, existing from 1948 to 1956

“In order to effectively manage this movement we had to continuously intercommunicate with the crowds who wanted, above all, to direct and rule themselves...”¹⁹⁰

Didn't the crowds themselves produce some leaders? Lenin's *purposive workers*: worker leaders, “genuine heroes...with a “passionate drive toward knowledge and toward socialism.” (Lih 2008: 344-45) Modzelewski seems to have forgotten that this was also his view.

Kuron's and Modzelewski's *Open Letter* had described them as the “...natural leaders of the working class” to be recruited alongside “youth and intellectual opinion...” “...(and) able to formulate (their) own political programme, to propagate it in an organised manner among the masses, to create a party.” (Kuron and Modzelewski 1966: 45).

Władysław Frasyniuk's description of workers' overwhelming enthusiasm for education in the Wrocław region, for the establishment for workers' universities, also gave expression to the suddenly liberated desire of workers to create the intellectual tools they required to control their own lives in 1980-81. And, as we saw earlier, according to Kowalewski, “natural leaders of the working class” were present at Solidarity's National Congress as they had been present in their thousands, if not hundreds of thousands, since the birth of Solidarity.¹⁹¹

That Andrzej Slowik represented exactly this working class political strand, and had it crystallised as a political party, would probably have emerged as one of its leaders. However Kowalewski, also in Part III, provided convincing explanations for the immense difficulties over recruiting these worker militants, to use the formulation of the *Open Letter*, “in an organised manner...to create a party.” But those difficulties neither alter the absolute centrality of attempting to implement such a perspective, nor appreciating that the failure to do so lost Poland its revolution in 1980-81.

¹⁹⁰ See full quote in the Introduction to this chapter.

¹⁹¹ Kowalewski's worker-intellectual based refutation of Friszke's interpretation of the left at the National Congress p95.

Chapter 3

The black workers' challenge to South African apartheid in the 1980's: how the struggle was lost.

Introduction: the historic twentieth century struggle against apartheid

The fall of apartheid and the election of Nelson Mandela as South Africa's first black president on the basis of one person one vote majority rule in 1994 was justifiably celebrated as one of the most spectacular victories for democracy over racial oppression in the twentieth century. Mandela's African National Congress, ANC, was the oldest black nationalist movement on the African continent. Its long history of struggle against colonialism and internal racial oppression sustained its legitimacy during the worst of the apartheid years in the second half of the last century. This was a period when the ANC was banned, its leaders killed, jailed or forced into exile. Two very important landmarks stand out from the earlier period which would have a decisive impact as the internal struggle to overthrow apartheid in the 1980's intensified. The first one is the endorsement of the ANC's Freedom Charter by some three thousand delegates at an open air meeting in 1955, representing African, Indian, Coloured¹⁹² and anti-racist White organisations, as well as the multiracial SACTU, the South African Congress of Trade Unions. (Johns, Hunt: 27) The second one is the Rivonia Trial, 1963-64, of Nelson Mandela and nine others, on charges of sabotage (SAHO:1).¹⁹³ They were members of the High Command of Umkhonto we Sizwe, Spear of the Nation (MK), which the ANC, along with members of the South African Communist Party, SACP, had formed as part of the armed wing of the resistance movement against apartheid.

The Freedom Charter was a powerful, rallying manifesto, unambiguous in its commitment to end racial oppression. But almost immediately it aroused bitter controversy. A central clause asserting the right for the ordinary people to control the country's wealth seemed far from unambiguous. It stated.

The People Shall Share in the Country's Wealth.' The national wealth of our country, the heritage of all South Africans, shall be restored to the people. The mineral wealth beneath the soil, the banks and monopoly industry, shall be transferred to the ownership of the people as a whole. All other industry shall be controlled to assist the well-being of the people. All people shall have equal rights to trade where they choose, to manufacture and enter all trades, crafts and professions.

¹⁹² "legally classified by the government of being of mixed descent" (Johns, Hunt: xi)

¹⁹³ SAHO, South African History Online

Within months the ANC felt obliged to publish a second document, *Does the Freedom Charter Mean Socialism?* hoping to clarify the controversial clause. It made clear that the transfer of “...wealth...to the people as a whole” meant “nationalization of the basic wealth”. At the same time, though, it stated explicitly that “socialism and...nationalization...are not synonymous terms”¹⁹⁴ This, then, left open the question of the ANC’s attitude to economic inequality, which, as we shall see in the conclusion, the ANC visited again at its Morogoro conference in 1969.

However this internal debate made the ANC no less of a threat as far as the apartheid government was concerned. And Sharpeville 1960, where police opened fire on an unarmed African crowd, objecting to the notorious racist pass laws, the compulsory carrying of passes, killing sixty-nine, eliminated any illusions about a peaceful transition. (Johns, Hunt: 6)¹⁹⁵ The Rivonia trial was seen as a way of decapitating the ANC. Mandela’s speech in the court would secure his lasting status as one of the movement’s most outstanding leaders. This was not simply a blistering attack on the evils of apartheid, it was an open defence of the use of political violence to destroy it (Johns, Hunt: 93). Mandela, and the others, were expecting the death sentence but instead received the infamous life sentence of hard labour on Robben Island. How the ANC understood the strategic objective of Umkhonto we Sizwe has an important bearing on the later struggles. At the trial Mandela stated that there were four possible forms of violence. – sabotage, guerrilla warfare, terrorism and open revolution. Umkhonto started with sabotage hoping “it would apply pressure for change while at the same time keeping bitterness to a minimum...holding out the possibility of accommodation rather than irrevocable confrontation” (Johns, Hunt: 90). Rivonia briefly shattered the organised resistance movement. But the 1970’s saw an upsurge of spontaneous mass black action on an unprecedented scale which would now shape the resistance movement right through to the collapse of apartheid in the early 1990’s. It took two forms, the Durban strike wave of 1973 and the Soweto township uprising of 1976. Both laid the groundwork for distinctive political perspectives that came to be known as “workerism” and “populism”.

“Populists” tended to argue “that racial oppression is the central contradiction within society.” Class contradictions, whilst acknowledged, were seen as less important, “downplayed in the interests of the broadest possible anti-apartheid unity.” “Workerists” by contrast, tended to see “racism and apartheid as a mask concealing capitalist exploitation.” “Populists” prioritized

¹⁹⁴ <http://www.anc.org.za/content/does-freedom-charter-mean-socialism>

¹⁹⁵ The pass law protest had been initiated by the ANC’s less influential rival, the PAC, the Pan African Congress. Unfortunately It is not possible here to discuss the significance of the PAC.

“the national democratic revolution”, “workerists” “the class struggle...the working class alone on an anti-racist and socialist programme, can effect real change...class alliances were not ruled out in principle...(but were viewed) with suspicion” (Baskin: 96). Despite the tension between them, in combination they posed a direct, arguably fatal challenge to the apartheid regime, drawing in both the exiled SACP and ANC. The potential of “workerism” additionally posing a left wing political challenge to the authority of both the ANC and SACP is the central theme of this chapter. The Durban strike wave witnessed tens of thousands of workers walking out of their factories and securing increased wages and improved working conditions for the first time since the 1940’s. It was only a matter of time before the government was forced legally to recognize independent black trade unions. Its Wiehahn Commission and the resulting labour relations legislation of 1981 hoped to restrict severely the scope of the new trade unions (Johns, Hunt: 187,189). But there was no escaping the implications of this startling new development. Apartheid had been breached in the workplace, at the point of production. White bosses and their deeply racist managerial subordinates were forced to negotiate with black workers’ democratically elected leaders.

The Soweto township uprising was sparked by a government attempt to impose Afrikaans as the mandatory language of instruction in African secondary schools. In response, secondary school student activists, many of whom had been active in the South African Student Movement, SASM, a black consciousness¹⁹⁶ group, called protest demonstrations. Tear gassed and shot at, the demonstrations spread rapidly to other urban centres. The ‘stay away’ tactic was introduced.¹⁹⁷ Township workers were encouraged to refuse to go to work on dates announced for demonstrations. Over 500 were killed but Soweto quickly became the symbol of a new defiance. This was underlined when black consciousness leader Steve Biko was brutally murdered by security police in 1977 and immediately attained status as one of the anti-apartheid movement’s great fighters. Whilst the ANC was weak on the ground in Soweto, it was the immediate recipient of many youthful volunteers who went into exile to join Umkhonto we Sizwe (Johns, Hunt: 188-9). Soweto was also the stimulus for one of the most important mass-based grassroots organisations that emerged in the 1980’s, the United Democratic Front. In August 1983, twelve thousand South Africans from all ethnic backgrounds met in Cape Town and agreed a campaign of civil disobedience and disruption to the minor constitutional reforms, designed to soften the public face of apartheid without changing its fundamental structure. Particularly offensive was the government plan to provide the

¹⁹⁶ A movement asserting black pride, black culture and ultimately black power.

¹⁹⁷ Strictly speaking ‘re-introduced’: the ‘stay away’ had a long and distinguished history in worker and community struggles with communities giving the lead (Webster: 1981).

franchise to Coloureds and Asians but not Africans. The UDF also supported the 'charterist movement' that developed in the early 1980's, promoting the ANC's Freedom Charter (Johns, Hunt: 195, 196). The UDF campaign was a tremendous success. The apartheid imposed political structures in the African townships came under relentless assault. Roving demonstrations challenged police patrols. Africans collaborating with the new local Community Council system came under intense pressure to withdraw. School student boycotts over a range of grievances quickly spread as a mass movement. The UDF provided coordination to a movement that was able successfully to call the 800,000 strong Transvaal 'stay-at-home' for two days in November 1984. The ANC had issued a call to make the townships ungovernable. (SAHO: 2) 'Ungovernability' was about to move from the townships to the workplace.

Meanwhile Umkhonto sabotage attacks escalated. The apartheid government was able to force Mozambique to close its transit facilities for Umkhonto guerrillas but its sense of losing control was deepening. Simultaneously it prepared to declare a State of Emergency whilst developing channels of communication with Nelson Mandela. In January 1985, South Africa's President Botha offered to free Mandela, (who by now had been removed from Robben island to a mainland prison), in return for his renouncing the use of violence. Mandela's response deliberately deepened the government's dilemma. Not only did he refuse the government's conditions, he chose a public rally of the UDF for his daughter Zindzi to deliver it. Unconditional unbanning of the ANC, freeing all political prisoners and moves to toward full democracy were amongst his conditions for negotiation. Botha refused. But the idea of a negotiated solution had been firmly placed on the political agenda (Johns, Hunt: 198, 199). At the same time the government was about to face an even more dangerous threat to its authority – a rapidly growing and self-confident independent and politicized black trade union movement, already in the making with black trade union federations like the Federation of South Trade Unions, FOSATU, the Council of Unions of South Africa, CUSA and the 'black consciousness' Azanian Confederation of Trade Unions, AZACTU. All three would be linked, directly or indirectly, to the much larger Congress of South African Trade Unions, COSATU.

As Cyril Ramaphosa¹⁹⁸, General Secretary of South Africa's recently formed National Union of Mineworkers and Convenor at the launch of COSATU, 1985, acclaimed.

¹⁹⁸ "Ramaphosa began work as legal adviser at...CUSA at the beginning of 1982... Unlike its competitor FOSATU, it reserved leadership positions for black activists..." (Butler: 130-1) For this reason CUSA has been linked to the black consciousness movement, however it was broadly based and included underground ANC supporters.

Never before have workers been so powerful, so united and so poised to make a mark on society...We all agree that the struggle of workers on the shop floor cannot be separated from the wider political struggle for liberation in this country¹⁹⁹ (Baskin 1991: 54).

The launch of the new trade union federation had the potential to transform the struggle against apartheid in South Africa. It was the largest black trade union federation ever formed in the country, representing affiliated unions with a combined membership of nearly half a million workers. It brought together the two wings of the internal resistance to apartheid, the 'workerists' in the workplaces and the 'populists' in the townships. But it also provided a covert link to the banned and exiled African National Congress, the ANC, and South African Communist Party, SACP. Several ANC and SACP supporting trade unionists were elected on to the COSATU executive. From now on, COSATU leaders would be in regular covert contact with the ANC. In other words, it seemed COSATU could threaten the apartheid government with maximum unity of resistance forces in a period where the struggle against it was increasingly taking on an insurrectionary character.

"A massive strike wave accompanied COSATU's birth" (Baskin: 77). On New Year's Day 1986, 30,000 workers downed tools at four Impala Platinum mines in Bophuthatswana. Strikes were triggered across South Africa's coal, gold and precious metal mines which would climax in the great national miners' strike of August 1987. The strikes spread to the manufacturing industry, as well as other sectors, particularly involving MAWU, the Metal and Allied Workers Union. The escalating struggle triggered new forms of action like the 'siyalala' or sleep-in strike (Baskin: 83). Managerial authority was fast eroding. This was the moment that the "ungovernability" of the township came to the workplace, analysed in microscopic detail in one of the most important studies of the period to which we will return. (Von Holdt 2003: 124) It was "a climate of uprising and even insurrection" (Baskin: 89). A successful test of strength for the new federation was its call to recognise May 1st, Mayday, as a workers' holiday. Without using the words, COSATU had effectively called for a one-day general strike, although it was called "a national stay-away...probably the largest ever in the country's history" (Baskin: 125).²⁰⁰ Over one and a half million workers took part. Planned rallies were met by government bans, enforced at venues by heavily armed police and soldiers. Some, like at Soweto, nevertheless went ahead where thousands of illegal SACP pamphlets were distributed

¹⁹⁹ The display of Ramaphosa's statement at the Workers Museum Johannesburg illustrates its emblematic significance.

²⁰⁰ COSATU and the UDF called it jointly. I described it as a "hybrid" between a stay-away and a strike in an e mail discussion with Webster (9/08/2018), author of (Webster: 1981). Webster is a pivotal figure in the studies of the black workers' movement. See fn 206.

(Baskin: 124-6). Pressure now grew from the employers, and even sections of the 'apartheid' press, to make Mayday a public holiday. But the government refused to recognise a date which was so obviously "Communist" (Baskin: 127). Instead it suggested a compromise, the first Friday of every May would be a public holiday known as 'Workers Day'. Now COSATU refused. But at least in 1987 both sides 'won'. The first Friday in May 1987 was Mayday, May 1st.

Alas, the growing power of the workers' movement, symbolised by the Mayday victory, was about to be rapidly curtailed. The deepening of the industrial revolt in the following year²⁰¹ climaxed with the great miners' strike of August 1987. It went down to crushing defeat. A month later the government published changes to its Labour Relations Act, severely restricting the right to strike (Baskin: 261-275). Although COSATU would mount an extremely impressive campaign resisting the changes, culminating in a three-day stay away from work in June, the following year, involving between two and a half and three million workers, (although with a very poor response from mineworkers) (Baskin: 287, 288), the government would impose the new legislation anyway (Baskin: 291). The period immediately following the defeat of the miners' strike, 1987-88, has been described as "a state onslaught" (Fine, Webster 1989: 272, Legassick: 537). COSATU had suffered a strategic defeat which would significantly shift the balance within the movement. "Implicit in this broad-front conception of unity", that had defined COSATU was "the view that class contradictions are secondary to the national democratic struggle" (Fine, Webster: 272).²⁰² This now became increasingly explicit and unchallengeable. Why this happened and its implications is the subject of the rest of this chapter. It is the moment that the workers' movement decisively lost the political initiative and hence any prospects of political independence. "Workerism" had failed to develop politically and had rejected the necessity of an independent workers' political party. It will be argued that the implications were fatal for its project and this will be analysed in four distinct ways.

Firstly, it was unable to resist the pressures of the SACP, the South African Communist Party, as the latter emerged from the underground in the late 1980's. Secondly, it missed an essential strategic opportunity to strengthen its position by failing to deliver any meaningful solidarity to the 1987 miners' strike, the high point of the strike wave of the period. Thirdly, the treason trial of Moses Mayekiso, "workerism's" most accomplished leader, decapitated the movement, his own political trajectory at this time and afterwards, reflecting "workerism's" impasse.

²⁰¹ See p130-31.

²⁰² The authors issued a warning. "In a post-apartheid society these class contradictions are likely to come sharply to the fore...Trade unions which emphasise their representative role...could easily be seen as opponents of the new state's attempt at national development" (Fine, Webster: 272-3). They didn't anticipate the incorporation of the trade unions.

Finally, how the limitations of “workerism”, tending to confine its political perspective to the workplace alone, were spectacularly exposed, at one of its most important power-bases, Highveld Steel on the edge of Johannesburg.

Meanwhile the apartheid government was about to be seriously weakened on the military front. This raised the question of the armed struggle and its relation to the deepening mass internal struggle. The battle at Cuito Cuanavale in May 1988, previously a little known town in Angola, was so dramatic and significant that Nelson Mandela would describe it “as a turning point for the liberation of our continent and my people.”²⁰³ Cuban military intervention tipped the battle in the tiny town in the bitter civil war in favour of the Angolan military and against the SADF, South African Defence Forces and SADF-backed Angolan ‘rebel’ UNITA forces. South Africa’s attempt to destroy Angola’s independence would end, as would its opposition to Namibia’s independence. Its military self-confidence was severely shaken and would hasten apartheid’s demise. Cuito Cuanavale has been even compared “to the great turning point in the second world war, when the Nazi forces were halted at Stalingrad...” (Kasrils 2008: 6) Namibia’s liberation forces led by SWAPO, the South West African Peoples Organisation, were also involved at Cuito Cuanavale. Namibia would become independent in 1990. Cuito Cuanavale clearly justified the fifteen year Cuban presence in Angola. Nor can Cuba’s military role be dismissed as a Soviet proxy. Moscow wasn’t even consulted “over Havana’s massive intervention” (Kasrils 2008: 8). Cuba lost over 2000 soldiers during that period, Umkhonto, its key South African ally during those years, 130 (Kasrils 2008: 10). International diplomacy was also intensifying. 1989 is the year that saw the beginning of the end for apartheid. The OAU, Organisation of African Unity, representing independent African nations across the African continent, met in Harare, capital of the newly independent state of Zimbabwe. The OAU endorsed a document known as the Harare Declaration, prepared in advance by ANC leaders, which spelled out the conditions for a negotiated settlement, leading to elections for a one person one vote constituent assembly. The Harare Declaration received world-wide attention and was the subject for a special session at the United National General Assembly in December – a convenient forum for Western governments to signal their support, albeit couched with diplomatic ambiguities (Johns, Hunt: 207-9). It was also the year that the Soviet Union disintegrated, easing the way for the fall of apartheid to take place on terms set by the West.

²⁰³ The 20th anniversary of the Battle at Cuito Cuanavale was the subject of a commemoration lecture by ANC government minister, SACP Central Committee member and former MK commander, Ronnie Kasrils, at the University of Rhodes in 2008 (Kasrils: 2008). Ronnie Kasrils is also an interviewee with this project.

COSATU's 1989 Congress captured the mood as well as the politics which were now hardening in its leadership.

The spirit of the congress was unusually defiant. Delegates' most popular songs lauded the ANC's military wing, Umkhonto...Flags of the banned Communist Party and ANC were in evidence. So too were hundreds of posters calling Nelson Mandela's release. SACP members covertly distributed the party's newspaper, *Umsebenzi*...a sense that the government was unable to contain the tide of resistance (Baskin: 345).²⁰⁴

Nelson Mandela would be freed in 1990 along with all other political prisoners. The ANC and SACP would be unbanned.

How the independent workers' movement lost the political initiative 1985-1989

1. The "workerist" movement and its collapse into the SACP, South African Communist Party

Cyril Ramphosa's COSATU launch speech, cited above, reflected the two components of the rapidly developing mass movement against apartheid in the mid 1980's: "the struggle of workers on the shop floor" and "the wider political struggle for liberation in this country." The ANC was accepted as the leader of that wider political struggle for national liberation. But what were the politics of the shop floor workers? How did that politics become associated with the idea of "workerism"? Did "workerism" pose a challenge to ANC leadership?

In 1982, Neil Aggett, a white trade union organiser with FCWU, the Food and Canning Workers Union, was tortured to death in a police station. FOSATU, the recently formed Federation of South African Trade Unions, which preceded COSATU, called strikes on the day of his funeral. More than 100,000 workers responded. (Baskin: 35-6) The solidarity strike helped inspire the 'legendary' speech by FOSATU general secretary, Joe Foster, at the Federation's 1982 April conference. It also made the solidarity strike, at least in principle, a strategic part of the FOSATU and "workerist" armoury. The Foster speech is generally regarded as a manifesto for the "workerist" movement. And as another former "workerist" leader, Alec Erwin, has recently explained, it was the product "of months of meetings and laborious drafts (usually hand

²⁰⁴ COSATU would be incorporated into the political process that would now unfold as part of the Triple Alliance, T/A, of ANC/SACP/COSATU. The period 1989-1994 was also subject to a rising tide of strikes and stayaways justifiably compared with 1985-89, but with the difference that the T/A was firmly in control and was able to use the volatile mass movement to further its negotiating strategy. (Ceruti (2020): forthcoming – see bibliography – a point also discussed by the Trotskyist interviewee Darlene Miller.

written) by one or other scribe” involving intellectuals, shop stewards and union organisers. (Erwin 2017: 237)²⁰⁵ The speech was indeed “a strident assertion of independent politics...” (Forrest 2011: 329) Whilst respecting “the international presence of the ANC...essential to a popular challenge to the present regime, this placed “certain strategic limitations on the ANC.” Perhaps the most damning claim by Foster was that to the Western powers, the ANC “had to appear anti-racist but not anti -capitalist” (Foster: 227). This was essentially a reminder that the ANC’s Freedom Charter was not a programme for socialism. Foster also noted because of its friendly relations with the Soviet bloc, the ANC could not appear to support socialist alternatives. Foster had already signalled support for Solidarity in Poland (Foster: 221).

It is therefore essential that workers...build their own powerful and effective organisation even whilst they are part of the wider popular struggle...to ensure that the popular movement is not hijacked by elements who will in the end have no option but to turn against their worker supporters (Foster: 228).

The base of the organisation was to be “located where workers have most power and authority and that is where production takes place.” Foster stressed the democratic base of the worker shop floor representatives and unambiguously cited class struggle as the driver of the new movement, even though the phrase is not used.

Capital’s hostility to factory organisation forces members and shop stewards to struggle continuously or else to have their organisation crushed. (The objective was) greater worker participation in *and control over* production (Foster: 231).²⁰⁶

Finally, Foster made it clear the objective of using “the strength of factory based organisation to allow workers to play an effective role in the community.” There is strong indication that Foster saw workers playing a leading role, “otherwise workers will be entirely swamped by the powerful tradition of popular politics” (Foster: 231,232).²⁰⁷

²⁰⁵ Alec Erwin, leading “workerist” intellectual, also a former General Secretary of FOSATU, predecessor to COSATU, where he became its Education Officer. Erwin also held various ministerial appointments in the post-apartheid governments of Mandela and others.

²⁰⁶ My emphasis in italics and it worth noting that Foster’s original speech is far more powerful than Alec Erwin’s recent summary of it (Erwin: 2017). See also (Webster 1985: 253) “The growth of an organised challenge from the shop floor...pushed forward the invisible frontier of control of the workplace. The reduction of the formal powers of the employer...threatened management’s traditional presumption that workers have no right to participate in the...planning of production.” (Webster: 1985) is regarded as “a landmark study” in the field (Botiveau 2017: 284fn12).

²⁰⁷ However Foster also made a comparison which will later require further thorough analysis. “The most appropriate comparison is with that of the guerrilla fighter who has to develop the strength to resist daily, the knowledge of his terrain that will give him every tactical advantage and the support for those for whom he is struggling. Probably of most importance, because both the worker leaders and the guerrilla are fighting a powerful enemy, is the development of a sense of when to advance and when to retreat” (Foster: 232).

In his review of FOSATU's position, Erwin elides over this tension. "The FOSATU leadership eschewed syndicalist and 'socialism now' positions as they realised that a mass struggle was essential to defeat apartheid, and that restricting organisation to factories would not achieve that goal" (Erwin: 2017). Here Erwin fudges the central question: who will lead "the mass struggle against apartheid", the workers' movement or the ANC? Erwin also implicitly opens up the so-called two-stage theory of the ANC and SACP, that national liberation from apartheid must precede the struggle for socialism.

Erwin's elision here is underlined with his claim that exiled SACP leader, Jo Slovo's "famous paper" in 1988, *The South African Working Class and the National Democratic Revolution*, which addresses the two-stage theory, was a reason why many former "workerist" leaders joined the SACP when it was unbanned in 1990 (Erwin: 250).²⁰⁸ Paradoxically Slovo answers the question that Erwin raised but didn't answer: who will lead "the mass struggle against apartheid." Whether Slovo answers it satisfactorily is another matter. Nevertheless Slovo's paper amounted to an ideological onslaught on the "workerist" position which the "workerists" were ill equipped to deal with. It would have been helpful if Erwin had admitted this rather than present Slovo's paper as a somehow seamless development of the "workerist" position.²⁰⁹ Slovo argues that the presentation of the SACP two-stage theory has often crudely misrepresented the party's position. He re-fashions it as follows.

There is...both a distinction and a continuity between the national democratic and socialist revolutions; they can neither be completely telescoped nor completely compartmentalized (Slovo: 1988).

The absolute key to the continuity between the two revolutions, writes Slovo, lies in the working class emerging "as the dominant social force in a truly democratic post-apartheid state."

²⁰⁸ Bethuel Maserumule, former "workerist" leader, metal workers' union shop steward and organiser is scathing about Erwin. He told Kally Forrest, historian of the union, that Erwin's politics were reformist, "broadly social democratic and he had abandoned even the two-stage philosophy but was loathe to admit it" (Forrest 2011: 428). An assessment of Erwin shared by a former apartheid minister, see fn 248. In his conclusion Erwin complains that after the fall of apartheid, "the workerist leadership missed a major opportunity to build working class power," (Erwin: 251), without making any attempt to assess his own role in the failure.

Maserumule's many insights into "workerism" are illustrated during my own interview with him, discussed later in this section.

²⁰⁹ Nevertheless Erwin concedes, however vaguely, something was going wrong by this stage. By joining the SACP, former "workerist" leaders "increased access...to the top decision makers (ie ANC). Given the exigencies of the time, this had many parallels with a 'war cabinet' type situation. In hindsight, though, this situation laid the basis for later inadequacies in building...working class organisation...the relationship with the SACP, as a purportedly class-based party, should have been thought through. Key COSATU leaders such as Jay Naidoo stated time and again that the unions were not a conveyor belt for the ANC..." (Erwin: 250-51)

This is the point which exposes the SACP's failure. Both in practice and in theory SACP politics led to the working class becoming a subordinate social and political force in the post-apartheid state.²¹⁰ But before attempting to develop this crucial proposition, it is important to contextualize it in Slovo's legitimate argument about the national democratic revolution and the struggle to maintain national integrity in the post-apartheid state, as a *unitary* nation state. As we saw earlier, by 1987 Botha's apartheid government was already searching for a 'negotiated' solution. As Slovo writes.

The growing demand for democracy and majority rule in a united South Africa continues to be met by the diabolically simple answer that 'South Africa is a multi-racial country'. There is no majority. There are only minorities, all of whom must retain their economic, geographic and cultural 'heritage'.

Slovo quotes a BBC monitored South African government broadcasted statement 'explaining' that "there are ten African nations plus whites, coloureds and Indians, and all insist on their right to self-determination." As Slovo rightly pointed out, promotion of this 'multi nationalism', a development of the original 'bantustan' strategy, was a "device for continued national domination." Worse, it encouraged in particular "the Buthelezi-backed Kwa Natal proposals..." This would lead to the apartheid government backing Buthelezi's Zulu nationalist Inkatha Freedom Party with the explicit aim of splitting the internal anti-apartheid resistance movement and its agreed objective of black majority rule in a post-apartheid democratic South Africa. (SAHO:3)²¹¹ So the elementary objective - the struggle for black majority rule in a post-apartheid state could not be taken for granted and Slovo was absolutely justified in raising this. Furthermore, as we shall see shortly, the "workerists" were very vulnerable to criticism on this point.

But would the working class be leading this struggle for black majority rule in a post-apartheid state? Metal workers' union historian, Kally Forrest, has succinctly captured the political and historical moment that preceded Slovo's paper.

The banning of the UDF and the imposition of the 1986 State of Emergency moved COSATU to the centre of the political stage (Forrest 2011: 416).

This seems to have left Slovo floundering about the meaning of working class leadership at this critical juncture in the struggle against apartheid. The section of his paper "Trade Unions and

²¹⁰ Exactly as predicted by Fine and Webster, footnote 11.

²¹¹ Inkatha very nearly succeeded in splitting the resistance movement and plunging the country into a racial civil war even after Mandela had been released and the ANC and SACP had been unbanned. Inkatha battalions were used regularly as strike breakers and as murderous para militaries to crush township unrest. Unfortunately this critical part of the struggle against apartheid cannot be discussed here.

the Working Class” treats COSATU as an abstraction. He makes a general argument without any mention of COSATU or its constituent unions’ struggles, apart from two very brief footnote references. This contrasts sharply with Slovo’s very concrete and arguably “populist” defence of the UDF in the townships, apparently undermined by democratic “workerist” principles.²¹² Slovo argues that the “UDF is the umbrella of the broad legal liberation front”, though he does add a footnote: “the relationship between trade union federations and organisations such as the UDF does need to be worked out more precisely.” But what he is certainly not saying is that COSATU should be at centre stage in that “umbrella”, the argument of the best of the “workerists” like Mayekiso. Indeed his treason trial was precipitated precisely because he put that perspective into practice. Furthermore, Slovo ignores the most important strike of the period, the miners’ strike, the politicized strike wave that preceded it, the political implications of the miners’ defeat. Typical of Slovo’s general argument about trade unions and politics we have.

The very fact that the workers’ economic struggle cannot be separated from the struggle against national domination has helped to blur the borderline between trade union and political leadership of the working class as a whole. It is, however, vital to maintain the distinction between trade union politics and overall revolutionary leadership. A trade union cannot carry out this dual role; if it attempted to do so it would have to change its basic character and risk committing suicide as a mass legal force. In addition, the very nature and purpose of trade unionism disqualifies it from carrying out the tasks of a revolutionary vanguard (Slovo: 1988).

Firstly, we’re discussing a trade union federation not a single trade union, with a legitimate claim to represent the working class as a whole. Secondly, trade union federations certainly can play political roles – as we saw in Poland with the example of Solidarity. Thirdly, whether trade union federations can play revolutionary roles does indeed depend on the interventions of “revolutionary vanguards.” But here Slovo’s argument descends into pure obfuscation. This is not about “revolutionary vanguards” becoming or replacing the trade union federation but about revolutionaries raising demands within the federation which advance the workers’ movement and, in the case of apartheid South Africa, simultaneously the wider liberation

²¹² “...the tendency to mechanically apply the principles of trade union politics and organisation to the broader political struggle...using the trade union movement as a model, critics of the UDF allege a lack of democratic control from below...” (Slovo: 1988) Slovo’s position is even more exposed because we know that the SACP leadership in exile were extremely well informed about COSATU – as is clear from Ronnie Kasrils’s interview.

struggle. Furthermore, the principle underlying such an intervention was developed by communism's most outstanding leader: Lenin.²¹³

"Revolutionary vanguards" are, of course, revolutionary socialist parties with strong workplace and community roots. Remarkably, Slovo's discussion about "revolutionary vanguards" is restricted to just five brief paragraphs, the shortest section in his paper. Here was an opportunity – missed – to show how a "revolutionary vanguard" would assist the working class emerging "as the dominant social force" in the struggle for "a truly democratic post-apartheid state." Translated into the practical politics of late 1980's South Africa with its apartheid-state structure on the brink of disintegration, this would have meant a COSATU deeply influenced by revolutionary socialist politics: a COSATU ready to rally maximum solidarity to the striking miners, a COSATU ready to exert extreme pressure on an ANC if perceived ready to make unacceptable compromises, rather than "becoming a conveyor belt for the ANC." (Erwin: 251)²¹⁴

In fact, Slovo's proposed "revolutionary vanguard" is a completely inadequate version of what was required. Slovo seems trapped with the Lenin of *What Is To Be Done* in 1902²¹⁵ rather than the Lenin of *State and Revolution* of 1917. This is not to argue that South Africa was comparable to Russia in 1917. But when Slovo tells us that "a vanguard party, representing the historic aspirations of the working class, cannot (like a trade union) have a mass character, it must attract the most advanced representatives of the working class; *mainly professional revolutionaries*"²¹⁶ with an understanding of Marxist theory and practice..." he misrepresents the development of Lenin's party in Russia.²¹⁷ As Chapter 1 illustrated "the most advanced representatives of the working class with an understanding of Marxist theory and practice" in Lenin's party in 1917 were not only the professional revolutionaries. They were the democratically elected shop floor worker leaders in the workplaces, on the factory committees at the point of production, who had joined the Bolshevik Party. To be sure, they were in

²¹³ Lenin defended at the 3rd Congress of the Communist International, the Comintern in 1921, the highly contested and innovative united front initiative launched by some German communists, the *Open Letter to German Workers' Organisations* (Riddell 2015: 1061-1069). This was an intervention with economic and political demands in the reformist trade union federation, as well as the wider labour movement. The attempt to politicise the federation was quite explicit.

²¹⁴ See footnote 209.

²¹⁵ By 1991 Slovo was distancing himself from *What Is To Be Done?* admitting it had been "our organisational bible" (Legassick: 549).

²¹⁶ my emphasis

²¹⁷ That this coincides with a Stalinist conception of party organisation with a professional full time leadership giving instructions to the party members, described by Moses Mayekiso as "commandist" (A-MM), must be noted here, but a wider discussion is not possible. Slovo, in any case, here avoids any serious discussion of the Russian Revolution, Lenin and the Bolsheviks.

political and intellectual dialogue with the professional revolutionaries who arranged education classes and prepared political pamphlets, newspapers and other appropriate forms of propaganda. But this was now a mass party with a worker cadre as part of its leadership.

Paradoxically as soon as the SACP was unbanned in 1990 it too became a mass party. The “workerists” were in political disarray. They had failed to respond to the miners’ strike in 1987.²¹⁸ And they had failed to form a political party of their own.²¹⁹ And, as an alternative, Slovo’s rhetorical claims for a working class political leadership were given credibility by Chris Hani, former exiled charismatic chief of staff of MK and, increasingly, the link with former “workerists”, who were close to the SACP. Hani’s role is examined in the conclusion. Nevertheless the opportunity to create a politically trained worker cadre at the point of production from the existing factory committees was squandered. Preoccupation with the ANC alliance and the prospect of a negotiated settlement took priority. Many of the “workerist” leaders who joined the SACP would leave, making a mockery of Slovo’s frankly outrageous claim that “there is no organised force in our country’s history which has matched our Party’s contribution to the spread of genuine workers’ organization at the point of production. We can truly claim to be the parent of black trade unionism.” (Slovo: 1988)

The political evolution of Bethuel Maserumule in the 1980’s illustrates the significance of the showdown between Slovo, the SACP and the “workerists”. Maserumule was a former shop steward with Barlow Aluminium until 1986 when he became a full time organiser with MAWU and then NUMSA, the metal workers’ union.²²⁰ My interview with Maserumule opened with the exposure of an immediate weakness of the “workerist” movement. Although both Poland’s Solidarity movement and the Workers Party in Brazil at different periods served as inspirational models, “we never clarified the relation between unions as a political movement and a political party.” This weakness is discussed in the concluding section of this chapter. This lack of clarity spilled over into the wider discussion of the workers’ movement as a political movement and the ANC.

A lot of us were persuaded about the potential power of the industrial proletariat but we weren’t sure about the requisite political force needed in order to achieve transformation. And so we realised there were other forces which constituted the broader working class in order to make this class a meaningful agent of change. In the initial stages I was in MAWU and NUMSA, (the metal worker unions), heavily critical of

²¹⁸ See next section 2. ‘The Great Miners’ Strike of August 1987 and the rise and fall of the independent workers’ movement’.

²¹⁹ Kally Forrest’s discussion of the “workerists”, Gramsci and the party is summarised in my conclusion.

²²⁰ Metal workers’ union, historian, Kally Forrest, recommended Maserumule to me as one of the most militant and left wing of the former rank and file “workerist” leaders.

the ANC, very resentful actually. Our understanding of the history of the ANC was that it did not inspire any hope in transforming the country in any meaningful way. They had a heavily reformist character and inclination into incorporation into the political and economic structures. This meant to us that we'll have an outcome, a political dispensation which would favour any other social class except the working class. And so we were heavily sceptical about any prospects of change coming through the ANC as the leading force. But the reality was that the ANC had established itself strongly in South Africa, that it influenced all militant mobilised formations within society... youth...students, community structures, rural movements, the leading cadres...owed their loyalty to the ANC. So you had this dilemma where the more consciously socialist elements are few and outside the ANC. And those within the ANC are good at organising struggles, building structures, fighting campaigns and battles against the regime.²²¹ If you really want to advance a meaningful concept of socialist change you had to connect to those forces who, unfortunately, were loyal to the ANC. That began to influence and moderate some of the resentment towards the ANC. And it gave us the opportunity to actually start interrogating them. What is the ANC? So for some of us it became interesting to develop this sense that the ANC is a broad movement led by middle class forces, heavily influential, but vulnerable to the movement and development of its constituencies. This broad movement consisted of people in urban areas, people in the industrial sector, people in the rural movements. And they were heavily radicalised, and at the height of the radical mobilisation, they would push the ANC to the Left. But as soon as the radical flow would decline, the middle class leadership would assert itself once again. So this made us appreciate an orientation towards the ANC – not in terms of its politics and policies but more in terms of the forces from below that were loyal to it and would follow it. (A-BM: 326-7)

Maserumule was to be surprised not so much by how the workers' movement might influence the ANC influenced movements outside the workplaces, but the extent to which the ANC was beginning to influence the workers' movement. He describes the "shock" of some "workerist" NUMSA leaders when they learned about a particularly militant and loyal "workerist" NUMSA organiser from the township, Katlehong, just outside the airport, the industrial heartlands of South Africa, East of Johannesburg. One evening the NUMSA organiser was nearly caught by police at a road block with heavy weapons and members of Umkhonto we Sizwe, MK. Again, Maserumule describes a comrade, an activist in a young Christian workers movement, influenced by "workerism", discovered also to be part of SACP initiatives. "Just around the '1990's...revelations about who was in NUMSA and associated with either the ANC or the SACP were multiplying by the day" (A-BM: 329).

The SACP was pivotal in organising the MK intervention. Maserumule describes how his relationship with the SACP developed.

They used to get their newsletter to us...I was initially critical of them because of their closeness to the ANC. I could not understand how a party of socialism

²²¹ This argument would particularly apply to the growth of the UDF, heavily influenced by the ANC, in the townships.

would...subordinate itself to the nationalism of the ANC. But the more I read their documents I found them inviting us and sensitising us to the national question in South Africa... And that's where they neutralised the influence of workerism – because they demonstrated that workerism neglected the national question...and national oppression. I joined SACP but very late on...my sense was that the way you deal with the national question was by settling the class question. There were no prospects for resolving racial inequalities without assuming control, the working class assuming political and economical control of society...²²² But the battle against the ANC was lost. The battle against the ANC would have required a resolutely and strongly organised industrial proletariat rooted in point of production that would show and say to the ANC, we are an all-round political force able to take our destiny into our own hands. Without that I think the ANC would always have outmanoeuvred us (A-BM: 329).

Here again was the political question challenging the “workerists” in relation to the ANC: the Slovo promise of the working class emerging “as the dominant social force in a truly democratic post-apartheid state.” How could the “workerists” have risen to that challenge? The Great Miners’ Strike of August 1987 had posed that challenge in the most practical and dramatic way.

2. The Great Miners’ Strike of August 1987 and the failure of the wider workers’ movement

Strike statistics for the period 1984-1994 illustrate the escalation of the workers’ strike movement, in the wider context of the rising internal struggle against apartheid, climaxing sharply with the three week strike of 325,000 miners in August 1987 (Ceruti, 2020 forthcoming: 11).²²³ The National Union of Mineworkers was the largest trade union in the country and this was to be its largest and longest national strike involving the loss of production of coal, gold and other precious metals, threatening the national economy, “mining...its backbone” (Baskin: 232). The NUM had been built quickly in the early 1980’s primarily by the lawyer, Cyril Ramaphosa, its first general secretary, and Lesotho migrant worker-miner James Motlatsi, the union’s first president. Several spectacular workers’ victories immediately preceded the miners’ strike, including the mainly women workers’ strike at the Anglo American owned OK Bazaar chain called by their union, the Commercial, Catering and Allied Workers Union of South Africa, CCAWUSA, the second largest union in the country: and

²²² Maserumule, like Moses Mayekiso, makes a special mention of Chris Hani, former MK chief of staff and general secretary SACP at time of his assassination in 1993. See concluding section.

²²³ 5.8 million strike days in 1987 in contrast to nearly 1.5 million strike days in 1986, 1 million in 1988 and falling, nevertheless Ceruti cautions: “Government statistics excluded ‘political’ strikes: the graph’s decline in 1988 disguises 9-million person-days lost that year to massive stayaways, including the first successful three-day stayaway in 27 years, called by COSATU against the new Labour Relations Act (LRA).” However, as we saw earlier, the government still felt confident enough to impose the LRA.

the rail workers who succeeded in forcing the South African Transport Services to reinstate a sacked leader and stayed on strike defying earlier advice from their leaders for a return to work. Other strikes at the time, including the post office workers, helped create a climate of generalisation of struggle and “mass politicisation” (Baskin: 224). On the other hand, NUMSA, metal workers’ union, the main “workerist” union, called off their planned national strike because it was deemed illegal.²²⁴

COSATU convened OK Bazaar striker solidarity meetings of shop stewards from non CCAWUSA unions throughout Anglo American companies. There were solidarity demonstrations and short stoppages. The Food & Allied Workers Union refused to make deliveries to OK. 60% of black customers stopped buying at OK, even though the union had not called a consumer boycott. In January, a bomb exploded at OK head office -believed to be the work of MK. Eventually OK capitulated (Forrest 2005: 66). The rail workers’ strike was notoriously violent with the police killing or injuring hundreds of workers and some strikers killing strike-breakers. COSATU HQ became an important strike centre with police storming the building, holding strikers at gunpoint for hours and systematically wrecking the building, room by room, destroying union records and equipment (Baskin: 177). Solidarity action in the wider community helped tip the balance: boycotts, black train commuters refusing to pay for tickets and riding free, attacks on train coaches and other South African Transport Services’ property. At some factories workers refused to unload railway trucks (Baskin: 175, 179). The miners’ strike was also preceded a year earlier by the Kincross gold mine disaster which killed nearly 180 miners. Between 1973 and 1984 more than 8,500 miners had been killed in South Africa’s notoriously unsafe mines. The motto of the newly founded NUM was ‘Organise or Die.’ The NUM called a one-day national strike on October 1st in protest. COSATU called brief solidarity strikes of between one and two hours for workers to attend memorial services (Baskin: 150). More than a quarter of a million workers took part making it the largest solidarity stoppage of its kind.

The NUM leadership called the 1987 national strike over pay and conditions. For the government and mining employers this strike was about who controlled the mines and the urgent need to refashion industrial relations in favour of the employers (Baskin: 226, Botiveau: 60). Government and employer violence dominated the strike from the start. Three months earlier COSATU HQ had been bombed, seriously disrupting both union federation and NUM

²²⁴ This was despite a 90% ballot in favour. There was fury at rank and file level – including illegal unofficial strikes, for example the Witbank Ferrometals smelter (see p143). The NUMSA leadership retreat is likely to have influenced its passive attitude to the miners’ strike the following month.

administration - it was also the NUM HQ. The State of Emergency anyway prohibited meetings outside the mining compounds, soliciting sympathetic strikes, mobilising opinion in the townships. The gold mines looked more like military installations. Armoured vehicles crammed with steel-helmeted soldiers and police patrolled the main road (Allen: 306, 316-17). Strike organisation was meticulous, though miners' leaders' suggestions that miners leave their hostels and return home for the duration of the strike were largely ignored (Allen: 309,320). Vic Allen, commissioned by the NUM to write its history and a life-long supporter of Soviet Communism, nevertheless was sufficiently impressed by the magazine of the Trotskyist Marxist Workers Tendency, MWT, *Inqaba Ya Basebenzi*, to quote its account of the secret and highly effective room by room strike unit organisation in the massive hostels, sometimes sleeping up to 10,000 miners (Allen: 322).

After a week, negotiations between union and mining employers resumed. During the meeting Ramaphosa received news that 15 unarmed strikers had been injured by the police, without any provocation. Rampahosa, well known for his calm demeanor, exploded and led the NUM delegation out of the meeting. He had placed rubber bullets and cartridges on the negotiating table and then with his arm swept them on to the floor (Butler 2007:197). But at issue wasn't simply police violence. Ramaphosa felt betrayed by Anglo American, the main mining company in the consortium, and with whom he had previously enjoyed very good relations.²²⁵ Ramaphosa's personally dictated the NUM press release afterwards was uncompromising. He accused the Anglo American Corporation of treachery, cowardice and deceit. The cowardice accusation was the most damning.

Cowardly in that they have now firmly come to depend on the state and its forces to assist them in breaking the legal strike... NUM Press Release (Allen: 356-7).

This was the moment of truth for both sides. For the mining companies relying on government authorised state violence, the collusion was there for all to see. For the NUM and COSATU, the strike could no longer be interpreted as a straight forward industrial dispute bound by industrial relations legislation and practice. The State of Emergency would also have to be defied. This meant serious COSATU solidarity action designed to secure a miners' victory. As we have seen, there were precedents with the OK Bazaar and rail strikes, but it was not forthcoming and in the third week the miners succumbed to the employers when mass dismissal notices were issued. The most recent independent study of the NUM describes the

²²⁵ Butler, Ramaphosa's biographer, provides vivid descriptions of this relationship including how Anglo saw the potential of a black NUM undermining the strength of the white mineworkers' union and how they preferred Ramaphosa to "workerist" leader, Moses Mayekiso and the metal workers' union which was also seeking to establish a base in the mines. (Butler: 137-9) On Mayekiso – see next section.

defeat as “catastrophic”, (Botiveau 2017: 61), with mass dismissals of up to 60,000 mineworkers, including all the most active shaft stewards and other known NUM activists, locally and nationally. The wider “massive strike wave” subsided (Baskin: 242). The following year COSATU nearly fell apart (Baskin: 239). *Inqaba Ya Basebenzi*, the Trotskyist MWT magazine cited by Allen earlier, carried a detailed analysis of the strike, including interviews with mineworkers, pinpointing the failure of COSATU solidarity. It quoted COSATU leader, Elijah Barayi, at the COSATU Congress earlier in the year warning that “COSATU was ready to bury P.W. Botha (South Africa’s President)” suggesting a readiness by COSATU for an all-out fight. *Inqaba Ya Basebenzi* criticised an earlier decision of the NUM leaders to disband the shaft stewards councils, a crucial organised tier of rank and file miners’ leaders which could have strengthened the strike and helped organise local appeals for solidarity.²²⁶

At the end of the miners’ strike, Jay Naidoo, COSATU general secretary said.

Black workers in this country have few weapons, but one of those weapons is the withdrawal of labour...A general strike is not a last resort...The mine owners have made it a test of strength and that is what it is going to be and we are determined to win it (Allen: 384).

But “it was...too late” (Baskin: 232). COSATU leaders knew what was needed but they seemed to lack the political will to carry it out.²²⁷

In May 2018, I put this and related issues to James Motlatsi, NUM president at the time of the 1987 strike. At first he was unwilling to admit the seriousness of the scale of the miners’ defeat, even denying it was a defeat. He also defended COSATU’s relative passivity in terms of their “inexperience”, although, as we saw in the earlier strikes, COSATU did provide solidarity.

²²⁶ <https://rob-petersen.info/looking-back/1981-1990-inqaba-ya-basebenzi/>

The MWT had been expelled from the ANC in 1985 and Slovo attacked them in his document quoted earlier. In the early to mid-eighties, they had good relations with many leading worker and trade union activists not least James Motlatsi and Cyril Ramaphosa. Rob Petersen, Editor of *Inqaba Ya Basebenzi* at the time, discusses this in his interview with me, as does James Motlatsi. The MWT had helped arrange a visit to Britain for Motlatsi during the 1984-5 British miners’ strike, via the South Wales miners and ‘Militant’ their sister organisation in Britain. Rob Petersen, then in Britain, was involved in detailed political discussions with him and describes the close relations at the time, which Motlatsi qualified, but nevertheless confirmed to me. The MWT were a factor, as, of course, were the “workerists”, in forcing a shift in position by sections of the ANC and SACP in exile with the launch of a secret project Operation Vulindela (‘open the way’), more commonly known as just Operation Vula, involving Ronnie Kasrils amongst others. This was unambiguous recognition that the internal struggle was outstripping the external struggle. “South Africa faced nothing less than an internal revolution”, and the ANC and the SACP were not there to take full advantage of it (Butler: 230-31). Martin Legassick, MWT leader and its chief historian, cites a leading source claiming that Operation Vula by-passed those on the NEC “wedded to crass militarism...” (Legassick 2007: 427).

²²⁷ Abraham Agulhas, former president of the CWIU, Chemical Workers Industrial Union and COSATU executive member at time of the miners’ strike. In his opinion, COSATU made no effort to organise solidarity in his industry (personal conversation, Cape Town, 21/5/18).

But, in any case, during the interview, Motlatsi seemed to shift his position as though recalling his former militancy and anger. He told me.

...if COSATU (had taken) that strike as a platform not only for bread and butter issues (but also) for general political changes in the country, if in the second week in the strike, COSATU had taken a decision to say ‘an injury to one is an injury to all’, I can tell you, not only could they have saved the dismissal of 50,000, we could have seen a lot of changes within the country, within the industry... (A-JM: 358).

Motlatsi then made an unexpected comparison with the successful miners’ strike in Britain in 1972. He pointed out that the British miners’ victory was secured through solidarity by other workers helping miners block the movement of coal to the power stations.²²⁸ He continued.

Yes, so if quite a number of unions, maybe without going on strike could have stopped the services which they were running to service the mining industry, we wouldn’t be where we are now (A-JM: 359).

Two political strands in the wider workers’ movement, though at loggerheads, had an interest in helping COSATU build solidarity with the miners, the “workerists” and the SACP.²²⁹ But the main “workerist” union, NUMSA showed little or no interest in the miners’ strike in August 1987 (Forrest: 2011). This had serious implications for the strong “workerist” base in the steel industry generally and, in particular, at the Highveld steelworks in the region of Witbank, 150km east of Johannesburg. This was one of South Africa’s biggest industrial companies, producer of precious metals, also owned by AngloAmerican, the main mining company. The Witbank region also produced 80% of the country’s coal. Eight power stations burned this local coal which produced half of South Africa’s electricity (von Holdt 2003: 14). During the 1987 miners’ strike, Witbank collieries were “the most tightly organised...” (Allen: 322). I return to this argument when I analyse Von Holdt’s detailed and outstanding investigation of the workers’ trade union and shop steward organisation at Highveld steelworks (von Holdt: 2003).

Bethuel Maserumule recognised this fundamental, arguably fatal, weakness in the “workerist” position.

²²⁸ Thousands of engineering and transport workers joined miners’ pickets in the Birmingham city area to force the closure of Saltley Gate and stop coal going to the power station. A useful summary of what happened http://news.bbc.co.uk/today/hi/today/newsid_9694000/9694645.stm

²²⁹ I’m excluding a possible third strand, the Marxist Workers Tendency, which, by this time, had been successfully marginalised following their expulsion from the ANC. Their propaganda continued to be taken seriously by other socialists and communists but they lacked a strong enough base in the workers’ movement to influence events. This point is discussed in my interviews with both Rob Petersen and James Motlatsi. Again, see both interviews for Motlatsi’s own relations with the MWT.

...a really important question. The steel industry and the mining industry are really closely connected. In NUMSA we organise the steel factories which means we produce the equipment that is used in mining. So the direct way we are connected to mining existed and should and could have been used as a basis of waging solidarity with the miners. Because we could simply have stopped producing or sending the equipment needed for mining production. But that didn't happen. 1987 was the year NUMSA was formed. A more moderate union had just joined it. 1987, the union was caught in internal organisational consolidation processes to integrate this more moderate element but also to merge different organisational and political cultures that came with the merging union. To organise its power and its united members the union wasn't available at that time, the year of its formation, to take up such major militant struggle. I don't remember thinking about it. We may have sent symbolic support messages but we never really discussed it in terms of a stronger role we could play... it was a serious mistake... one fundamental weakness in building the industrial working class as a political force for change. The situation had fragmentation, fragmented thinking. The "workerists" were so inward looking in terms of union role which was still incomplete in the way I am trying to explain, that while the union pronounced against nationalism and for socialism, it had little by way of guiding or empowering its members on the shop floor on what that vision meant... (A-BM: 331-2).

Ronnie Kasrils in his interview with me provides a forceful defence of the SACP's view of the rising industrial struggle 1986-87, citing a comprehensive statement issued by the SACP Central Committee issued in January 1988, titled "Leading Role of the Working Class in the Present Situation"²³⁰.

The statement referred to the extraordinary growth and achievements recorded by COSATU in the two years since its creation and its rise in membership to one million members; its composition of 13 federated industrial unions, with 31 shop stewards councils, and according to the CC statement 'an industrial army marshalled by 50,000 shop stewards in the factories and 20,000 shaft stewards in the mines.' The influence of both the ANC and the SACP would have been profound on that organised core of the working class. The statement highlighted the rising tide of workers' militancy as reflected in the growth of the strike movement, 'the highest figures in South Africa's history', evident through 1985-86, and the May 6 and 7, and June 16 general strikes in 1987, which were by far the biggest and most highly organised ever recorded. Identifying the most significant strikes during 1987 the statement listed a ten-week national strike at OK Bazaars - the country's leading departmental store chain; a twelve-week railway workers strike; two major strikes in the postal sector; strikes in the country's sugar mills and tea estates, a massive one-day strike on July 14 by metalworkers called off when it was declared illegal. 'Then', the statement continued, 'there was the largest strike in South Africa's history - the August 9 miners' strike involving 340,000 workers led by the NUM which lasted three weeks.' The report did not include on which of these strikes the workers had won their demands and where they had failed - as in the case with the NUM strike which was defeated. The cause of that failure was not analysed - in that statement at any rate (A-RK: 315).

²³⁰ (African Communist, Second Quarter 1988, Number 113) This contrasts starkly with Jo Slovo's failure to mention COSATU's "extraordinary growth and achievements" and hence political potential in his 1988 paper cited earlier.

But the ANC magazine *Sechaba* in its October 1987 issue did analyse the strike in some depth in an article presumably written by a SACP member, who referred favourably to Lenin calling for the capitalist state to be shaken by violent revolution. The writer described the conclusion of the strike as a tactical retreat rather than a defeat, even claiming the union “scored tremendous victories.” Astonishingly it applauded COSATU for “fast gaining strength” and emerging “from every action with greater resilience.” Not a word about COSATU’s failure to provide solidarity to the miners.²³¹ The failure to admit and analyse the miners’ defeat contrasts with the detailed analysis in *Inqaba Ya Basebenzi*, the Trotskyist MWT magazine mentioned earlier. The SACP needed to be more than cheerleaders for COSATU. If there was a fundamental problem of organising solidarity for the miners (Baskin: 232), then the SACP needed to address it. Kasrils now recognises the potential of the MWT and, whilst using very cautious language, thinks that their expulsion from the ANC was mistaken.²³² A retrospective view that sees the MWT growing alongside, or even inside, a re-emerging SACP, disoriented by the collapse of Soviet Communism in 1989, might have provided the political focus that “workerism” so obviously lacked. The necessity of a left wing challenge to the SACP is developed in the conclusion. Finally, we know that Kasrils as a member of Operation Vula was part of an apparently secret ANC/SACP group, recognising the limitations of the armed struggle as well as the enormous potential of the internal and industrial struggle. Did the earlier militaristic perspective still affect the SACP internally even as it re-emerged?²³³ There is also

²³¹ http://www.disa.ukzn.ac.za/sites/default/files/pdf_files/seoct87.pdf

²³² “What did emerge was active assistance provided to SACTU* leaders John Gaetsewe in London and Archie Sebeko based in Manchester, by a group of Martin Legassick, Paula Ensor, Rob Petersen and Dave Hemson. The group assembled a range of experience with Legassick an internationally acknowledged historian, Ensor and Petersen who had experience in the formation of independent workers organizations in the Western Cape and Hemson who had been a participant in the 1973 mass strikes which spurred the revival of trade unions and political resistance. The group advocated the development of workers’ leadership and socialist policies in the struggle against national oppression. In a short time this became highly contentious owing to what was regarded as presenting a “independent perspective”, factionalism and a workerist (rather than national liberation) agenda. A pity because they had a lot to offer.” (A-RK: 318).

*SACTU - South African Congress of Trade Unions, the SACP dominated trade union federation that had preceded FOSATU and COSATU a generation earlier but still had a presence in the new trade unions. See also SACTU reference p1.

²³³ “At the same time it should not be denied that focus on MK, and its rising military activity, was a major preoccupation of the Party along with the ANC and created a militarist deviation at the expense of political work in both cases. Even prior to the influx of the 1976 generation the liberation movement’s focus was on armed struggle and this undoubtedly affected even the Party’s response to its condition of isolation. This meant that the concentration of effort and resources went into armed responses to the violence and brutality of the regime. Undoubtedly if this had not been the case the Party might have been in a better position to influence the rising tide of working class struggle. I use the word “might” since how sure can anyone be that a different outcome could have taken place specifically regarding the strike movement of that time?” (A-RK: 319).

the question of SACP over-dependency on the ANC. Again, Kasrils, though couching the argument with extreme caution, hints at the possibility.

Whilst there is a growing critique that much that is wrong with the ANC and liberation movement today, stems from...(the SACP) tailing behind the ANC in service of a skewed nationalist agenda in a two-stage march to socialism. My view (without dismissing the criticism outright) would argue that the main deficiency in the Party's involvement in the 1987 miners' strike related more to the concrete exile limitations (A-RK: 319).

Ramaphosa's own complex relations with the ANC and SACP at the time are succinctly summed up in the chapter title of his biographer that addresses them: "Becoming ANC" (Butler: Chapter 13).

3. The Treason Trial and political transformation of Moses Mayekiso, "workerism's" most accomplished leader

At the height of the township uprisings in 1984, FOSATU mandated Moses Mayekiso to represent its interests on the Transvaal regional stayaway committee where he sat with activists from the Soweto Youth Congress committee, the Release Mandela Committee and the UDF-affiliated unions. The stayaway call resulted in nearly a million workers from the Witwatersrand and Vaal Triangle absenting themselves from work for two days in November. (Baskin: 45) Mayekiso, former miner and metal worker and now organiser with MAWU, the Metal and Allied Workers Union, which preceded NUMSA, was the best known, and most political, of the "workerist" activists. He was seen as a major threat to state security and would be put on trial for treason along with his younger brother, Mzwanele, and three others from the Alexandra township. The apartheid state had reason to worry. The potential fusion of township and workplace struggles, 'populism' and 'workerism' was indeed insurrectionary.

My politics were developing now to say...not only mobilise metal workers, but all workers across industries to have power... I looked at (our) shop stewards' committees...I thought these are grand structures that can really give power to workers, not only...for wages, better conditions...but also to change the system of capitalism...The perspective was that for any revolution to succeed the workers must be able to seize power in the factories. And working together with the communities seizing power in the residential areas – merged that to mount a real revolution (A-MM: 342).

It was the most high profile trial of the period and it provoked major protest struggles, illegal solidarity strikes and demonstrations, led by NUMSA in South Africa and a worldwide international campaign (Bell: 2009, Forrest 2011: 421). The trial and its background - the uprising in the Alexandra township - have been analysed by Moses's brother, Mzwanele,

(Mayekiso: 1996).²³⁴ For a few days, after fierce fighting, “The Six Day War” (Mayekiso 1996: 61-64), the puppet black civic authorities and the white police were marginalised. The Alexandra Action Committee became the real authority, with Moses Mayekiso its leading figure. It was a formidable expression of the ANC 1985 call to make South Africa “ungovernable” (Mayekiso 1996: 53). The ANC magazine *Sechaba* even compared Alexandra to the Paris Commune, an article written by a SACP member (Mayekiso 1996: 83). It was a superficially attractive comparison but revealingly misleading. Alexandra was a black township suburb of apartheid-era Johannesburg, South Africa’s capital city with modern industrial production located outside the township in the wider city region. In Paris, France’s capital city, in 1871, the year of the Commune, the communards momentarily controlled the whole city including its rudimentary, early industrial productive system. It was precisely this distinction that made Moses Mayekiso so threatening to the government. He understood only too well the limitations of the township uprising he was leading.

With those shop stewards councils, we began looking beyond the realm of those workers’ areas. We asked where are the workers staying? They are staying in squalid conditions in the town ships. Let’s bring our structures. Organise the communities, the poor, in the townships to really topple apartheid and capitalism later...I got labelled as the workerist because of my emphasis on the worker power at the point of production. You can do whatever outside the factory, but if you cannot stop production then you cannot mount a revolution (A-MM: 343).

At the same time the ANC view, and its main supporter in the townships, the UDF, wanted the political initiative to stay with the townships and not the workplaces.²³⁵

The trial was also subject to a lengthy analysis by legal writer, Richard Abel. It provides a different and unexpected insight both to the trial and the fluid politics of the time. Abel makes his clear that the trial was about Moses Mayekiso and the entire labour movement

...Unable to outlaw the unions, the state sought to discourage links with community organisations, remove a militant leader of the second largest union, and encourage a return to economism (Abel: 374).

Abel, however, claims Mayekiso deliberately moderated his position as a legal defence tactic. He reinterpreted his actions to present responsible citizenship rather than revolutionary challenge. Abel gives numerous examples but one in particular stands out.

The most embarrassing language appeared in the (British) Socialist Worker (4.5.86)...which he now tried to explain (Abel: 354).

²³⁴ (Seekings: 2000), (Van Kessel: 2000) are two of the most important studies analysing the UDF and the township uprisings, including Alexandra.

²³⁵ Also the SACP position: see Slovo discussion earlier.

Abel then addresses the several often quite ingenious ways Mayekiso used to distance himself from the article. In reference to a related exchange, Abel comments, "Mayekiso gratefully accepted less threatening interpretations of his words suggested by the judge. He had embraced the two-stage theory of revolution, first nationalist then socialist" (Abel: 348).

Judge: "So, you want a mixed, socialist and capitalist state or to put it another way, a capitalist state in which the worker has more say?"

MM: "Yes...and the model that saw ...in Sweden...seems to be giving something to the worker and there would be no super exploitation."

This explicitly contradicts Mayekiso's position in the pamphlet 'Comrade Moss' written and published by respected South African journalist, Terry Bell, where he counter-poses a 'Workers Charter' to the ANC's Freedom Charter rejecting the stages theory (Bell: 34-5).²³⁶

The encounter infuriated Abel .

Mayekiso bowdlerized his own political philosophy...he was not a communist or even a socialist but just a Swedish social democrat, and even that was a utopian aspiration...Such repudiation of achievements, ideologies and loyalties may be one of the most insidious attributes of treason trials. Whereas punishment moral purity and confers martyrdom, strategic denials are a degradation ceremony (Abel: 377).

When I interviewed Moses Mayekiso, I put to him some of Abel's observations. He burst out laughing at every one. He accepted that it was a legal defence tactic and described the choice that confronted him: a revolutionary defence, a politician's defence or a coward's defence. A politician's defence accepted the evidence when accurate but did indeed re-interpret it to 'soften' its impact. The question for Mayekiso was simple, which defence would take him back to the struggle and which defence would take him to Robben Island. In 1988 he and the other

²³⁶ Bell's reference is an interview Mayekiso gave to Socialist Worker Review magazine in 1985. Using a pseudonym at the time, it was Peter (today Kate) Alexander who conducted that interview with Mayekiso. Kate Alexander recalls Moses Mayekiso, worker intellectual.

"He knew that capitalists exploited workers and probably had an understanding of the labour theory of value; he had decided that white workers were not the enemy; he knew that workers (implicitly black workers) had the power to smash apartheid if they were sufficiently organised; and he had a vision of a socialist society that was based on a different model to that of the Stalinists. He was aware that the struggle would be strengthened through combining workers and youth/community in a common struggle (though I don't know if this was theorised); he was also an internationalist of some sort (though I can't recall details); and he probably rejected sexism. Perhaps, importantly, he linked theory and practice, doing so in an original way through the workers charter, and he challenged the unions' acknowledged 'intellectuals'." (E mail communication 30/08/2019) Kate Alexander, Professor of Sociology, South African Research Chair in Social Change, Director, Centre for Social Change, University of Johannesburg.

defendants would be acquitted. I gave Moses Mayekiso a copy of the offending Socialist Worker article and asked him to re-read it. He told me later that he stood by every word. It is indeed a unique account of “workerism” providing leadership in the Alexandra township uprising. Mayekiso describes the breakdown both of the court system and police authority in Alexandra.

People are sick and tired of the court system, they don't want to take their cases to the state. They want to discuss their own cases, and be able to mediate (Mayekiso: 1986).²³⁷

The interview also gives fascinating account of the shifting relations between COSATU and the UDF.

The UDF is supported widely by many people. Say in the unions we decided we were going to have a stayaway...then we communicate with the UDF...like the May Day now approaching (Mayekiso: 1986).

As we saw earlier the 1986 May Day strike - stayaway was the largest in the country's history.

²³⁸

Moses Mayekiso nevertheless leaves a conflicted legacy for the period. On his release, he resumed his duties as NUMSA general secretary. When the SACP was unbanned he would declare himself a member. He would rapidly become one of its most important worker leaders. He accepted the Triple Alliance, ANC-SACP-COSATU, negotiating strategy. And he became very much part of its apparatus, leading a mass movement with a leadership expectation of a government-in-waiting. His legal defence tactic had indeed become his politics, even if he rationalised it as an inevitable short term compromise in the interest of unity with the wider movement necessary to destroy apartheid.

²³⁷ This point in particular pre-occupied the judge at the treason trial. He pressed Mayekiso repeatedly on it who gave several alternative explanations, including an explicit denial that he was encouraging people to defy the Alexandra legal court system (Abel: 354). I would like to thank Charlie Kimber, editor of the current Socialist Worker, for locating and producing photocopies of this vital evidence in a historic trial.

²³⁸ Here is an extract from the full interview about Moses's treatment whilst he was in prison during the trial.

How long were you in prison? Almost 2 years. 12 months in solitary confinement. *How did you withstand pressure of solitary confinement, mentally?* Mentally, sometime you feel you cracking. *Were you able to read?* Only the bible: I read the bible from cover to cover (*Bursts out laughing*) *Were you able to exercise?* An hour of exercise. The only people to talk to were the prison guard and the police who were investigating the case. *Were you beaten?* Not physically beaten but tortured. Sometimes they make you stand for whole day whilst they are cross-questioning you. Sometimes you say you want to go to the ...they say, no we are too busy. They are testing your capacity to resist. They want you to say what they want you to say. There was no torture like electrocution, beatings no, no. I think what helped the protests mounted by the workers (A-MM: 347).

In his own words...

FOSATU became COSATU. MAWU became NUMSA – the beginnings of the broad working class movement. We (had earlier) got in touch with the Communist Party guys, for example, Siphso Kubeka²³⁹ in Alexandra ...I went along with their politics, but not the commandist, the top down approach. I didn't agree with that, but, for the sake of unity, then let's work together.(But) I was adamant – you cannot have two stages of revolution. That's what happened. You use the power of the workers to get the elite into government, then once they are in government they will stifle. We were looking at the ANC, the ANC wants to get into government, once they are in government they will forget about the workers – even gun down the workers. Marikana is a good example. I opposed this but with the politics of COSATU I said let's allow this as a trial stuff.I would say a majority of the shop stewards got sucked into CP politics. This all happened with the formation of COSATU. It was a compromise on my side. That this may not work. But the unions were a mass moving in that direction of accepting the CP, accepting the ANC as liberators. We thought let's get in and change the way things work. With people like Chris Hani, I was very close to him, to change the way the CP is working.²⁴⁰ Hani was a real revolutionary. He believed workers should take power at the point of production. I joined CP...after meeting people like Chris Hani after CP was unbanned. ..His approach was that if we leave the CP led by people who are leading it now, not by the working class, the workers, therefore it's not going to address the issues of the workers. Well that was a good argument. But I was still sticking to the fact that the two stages is not going to work. I don't think I was appreciated much... (A-MM: 343-4).

I told him I thought he was appreciated. He was now on the steering committee of the CP. He was playing a leading role. For example, he had gone with Jo Slovo and another ANC leader to Mercedes Benz in E London and persuaded striking workers to go back to work.²⁴¹

Mayekiso left the CP in 1993, the year Chris Hani was assassinated.

I could see that it (the CP) was going to lose the plot – before the final settlement. I lost interest and my membership lapsed. I doubted the interest of the CP leadership to represent the workers in the way Chris Hani was dedicated. The leadership that was left didn't impress me to be able to do what Chris Hani could do to mount the revolution...Yes, he was in the ANC structures but I don't think he believed in the 2-stage theory of the CP (A-MM: 346).

4. “Workerism” implodes: the case of Highveld steel

As reported earlier,²⁴² Highveld steelworks in the region of Witbank, 150km east of Johannesburg, was one of South Africa's biggest industrial companies, producer of precious

²³⁹ Siphso Kubeka, a trade union organiser with PPWAWU, Paper, Printing, Wood and Allied Workers Union, constantly harassed by the apartheid authorities.

²⁴⁰ See the discussion about Chris Hani in the concluding section.

²⁴¹ See the interview for his forceful defence of that decision.

²⁴² p134-5.

metals, also owned by AngloAmerican, the main mining company. The Witbank region also produced 80% of the country's coal. Eight power stations burned this local coal which produced half of South Africa's electricity. The NUM organised Witbank mines were amongst the most militant in the country. The steelworks was a model of NUMSA "workerist" shop floor organisation, democratically elected shop stewards committee constantly challenging pay, conditions and the petty apartheid, the grotesque bullying, often violent, from white foremen and white skilled workers. Black workers lived either in the township, KwaGuqa, or if they were rural migrant workers, and often from distinctive ethnic or tribal backgrounds, in hostels. The struggle to overcome this split between urban and migrant workers, institutionalised by the apartheid system, signalled one of the first victories for united shop floor trade union organisation. The company's desperate need for black semiskilled workers had also opened an unintended route for the new unionism. The first major strike successfully reinstated a shop steward, sacked after he had assaulted a white foreman in response to persistent racial harassment. Both sides understood that industrial relations were inseparable from the apartheid structure (von Holdt: 72-3). Unrest in KwaGuqa led to the township's 'ungovernability', its demands for stayaway strike action coupled with a dangerously divisive demand for township employment only, sometimes led by the unaccountable township youth and unemployed, drew the shop stewards into the action, demanding democratically-based unity. After its formation, COSATU locally took the lead, based on the steelworks shop stewards, described by Von Holdt as "social movement unionism"²⁴³ (von Holdt: 101-9, 119). The focus of the struggle also shifted to the workplace. In 1987 'ungovernability' came to the steelworks with strikes every week.

According to a migrant worker, "we never negotiated, we would just go into the bush" (von Holdt: 122). The remark captured the mood. "Release Mandela" became a strike demand. Strikers increasingly saw themselves as liberation fighters. Collective bargaining, as well as managerial authority, broke down completely. "Ungovernability prevailed" (von Holdt: 122). A

²⁴³ 'Social movement unionism' has become a widely accepted concept applied to black trade unionism's involvement in local community struggles. Botiveau reviews some of the relevant scholarship, (Botiveau 2017: 10-11), with claims that it also "aimed at transforming society" (Botiveau: 90). Yet whether it is more useful than the older concept and idea of 'solidarity' is debateable, especially when infused with Marxism's taken-for-granted assumption that the workers' movement takes a lead in community struggles. Certainly social movement unionism's intellectuals and scholars have remained curiously silent about the failure of solidarity between metal workers and miners during the 1987 miner's strike: surely a failure of social movement unionism too. As we shall see, for different reasons, von Holdt also challenges its credibility.

Karl von Holdt has confirmed to me by e mail that he cannot recall any discussion about the August 1987 miners' strike amongst the shop stewards or other workplace activists at Highveld Steel either just before or during the strike.

spectacular victory was achieved out of the chaos caused when NUMSA leaders called off the national strike in July 1987. Highveld shop stewards accepted the decision but workers at the Witbank Ferrometals smelter, owned by a separate company, did not. Some strikers there were sacked. Threats of strike action at Highvelds forced their reinstatement. Von Holdt describes not just the solidarity but “an extraordinary display of worker power” (von Holdt: 128). But this moment was to prove short lived. Immediately after the August miners’ strike was defeated, AngloAmerican imposed a lock-out at Highvelds, as with miners threatening mass dismissals. The shop floor union organisation was “smashed completely” (von Holdt: 137). Anglo American, fresh from its victory over the miners, had felt sufficiently confident to break the union at one of its most important steelworks. “The parallels” between “ungovernability” in the mines and Highvelds “are obvious” (von Holdt: 133, 145fn26).

Yet von Holdt records not a single instance of solidarity from Highveld steelworkers to the miners in August despite the “extraordinary display of worker power” the month before: and despite his earlier reports about the militant miners of Witbank as the “general unrest” in both community and workplace mounted (von Holdt: 92). A year before the miners’ strike, several NUM officers, including the regional treasurer, were “arrested after a clash with police at Bank colliery when workers commandeered the store owner’s vehicle, and workers at Landau colliery ‘set upon’ a police car carrying two black police officers and burnt it after they fled” (von Holdt: 92). The NUM regional treasurer was also a member of the Witbank Youth Congress. We also learn that the first attempt to build political structures linking township to workplace with a Co-ordinating Committee included a key shop steward from Highveld and a former NUM shop steward from Rietspruit Opencast Collieries, who had been dismissed during a strike at the beginning of 1985 (von Holdt: 96-7). But it is an extraordinary earlier incident at the Mapochs mine that most commands our attention. Weeks before the miners’ strike, the Highvelds strike committee, ‘armed’ with their *sjamboks*,²⁴⁴ organised an expedition to the Mapochs mine to bring it out on strike in solidarity with one of the steelworkers’ strikes (on Holdt: 151). The *sjambok* and what Von Holdt calls “revolutionary bullying” (von Holdt: 173) holds the key both to the failure of Highvelds steelworkers’ solidarity with the miners and the implosion of “workerism” at Highvelds. Charles Makola, active in community structures, chairperson of COSATU locally, vice chair of the shop stewards committee describes the political mood in 1987.

²⁴⁴ *sjamboks*, Afrikaans for rawhide whips

The aim was political...to overthrow the government...there was no differentiation between the state and the companies. Apartheid was more practical in the working environment...Negotiations were not strictly speaking negotiations...our approach was one of confrontation...We strike whether it's legal or illegal... (von Holdt: 121).

There were so many strikes that a separate strike committee was formed. "from the most militant workers amongst the rank and file" (von Holdt: 148). The strike committee rapidly grew to be a movement within the union. At its height anywhere between 800 and 1800 members and supporters, identified by their distinctive maroon T-shirts and *sjamboks*...consisted of migrant workers from the hostels, and militant young workers from hostels and township" (von Holdt: 152). It was an unmitigated disaster. It re-opened the split between migrant and township workers, it exacerbated tensions between literate and illiterate workers. In short, "workerism" imploded. Bunny Mahlangu, militant chair of the shop stewards, who had displaced a more moderate chair, (von Holdt: 151), was shocked by the development.

...we saw a very big giant...uncontrollable...attacking us viciously. Can you imagine 800 people coming from one side with sticks and everything...And if one person talks and the 800 clap hands, the rest get frozen. They scare the shit out of you...(von Holdt: 153).

It was also a gift to management, the shop floor union was already effectively broken before they imposed the lockout. Von Holdt's explanation criticises core assumptions of social movement unionism .

...community and workplace struggles (were) woven together by a discourse of national liberation struggle. In effect, the community was inside the union... In place of the democracy and open debate, (associated with social movement unionism), this study highlights a coercive approach to solidarity...and the failure of democracy to empower the unskilled workers in the union...At its height this struggle broke into open violence between factions...(von Holdt: 148)...the failure of union democracy to empower the less literate migrant workers led them to resort to coercion to empower themselves" (von Holdt: 175).

The breakdown of the shop floor union reflected the breakdown or absence of politics. In a revealing footnote von Holdt writes.

The issue of socialist beliefs is scarcely mentioned in this study, despite its significance to the culture of social movement unionism, because shop stewards referred so seldom to it in relation to the struggles in the 1980's. This may have been because Witbank was somewhat remote from the main urban centres where socialism was most discussed –

which itself casts doubt on the depths of such beliefs, or at least the meaning of these beliefs... (von Holdt: 295fn28).²⁴⁵

“Workerism” proved incapable of politically theorising its own crisis or even understanding its own limitations. This was exposed when the point of maximum militancy within the workplace was achieved, cloaked in a narrow one dimensional version of the ideology of national liberation. The SACP exacerbated the “workerism” crisis by prioritising the national liberation struggle over class struggle, prioritising community struggles over workplace struggles (Slovo: 1988). The distortion of the miners’ strike outcome displayed in the SACP article in Sechaba was a symptom of this flaw. This absence of political, and especially socialist, discussion meant that the rhythm of class struggle in winter 1987 dramatically rising with the miners’ strike, and hence understanding the need to generalise the struggle, was ignored. Its potential blow against apartheid not recognised.

The explosive revolutionary mood that had penetrated the factories had no outlet. Not even the strike committee with their *sjamboks* proposed an immediate overthrow of the factory management. Yet an outward direction for that mood was essential – not least to avoid the inward implosion that would substitute for it. “Ungovernability” had come to the steelworks. A victory for the miners offered the prospect of destabilising still further the apartheid regime’s entire productive system – making it increasingly “ungovernable”. Recall miners’ strike leader, Motlatsi’s understated remark. “I can tell you, not only could they have saved the dismissal of 50,000, we could have seen a lot of changes within the country.” It seems that the need to fight simultaneously for national liberation and workers power was not understood (Legassick 2008: 408). Recall Foster’s speech. It was implicit in “workerism” but remained politically undeveloped. It is impossible retrospectively to spell out the strategic and tactical significance of Witbank metal workers solidarity with the miners. Could coal have been halted moving to those power stations? Could the apartheid government have faced a shutdown of half its electricity supply? We will never know. A former miner writing for the MWT’s miners’ strike special feature in its *Inqaba Ya Basebenzi* magazine²⁴⁶ described a strike at his Kloof mine a

²⁴⁵ Maserumule noted the absence of political discussion at Highveld but also seemed to welcome the emergence of the strike committee (A-BM: 331). von Holdt goes on to write that a version of socialist ideas only emerged after 1989 in relation to the “new strategy of reconstruction.” In other words a “socialist” defence of the Triple Alliance government. He quotes shop steward Nhlapo’s ferocious attack on what he saw as SACP ideological dishonesty (von Holdt:288).

²⁴⁶ <https://rob-petersen.info/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/Inqaba-24-25-Oct-1987.pdf>

year before. Local township youth had spoken to the striking miners. Shaft stewards knew the activists following visits to the township. Even township taxi owners had offered free transport to the striking miners. Witbank's KwaGuqa township rallying in support of the miners would have strengthened both their resolve as well as encouraging Highveld steelworkers' solidarity actions. Was this possible? Again, we'll never know. But the point is that not only was any of this not attempted, it seems that no-one even thought about it.

Conclusion: "South Africa...one of the highest inequality rates in the world" World Bank, South Africa, 2018 ²⁴⁷

How has it come about that after more than 20 years, following "South Africa's peaceful transition...one of the most remarkable political feats of the past century", according to the same World Bank report, has made it one of the most unequal societies in the world? This outcome, according to Ronnie Kasrils, not only betrays the expectations of the vast majority of South Africans following the fall of apartheid, but also the ANC's own Freedom Charter. Although, as noted earlier, the Freedom Charter explicitly rejected socialist solutions, nevertheless it anticipated a significant reduction of apartheid's extreme economic inequality. Kasrils has pointed to refinements to the Freedom Charter elaborated at the ANC's Morogoro Conference in 1969.

It is inconceivable for liberation to have meaning without a return of the land to the people as a whole...To allow existing economic forces to retain their interests intact is to feed the root of racial supremacy and does not represent even the shadow of liberation. Our drive towards national emancipation is therefore...bound up with economic emancipation... The argument was forcefully repeated by ANC president Oliver Tambo in 1981 (Kasrils 2017: 226).

Whilst avoiding the word "betrayal" but in no sense denying his own responsibility, as part of the ANC and SACP leadership, he summarises the calamitous implications which included the unprecedented corruption of the Zuma presidency, the focus of Kasrils's most recent book (Kasrils: 2017).

"Formal political independence without economic emancipation...provided a stepping stone for all manner of predatory rogues to use power for self-enrichment..." (Kasrils 2017: 227).

²⁴⁷ World Bank South Africa, April 2018 <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/southafrica/overview>

He spells it out point by point.

*The repayment of the 25 billion dollar apartheid-era foreign debt. This denied Mandela money to pay for the basic needs of apartheid's victims.

*Giving the South African Reserve Bank formal independence. This resulted in the insulation of...the bank's officials from democratic accountability. It led to high interest rates and the deregulation of exchange controls.

*Borrowing 850 million dollars from the International Monetary Fund in December 1993 with...conditions...scrapping import charges that had protected local industries, state spending cuts, lower public sector salaries and a decrease in wages across the board...

*Reappointing apartheid's minister, Derek Keys²⁴⁸, and the Reserve Bank governor, Chris Stals, who retained neo-liberal policies.

*Joining the World Trade Organisation on adverse terms, as a 'transitional', not a developing economy. This led to the destruction of many clothing, textiles, appliances and other labour-intensive firms.

*Lowering primary corporate taxes from 48% to 29% and maintaining white privileges...

*Privatising parts of the state...Telkom telecommunications company.

*Relaxing exchange controls. This led to sustained outflows to rich people's overseas accounts and a persistent current account deficit even during periods of trade surplus, and raising interest rates to unprecedented levels.

*Approving the 'demutualisation' of the two mega-insurers, Old Mutual and Sanlam...privatisation...

*Permitting most of South Africa's ten biggest companies to move their headquarters...abroad. The results were a permanent balance of payments deficit and corporate disloyalty...(Kasrils 2017: 225).

²⁴⁸ South African apartheid's last white president, De Klerk, boasted about how successfully Keys 'played' the ANC leadership. Kasrils quotes De Klerk praising the "wonderful work" of Keys "winning the confidence of the ANC." Keys apparently said of his ANC deputy minister, "God gave me the gift of this communist." The name of that deputy minister was Alec Erwin, former FOSATU, COSATU and of course former "workerist" leader (Kasrils 2017: 236).

Kasrils then recalls the fateful day in 1992 when ANC leaders were called together to listen to Trevor Manuel, the ANC's future Finance Minister, make a presentation of the possible "scenarios" facing a future ANC government. "The technique of scenario planning was introduced in South Africa by Anglo American Corporation guru, Clem Sunter...to massage protagonists onto a common ground...Nelson Mandela...looked sombre. His face was an expressionless mask" (Kasrils 2017: 228). The fundamental message could hardly have been more candid. "...quickly redistributing wealth from rich whites to poor blacks would not work." (Kasrils 2017: 229) This included land distribution which is still over 70% white-owned. Instead Manuel described the perspective which would lead to the point by point policies described above.²⁴⁹ There were only two dissenting voices, Kasrils and Pallo Jordan.²⁵⁰ Chris Hani was not present.

Jo Slovo...gave the presentation a very polite hearing...angry with Pallo for the roughness of his response. Slovo...had taken to accepting that there was only one man driving the bus and that was Mandela. He in all likelihood would have found the opportunity to whisper privately in the bus driver's ear...Mandela was not amused at our reaction. He tore strips off us and at the conclusion stalked out. (Kasrils 2017: 230)²⁵¹

But what had happened to Jo Slovo and his commitment to the working class emerging "as the dominant social force in a truly democratic post-apartheid state." Had the SACP's perspective on post-apartheid South Africa shrivelled so much that it was to depend upon Slovo, presumably the political representative of the working class, managing the occasional whisper in Mandela's ear? In fact Slovo himself was one of the architects of the fateful compromise both with the representatives of international capital and the apartheid state. In 1992 he wrote. "We are clearly not dealing with a defeated enemy and an early revolutionary seizure of power by the liberation movement could not be realistically posed." Instead he proposed the

²⁴⁹ At issue was the counter posing of the Manuel's neoliberal GEAR perspective, the Growth, Employment and Redistribution programme to the ANC's RDP, Reconstruction and Development Programme as well as policies being developed by the ANC's think tank MERG, the Macroeconomic Research Group, led amongst others by Marxist economics scholar, Ben Fine.

²⁵⁰ One of the very few independent Marxists in the ANC leadership.

²⁵¹ "As for Mandela, it has long been understood that it was his trip to Davos in 1992, for a meeting of the World Economic Forum...that changed his mind about the ANC's economic principles. Meeting the world's business and political elite, he reported, dissuaded him from pursuing radical economic policies. Unless South Africa joined the global free market economy and avoided the disasters of socialism...the country would suffer economically, investors would be frightened off, and South Africa would face isolation like Cuba or become a failed state like Zimbabwe. No doubt the collapse of the Soviet Union and, before that, signs of failure in the socialist East European bloc would have raised Mandela's concerns in prison" (Kasrils 2017: 237).

so-called 'sunset clauses' as a compromise: compulsory government of national unity power-sharing; no purge of civil service or security forces (Legassick 2007: 433).²⁵²

ANC and SACP leaders justified such compromises in terms of MK forces being "too weak" to secure an alternative (Legassick: 434). The possibility of the working class resisting such compromises is simply forgotten or ignored.

A comprehensive discussion of the disorientation of SACP leaders following the collapse of Soviet Communism is not possible here, though it is an essential component for fully understanding the process of capitulation to neoliberalism that was unfolding. Slovo's pamphlet *Has Socialism failed?* (1990) exposes a deep demoralisation with the authoritarianism of the former Soviet Union but offers no serious explanation. As Pallo Jordan wrote at the time, Stalinism needed to be called by its name and thoroughly analysed, (Legassick: xxi), not least for its bureaucratic interpretation of the working class as a dominant social force – a point to which we will return. But meanwhile in 1992 the working class may not have been that dominant social force, but, as represented by COSATU, it was still a force to be reckoned with by the compromisers on both sides (Ceruti: 2020 forthcoming). But was there an alternative to it becoming "a conveyor belt for the ANC", (Erwin: 250-51), in the Triple Alliance of ANC-SACP-COSATU? As we have seen, former "workerist" activists and trade union leaders, like Moses Mayekiso and Bethuel Maserumule who joined the SACP when it was unbanned in 1990 certainly thought so. They cite the name of Chris Hani, former MK Chief of Staff and at the time new general secretary of the SACP. Hani seems to have exuded confidence that the SACP would now open up, responsive to the democratic awakening sweeping the country, and the demands of its new worker members.²⁵³ Here is an extract from Chris Hani's last interview, one week before he was assassinated by a neo-nazi²⁵⁴ in 1993. As part of the exile ANC leadership, Hani describes his underground role in Lesotho from 1975. He was secretly meeting individual trade union activists from unions which would form FOSATU.

²⁵² Legassick is quoting Slovo from the SACP magazine *African Communist*. Slovo was criticised in the same magazine by Pallo Jordan, amongst others (Legassick: 641fn182).

²⁵³ Bethuel Maserumule in an e mail to me clarifying his remarks about Chris Hani wrote.

"Regarding the reflection on our discussions with cmde Chris Hani: I thought I was saying that we challenged him around two issues: multiclass alliances, to which he said they experimented with various forms of alliances, to win more forces on to the side of the struggle. We also engaged him around the revolutionary process and its phases. He pointed out that they believed in stages and not revolution as one big step, and was willing to hear about our view. I must have stated that we felt encouraged by his open attitude towards debate, that he was not defensive. I wished under such circumstances to have had more time for dialogue with him" (A-BM: 334-5).

²⁵⁴ a supporter of the AWB, Afrikaaner Weerstandsbeweging.

In FOSATU we had elements which were pro SACTU, pro ANC, pro CP. You had syndicalists, you had elements which were hostile to the old tradition of the trade union struggle... So there was a struggle, say about the tendencies within FOSATU. But our approach was that...we must form one federation in SA...weld together, all these tendencies...Our approach has always been...the trade union struggle is part of the broad national liberation struggle. That the victory of the national liberation struggle would actually create better conditions for the workers in this country, and that the workers had to participate in the struggle. They would not have to remain on the sidelines as spectators...(FOSATU led to COSATU)... We didn't say because some elements rejected us... no, no, no, to hell with them. We felt that it was our duty to engage ourselves in the struggle... To contest the influence with the New Left, with neo liberal elements, because FOSATU (and then COSATU) was a mixture of all things. And I think ultimately we succeeded in building a federation which...became close to the national liberation struggle...from Lesotho we began also to build the CP. We set up cells. We influenced comrades from the trade union movement, and we influenced the youth, and that is why again you see a lot of the comrades who were in the Black Consciousness Movement also opted for the Party, and today they are outstanding leaders of the Party.²⁵⁵ Through...the ideology of the Party, through the politics of an alliance, they saw the relevance of the ANC, as a broad national liberation movement...as a left-inclined nationalist movement.” (Callinicos: 1993)

His biographers help enrich these comments.

...privately those closest to him had an understanding that his need to intensify the role of the SACP, and to entrench socialism in the communities where ever he went, was beginning to dominate his engagement. The revolutionary consciousness was not enough. Slogans were shallow. Only true mobilisation to roll back poverty could lead to the complete political transformation that the country needed. Nearly two decades later, Hani's voice on this is as loud as ever. It echoes, but the echo may be too late (Smith, Beauregard 2009: 234).

According to Moeletsi Mbeki, brother of former ANC president Thabo Mbeki, the (unbanned) SACP offered Hani,

...the first opportunity to construct his own vision as the top person...Within days of his election, he was burrowing away with his characteristic energy and enthusiasm and, above all, his openness of mind and spirit. He was trying to make his mark on the SACP and South Africa as a socialist not as a military man. M.Mbeki said Hani – whom he described as ‘a strategist for a socialist South Africa’ – was ‘emphatic’ that he no longer saw the SACP as the vanguard party of the working class, with the right to define what was or was not true socialism.²⁵⁶ At the same time, he did not agree with those – like Thabo Mbeki – who were critical of the Communist Party, particularly after the fall of the Berlin Wall. That communism had failed in Europe did not have meaning within the

²⁵⁵ Hani was not in Lesotho throughout this period. He left in 1982 as South African state security attempts on his life increased. (Smith, Beauregard 2009: 5)

²⁵⁶ Ronnie Kasrils, one of his closest comrades, insists that Chris Hani continued to believe in the leading role of the party “but not in the dogmatic sense that it was a right. It would have to win and prove that it warranted a vanguard role. Moeletsi Mbeki was correct to say that Chris believed that the party did not have a sole right to what was or was not true socialism. Chris was tolerant and flexible of rival views, that differences needed to be debated and the acid test was in the praxis. The fall of the Berlin Wall did have lessons...to be more open, democratic...” (E mail communication: Ronnie Kasrils 10/09/2019).

South African context. But he was equally forthright about COSATU. At the time, its leadership was vacillating between positions – trying to do deals with capitalists on macroeconomic issues and trying to secure a better life for the working class. ‘Instead’, said M Mbeki, ‘he stressed the need for unions to fight for democracy at plant level. He said he got the impression that this aspect of working class aspiration was being abandoned by the union movement in return for a search for a deal with capital – something he did not think was feasible’ (Smith, Beauregard 2009: 269).²⁵⁷

The attraction of Hani to former “workerists” seems obvious. Hani, in shifting away from former SACP orthodoxy seemed ready to inject a healthy sprit of openness and internal democracy into party structures focussed on working class interests.²⁵⁸ But he never sought to develop theoretical clarity about the past or develop an innovatory Marxism to provide guidelines for what was then the immediate post-apartheid present. However his status as a former MK chief of staff, perhaps surprisingly, may also have been a factor attracting former “workerists”.

There will be an attempt to address these questions shortly and that will conclude this chapter, but first some further brief comments about the scale, the potential as well as the limitations of the “workerist” challenge and its allies in other trade unions, apart from NUMSA. A history of the emergence of independent textile unions in the Durban area and beyond following the 1973 Durban strike wave has been written by one of its principal (white) organisers, Johnny Copelyn. A number of these unions finally came together in 1990 to form SACTWU, the South African Clothing and Textile Workers Union. Perhaps its most significant achievement “was that for the first time it brought large numbers of Indian and Coloured workers into COSATU’s ranks”, (Baskin: 394), including a large number of Indian and Coloured women workers. Copelyn was its assistant general secretary. Known as an “arch workerist” (Copelyn 2016: 4506), Copelyn is a further illustration of the limitations of workplace shop floor democratic

²⁵⁷ Inexplicably, Hani’s biographers then quote a British journalist Carlin who wrote, “by the time of his death, (Hani’s) political vision had mellowed into something more closely resembling (Labour Party leader) John smith’s than Fidel Castro’s” (Smith, Beauregard: 269). The same John Smith who certainly did believe that deals with capital were possible.

²⁵⁸ South African sympathisers of the British SWP – today called the International Socialist Tendency – joined the SACP during this period. “We joined the Johannesburg Central branch, which was undergoing a revival of its fortunes and some good people were joining. It was an open atmosphere...We continued to publish our magazine and sell it in the branch ...Problems arose for us however when we challenged the neo-liberal management of Johannesburg Council’s SACP mayor... It was not long after this that the heavy weights marched into the branch and set up the expulsion of a leading comrade. The dynamism in the branch soon petered out.” (E mail communication 16/09/2019). Botiveau’s account of the SACP takeover of the NUM in the 1990’s is all about “discipline...mechanically imposed on the union...and a critical reduction of internal debate...” (Botiveau: 245-6).

unionism bereft of political anchorage. On the one hand he describes the impressive union structures he helped establish and which might have propelled serious advance for a left that knew what it was doing. “(We) focused on building a shop steward movement. The highest policy making structure...was a national shop steward congress comprised of a set number of elected shop stewards from each branch of the union proportional to the membership of the branch. It was a structure made for large representative gatherings of activists capable of taking resolutions calling for mass action” (Copelyn: 1312). At the same time he praises two NUMSA officials writing for the South Africa Labour Bulletin in 1992 who no longer “sprout socialist rhetoric” and recognise “that some social pact with capital was inevitable”(Copelyn: 4869-4877).

As reported earlier, the Commercial, Catering and Allied Workers Union of South Africa, CCAWUSA, the second largest union in the country and the union with the largest number of women workers, won an important strike against Anglo American’s OK Bazaar chain in 1987. But as it grew it faced a bitter and prolonged political split, “it was hell, a divided union” (Forrest 2005: 91-99). Apolitical regional, factional and personal rivalries undoubtedly complicated and clouded the roots of the split. Nevertheless a polemical leaflet attacking what might legitimately be called the pro ANC faction by the socialist faction exposes the more serious political divide. “The opportunists...have adopted the programme...which calls merely for reforming present-day racial capitalism to a more ‘Democratic Capitalism’...(but) this will not mean the emancipation of the working people, it will only open the road for the oppressed petty bourgeoisie, the small businessmen, the petty proprietor...the working class must have its own programme, its own policy, its own class leadership, distinct from and opposed to all nationalist leadership.” The leaflet made clear it was not opposed to an alliance with the nationalists, but resolutely opposed the “subordination of the working class to nationalism.”

²⁵⁹ Interestingly the socialist faction attracted support from potentially critical political movements. Makoma Lekalakala, CCAWUSA shop steward at the time, has described her political background.

I grew up in the black consciousness ideological movement. I was a student before I joined the workforce, I was part of the Azanian youth organisation. So when I got into the union my drift was more towards the socialist faction... (A-ML: 323).

COSATU intervened and managed to bind the factions, (Forrest 2005: 97), and as a COSATU affiliate in 1990 it became SACCAWU, South African Commercial, Catering and Allied Workers Union. But according to Darlene Miller, National Education Office-bearer 1990-93, for

²⁵⁹ (Callinicos 1988: 180) private collection

SACCAWU, the political divisions continued. “You had these large company union councils, I think they were called, for example in the retail industry you’ve got Woolworths, Checkers. So it would be known that Checkers would be sympathetic to the socialist faction, Woolworths to the ANC faction...” (A-DM: 350). Thus the question forcefully and finally confronting us is whether an independent left might have developed and what it would have looked like.

Kally Forrest, NUMSA’s historian, records that in her interviews with metal workers, two political theorists were often mentioned, the Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci and the South African political scientist Rick Turner.²⁶⁰ She provides a powerful summary of Gramsci’s position showing why the “workerist” factory committees in South Africa might have thought they would benefit from applying Gramsci’s arguments about the factory councils in the Italian city of Turin in the revolutionary upheavals after the first world war. She shows how Gramsci understood the role of communists, before the stalinist era, helping to facilitate an “embryonic form of worker democracy with the potential to become organs of worker power.” But the implication was also that an independent Marxist party was necessary – a conclusion rejected by NUMSA “workerists”.

The Numsa unions appreciated the importance of rank and file engagement and the need to build national power but made no attempt to launch a socialist party which would develop worker political cadres and coordinate the national mobilisation of workers for political power...(Forrest 2011: 484).

This was to be a recipe for failure. As Maserumule put it.

Yes, one fundamental weakness in building the industrial working class as a political force for change. The situation had fragmentation, fragmented thinking. The “workerists” were so inward looking in terms of union role which was still incomplete in the way I am trying to explain, that while the union pronounced against nationalism and for socialism, it had little by way of guiding or empowering its members on the shop floor on what that vision meant... (A-BM: 332).

The weakness was ideological and it undermined political strategy.²⁶¹ ‘Militarism’ and ‘guerrilla-ism’ filled “workerism’s” ideological and political vacuum after the defeat of the

²⁶⁰ Whether Turner would have become more influential we shall never know, he was assassinated in 1978. For a brief and sympathetic introduction to Turner: (Legassick: 15, 37-38).

²⁶¹ The discussion that follows takes the prospect of a negotiated settlement as context in the late 1980’s. This is an easy ‘hindsight’ perspective but it needs qualifying. The unbanning of the ANC and SACP and the release of Mandela in 1990 took all sides of the resistance movement by surprise. All sides, including “workerists” former “workerists”, the MWT and other Trotskyists groups AND the UDF, ANC, SACP, COSATU were discussing, at the same time, armed insurrectionary tactics and strategies. All were struggling with the problem summed up by Karl Von Holt. “The democratic forces were very weak militarily” (Legassick: 425). Von Holdt’s remarks form part of an excellent wider review of the different positions (Legassick: 413-428), including the shifting line of the ANC/SACP summed up by Kasrils

miners' strike in 1987. Joe Foster in his famous "workerist" speech at the FOSATU Congress created an opening when he compared favourably the workers' struggle and the guerrilla struggle.²⁶² At COSATU's 1989 Congress, "delegates most popular songs lauded the ANC's military wing Umkhonto de Sizwe" (Baskin: 345). Von Holdt concluded after his Highveld steel investigation, "...community and workplace struggles (were) woven together by a discourse of national liberation struggle. In effect, the community was inside the union."²⁶³ Maserumule had read Lenin, Luxemburg, Trotsky, yet said, "strangely I found Maoism...and guerrilla-ist concepts and approaches to struggle (more helpful)..." (A-BM: 333). Maserumule also approved of the division between the shop stewards and the strike committee at Highveld's steelworks. It is easy to see Chris Hani's appeal. He combined his former MK Chief of Staff status with a genuine interest in understanding and addressing workers' questions. Though, through no fault of his own, he was politically ill-equipped to provide the guidance that was needed. MK understandably symbolised the struggle for national liberation against apartheid. It became a workers' motif. But the final step was missing. Workers could only transform the motif into a real struggle for national liberation if they combined it with the struggle for their own liberation as workers. This was never understood and Marxist parties and groups across the board must share some of the responsibility. Baskin has provided an outstanding illustration of how this expressed itself.

The East London plant of Mercedes Benz was a notorious NUMSA "workerist" stronghold even in the early 1990's. On one occasion both Joe Slovo and Moses Mayekiso had to persuade striking workers to return to work and give up plant bargaining for national bargaining. (A-MM) NUMSA members wore MK machine gun emblazoned T-shirts. They independently resolved

to build a special bullet-proof luxury model as a gift for Mandela. Union power in the plant was such that management rapidly agreed. Mandela's car came off the production line with nine faults. 'In this company cars don't come off the line with less than 68 faults,' commented the company chairman...'Normally it takes 14 days to build that car. Mandela's was built in four days! Only nine faults!'

A tribute indeed from one of international capital's most prestigious corporations: it confirmed a prediction of Karl Marx more than one hundred and fifty years ago that

(Legassick: 424-5). Of course it should be added that the negotiated settlement, which led to black majority rule after a democratic one person one vote election, was a tremendous victory, whatever its limitations, which was itself partly a result of the complex and contradictory mass insurrectionary movement which included its military wing – however weak.

²⁶² See fn 207.

²⁶³ p144.

uninhibited workers' power is far more productive than workers controlled by capitalists' power.

The cost of the vehicle of the vehicle was covered by each employee working a few hours of unpaid overtime... 'We look to comrade Mandela to initiate a...political settlement which will incorporate the needs and aspirations of workers,' said NUMSA's general secretary Moses Mayekiso. Cynics noted that Mandela would be driving a luxury car and saw in it the premature emergence of a privileged 'wabenzi' class. Others saw in it a sign of workers' expectations... After all, workers had insisted that Mandela's car be painted not black, but red (Baskin: 421).

Once again motif and gesture, indeed a great gesture, but no politics: cynics might warn against the rise of a 'wabenzi' class, but there was no political movement signalling this danger. Was that possible? A new political party, rooted amongst the best of the worker activists at Mercedes Benz and across the country which would organise immediately against this threat – and to keep within the spirit of the times – to save Mandela from himself?

But how might this political party have been formed? As suggested earlier during the discussion about Gramsci, the "workerist" factory and shop stewards' committees would have provided an excellent base to root a small non-stalinist Marxist party and contest prevailing ideas, strategies and tactics or lack of them. But, most important of all, it would have insisted that Slovo's claim about the working class emerging "as the dominant social force in a truly democratic post-apartheid state," found political and practical expression. Von Holdt formulated exactly the political and practical strategy that was required. In 1989, anticipating successful elections for the ANC in a future constituent assembly, he proposed that the first sessions of the assembly coincide with factory occupations "by militant workers demanding their immediate nationalization."²⁶⁴ By arguing for such a strategy the new party might have strengthened the former "workerist" voice in the SACP and galvanized support. Certainly an independent, uncompromising and frankly intimidating, expression of workers power was urgently required by the time those elections arrived in 1994. Not only was nationalization off the agenda, but, as we have seen, the ANC was ready to endorse an economic neoliberal programme which, in effect, tolerated the persistence of economic apartheid. That stark warning issued by the ANC's own Freedom Charter Morogoro Conference in 1969 that "to allow existing economic forces to retain their interests intact is to feed the root of racial supremacy and does not represent even the shadow of liberation," was simply forgotten or ignored. Both the SACP and COSATU capitulated. Chris Hani's own warning that COSATU might

²⁶⁴ He also called for communities to establish armed militia. *Parliament and Revolutionary Democracy: Debating the Constitution for a New South Africa*, South African Labour Bulletin 14, November 1989 (37-38), cited (Legassick: 433).

be abandoning the struggle for workers' democracy at plant level "in return for a search for a deal with capital" was similarly ignored. A wave of factory occupations challenging the new ANC government's abandonment of its earlier commitments could only have been led by a new left workers' party.

Chapter 4

How workers helped make and then lose the Iranian Revolution 1979

Introduction

The 1979 Iranian Revolution has been described both as an Islamic Revolution and a peoples' revolution. Whatever the merits of these two descriptions, and the chapter attempts to scrutinise both of them very carefully, it is the under-stated role of organised workers in the revolution that is the chapter's main focus. Indeed, the argument is that organised workers held the key for the secular Left both to address the Islamic content of the revolution and to transform it in a socialist direction. Strikes by workers, and especially oil workers, were decisive in toppling the Shah of Iran. But it was the unexpected development of workers' shoras, briefly springing up in modern workplaces around the country immediately afterwards, that offered a potential political challenge to the revolutionary leadership of Ayatollah Khomeini, and his determination to install an 'Islamic Republic'. Workers' shoras were democratically elected workplace councils where manual and non-manual workers united in an attempt to control the productive process. Managements had either fled or were replaced or put under intense pressure to accede to workers' demands over wages, conditions and crucially control over the goods or services produced. Comparisons and contrasts with the early soviets of the 1917 Russian Revolution will inform an important part of this investigation. Although the conclusion argues that it is the failed German Revolution of 1918 that possibly offers more important lessons. The new regime certainly understood the threat. In less than a year, the shoras were brought under control through a mixture of repression and ideological confrontation with the minority, but highly influential, secular Leftists who were playing a significant role in the shora leaderships. The ideological confrontation pitted Khomeini's version of political Islam against the heavily Stalinised version of the Marxism of the secular Left. At the same time a separate struggle was unfolding over Khomeini's determination to install an Islamic Republican constitution on post-revolutionary Iranian society. But was it to be a theocratic or a democratic constitution? Explaining the relatively swift victory of the political Islamists in both of these struggles, and their connection, is one of the most demanding tasks of this chapter.

The chapter is divided into five parts. I. The historical background and political context of the 1979 Iranian Revolution. II. Analysing the claim that the 1979 Revolution was an Islamic Revolution. III. Analysing the role of the Left in the Revolution. IV. Analysing the rise and fall of

the shoras in 1979. V. A conclusion which probes the failure of the Left to link the struggle for workers' democracy in the workplace with the struggle for popular democracy in the wider society.

I. The Iranian Revolution 1979

The Iranian Revolution, 1979, involved almost the entire population in the active overthrow of the Shah, the dictatorial self-proclaimed monarch. Ayatollah Khomeini, who came to be recognised as its principal leader, was determined to install what he and his followers described as an 'Islamic' Republic. In his authoritative studies of modern Iran, Ervand Abrahamian highlights the military coup against Mohammad Mossadeq, Iran's democratically elected nationalist leader in 1953, and its aftermath, as an essential guide *both* to the overthrow of the Shah and to the consolidation of Khomeini's regime. Mossadeq also serves as a reminder that the struggle for popular democracy in Iran had a long pedigree, symbolised by the Constitutional Revolution 1906 and the civil war that followed it (Abrahamian 2008: 45-54). Mossadeq, who had nationalised the oil industry, to wide and enthusiastic public acclaim, can be compared to other great contemporary twentieth century nationalist leaders, Gandhi and Nasser, resisting colonial and imperialist domination. The Shah, on the other hand, was seen as a puppet placed in power by the British, its Anglo-Iranian Oil Company with CIA complicity, following the coup (Abrahamian 2008: 122). These murky origins would contaminate his rule for the next twenty five years: savage repression of opposition, imposed by SAVAK, the Shah's secret police torture and murder squad. Mass arrests, execution and forced exile of their leaders effectively destroyed Mossadeq's nationalist party, the National Front and Iran's Communist Party, the Tudeh Party. But the ideas of republicanism and nationalism associated with the former and the 'marxism' of the latter, however much tainted by Stalinism, could not be so easily eliminated.

In the 1960's, using Iran's vast oil revenues, the Shah embarked on an ambitious modernisation programme dubbed the 'White Revolution'. Industrialisation, Western technology, minimal health, educational and other public reforms were all part of the package. But, as the Shah readily admitted, his 'White Revolution' was designed "...to pre-empt 'Red Revolution' from below" (Abrahamian 2008: 131). Expectations were raised but few Iranians enjoyed substantial benefits, sowing the seeds of unrest. Frustrations were exacerbated by the Shah's association with the so-called Nixon Doctrine, the Shah protecting US oil and supply interests in the Persian Gulf for US President Nixon (Behrooz 2000: 49). In his posture as 'moderniser', the Shah also antagonised two of the pillars of historic Iranian society. His

supporters burst “into the bazaars and the clerical establishment...undercutting the few frail bridges that had existed in the past between itself and traditional society. It not only threatened the ulama,²⁶⁵ but also aroused the wrath of thousands of shopkeepers, workshop owners, and small businessmen” (Abrahamian 2008: 153-4). Not least, here was religious leader, Khomeini’s base.

Khomeini was exiled in 1964 after attacking the Shah for granting the Americans ‘capitulations’, favours (Abrahamian 2008: 143). The favours were diplomatic immunity for the Shah’s US military advisors. He had been jailed for two months, in June the year before, accused of turning a religious procession into a violent street protest. These events transformed Khomeini into the leading anti- regime ayatollah. June 1963 may be interpreted as a precursor for the 1979 revolution (Abrahamian 1993: 10-11, 41). Khomeini’s developing mix of unprecedented political and religious radicalism has been linked to his adaptation to some of the views of the progressive Islamist scholar, Ali Shariati. Shariati was typical of a new generation of college educated professionals coming from traditional rural middle class religious backgrounds. The young Shariati won a state scholarship to the Sorbonne in Paris in the early turbulent 1960’s. He attended demonstrations for Algerian and Congolese independence. He wrote articles for the journal of the Confederation of Iranian Students, an organisation founded by younger members of the Tudeh Party and the National Front. Shariati translated some writings by Sartre, Fanon and Che Guevara’s *Guerrilla Warfare*. He praised the author, Amar Ouzegane, of a book on the Algerian war, *Le Meilleur Combat*, as a *Musulmani-e Marksisti*, Muslim Marxist. Both the secular Marxist Fadaiyan²⁶⁶ and the left wing Islamic Mojahedin guerrilla organisations would later recruit in the Confederation.²⁶⁷ Shariati returned to Iran in 1965. His lectures were circulated widely in booklets and recorded tapes. He was eventually arrested and forced into exile. Aged only 44, he died suddenly in England in 1977, SAVAK accused of his murder.

By then Shariati was a household name. His prolific works had one dominant theme: that the true essence of Shi-ism is revolution against all forms of oppression...feudalism, capitalism, imperialism. ..the Prophet Muhammad had been sent not just to establish a new religion but...a classless utopia (Abrahamian 2008: 144).

²⁶⁵ Muslim scholars and preachers

²⁶⁶ I have adopted the English spelling of Fadaiyan from (Behrooz, 2000)

²⁶⁷ The Fadaiyan launched its guerrilla campaign with an attack on a police station in a village called Syahkal in northern Iran, on the edge of the Caspian forest, in 1971. It was to be the opening salvo in a low level military insurgency which would dominate the decade. The Mojahedin felt compelled follow them (Behrooz: 61).

Khomeini built his base primarily amongst the ulama. He developed a distinct interpretation of Shia Islam, a form of “clerical populism”.²⁶⁸ He articulated his ideas first in a series of lectures to seminary students in 1970, and then published them anonymously under the title *Velayat-e Faqeh: Hokumat-e Islami* (The Jurist’s Guardianship: Islamic Government). The concept traditionally meant the legal guardianship by senior clerics over those deemed incapable of looking after their own interests, minors, widows, the mentally disabled. Khomeini, however, expanded the term to encompass the whole population. This was because monarchies had betrayed the peoples’ trust. This broke with twelve centuries of traditional Islamic teaching which “deemed one day of anarchy to be worse than ten years of autocracy” (Abrahamian 2008: 147). Now Khomeini argued that Muslims had a sacred duty to destroy the monarchy. Khomeini’s version of Islam, fused, consciously or otherwise, with Shariati’s, would help provide the ideological glue for what became a political Islamic revolutionary mass movement, dramatically illustrated by its street slogans.

Islam belongs to the oppressed, *mostazafen*, not to the oppressors *mostakbaren*

Islam represents the slum-dwellers, *zaghehneshin*, not the palace-dwellers *kakhneshin*

Islam is not the opiate of the masses

The oppressed, *mostazafen*, of the world, unite

Neither East nor West, but Islam

We are for Islam, not for capitalism and feudalism

Islam will eliminate class differences

In Islam there will be no landless peasant

(Abrahamian 2008: 148).²⁶⁹

The first stirrings of revolution began in late 1977 with professional middle class protests against the Shah’s autocracy in the form of public statements and poetry readings with audiences that would flow into the streets looking very much like political demonstrations. Violent, sometimes fatal, clashes with the police were inevitable. Students joined in – including

²⁶⁸ Or “Islamic populism” see p169.

²⁶⁹ “Unlike the secular forces...the clergy had the comparative advantage of possessing invaluable institutional capacity...over ten thousand mosques...Young Islamists, both boys and girls as well as young clergymen, linked the institution of the ulama to the people...in the mosques higher level decisions were disseminated to both the activists and the general public...” (Bayat 1997: 37).

the seminary students from Iran's main religious city, Qom, who persuaded local bazaars to close down, initiating waves of street demonstrations that would grow ever larger, involving fresh layers of the public. Two extremely violent though separate incidents drove forward the movement. A large cinema in the working class district of Abadan, in the oil rich Khuzestan southern province, went up in flames in mid August, incinerating over 400, including women and children. SAVAK was blamed. Then just weeks later, Friday September 8, after the Shah had declared martial law, a crowd in Jaleh Square in Tehran was ordered to disband. When they refused, they were shot at indiscriminately, killing nearly a hundred people. September 8 became known as Black Friday. In the following weeks, strikes spread from colleges and high schools to the oil industry, bazaars, state and private factories, banks, railways, port facilities, and government offices. The whole country, including strategic parts of the government apparatus, went on strike. On December 11, 1978, during Ashura, the climactic day of Muharram,²⁷⁰ Khomeini's representatives²⁷¹ reached an understanding with the government. The military would be kept out of sight. The opposition would march along prescribed routes and not raise slogans directly attacking the Shah. On the climactic day, four orderly processions converged on the expansive Shahyad Square in western Tehran. Foreign correspondents estimated the crowd to be in excess of two million. The rally ratified by acclamation resolutions calling for the establishment of an Islamic Republic, the return of Khomeini, the expulsion of the imperial powers, and the implementation of social justice for the "deprived" masses. The New York Times reported the street presence of an alternative government. One of its most important leaders was Ayatollah Mahmoud Taleghani, jailed by the Shah. Taleghani, whose religious politics were similar to Shariati's, had been specifically selected by Khomeini as one of the leaders of the street movement (Parsa 1989: 212). He would become the cleric most associated with the independent workers' movement.

Khomeini returned from exile on February 1, 1979. The Shah had already fled two weeks earlier. The crowds that greeted Khomeini totalled more than three million (Abrahamian 2008: 161). When it came to improvised tactics, Khomeini had proved to be the undisputed master. During the Shah's last desperate street curfew, millions of Khomeini's supporters took to their roof tops, nightly, shouting *Allah-o Akbar*, 'God is Great!' (Moaddel 1993: 162).

Yet at a critical juncture, it was the intervention by striking workers, and oil workers in particular, became decisive. By late October 1978, oil workers' strikes were closing down oil production on the oil fields and in the oil refineries, raising openly political demands: end

²⁷⁰ A vital date in the Islamic Shia calendar

²⁷¹ Khomeini had built a coalition with former Mossadeq supporters – to be explained shortly.

martial law, release political prisoners, Iranianize of the oil industry, dissolve SAVAK, end discrimination against women employees. The Washington Post reported the oil strikes as the greatest single threat to the Shah's survival. "Oil became a key transmitter of revolutionary consciousness..." (Jafari 2018a: 74-5). Khomeini had intervened from Paris, where he was then living, to take control the oil strikes. His political alliance, the Oil Strikes Co-ordinating Committee, OSCC, depended on some of the key cadre from the Mossadeq era. Mehdi Bazargan would lead it, a deputy minister under Mossadeq. He would become Khomeini's first prime minister. The OSCC used the strikes to obtain direct negotiations with the government-backed National Iranian Oil Company. All of its key demands – withdrawal of the military from the oilfields, reinstatement of sacked strikers and the right of return for striking workers who had been forced to leave company houses, release of all arrested oil workers, back payment of wages owing – were conceded. The OSCC felt increasingly strong enough to persuade oil strikers to return to work (Jafari a: 78). Many of the oil strikers' original demands had not been met. But there was a strong sense that the Shah's authority had been damaged beyond repair and outstanding demands would be conceded. In any case, the oil workers lacked their own independent national organisation to sustain the strikes. This would have required a political orientation that was missing. The remnants of the Tudeh Party amongst older workers in the oil fields and refineries tended to adapt to the OSCC. Younger workers attracted to the 'new left' organisation like the Fadaian and Mojahedin were mesmerised by their urban guerrilla strategy. These organisations would make a political turn, and attempt to build a mass base amongst workers, but arguably it came too late. The secular Left's influence certainly had limited impact on the highly successful launch of the OSCC.²⁷²

The OSCC spawned two further organisations which together with itself would help form the infrastructure underpinning Khomeini's post-revolutionary political authority. The two new organisations, unlike the OSCC, would explicitly identify themselves as *Islamic*. In January 1979, the Council of the Islamic Revolution was formed "to study and explore conditions for a transitional government", and "to prepare for a constitutive assembly and hold elections." Finally, neighbourhood committees, encouraged by OSCC members, later transformed into Committees of the Islamic Revolution, were formed to distribute heating and cooking oil, to overcome shortages that had mounted as a result of the strikes. Though these committees

²⁷² To give just one example, the strike committee at the strategically important oil refinery in Abadan, Khuzestan, the oil rich province in the south of the country, there were just 5 secular leftists on the 40-member strike committee.(Jafari:73) Following the OSCC intervention, a communique from 'striking employees from the oil industry in the south' called for victory for Khomeini's "holy struggle to overthrow the illegal government" (Jafari a:78).

often sprang up from local initiatives, the mosques were obvious organising centres and used very effectively by the political Islamists. Saeed Jalili, today a political Islamist hardliner, recalls.

At the height of the revolution...neighbourhood committees played an important role serving peoples' needs...At the time Marxism had many followers...The slogan of Marxism was based on the shoras. This slogan was everywhere...In this situation, the neighbourhood committee with its centre in the mosque was a 'slap in the face' (*tudahani*) and a harsh reply to them (the Marxists) (Jafari a: 84).

Workers' shoras, independent democratically elected workers councils, which were beginning to develop out of the strike movements, had the potential to focus an alternative political pole of attraction. The detailed investigation of these shoras, part IV, will also examine the reasons for their limited influence in the neighbourhoods and localities. Oil workers' strike organisation had been decisively outmanoeuvred but it was by no means broken. A group of oil workers, for example, called for a workers' representative on the Council of the Islamic Revolution. (Jafari a: 85) In Ahwaz, clerics challenged left leaders of the oil workers, prompting the resignation of one of them, Mohammad Javad Khatami. He accused "reactionary" clerics of making death threats against him. American journalist, and future Pulitzer Prize winner, Kai Bird, who interviewed oil workers wrote.

The oil industry is virtually controlled by dozens of independent workers' komitehs, committees, which, though loyal to the central government, are nevertheless participating in all of the decisions related to production and marketing...the khomitehs have unquestionably demonstrated that they can run the oilfields and the refineries without the top rank Iranian managers and without the expertise of some 800 foreign technicians...(Jafari a: 85-6).

A Tehran striking workers' slogan, from industries other than oil, contained a potential warning for the new revolutionary government.

"Our oil worker, our determined leader!" (Jafari a: 87).

Khomeini's first task following his sensational arrival and mass greeting in Tehran was to secure the position of the armed forces, already overwhelmed by the sheer scale of public loathing of the Shah. The Shah's last bastion of armed support was his elite Imperial Guard. In a remarkable battle, cadets and technicians, supported by armed guerrillas from the Fadaiyan, and the Islamic Mojahedin, took them on at the main air force base near Jaleh Square. The chiefs of staff declared their neutrality and confined troops to barracks. Astonished Western journalists reported the readily available distribution of weapons to any civilians ready to join in. "Two days of street fighting completed the destruction of the 53-year old dynasty"

(Abrahamian 2008: 162). Former Fadaiyan school student and youth leader, Bijan, recalls how the newly radicalised youth joined in.

We all made Molotov cocktails and that was where the fight gradually started. The Shah's guards came but people with guns stopped them. But then we heard that they were sending the tanks, we were all asked by the more experienced around... to go on top of the buildings and attack the tanks with the Molotov cocktails. That's what we did that night. At least 10 tanks tried to come through, we set them on fire...we stopped all the tanks (A-B: 373).²⁷³

Immediately after the revolution Khomeini and his supporters were determined to institutionalize their concept of *velayat-e faqeh* within a new Islamic constitution. This was opposed by Bazargan, the official prime minister, and his liberal lay Muslim supporters and fellow veterans from Mossadeq's nationalist movement, "eager to draw up a constitution modelled on Charles de Gaulle's Fifth Republic." They wanted a republic, Islamic in name but democratic in content. Khomeini had set up this Provisional Government to reassure the government bureaucracy – the ministries as well as the armed forces. He wanted to remove the Shah, not dismantle the whole state. On the other side was the far more formidable shadow clerical government (Abrahamian 2008: 162).

This incorporated Khomeini's Council of the Islamic Revolution and the Committees of the Islamic Revolution. This group would become known as the *Maktabis* (committed and doctrinaire). It was unambiguously 'anti-imperialist', especially when compared to Bazargan's 'Liberals'. It stressed the independence of the new Islamic Republic, "neither East nor West". They would form the core of the IRP, the Islamic Republic Party (Behrooz 2000: 102). Khomeini now insisted on an immediate 'yes or no' referendum for an Islamic Republic, observing. "We don't use the Western term 'democratic'. Those who call for such a thing don't know anything about Islam" (Abrahamian: 163). The referendum, held on April 1, produced 99 per cent yes votes for the Islamic Republic. Twenty million – out of an electorate of twenty-one million – participated (Abrahamian 2008: 163). Yet Fadaiyan school student and youth leader, Bijan, strongly denied this was a vote for a totalitarian Islamic state.

...it was seen as a vote against the Shah's regime... Before the revolution he (Khomeini) gave lots of interviews where he said it's going to be a democratic country, everyone is free to do what they want. So we had no issue with this (A-B: 376).²⁷⁴

²⁷³ Bijan is a pseudonym, see Appendix p372.

²⁷⁴ For Khomeini's Paris interviews with journalists guaranteeing democratic freedoms, see (Rahenma, A. 2005: 1iv) Bijan has the dubious honour of twice confronting the repressive armed forces of the state at the gates of one of Tehran's universities. First, the Shah's army, when the revolution began. Second, three years later, when Khomeini's armed forces dislodged the revolutionary student university

Indeed Khomeini, sensing this ambiguity, made concessions. Abrahamian describes the new Islamic constitution, published later in the year, as a “hybrid” albeit one weighted in favour of *velayat-e faqeh* as against Bazargan’s French Republic, “between divine rights and the rights of man, between theocracy and democracy...” (Abrahamian: 163). It acknowledged Khomeini as “Supreme Leader” and “most potent of all, ‘Imam of the Muslim Umma’ – Shi-ism had never before bestowed on a living person this sacred title with its connotations of Infallibility” (Abrahamian 2008: 164). At the same time the new constitution did make concessions to democracy. The general electorate, defined as all adults, including women, would be able to vote in a secret ballot for the president, highest official authority after the Supreme Leader, the Majles (parliament) provincial and local councils as well as the Assembly of (religious) Experts. There had already been public elections for the latter.

According to one historian who is a constitutional expert, (Randjbar-Daemi: 2013), these elections, especially in Tehran, where the balloting process “was shielded from significant manipulation”, provided “unique empirical information” about the popularity of competing political forces. Although candidates loyal to Khomeini, especially members of the IRP, swept the field, one political Islamist leader’s outstanding victory deserves notice. “Ayatollah Taleqhani led the ranking with approximately 2 million preferences.” As already noted, Taleqhani was the most left wing cleric openly sympathetic to Marxist ideas and a staunch defender of the shoras, and had clashed with Khomeini over their significance (Bayat 1987: 156). Meanwhile the secular Left failed to win any seats. Whatever complications it raised, the result emphasised the popularity of political Islamism and the necessity for the secular Left to find principled means of relating to it. The result however was immediately marred by the banning of the liberal and leftist independent press, especially the newspaper *Ayandegan*, following their investigations of voting irregularities in other parts of the country. Unfortunately Talequani died one month later. The ‘Assembly’ had produced the draft of the constitution. Assembly candidates had been vetted by Khomeini and his advisors. In principle, most of the democratic values, taken for granted in parliamentary democracies, were at least rhetorically enshrined in the constitution, even the right, with a two thirds majority, for the Majles to call for a new referendum to amend it. In practice the theocracy had the upper hand, though the strictly limited ‘democratic’ space for political manoeuvre could and would later be tested by the ‘reform’ movement. The constitution also promised economic and political reforms on pensions, unemployment benefits, disability pay, decent housing, medical care,

occupation as part of its campaign to destroy leftist influence. On the second occasion he was shot and hospitalised (A-B: 372).

free secondary as well primary education, home ownership, and to eliminate poverty and inequality. Public ownership of large industries would co-exist with private ownership of light industry, agriculture and services. As we shall see shortly, some of these promises were far from rhetorical. They would help stabilise the regime, secure genuine improvements for the poor and divide the left, seemingly fulfilling the constitution's requirement to help the "mostazafen (downtrodden)...struggle against their mostakaben (oppressors)." ²⁷⁵ Bazargan and seven members of the provisional government attempted rear guard opposition to the new constitution. They called for the Assembly of Experts to be dissolved on the grounds that the proposed constitution violated popular sovereignty and elevated the ulama to a ruling class. They threatened to make their opposition public.

Before he died, Taleghani also criticised the Assembly of Experts, despite being its most electorally successful candidate. He made the provocative statement that the new constitution might be inferior to the famous previous version which had precipitated civil war following the Constitutional Revolution of 1906. "In his last public speech, Taleghani reiterated that the only solution to Iran's problems was to give people responsibility for governing themselves through councils." He suggested that those in power oppose the formation of councils because they feared losing their position. He criticised sectarianism, opportunism and ideological domination. (Parsa 1989: 294) Abrahamian argues that Taleghani, had he lived, posed a serious challenge to Khomeini, (Abrahamian 2008; xxiv). Similarly, given the choice, and an open debate, Bazargan might now have won in a new public referendum on the constitution.²⁷⁶

But it was at this critical moment that the infamous anti-imperialist occupation of the US embassy, and the ensuing 444-day US hostage crisis, began. We will have occasion to re-visit this moment several times in this study. The occupation was popular throughout the country, the embassy understandably viewed as a focus for counter-revolution. Bazargan, opposed to the occupation, resigned. And Khomeini "under the cover of this new crisis...submitted the constitution to a referendum... on December 2nd 1979", (Abrahamian: 168), and easily won. Khomeini took advantage of a Left deeply divided, the Fadaiyan and the Mojehedin abstained in the referendum on the grounds that it wasn't democratic. The Iran Iraq war, September 1980, would consolidate Khomeini's control. Islamisation of the new revolutionary state

²⁷⁵ "This was driven by the social justice motive within Islam...You had people coming to power...(with) high ideals about the 'just society'. The challenge for us is that when you talk to uneducated people in the working class, it was difficult to explain clearly the difference between what you want and what the government wants..." (Bijan, A-B: 378).

²⁷⁶ The political situation was extremely unstable. See the description and implications of the standoff between Ayatollah Shariatmadari and Khomeini over the Tabriz revolt, p20-1.

proceeded apace but once again posing a dilemma for the Left. Was the new regime pro-capitalist or anti-capitalist? On the one hand public control was preached and practised. The assets of millionaires and high profile Western companies were confiscated, Coca Cola became Zam Zam Cola. The Hilton Hotel found its name and ownership changed. Semi religious public foundations controlled commercial operations, including former private companies, agro-businesses worth over 20 billion dollars. On the other hand, the new regime cultivated the bazaars. The Chamber of Commerce was packed with importers and exporters with impeccable records of giving alms. One of the most famous was Rafsanjani, millionaire pistachio nut grower and future president of the republic. Khomeini was unambiguous. Free enterprise “turns the wheels of the economy...Islam differs from communism....we respect private property” (Abrahamian 2008: 179). At the same time, whilst it placed no ceiling on private land ownership, it distributed confiscated agro business land to 220,000 peasant families. It raised agricultural prices helping the country to become self-sufficient in cereal production. A Reconstruction Crusade launched an ambitious literacy campaign amongst the peasantry, extended roads, electricity, piped water, health clinics to the villages. The strategy “transformed the countryside, turning peasants into farmers.” One key indicator of progress: “on the eve of the revolution, life expectancy at birth had been less than 56, by the end of the century it was near 70” (Abrahamian 2008: 180).

The regime also brought direct benefits to the working class. It spent a quarter of the annual budget in subsidies to the poorer population, bread, rice, sugar, cheese, fuel, cooking oil, as well as indirect subsidies for electricity, sanitation and piped water. Its Labor Law, whilst banning strikes and independent trade unions, conceded 6-day 48 hour work weeks, paid (religious day) Fridays, a minimum wages, 12-day annual holidays and some job security. The percentage of children in school rose from 60 to 90; infant mortality per 1000 dropped from 104 to 25. Most important for all, the literacy rate doubled, “almost eradicating literacy among the age group six to twenty nine” (Abrahamian 2008: 180). For the first time, the very poor, both urban rural, could access further and higher education. By the early part of this century, 65% of university students were women (Rostami Povey 2010: 48). Yet the reform programme co-existed with the bloody oppression of the Left and other opponents. This was massively intensified when the Mojahedin – supported by President Bani-Sadr – tried to overthrow the government in June 1981 and instead ended up assassinating numerous prominent figures.²⁷⁷ Between February 1979 and June 1981, revolutionary courts had executed 497 political

²⁷⁷ The Mojahedin would now begin to turn into a reactionary cult, supporting Saddam Hussein in the Iraq Iran war, and today a puppet of the US administration.

opponents as “counter-revolutionaries” and “sowers of corruption on earth.” In the next four years from June 1981 until June 1985, revolutionary courts executed more than 8,000 opponents. Although they targeted mainly the Mojahedin, victims included the Fadaiyan and Kurds as well as Tudeh, National Front, and (Grand Ayatollah) Shariatmadari supporters. Many – including Shariatmadari, Bazargan supporters, and Tudeh leaders – were forced to appear on television and recant their previous views (Abrahamian 2008: 181).²⁷⁸

II. An Islamic Revolution?

Moghissi and Rahnema have provided a graphic account of the formation of the infrastructure of the Islamic Republic of Iran. They describe the central role of the mosques²⁷⁹ as a base for the regime in every neighbourhood. In addition, the Islamic Revolutionary Committees, “one of the most feared and repressive institutions of the regime, formed by the lumpen proletariat and bullies of the neighbourhoods (these committees were later incorporated into the regular ‘law-enforcing’ bodies)” (Moghissi, Rahnema 2004: 292).²⁸⁰ In addition to massive propaganda and ideological indoctrination, the clerics maintain control over their followers through economic means and the provision of social welfare.

The largest fund of this type belongs to the late Ayatollah Khomeini, known as ‘Imam Khomeini’s Aid Committee’. Established in 1979 and now secured through more than 1,130 branches throughout Iran, it provides a vast array of social and financial services to needy followers. Over 1.7 million people are ‘permanent’ beneficiaries of this fund, mostly the working poor and the unemployed. The Aid Committee also provides health services through clinics, covering over 4.3 million people. It provides educational grants to over 769,000 students and has created over 850 youth centres in urban and rural areas to provide

²⁷⁸ “One final bloodletting came in 1988, immediately after Khomeini ended the (Iran Iraq) war by accepting a UN-mediated ceasefire. In four short weeks...prisons hanged more than 2,800 prisoners...former Mojahedin for...secret sympathies for the organization. Leftists...for “apostasy” ...This extraordinary bloodbath has one plausible explanation. Khomeini, in his dying years, was eager to leave behind disciples baptized in a common bloodbath. The killing would test their mettle, weeding out the half hearted from the true believers. It would sever ties between religious populists...and secular radicals outside. Some of his followers had toyed with the dangerous notion of working with the Tudeh Party to incorporate more radical clauses into the Labor Law as well as into the Land Reform Law” (Abrahamian 2008: 181-2).

²⁷⁹ Bayat describes mosques as “institutions of leisure”. Those workers in his surveys with leisure time (20%) went to the mosques, not least because they were the only places, compared to sporting events or cinemas, which were free. He cites similar surveys making the same point. Bayat concludes that this “reflects the contradictory position of workers towards Islam. They both are and are not religious.” Islam is a practical reference point for “their socio-cultural activities”. Workers interpreted Islam in their own way “to fit with their own socio-economic and political ends” (Bayat 1987: 50-1).

²⁸⁰ This article was first published in *Socialist Register Working Classes Global Realities* Eds Leo Panitch, Colin Leys, Greg Albo, David Coates (London Merlin Press, 2001)

‘education, ideological guidance, and physical education’. It also gives allowances for the construction and repair of dwellings, marriage allowances, and interest-free loans... there are also several extremely powerful religious/ para-statal organizations, including the Mostaz’afan and Janbazan Foundation, the Martyrs Foundation, and the Fifteenth Khordad Foundation, which run the lucrative confiscated properties of the last shah’s Pahlavi Foundation and those of the richest families of the previous regime. The Mostaz’afan Foundation, one of the largest corporations in Iran, is the richest cash cow of the clerical establishment outside the oil-rich government itself. With links to the powerful bazaar, the traditional economic base of the clerics, this foundation has helped create a new bourgeoisie out of the Islamic elite...(which has) amassed enormous wealth in their religious funds, endowments and foundations... (Moghissi, Rahnema 2004: 293-94).

Jafari has also proposed an analytical framework compatible with this view describing the formation of a new Islamic state ruling class or bourgeoisie. He focuses on three of Khomeini’s Islamic concepts, *Velayat-e Faqeh*, providing a fusion of religious and political legitimacy, the *Maktabi*, ideologically committed Islamists, the new cadre, who wanted to further their own cause, enhancing their status, but also the cause of the *mostazafin* (downtrodden), the powerful social justice motif in traditional Islam but also an ideological and when necessary physical battering ram against the Left. He argues that *Maktabi* discourse facilitated the formation of a new bureaucratic social class, whose members belonged to the new Islamic middle class. Born into traditional middle class families, they were often the first generation to access universities: lawyers, engineers, doctors, journalists, writers, jobless graduates and teachers who staffed the expanding bureaucracy of the new state. Three processes enabled this process of upward mobility. Firstly, the purges opened up positions at the top of companies, oil industry, ministries, the army and other public institutions like universities and hospitals. Second, the expansion of the state bureaucracy with a plethora of new semi religious public foundations created new employment opportunities. Third, ideological loyalty could open promotion routes from humble beginnings to senior executive posts both in business and politics. For example, *Maktabi* supporting oil workers displaying initiative and flair could rise to and then through management and then be considered for local or regional governmental posts (Jafari b: 497-8). The ideological cement is provided by *Islamic populism*. Elsewhere Jafari has cited Abrahamian’s definition: the propertied middle class mobilising the urban poor with radical rhetoric directed against imperialism, foreign capitalism, and the political establishment.

Populist movements promise to drastically raise the standard of living and make the country fully independent of outside powers...they intentionally stop short of threatening the petty bourgeoisie and the whole principle of private property. Populist movements, thus, inevitably emphasise the importance, not of economic –social revolution, but of cultural, national and political reconstruction (Abrahamian 1993: 17, Jafari 2009: 106-7).

Writing in the aftermath of the Islamic reform movement in Iran in the 1990's and 2000's, and the open struggle between the Islamic conservatives and the Islamic liberals, Rostami-Povey observed, "...the reality is that the process of Islamisation in Iran has mass support...the religious middle class, the urban poor and the working class who supported the Islamic state were given priority in employment and education" (Rostami Povey 2010: 44-5).

But was Islamisation an inevitable outcome of the Iranian Revolution 1979? Certainly the Islamic movement was the major player but a particular form of improvisation – borrowing from the Left whilst excluding the Left - formed part of its strategic and tactical foresight, alongside creative adaptation of the religious traditions.²⁸¹ This should have provided the Left with its own strategic and tactical opportunities. After all, they were supposed to mean it. The Left really was in favour of the strategic objective of a classless society with the strategic means to achieve it, collective workers' action. Yet the Left itself, as we shall see, was overwhelmed by the Islamic movement – was it friend or foe? Two very different Left political leaders testify to the challenge posed. Here is Farrokh Negahdar, one of the Fadaiyan leaders²⁸² who helped turn the former guerrilla organisation toward the emerging revolutionary mass movement in the late 1970's.

If you have a positive mind set, you can interpret these upcoming (Islamic) elements as revolutionaries, anti- imperialists. It was a real mass movement with their own psychology, their own culture, their own tactics. If you are negative to them, you would probably call them a fascist movement, an oppressive movement, reactionary forces against the people. I do not agree with this second...interpretation. All major changes, not only in Iran, but within MENA, Middle East North Africa, were influenced by the outcome of the 1967 war between Israel and the Arab world.²⁸³ From that point

²⁸¹ Rostami-Povey cites an example of the latter in Shariati's riposte to conservative apolitical clerics who believed true justice for the world meant waiting passively for the return of the 'Twelfth Imam', a key spiritual figure in Shia Islam. Whereas according to Shariati, Islamic political action now would hasten his return (Rostami-Povey: 91-2).

²⁸² Organisation of Iranian People's Fada'i Guerrillas. OIPFG, *sazman-e cherikha-ye fada'i-ye khalq-e Iran* (Behrooz: 51). According to Behrooz, Farrokh Negahdar led the pro Tudeh Majority split in 1980 (Behrooz: 106), which supported a conciliatory position towards the new regime, (Behrooz: 109), regarded as "progressive" (Behrooz: 116). Farrokh Negahdar did not deny this description when I put it to him.

²⁸³ This argument that the defeat of Nasser in 1967 was a defeat for radical secular nationalism and a spur to political Islam throughout the Middle East and North Africa is raised by Anne Alexander who, in

onwards we are witnessing the growth of the influence of the Islamist element – everywhere. Islamism gets momentum, strength and status. Secular elements in these societies needed to think about it. How do we deal with these rising Islamic movements, with their growing power...When the Shah's regime collapsed...there was no political or legal structure of power to control the people. But the balance of power between the Islamists and non Islamists was one to ten. Millions of people followed the Ayatollahs...We realised before the revolution that the Islamists had a far greater opportunity to win hegemony over the people than the Left. Jazani had predicted this prospect in the early 1970's (A-FN: 385, 384).

Bizhan Jazani was the best known of the Fadaiyan leaders, and, arguably, their most talented theorist, a philosophy graduate student arrested in 1968. He was one of the very few leftists to understand Khomeini's appeal. He wrote. "With this background, Khomeini has unprecedented popularity among the masses, especially petty bourgeois businesses, and with his opportunities for relatively free political activity has an unprecedented chance of success" (Behrooz: 53). Workers in tiny traditional workshops far outnumbered workers in modern industry and were influenced by their employers, sometimes relatives or part of a cultural network reflecting prevailing ideas in the bazaars and the mosques. This discussion is developed in Part IV 'Shoras'. Jazani, in other words, was sensitive to the popular mood and recognised the need for political propaganda to relate to it. He called explicitly for proletarian leadership of any coalition emerging to lead mass mobilisation. Behrooz implies that Jazani's murder in jail in 1975, along with other Fadaiyan founders, was linked to this potential shift of political perspective (Behrooz: 53, 54, 56). Farrokh Negahdar continued.

During the first year of the revolution we never believed that we could gain the upper hand in relation to Khomeini. A few months before the fall of the Shah, specifically 8 September 1978, we realised that Khomeini had hegemony over the liberals...One of the clerics gave a good example using the children's story of the cat and the mouse cartoon, 'Tom and Jerry'. We had to play with that cat, not fighting face to face with them (A-FN: 384, 386).

Torab Saleth was leader of the tiny Trotskyist Fourth International group in Tehran in 1979.²⁸⁴

In the beginning...these shoras... most of them were actually calling themselves Islamic. This was not accidental. Most of the young workers were organised, radicalised by the general movement which was dominated by the religious leadership. They got most of their information when they were on general strike through the mosques, so these strike committees after the revolution called themselves Islamic shoras...(But it is

turn, references the argument in Arabic by the Egyptian revolutionary socialist Sameh Naguib (Alexander, Bassiouny 2014: 19fn38).

²⁸⁴ Torab Saleth was its national secretary (dabir-e sarasari). Immediately after the revolution it was campaigning openly. In his interview with me, he emphasises how small was their group - nearly 100 - only 30 he would describe as cadres. But because their ideas, as he saw it, fitted with the most advanced workers' struggles and their mood of the time they were able to grow to over 600 – over 400 were workers. The two key slogans: socialist revolution and united shora organisation (A-TS:409 fn412).

essential to make a distinction in the workplaces between) two different organisations which appeared immediately after the revolution, Islamic shoras and Islamic Associations. The Islamic Associations began as little support groups...directly linked to the regime and the forces of the repression of the regime right from day one²⁸⁵...But alongside this the general mass of workers in the factory which (had followed) the strike committees, now obviously... followed the shora... But the workers were organised in these Islamic shoras...included everybody, including whoever was part of the Left at the time...Yet the actually existing shoras were completely open, all sorts of radical workers were in these shoras. There was a fight over who can appoint managers. These workers who were thinking of calling themselves Islamic councils immediately confronted the Islamic government – driven by the logic of class struggle itself, demonstrating to everybody the lines of cleavage in these shoras, in these councils – between the capitalists and the workers, forget the Islamic bit (A-TS: 405).

The Islamic movement had become increasingly hegemonic as the revolution unfolded. But was the Left confronting the inevitability of a totalitarian Islamic state-in-the making or an Islamic state where the political meaning of 'Islamic' had yet to be determined, or rather would be determined by the balance of social class forces? Both versions are capitalist class societies, but in the latter the Left and the workers' movement might have fought and achieved maximum capacity for independent democratic organisation and action.

III. The Left in the Iranian Revolution, 1979

The Shah of Iran's close ties to US interests in the Middle East didn't prevent his powerful northern neighbour, then the Soviet Union, also benefitting from his exploitation of the country's oil and gas wealth. In 1966 the two countries signed a pact under which Iran provided natural gas, the Soviet Union made limited military sales and assisted the Shah with his new steel complex in Isfahan. (Behrooz 2000: 50) It wasn't difficult for Khomeini to denounce the Soviet Union and Soviet 'Communism' as the lesser Satan. The new Soviet pact did little to restore the fortunes of Iran's main Communist Party, the Tudeh Party, effectively neutered by SAVAK, with many of its surviving leading members exiled in the Soviet Union. New left political formations were gathering momentum, the most important of which was the Fadaiyan. All of them were inspired, directly or indirectly, by Che Guevara's *Guerrilla Warfare* and "Regis Debray's metaphor of the 'little motor' and 'big motor' to describe the relation between the guerrilla force and the revolutionary classes" (Behrooz: 53). The battle with police at Syahkal, a village in northern Iran in 1971, referred to earlier, launched the Fadaiyan's armed campaign. Whilst, undeniably, carrying out waves of courageous military-style operations often with surprising success - military chiefs, SAVAK torturers, particularly

²⁸⁵ They would be nurtured by the regime. One writer has likened them to *Arbeitsfronts* in Nazi Germany, "while creating an atmosphere of terror in the workplace, they moved to ideological indoctrination of the workers..." (Rahnema 1992: 73).

repressive employers were assassinated and strategically important centres, like American oil companies, were bombed - it was an urban war it could not possibly win. Inevitably, it would prove far more costly to the Fadaian than to the Shah's state in terms of loss of life and repeated arrests (Behrooz: 62). It also meant that when the mass movement began to stir in the late 1970's, Khomeini's clerical cadre was far more effectively positioned than the cadre of the Fadaian. Though very weak inside Iran, the impact of the remnants of the old Tudeh Party must also be taken into account. It retained a grudging respect from some older, surviving middle class intellectuals and working class political activists. It was the strongest of the exile organisations outside Iran, backed by financial and logistical support from the Soviet bloc. It smuggled publications into Iran as well as using radio broadcasts (Behrooz: 76-7). It welcomed and encouraged the Soviet Union's relations with the Shah. This generated an almost permanent internal argument about the prospects of genuine reforms by the Shah and even Tudeh participation in them. This helped the Shah peel away some senior Tudeh party leaders, hoping they would make more credible his 'modernisation' programme. Though its intervention in the revolution was minimal, its influence, many would argue a malign influence, on events as they unfolded afterwards would be highly significant.

The Fadaian was the secular Marxist organisation best placed to take advantage of the revolutionary opportunities that opened up immediately after the fall of the Shah. It faced three major questions: how to relate the workers' shoras which were springing up everywhere,²⁸⁶ how to relate to the women's question which the new regime quickly forced onto the political agenda and the struggle of the national minorities. The struggle of the national minorities, especially the Turkman and the Kurds, against the new regime was very important and some Fadaian fighters took up arms alongside them (Behrooz: 105-7).²⁸⁷ But it was the women's question, above all, which almost immediately exposed the limitations of the Fadaian's theoretical and practical grasp of Marxist politics.

Bijan recalls.

Tension with Khomeini started over hejab and the International Women's Day demonstration just one month after the fall of the Shah. I went there and actually got hit with a stone in my face. They had highly systematically organised thugs –not very big²⁸⁸ ...Fadaian did not support demonstration. They didn't take a view. We all went

²⁸⁶ See Part IV.

²⁸⁷ Unfortunately it is not possible here to give this question the attention it deserves.

²⁸⁸ Khomeini had launched the IRP the Islamic Revolutionary Party. "Tied to the IRP were the bands of *chomaqdars* (club wielders) who called themselves *Hezbollah* (Party of God...(Later) The bands...invaded the universities, injured and killed members of political groups who were resisting the cultural

because of a sense of justice. We didn't go as an organisation formally supporting it. If I remember correctly, there was an article against forcing hejab on women in the Fadaiyan's newspaper. My sense, looking back at it now, I think there was confusion. Years later we discussed it. What was important at that time – were we distracting the movement by focusing on hejab, rather than focusing on workers' rights? (A-B: 374-5).

The Fadaiyan position caricatured the classical Marxist position on women's oppression, made very clear at the 1921 Third Congress of the Communist International.²⁸⁹ Whilst the Fadaiyan argued that women's oppression would be overcome by the elimination of the class system in the future, that did not justify abstaining from resistance to a regime that was intensifying women's oppression in the present. But that, in effect, became their position. An independent women's movement was condemned as "false agitation" (Behrooz: 108).²⁹⁰ The Fadaiyan had failed to see that the implications of the International Women's Day demonstration had the potential to disrupt the consolidation of the new regime and build a broadly based left opposition. The new regime had immediately politicised the role of women in society by attempting to impose its own particular interpretation of Islam on gender relations. A liberated woman was declared to be one who followed the path of Fatimah, daughter of the prophet Mohammad, and Zaynab, her daughter. Fatimah symbolised motherhood and womanhood. A woman's place was in the home. Even Shariati had projected Fatimah as the ideal role model. Many women were sacked because they did not comply with Islamic dress and behaviour codes. On 26 February 1979, in the same month of the revolution and just a few days before the International Women's Day demonstration, the Family Protection Act, the Shah's minimal reform of women's rights was suspended. Men were given exclusive right to divorce and permitted to take four permanent and an unlimited number of temporary wives (*sighe*). On March 3 1979, just five days before the International Women's Day demonstration, a decree forbade women judges to work, because women were deemed not fit to judge. Just three days later women were told they would no longer be drafted into the army, all women serving their conscription terms were dismissed (Poya 1999: 64-68). Then just before the demonstration Khomeini announced the hejab, the headscarf, must now be worn by women (Poya 1999: 130).

revolution, (launched in April 1980) and burned books and papers thought to be unIslamic" (Moaddel 1993: 213).

²⁸⁹ Theses on political work amongst Women (Riddell:1009-1025) A "vigorous struggle" must be "conducted against all prejudices, customs and religious practices that bear down on women. This agitation must also be addressed to men...apply the principle of women's equal status to the raising of children, family relations and public life...try to win support of exploited working women engaged in small shops, cottage industries, and rice, cotton and other plantations..." (1026)

²⁹⁰ There was also a problem with lack of internal democracy within the Fadaiyan. Important questions like the women's question were not properly debated. See the remarks of Kobra Qasemi, women's representative in the Ahwaz oil employees' city wide shora in Khuzestan, Appendix p403.

Thus the International Women's Day demonstration became a major test of strength between the regime and its left wing opponents. It was a resounding success, involving hundreds of thousands of women throughout the country. In Tehran the demonstration was attacked, as reported earlier, by stone throwers linked to the IRP, one of their slogans was "Either hejab or tisab (acid)" (Poya 1999: 131). The new regime was shaken by the level of support. Khomeini's prime minister, Bazargan, hurriedly announced that there had been a misunderstanding, women activists had been manipulated by left wing trouble makers. Women should be "guided", not forced to wear the hejab (Tabari 1982: 14). This was the moment for the Left to act quickly in defence of women's rights. Suspension of compulsory headwear was obviously only temporary. Demands needed to be raised uniting (the often poorer working class) religious women, the majority, for whom wearing the hejab was taken for granted, with (the often middle class) secular women. For example, setting up workplace nurseries and organising for women's participation in the election of workers' shoras. The Women's Solidarity Council, *Shoraye Hambastegie Zanan*, was formed for precisely this purpose. Alas, the Fadaiyan would withdraw its support at a crucial moment²⁹¹ (Poya 1999: 132-3). In November 1979 the regime rallied support for the anti-imperialist occupation of the US Embassy. Most of the Left seemed unable to combine support the occupation with an independent stance on other issues – not least the women's question. A government sponsored demonstration in support of the Embassy occupation co-incided with a Women's Solidarity Council Day of Action. The Fadaiyan, originally a sponsor, now proposed it be cancelled. It wasn't and the Fadaiyan did not support it (Poya 1999: 133). Tehran oil refinery workers' leader, Ali Pichgar, has confirmed this standpoint.

One day we were meeting with Yazdi, Minister of Foreign Affairs, at a meeting of Tehran refinery representatives. He'd just heard about the occupation of the American embassy, he...told us it was a bad idea. We disagreed and the next day we had a demonstration in support, outside the embassy. We believed that it was the Fadaiyan who had occupied the embassy and that's why we were so keen to support them. I read a document outside the embassy in support. But that day it meant that we didn't support the women's demonstration that was taking place on the other side which was a mistake (A-AP: 397).²⁹²

²⁹¹ Following the Iran Iraq war, the reform movement would challenge the regressive legislation on women's rights with an equally challenging and progressive re-interpretation of Islam (See "Reversal" Poya 1999: 94-122).

²⁹² Of course the Fadaiyan had not organised the occupation, it was Islamist students. But the fact that Ali Pichgar thought it was the Fadaiyan is an interesting measure of their perceived influence, even if illusory. In fact, the occupation helped exacerbate the pro-Tudeh split in the Fadaiyan.

Another prominent communist oil workers' leader, Yadollah Khosroshahi has also reflected. "We were very weak in supporting the women's movement and we didn't do anything about it" (Khosroshahi 2013: 4).²⁹³

The ambiguity over the women's question reflected deeper confusion about how to relate to Khomeini's regime. His general popularity in the country tempted forms of adaptation to his regime – particularly to the *Maktabi* (IRP) wing, the regime's "anti-imperialist" wing.²⁹⁴ This adaptation would have a catastrophic debilitating impact on the Fadaiyan at the very moment when it should have been concentrating its efforts on the workers' shora movement, already withering because of political disorientation. The Fadaiyan began to split more openly into two factions, the 'Majority' (aksariyyat) and the 'Minority' (aqaliyyat). When the Kurdish war began in August 1979, the two factions clashed head on. A re-surfacing Tudeh Party gleefully circulated a version of the internal dispute between the factions. Tudeh "had strong supporters...among the Majority faction" (Behrooz: 110). The occupation of the US Embassy helped crystallise the split, reinforcing the Fadaiyan Majority view of the progressive role of the IRP, whilst the Minority faction viewed the occupation with suspicion. The Tudeh Party welcomed the split, viewing the Fadaiyan Majority as a source for replenishing a younger cadre of its own. Indeed the Tudeh Party would become the Majority's "mentor and ideological guide" (Behrooz: 126). Tudeh's own adaptation to the IRP deepened even to the extent of collaboration to suppress the opposition, including the independent Marxist groups, a fact recorded in the Soviet Embassy's KGB files (Behrooz: 126). Tudeh gained no benefits from this collaboration. Not only was it eventually caught up in the total onslaught of the Left by the regime, many of its imprisoned members became the subject of extraordinary Stalin-like 'show trials', replete with 'confessions' from recanting 'former' Communists.²⁹⁵

The 1979 revolutionary Mayday rallies also exposed the failures of the Left in relation to Khomeini and the IRP. Khomeini moved swiftly when he realised, apparently belatedly, that the Left were not only planning workers' rallies on Mayday but that they were likely to prove immensely popular. In response, the government raised the minimum wage and declared Mayday a public holiday. Khomeini broadcast a resounding Mayday speech, warning workers to be aware of non-believers. "Every day should be considered Workers' Day, for labour is the source of all things, even of heaven and hell as well as of the atom particle." As Abrahamian

²⁹³ On Yadollah Khosroshahi, see p182 fn305.

²⁹⁴ See 'An Islamic Revolution?' page 168.

²⁹⁵ "As Abrahamian makes clear, (Abrahamian: 1999), public recantation played a key role in the Islamic Republic's search for legitimacy" (Cronin 2000: 235).

noted, this theory of value sounded more radical than that of Marx (Abrahamian 1993: 71). When Mayday arrived, no less than four separate rallies assembled in Tehran, three left wing and one Islamist led by the IRP. Reports hostile to the IRP conceded that its march was three kilometers long. Its placards proclaimed Every Day a Workers' Day. Speakers at its rally included a Palestine Liberation Organisation activist. A coalition of leftist groups led by the Fadaian and the Maoist Paykar group also staged an enormous march and rally – claiming half a million, though this is almost certainly an exaggeration. Tudeh also had a demonstration, one sympathetic foreign observer claiming it had more trade union support than the other leftist demonstrations.²⁹⁶ Finally, the Islamist left Mojahedin also staged a demonstration and rally, the left, then, clearly failing to achieve unity. Similar demonstrations were held in towns and cities throughout the country. The struggle for the hearts and minds of workers was well underway.

A little noticed turning point came in August 1979 with the escalation of the war between the Kurds and the new regime. "Massive bloodshed resulted" (Parsa 1989: 260). Armed Fadaian support for the Kurds was used as a trigger by the regime not just for an attack on the Fadaian but against all Left and liberal democratic forces. Not only were Fadaian members and other leftists arrested, a total crackdown on the freedom of the press was imposed.²⁹⁷

Kobra Qasemi was one of the hundreds of Fadaian members arrested at this time. She was also one of the three women activists amongst the sixty representatives elected to the leading committee of the General Shora Oil Employees of Ahwaz, (Khuzestan capital). They represented shoras in the oil fields, the production units, maintenance departments, and administrative offices in and around the city. "I was in prison for 3 or 4 months."²⁹⁸ I was able to return to work after I was released, but the shora organisation had been dismantled" (A-KQ: 401). As we shall see Kobra's description fits with the generally agreed periodisation for the rise and fall of the shora movement. August 1979 represents the peak of their independence. In fact formal shora organisation was not so much dismantled but institutionalised – fully

²⁹⁶ Abrahamian (1993: 73) cites (Goodey: 1980).

²⁹⁷ I am grateful to former Paykar member, Mansor Parhizgar, for drawing my attention to this remarkably under-recorded development. Abrahamian, for example, ignores it. In his interview with me, Mansor insists that "Paykar was amongst the first to resist the closure of *Ayandegan*, a daily newspaper dating back to last period of Shah's period, it was semi-independent, quite radical and critical" (A-MP: 390).

²⁹⁸ https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=3&v=CYvQjCncbri

This is a video made in November 2018. It shows Rieneke Van Santen, Executive Director of Zamaneh Media in ZamanehGala, a Dutch independent media and human rights NGO. In the video Ms Van Santen provides a horrific account of prison conditions in Iran at this time, late summer 1979, in particular, the way prisoners like Kobra could hear the screams of fellow prisoners facing execution.

Islamised, Leftist influence eliminated, under government control. In fact some Islamic Association oil worker leaders were ready to defend Kobra.²⁹⁹ But the Fadaiyan itself must take some responsibility for what happened next. The organisation was split, with the 'Majority' group ready to find accommodation with the *Maktabi* (IRP) "anti-imperialist" wing of the regime. How to support the regime's 'anti-imperialism', without surrendering your independence in the wider political context was indeed the challenge. One test was the Fadaiyan's approach to democracy both within its own internal structure but also in the Islamic Republic. A test it failed as Kobra Qasemi explains.

But there was a paradox. We raised the women's question with the Fadaiyan 'Majority'. We couldn't accept our leaders' response. They said the revolution was the priority. Anti-imperialism was the priority. The demand for democracy was not given equal priority. Nor was there internal democracy in the Fadaiyan. I felt personally free in the Fadaiyan but I knew that it wasn't really democratic. Personally I did not accept their ideas and I was considered a 'problematic' member, a 'troublemaker'.³⁰⁰ I was one of the most experienced members of the Fadaiyan cell in Ahwaz. Most of the other members were students. I told them you haven't had to fight for the bread. So you don't what it is. You have read only the books and you are repeating what you have read.³⁰¹ When the revolution started I had been working for 7 years. I was trusted in the cell, a friend, a comrade³⁰² (A-KQ: 403).

At the end of 1979 the question of democracy flared in the most dramatic way. In Part I reference was made to the prospects of Khomeini losing the vote in the referendum for his

²⁹⁹ See later, Kobra's description of this development, IV. 'Shoras' section, p28, and more generally, the Islamisation of the shoras in part IV.

³⁰⁰ "As a result of their Stalinist training, not one Marxist group or organisation in Iran in practice respected the right of individual members in internal disputes" (Behrooz: 160).

³⁰¹ A damning criticism of the Fadaiyan was its approach to Marxist education. "For example, throughout the period under study, the main reference text on the history of the Russian Revolution was a Persian translation of *History of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (Bolsheviks)* written in the 1930's. The text offered Iranian Marxists a highly distorted version of Russian history which endorsed the actions of the Bolsheviks, led by Lenin and Stalin, while condemning their opponents" (Behrooz: 160). "Very few of Marx's original writings were available and studied" (Behrooz: 161).

³⁰² Kobra added the following about Stalinism. "I had read many books, many 'romances', novels, from Russia. From my reading I discovered that people are not happy in Russia. They have many questions. They realised they are not really free. I raised these questions in the cell and they said how dare you say these kind of things! Do you know better than our leaders?! I also said that there were differences of opinion about politics within the Soviet Union. They said no, no – there is only the decision of the party. I said that there had been differences of opinion even within the Soviet regime, within the Russian politbureau at the time of the Shah – about selling weapons to the Shah. Nobody knew about this. When I said it means there is also another voice in the party (The Soviet Communist Party at the time), they didn't know that. They said how dare you say this. So I found the article (from the Soviet press) and I showed them...I had heard of Trotsky. There had been lots of discussions in the universities and amongst the political groups who for a short period were able to openly promote their ideas in the universities and on the streets. When I asked about him I was told he was against Lenin. I knew two Trotskyists. They were not bad boys but no one liked them, but I was interested in their questions" (A-KQ: 403).

theocratic, hence undemocratic, Islamic constitution. Ayatollah Shariatmadari, a highly respected leading cleric, the association of human rights lawyers, the Mojahidin, the Fadaiyan and the Kurds called for postponement of the referendum, though the Tudeh Party did not and supported Khomeini. Shariatmadari made it clear that there was a serious conflict between the article of the constitution vesting sovereignty in the people and the articles on *velayat-e faqeh*. This was an unambiguous public attack on Khomeini's authority. Demonstrations and fighting broke out on December 5. In Qum, Iran's most religious city, Shariatmadari's house was attacked by Khomeini supporters. In Tabriz, in Azerbaijan, where a majority refused to vote, Shariatmadari supporters seized the radio station and chased the pro-Khomeini governor from his office. A panicking Khomeini met Shariatmadari two days later and agreed that Shariatmadari was to be consulted on changes in the constitution and on all matters dealing with Azerbaijan. But the agreement broke down. The struggle in Tabriz escalated, planes carrying revolutionary guards were denied permission to land by pro Shariatmadari armed supporters (Fischer 2003: 236-8). A general strike was organised in Tabriz, (Poya 1987: 159), raising the possibility of the Tabriz shoras uniting with progressive Islamists demanding a genuine democratic constituent assembly, with guarantees protecting workers' rights to organise independently. A vital opportunity ignored by the Fadaiyan and the other Leftist organisations. Meanwhile Khomeini supporters in Qum and Tehran demanded that Shariatmadari disband his Muslim People's Republican Party, charging that it was divisive. The IRP was clearly threatened by the existence of a second more liberal Islamic political party. Khomeini claimed that the troubles in Tabriz were American-inspired. Shariatmadari responded sharply that to connect all events to American imperialism would not solve any problems. He warned Khomeini that he was in danger of provoking civil war.³⁰³ Shariatmadari followers in Tabriz took nine revolutionary guards hostage with supporters demanding release of two hundred persons arrested by the revolutionary guards in the previous weeks. Shariatmadari, demonstrating that his leadership was different from Khomeini's, ordered the release of the hostages. The conciliatory gesture was to no avail. The Khomeini regime asserted itself and subsequently executed eleven members of Shariatmadari's party in retaliation for this resistance (Fischer 2003: 236-8).

³⁰³ "Kurdish leader Shaykh Ezzedin Husayn sent Shariatmadari a message of support. In Baluchistan, (the Sunni Muslim province bordering Pakistan), the governor was taken hostage and fighting broke out: Baluchis charged the governor, an outsider, was staffing local offices with his cronies. Far more important, the Baluchi religious leader Mowlavi Abdul-Aziz Mollazadeh accused the revolutionary guards of molesting women during their house-by-house search to disarm the Baluch; guns so seized, it was charged, were being given to local Shi'ites" (Fischer 2003: 236-8).

IV. Shoras

Assef Bayat's *Workers Revolution in Iran* (Bayat: 1987) remains the most authoritative study of the shoras. Its great strength, based as it is on extensive interviews with shora activist workers as the revolution unfolded, is that it captures both the mood and experience at a critical moment in the revolution, illustrating the potential for a politically independent workers' movement. A weakness, however, is that it is mainly based on fourteen manufacturing plants in Tehran (Rahnema 1992: 70), so prone to over generalisation, and there are only cursory references to the oil worker shoras, arguably the best organised and most radical shoras (Jafari 2018b: 437). Jafari's investigation of the oil worker shoras has attempted to fill this gap. Shoras were workplace organisations (blue-collar and white-collar) which elected committees representing all employees, irrespective of trade, skill or sex. They demanded "workers control and the transformation of power relations" in the workplace (Bayat 1987: 100). At the point of production, "workers developed a strong sense of possession of the factory...a commitment to responsibility for it as part of the peoples' wealth." During this period workers sometimes "managed and ran the factories themselves" (Bayat: 101). Typically, at the Yamaha Motor Cycle company in Ghazvin, Bayat interviewed workers who had not only dismissed managers but had travelled to the central office and physically ejected the director and major shareholder from their desks (Bayat: 118).

Nowadays you don't need to tell a worker to go to work. He works for himself; why? The reason that he didn't work (under the Shah) was because he was under the boss's thumb. He couldn't speak out. Now he'll say, 'the work is my own, I'll work' (Melli Shoe workers, in Ghotbi, 1980, Bayat: 111).

Jafari cites a later study by Bayat detailing the immense significance of the shoras.

The councils by their executive committees were directly elected and were subject to recall at any time by the members. The committees were accountable to general assemblies, and their members were not paid any extra salary for their positions on the committee. Almost all workers in a unit would attend meetings in which heated debates would take place on issues concerning the running of the workplace. At crucial meetings, as the ones concerning the conduct of management, a few officials from the Ministry of Labour or the 'Imam's representatives' would also attend. The day-to-day activities of the shoras, including elections, debates in general meetings and operations of the affairs of the enterprise, had a dramatic effect on the way workers conceptualised society, authority, and their social position in the society at large...the workers were involved in a learning process. To understand the significance of this change, the reader should recall that, during the last thirty years, democratic institutions, (whether state or non-state), have been almost totally non-existent in Iran. In family, in school, in workplace and political organisations, both open and clandestine, decision making has been basically authoritarian. It was against such a background of a political culture that the councils established nascent democratic tradition and culture (Jafari b: 443, Bayat 1988: 48).

Bayat identifies four periods which describe the rise and fall of shoras in first two years, following the fall of the Shah. Bayat's periodization has not been challenged by his critics. The first period begins with the revolution in February 1979 and ends with the first signs of repression in August 1979, signalled by armed resistance by some of the national minorities, especially the Kurds. Some of the former guerrilla groups like the Fadaiyan supported the Kurds, so it became a trigger for a generalised crackdown against them, especially in the shoras. Left wing papers were banned, individual worker activists were arrested, as we saw, for example, of Kobra Qasemi. The second period from September 1979 to June-July 1981 was marked by the systematic return of management from above coupled to the gradual demise of workers control. Two events marked the determination of the government firstly to isolate and then eliminate leftist influence in the shoras, as well as neutering the independence of the shoras. The first one was the US embassy occupation which began in November 1979, the second was the Iran Iraq war which began in September 1980. Both events strengthened the influence of the government linked Islamic organisations inside the shoras like the IRP and the Islamic Associations. Bayat argues that the IRP and the IA's strengthened their grip on the shoras both at rank and file and management level, leftists effectively banned amongst workers, liberal managers replaced by *maktabi* (Islamic) managers under much tighter government control. This reflected an internal power struggle within the regime between the remnants of the liberal nationalists led by President Bani Sadr and the hard line Islamists loyal to Khomeini. The third period followed the sacking of Bani Sadr as President and the executions that followed the failed bid at armed overthrow of the government by the Mojahedin, supported by Bani-Sadr, in June 1981. Khomeini and his supporters now had total state power, and the Islamists, the *maktabi* managements and the IA's total control in the factories which led to their militarisation and a lowering of wages. The shoras were now dominated by these Islamic organisations and in some cases ceased to exist altogether. The fourth period reflected splits in the IRP and the IA's as they found themselves pressurised to reflect workers' interests against management and government. Despite full Islamisation, shora influence and recent memories of what had been possible, was still struggling to find expression, ready to use the government's own agencies if necessary (Bayat 1987: 100-2).

The study here focuses exclusively on 1979, the high point of shora activity. It will look in more detail at the formation of shoras and their successes, as well as the weaknesses. It will discuss how viable is a comparison with the soviets which developed during the Russian Revolution in 1917. It will discuss the role of key professionals in the shoras, technicians, engineers, managers. And it will examine shora relationships with the urban poor. The shoras had grown

out of the strike movements and their strike committees which had played such a strategic part in the overthrow of the Shah. Some Islamist progressive clerics like Ayatollah Taleghani were influential from the very beginning.³⁰⁴ Bayat reports that Taleghani “instructed” that each industry should have “only one single central nucleus to carry out decision making.” But no steps were taken to co-ordinate strike committees across industry. Bayat identifies this “lack of a co-ordinating organ” as one the key strategic weaknesses of the shoras’ movement (Bayat 1987: 94).

Ali Pichgah was oil workers’ leader in the repairs section of the Tehran oil refinery during the revolution. Here he describes the fascinating way the repair workers made contact with the wider workforce which would help lay the basis for the Tehran refinery shora.

We decided to enter the (refinery) employees’ restaurant, our restaurant was separate from the employees’ restaurant, we started shouting slogans celebrating (repair) workers and (oil refinery) employees unity. I took the microphone and recited the famous poetry of Khosrow Golesorkhi, and other workers made some very useful speeches. We set up a secret unity committee in the restaurant’s kitchen, calling it a strike committee...” (A-AP: 394).

Khosrow Golesorkhi was a well-known poet, writer, communist and part of a “famous cell, some of whose members had sympathy for the Fadaïyan,” arrested in 1972 (Behrooz: 69). The Shah and SAVAK attempted to use their trial to celebrate success against guerrilla movement, and its proceedings were broadcast on national television. There were forced ‘confessions’ but five including Golesorkhi, “refused to confess, even after extensive torture. Golesorkhi and Daneshian used the fact that the proceedings were televised to put the regime on trial, defend revolution and Marxism and refute the charges. They refused to ask for the Shah’s pardon and were executed” (Behrooz: 70).

In other words, Ali Pichgah’s workers’ unity plea drew upon Iran’s secular revolutionary political and cultural tradition rather than its Islamic tradition. Yadollah Khosroshahi, another Tehran oil refinery workers’ leader, and a prominent communist amongst the oil workers,³⁰⁵ also recalls this moment and a particular slogan that was shouted.

³⁰⁴ As we saw earlier, Taleqani, like Shariati, had openly defended Marxist principles, arguing that “Islamic social justice is consonant with the Marxist position on the distribution of property, wealth and other resources” (Rostami-Povey 2010: 30).

³⁰⁵ Yadollah Khosroshahi helped create Syndicate of Oil Workers in the 1970’s. He was jailed by Shah. Released, along with others, in 1978 when demonstrations against Shah began. Khomeini’s regime would arrest him again in early 1982, along with other leaders of the Shora of Oil Industry Employees, (*Showra-ye Sarasari-ye Karkonan-e san ‘at-e Naft*), following its suppression. A number of them were

Who robbed the oil? America. Who robbed the gas? Soviet Russia. Death to the Pahlavi regime! (Khosroshahi 2013: 2).

But the slogan would also give advantage to the hard line political Islamists and their denunciation of Imperialisms, East and West. The main secular Left organisations, Tudeh and the Fadaian, were directly or indirectly associated with the former Soviet Union. However, the Fadaian, the largest Left organisation, made a promising beginning amongst workers. They had made a turn away from armed struggle to the workers' movement – expressed with the launch of their new journal *Kar*, Labour. Its first editorial, March 10th 1979, stated:

Workers collective struggles are organised through labour unions around economic demands...but in order to be finally free, the working class has no other choice but to take political power, abolish private property of the means of production and destroy capitalism...If the shoras act correctly and organise those who are capable and knowledgeable, and actively interfere with political affairs, they can develop into peoples' organisations for running the politics of the country³⁰⁶ (Jafari b: 445-6).

However, as reported in part III, the Fadaian was quickly distracted from this perspective, disoriented by the complex and contradictory politics of the new regime. Whilst it cracked down ruthlessly with assaults, arrests and even executions of women's rights and democratic rights activists more generally, it also made its own enticing overtures to the workers' movement, as well as parading its virulent brand of anti-imperialism. The Fadaian would quickly split with its Majority wing (critically) supporting the regime. Just one month after the revolution, in March 1979, Khomeini had launched his Islamic Republican Party, IRP, opposed to "liberals", meaning Bazargans' government, "communists" and *monafeqin* "hypocrites" (a term use for the Mojahedin) The aim of the IRP was to smash the Left, sometimes literally with their *chomaqdars* (club wielders), part III reported their use against the March women's demonstration, but also as competitors in the shoras, its newspaper *Jomhuri-ye Islami* proclaiming "the importance...of shoras" (Jafari b: 448). And the IRP, had of course organised its own Mayday march. *Jomhuri-ye Islami* intervened in shora elections to isolate known communists and support candidates "who are struggling against Western and Eastern imperialism" (Jafari b: 459).

executed and others sentenced to long imprisonments. Khosroshahi was released in March 1983 and fled the country. (Jafari b 2018: 519) He later died in London.

See also Khosroshahi's comments about Taleqani. Whilst in no way disparaging Taleqani, Khosroshahi reflects that his influence, which included persuading the bazaaris to raise funds for strikes, made workers too reliant on the bazaaris (Khosroshahi: 2013).

³⁰⁶ Jafari counted five separate Fadaian newspapers in Khuzestan aimed at different sections of oil workers both in terms of specialisation as well as different locations, for example refinery, drillers, gas, petrochemicals (Jafari b: 456).

According to Time Magazine In April 1979 “the world’s largest oil refinery” in Abadan, Khuzestan, was controlled by revolutionary workers dissatisfied with their own revolutionary government. Given the centrality of oil supply to the global economy, the more serious sections of the Western press were almost obsessively chasing these developments. A fascinating Associated Press, AP, report from the Abadan refinery reflects both the strength of revolutionary sentiments amongst workers as well as the tensions and overlap between political Islam and the Left . The oil workers demanded

redistribution of income, an end to foreign control of industry and the right to reject management appointees,” with a new strike threatening if their demands were ignored. “Although most workers claim to be devout Muslim followers of...Khomeini and disavow atheistic communism, they espouse political views very close to Marxism.” Oil committee member, Habib Khabiri, told AP that only the elementary stages of the revolution had been completed. The report continued.

Managers left over from the previous regime...avoid any decisions that might conflict...with the committee, *who also have the power of arrest*.³⁰⁷ It is unclear how many workers belong secretly to the illegal pro Moscow Tudeh Communist Party or to the Peoples’ Fadaiyan... ‘Out of a section of 8 people, maybe 2 or 3 are communists.’ Said one worker. ‘No one pays them any attention.’ Others estimate as many as 25 per cent of some departments may be Marxists or sympathisers...Marxist pamphlets...appear regularly on company billboards and on walls in working class districts... (Jafari b: 456-7).

At the Tabriz and Pars Oil Company refineries, shoras took almost total control of administration and production. The latter, near the city of Karaj, was Iran’s only privately owned refinery (25% Shell).The shora there put demands for nationalisation to the Labour Ministry and Ayatollah Taleqani. With no response, the shora took over the refinery itself, selling its products to pay wages and salaries. It co-ordinated the take-over with the production managers, establishing a “committee for the provisional administration of the refinery” consisting of shora members and two technicians. The “National Oil Company of Iran: Karaj Refinery” was publicly declared. A reluctant government would quickly accede to the nationalisation demand. (Jafari b: 458)³⁰⁸

Nor was this an isolated example of workers directly taking over their own means of production and distribution. Torab Saleh explains.

...another example – (it) must have been repeated a hundred times in Tehran alone. It was a factory connected to Rayovac battery factory in Japan. Like many industries in Tehran, these were joint venture companies. A foreign producer provided the

³⁰⁷ My emphasis

³⁰⁸ However this was a double edged outcome. The workers’ victory here was also a victory for the hard line Islamists in government who backed widening Islamic state control over private industry.

technology, the means of production - with some Iranian capitalists producing these under licence for the internal market. This was the biggest battery factory in Iran. It had 500-600 workers. The executive committee of the shora had been radicalised by the mosques. They had learned how to organise strikes from people they had met in the mosques. The Left had no influence on them before the revolution. They had not even met leftists. After the revolution the city is open. In front of Tehran University is the main centre for gatherings, discussion. Everybody comes there. Newspaper sellers, book sellers, everybody. Some even became Trotskyists simply by reading our newspapers. They would say ah this is all very good, we agree so let's contact these people, they came and they joined us. It shows how fluid the situation was in terms of the consciousness of the working class. Anyway Rayovac battery factory they had participated in the last three months of the general strike. The owners had escaped...the country but their manager was still there. Most of the leading members of the shora were also members of the local neighbourhood committee. During the insurrection 50 or 60 of the workers from Rayovac actually participated in the fighting. The people who resisted the shah's guards, coming to the airforce base in Tehran to suppress the technicians. In this fight a lot of workers from Tehran participated, organised by the neighbourhood committees. They became armed after the insurrection. In Rayovac factory 30, 35 workers actually carried guns. Immediately after the insurrection, they go to the manager's house, the manager had also escaped. They confiscate his assets and they discover 50 million toumans – equivalent in those days of 5 million pounds which they give to the local mosque. So these were the type of workers who took part in the insurrection...and they were now managing the factory. They elected one of their own as the manager. And they had worked out through the books of the company that the quality control is based in Japan. They send samples to Japan for them to be given quality control as a condition for producing goods. In their fight with the government over who can manage this factory, they win the competition with the government by proving they are producing batteries of the same quality as before. So the government could not use the excuse that the factory is not working so we have to appoint a new manager...These workers are now fighting the Iranian government which has become the Islamic government. The workers have become so radicalised they say these bastards are all linked to the bazaar merchants, to the same guys who used to screw us before the revolution, so why should we sell our goods through the same distribution network . We can sell batteries ourselves. So they set up tents to sell the batteries outside the factory on the main road between Tehran and Karaj, the main industrial centre...they (had) accepted our suggestion to set up tents outside Tehran University. We said nobody would dare to touch you. This was three months into the revolution (A-TS: 407-8).

Chris Goodey³⁰⁹ visited several Tehran factories in August and September 1979 where he obtained access to some of the worker activists. He provides a useful snapshot both of the shoras and their diversity at this critical moment. The Chit-e-Jahan textile factory lies just outside the industrial town of Karaj near Tehran. The owner of the company did not flee the country after the revolution, but the workers elected a 7-man committee to represent them, a majority sympathetic to the Mojahedin. The owner accused it of wanting “to expropriate property by armed struggle.” But the government seems to have ignored his pleas and allow

³⁰⁹ An American writer for a highly regarded Middle East research unit, MERIP, Middle East Research and Information Project.

the situation to develop, at least in the short term, whilst the committee occupied the office of the former SAVAK agent. Critically, it reached agreement with the qualified technical management and therefore was able to carry on production. Goodey reports that council claims to have increased production by half were justified, the minimum wage had been doubled, while top salaries reduced to one third their former level. Every worker received a litre of milk a day. Mojahedin propaganda tended to dominate. Goodey also noted that although general assemblies are called once a month for all workers, there was no constitution or system of recall. In Goodey's view, the general assembly did not provide an adequate forum or mechanisms for self-management.

Goodey found the opposite extreme at Iran National, formerly associated with Chrysler UK, employing 12,000 workers used to reasonable housing and health care. It continued to receive kits from Britain even though it had been nationalised. The head of the workers council there was a member of the factory administration during the Shah's time. A council spokesperson told Goodey that they were 100% religious, 100% in support of Imam Khomeini. Goodey points out that this was as unique in its own way as the situation in the textile factory, but he reasonably surmises that this was the kind of rubber stamp council the regime envisaged for the nationalised sector. At General Motors, also nationalised, Goodey found another fully 'Islamic' worker council executive committee, supporters of the Islamic Republican Party. It had 21 members, 15 manual workers and 6 office staff. Although unconvinced about its democratic shop floor credentials, Goodey was impressed by their degree of autonomy, their involvement in management, the fact that only one of its members worked full time, the rest put in all the extra hours without pay. Top management salaries had been reduced to 40% of what they were. The committee's main aim was now to divert production away from cars to public service vehicles such as buses. The Caterpillar factory was similarly nationalised after the owner, who had leased it from the US parent company, had fled. Here the workers' council committee, 10 manual workers and 2 office staff, was evenly divided between leftists and Islamists. Women workers organised separately, having rejected what they regarded as a 'token' offer of one place on the committee. Weekly committee meetings took place in the office of the one remaining director who, Goodey writes, was "ejected" for the purpose whenever necessary. The factory was under full control of the council who signed cheques, controlled accounts, fixed wage levels. Goody was allowed unchaperoned access to the shopfloor. In his view democratic control from below was not fully functional, nevertheless concluded. "It was clear that the council and the self-management of the factory were

supported with enthusiasm and pride by the workers, whatever their political colouring” (Goodey 1980: 5-9).

Khomeini’s new regime viewed these developments with increasing alarm. A two fold strategy developed to minimise and ultimately eliminate leftist influence, using government structures outside the workplaces and quasi government agencies inside the workplace. For example one of the most important Committees of the Islamic Revolution, referred to earlier, would increasingly police the main road between Tehran and Karaj, the main industrial centre, described by Torab Saleth with the explicit aim of identifying leftists (Jafari b: 462). Elsewhere in his interview Torab Saleth describes the precautions he had to take to attend a shora meeting in order to avoid arrest (A-TS: 409). In Abadan the Committee of the Islamic Revolution was established by pro Khomeini oil employees. It was a city-wide Committee but it was located in the compound of the oil refinery’s security organisation and was funded by local rich bazaar merchants. Farivah Batmanghelich, Abadan’s main government representative, made clear the priorities, to curb the activities of “the Left and the Mojahedin” (Jafari b: 463).

The struggle, and its complexity, between the Islamists and the Left in the shoras is particularly well illustrated by the General Shora of Ahwaz (Khuzestan capital) Oil Employees. It had 60 representatives from the oil fields, the production units, maintenance departments, and administrative offices in and around the city. It elected a chair and deputies, oil workers who were leaders of the Islamic Association, IA, oil workers who were devoted Muslims, supporters of Khomeini. Their contacts with leading clerics added to their credibility. In its first few months it managed to force the authorities to lessen the inequalities between the blue-collar and white-collar workers. The blue-collar workers received air conditioners, which most of them weren’t able to buy, unlike their white-collar colleagues. The shora also gave support to workers of the drilling companies who were demanding nationalisation of their companies (Jafari b: 461). Kobra Qasemi was one of 3 women on the shora committee. She worked in the administration at the head office. The demands of these women focused on childcare provision and they managed to increase pregnancy leave. Kobra was, of course, also a member of the Fadaiyan. Kobra was very cynical about some but by no means all of the IA leadership. Some had opposed the earlier oil strikes as supporters of the monarchy. Kobra describes a “shah loving man” who switched to “zealous Islamist”, telling us, “ladies the revolution is over, go sit behind your desks” (Jafari b: 463). At the same time Kobra describes members of the Islamic Association In the shora collaborating well with secular members and defending the

shora from attacks from the government. Later when leftist members were purged, the Islamic Association, IA, was protective and tried to give them a way out. She recounts the period after she had been in prison and returned to work.

When the purge committee investigated me, they (IA members) told them. 'She is good. She is Islamic like us, but we don't understand why she doesn't believe in God.' We didn't have any problems with those religious colleagues around us' (Jafari b: 464).

Kobra Qasemi's arrest along with other Fadaiyan members in the summer of 1979 would however signal the peak of independent shora organisation and influence. In the oil industry this co-incided with the dismissal Hassan Nazih, chair of the nationalised oil industry. He had provoked Khomeini with his public scepticism about the 'Islamisation' of politics, economics and the law. The IRP and the Islamic associations began a campaign against him, spicing their hostility with polemics against Nazih's proclaimed pro-capitalist sympathies. This posed a dilemma for oil shora activists, especially the leftists. It was again the dilemma that would haunt the Left throughout this first decisive phase of the Iranian revolution and one which it failed to resolve. When do you support the Islamic liberal opposition to Khomeini, when do you oppose them? When do you support the IRP with its pro-worker, anti-capitalist, anti-imperialist rhetoric, when do you oppose them?³¹⁰ On the one hand, Nazih was hostile to the shoras, on the other hand there was a sense that his removal would intensify the crackdown on shora activists. Despite their reservations, many different groups of oil workers petitioned on his behalf. But it was a lost cause. Nazih himself feared for his life and fled to France (Jafari b: 473-5).

Khomeini now intensified his two-fold strategy towards oil workers - repression and incorporation - in recognition of their centrality to the economics underpinning the new revolutionary state. The independence of the oil workers' shoras was gradually eliminated but

³¹⁰ The Left had failed to unite the shoras but their increasingly formal Islamisation did provide unity, the US Embassy occupation proving to be the perfect facilitator "The Islamic Labour Shora representing 128 shoras in Tehran factories organised a demonstration on 23 December 1979 in which tens of thousands workers participated...It called for the continuation of the struggle against American imperialism, extradition of the Shah...the abolition of capitalism and plunder..." (Jafari b: 476-7). In February 1980, the Islamic Labour shoras held their first national conference. Many of the main speakers explained that the concept of shora was Islamic not Marxist, that shoras should strive to achieve harmony between workers and employers. At the same time, though, the demand for workers control persisted. Legislation would quickly follow turning the Islamic shoras into consultative bodies hence attempting to restrict workers' influence on managements (Jafari b: 479, 480). However the formal Islamisation of the shoras, legally sanctioned, proved to be no guarantor of 'peaceful' industrial relations. Worker militancy persisted, as did demands for workers' control: the IRP itself developing a left wing to accommodate these developments. For example, see discussion at fifth congress of Islamic shoras, June 1982 (Jafari b: 501, 502). Meanwhile the national oil workers' shora organisation was officially suppressed in January 1982 with about 140 oil workers activists arrested and in some case executed. Yadollah Khosrowshahi was one of the oil workers' leaders arrested (fn305).

many of their gains were at first maintained and repackaged as Islamic state policy, the 5-day working week, building new houses, reducing pay and conditions inequalities between blue-collar and white-collar workers, nationalisation of foreign drilling companies. In addition, resignations and the purging of senior managers opened up routes for upward social mobility for workers expressing loyalty to the regime. But this balancing act would come to an abrupt end with the declaration of war on Iran by Iraq in June 1982. Repression gained the upper hand, many of the gains mentioned above were rolled back. Ideologically Khomeini was able legitimately to present the war as an all-out assault on the revolution, demand unconditional loyalty, and thus consolidate the state's total control over the oil workers (Jafari b: 554-5).

How did the Fadaïyan, the largest secular leftist organisation with growing roots in the shoras, understand the complexities thrown up by what appeared to be the rapid Islamisation of the revolution?

Farrokh Negahdar, Fadaïyan leader, argues that their organisation at first based their intervention in the shoras on the model of the Bolsheviks providing leadership in the soviets which played such a decisive role in the 1917 Russian Revolution.

We were copying the same model. And our understanding is that the process that happened to Bolshevik Revolution from February to October is happening in Iran. We have to prepare ourselves for a socialist revolution based on the transfer of power to the shoras. And this idea was widely accepted by members of our organisation (A-FN: 383).

But they were quickly disillusioned.

In the workplaces, particularly in the oil industry, the steel corporation in Ahwaz, universities, civil service, municipalities and other government organisations, people themselves formed shoras. They started to decide who should be head of the departments, who should deliver the demands of the employees, the workers. The shoras survived until the summer of 1979, perhaps until the autumn. They lasted about 6 months maximum. After that Khomeini and the government started to maintain their control in workplaces (A-FN: 384).

The Fadaïyan and the Left in general confronted a reality completely different to that of the Bolsheviks in Russia in 1917. Lenin's famous demand "All Power to the Soviets" assumed a workers' state based on workers' soviets rooted in the workplaces and the localities was a plausible outcome of the 1917 Russian revolutionary upheavals and process. But it was far more problematic for the Left in the Iranian shoras to raise a similar demand. Firstly, organisations like the Fadaïyan, unlike the Bolsheviks in 1917, had no developed worker cadre when the Iranian revolution erupted in 1978-9, partly as a result of their pre-occupation with the armed struggle. Secondly, as discussed in Part I, Khomeini and his nationalist allies were

at pains not to overthrow the Shah's state but to insert themselves inside it and transform it from within. The revolutionary crisis in the Iranian armed forces was different to the political and psychic collapse of the Russian Czar's army, exhausted and demoralised by the first world war. Although his brief summary risks over simplification, Farrokh Negahdar expresses it as follows.

"There was an agreement between the clerical religious elements of the revolution and the army generals to surrender the army to the ayatollahs, to Khomeini" (A-FN: 383).

Khomeini and his supporters "had carefully adopted the deliberate tactic of trying to win over the army...issuing appeals to officers as well as to the ordinary soldiers to join the revolution." Even so by July 1979, "over 60 per cent of the army had simply disappeared, most simply going home." To secure his control of the army, Khomeini conducted limited purges as well as creating the Revolutionary Guards, the *Pasdaran* and a militia tied to them, the *Basij-i Musta'zafan* (mobilisation of the dispossessed) (Cronin 2014: 200-01). But there were no soldiers' shoras, and certainly no workers' and soldiers' shoras constituting the embryo of an alternative state power. This meant that the demand on the state for 'nationalisation under workers control'was a contradiction in terms. As Moghadam noted, this demand when it was raised in the Tabriz shoras "...ironically...allowed the government to undermine activist councils..." (Moghadam 1985: 169).

The Islamic state as it consolidated, emerged unambiguously as a capitalist state, as discussed in part II, even if the state itself was a major employer. Thirdly, the soviets were seen as 'tribunes of the people', the political and democratic expression not just for organised workers but for all the exploited and oppressed peoples. The constituency of the soviet was rooted in the locality, the neighbourhood even if the strategic leadership was at the point of production in the workplace in the towns and cities. This is in sharp contrast to the shoras which were exclusively workplace based.

As Bayat pointed out, the Iranian councils were similar to the Russian factory committees which temporarily took over and ran factories during the Russian Revolution. One difference was that in Iran there were no city level type organs to which the shoras could relate (Rahnema 1992: 85).

Most of the large firms were government owned or controlled, relying, indirectly or directly, on subsidies and often involved in foreign licensing agreements with multinational corporations. Most of the shoras were located on these sites. Rahnema says this undermined

the most basic principle of the shoras, “worker control and management from below”, (Rahnema: 74), because shoras could not resist government-imposed managers for firms dependent upon government finance. But Rahnema’s conclusion is not so obvious. The demand for “worker control and pressure on management from below” did not cease when government imposed managers. We have already reported examples, particularly from the oil industry which Rahnema here ignores, which did not receive government subsidises because it was itself the source of the subsidy. There were many months of battles in the oil industry between oil workers and government-imposed managers. Also, as reported earlier, the Islamists themselves were compelled to find ways of accommodating pressures for workers’ control.

However, Rahnema raises a further argument about the role of white-collar specialists, engineers and other professionals in the leaderships of the shora movements, including the oil and steel industries. This is, perhaps, the one area where the shoras had an advantage over the soviets. Lenin knew that the revolution in Russia could not survive without the white-collar specialists, but he took for granted they were “bourgeois specialists” and had to be paid “bourgeois salaries”.³¹¹ In the Iranian revolution at least a section of the “bourgeois specialists” were committed socialists ready to put their skills at the service of the revolution.³¹² Rahnema argues their impact was double-edged. On the hand it meant that the shoras had at their disposal technical and managerial skills to support their claims for self-management and workers’ control. On the other hand their role in the shoras also depended on their political outlook. “Some with left wing orientations struggled in the interests of workers...others...pursued their own interests” (Rahnema: 82).³¹³ Rahnema argues that Bayat misunderstood this point, firstly, by not acknowledging their role in the shoras’ leadership and secondly assuming they were a homogeneous pro-management and pro-capitalist social layer.³¹⁴ However Rahnema and Bayat both agree that the Left in the shoras, “were confused about what to do and...what...role the shoras could play politically” (Bayat 1987: 146, Rahnema: 84). Rahnema cites the split in the Fadaïyan, the largest Left presence amongst the

³¹¹ *The Need of Specialists* in ‘The Soviets at Work The Problems of the Soviet Government’ (Lenin: 1918) <https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1918/mar/soviets.htm>

³¹² There is the further explanation that in modern capitalism this strata is more susceptible to working class pressures. They are no longer simply bourgeois specialists but rather they are ambiguously placed in the class structure, in “contradictory class locations”, according to an important theory developed by Erik Olin Wright. For a discussion of this and Wright’s own rejection of it, see (Callinicos 2004: 219-26).

³¹³ which meant ultimately the government’s interest. As we saw in Chapter 2, exactly the same tensions arose in Poland’s Solidarity movement.

³¹⁴ (Bayat 1987: 164). See also Jafari’s agreement with Rahnema over the role of the white collar specialists in the oil industry (Jafari b: 542).

organised workers, into its 'Majority' and 'Minority' sections, as having a "devastating effect" on the shoras. He also argues that the Left was compromised by the IRP in the shoras and its "anti-imperialist and pro-dispossessed rhetoric," which "disguised the anti-democratic and anti-working class nature of the Islamic clerics" (Rahnema: 85).

Rahnema has also emphasised the challenge the shoras faced in relating to the majority of workers and the urban poor outside the shora movement – reinforcing the distinction between the shoras and the soviets. Rahnema was politically active in one of the strongest network of shora organisations: the Union of the Workers' and Employees' Councils Development and Renovation Organisation of Iran, IDRO. IDRO was the largest industrial conglomerate in the country, comprising 110 establishments of heavy and light industry with over 40,000 workers and employees. In 1980, Rahnema carried out an extensive survey of workers' attitudes with the support of the IDRO.³¹⁵ Rahnema is today highly critical of the Left's "illusions" in the shoras, which he says, at the time, he shared (Rahnema 1992: 70). He points to the number of firms, hiring a large number of workers, the potential "proletarian fortress", was very small (Rahnema: 74). Similarly Moaddel cites "a well-known saying amongst Iran's labour activists – 'in the vast ocean of the petty bourgeoisie, the industrial concentrations represent only small islands'. In Tehran alone there were about 750,000 merchants, middlemen and retail traders...on the other hand...in large industrial enterprises (with ten or more employees)... there were 426,000 blue-collar workers and 60,000 white-collar workers." And only one fifth of these had more than a hundred employees (Moaddel: 239).

Iranian sociologist, Val Moghadam, discussed this question with 'Javad' in 1985, a former shora worker's leader in Tabriz, a major industrial city in the north western 'Azari Turkish'³¹⁶ province of Eastern Azarbaijan. Javad, was 'on the run' following the Islamic state's murderous crackdown on leftists. A former member of Paykar, he had started working in menial jobs like office sweeper, tea boy, even preparing the *aftabeh* (toilet bucket) for the workshop owner, in Tabriz's myriad of tiny workshops before obtaining skilled employment in a new motor assembly factory, typical of Iran's industrialisation surge in the 1970's. He was trained for this type of work at the Institute of Technology in Tabriz where he first encountered both leftist students as well as the 'showdowns', often physical, between leftist and religious students.

³¹⁵ Several thousand questionnaires were filled in by wage workers and over a thousand workers were interviewed. 24 large industries with over 20,000 employees were covered (Rahnema 1992: 70, 70fn2).

³¹⁶ Azari Turks speak Farsi with a Turkish dialect and comprise the largest ethnic community in Iran after the dominant Fars ('Persian'). (Moghadam 1985: 153) Unfortunately, neither Javad nor Moghadam discuss the Tabriz revolt in late 1979 raised in conclusion in part III.

Javad told Moghadam that it was his parents who had pushed him to attend both school and then the Institute, otherwise, he said, he would have started work as a rug weaver at the age of seven. Child labour was still taken for granted. The story illustrates well the co-existence of pre-industrial and industrial forms of work in 1970's Iran. Moghadam shows that despite the Shah's economic reforms, the informal, rural and urban workshop and handicraft sector remained the dominant form of employment. Javad described workers in the informal sector. For example, a Tabriz construction worker still had very strong ties to the countryside. He aspired to become a *bana*, an independent self-employed builder, while many of those labouring in the workshops longed to have their own shops.

Apologising in advance for the following statement, Javad said, 'They want to move from being 'Hassan khar' (Hassan the donkey) to 'Hassan agha' (Mr. Hassan). These workers want to become owners. Ideologically, the workers in the informal sector, for the most part, can identify more easily with traditional religious values and practices than with any secular or socialist ideas. Having come from rural areas and facing the complex realities of Iranian urban life, they can expect to be susceptible to recruitment by a religious populist movement. On the other hand, workers with urban backgrounds are more likely to be interested in secular ideas and modes of life (Moghadam 1985: 161).

This raised the critical question confronting the shoras' movement. Could they give a lead to the weaker, poorer sections, the urban workshop and rural sectors? In Tabriz the shoras were organised by mainly skilled workers including some foremen and technicians (Moghadam 1985: 167). A sophisticated politics was required to reach out to the unskilled workers in the factories and the mass of poorer workers in the informal workshop sectors in the rest of the city. Javad describes how in Tabriz shora politics were dominated by the Fadaiyan, Paykar and the Mojahadin. These organisations were unable to respond to this challenge. In fairness, they had little time, they quickly came under attack when the Left in all the shoras found that their defence of the Kurdish revolt against Khomeini's regime, especially in August 1979, made them also a target of the regime. Nevertheless the Tabriz shoras survived, at least briefly and even developed, in the winter of 1979-80, a co-ordinating committee uniting eight factory councils, initiated by supporters of Fadaiyan and Paykar. The workers' council at the machine-tool factory, representing 3,000 workers, was the leader; other councils were at the lift-truck, motor assembly plants and several others. Altogether, the coordinating council represented 5,000 workers (Moghadam 1985: 168). At the same time the Islamic Associations organised by

the Islamic Republican Party intervened. Unfortunately Moghadam gives only a very brief description on how they took control of the shoras.

Assef Bayat in a separate investigation of the urban poor, has challenged the view that they were so obviously a vanguard base for Khomeini and the political Islamists.³¹⁷ He agrees that “the portrayal of the revolution by new Islamic leaders as the *inqilab-l mustaz’afin*, the revolution of the downtrodden, signified the so called centrality of the underclass to the revolutionary process” (Bayat 1997: 37). But Bayat, using empirical data, shows the poor, squatters’ illegal settlements for example battling the Shah’s paramilitaries, (Bayat 1997: 46), organised separately, independently of the religious leaders. He notes that the term *mustaz’afin* entered Khomeini’s discourse only during the height of the revolution. But he argues that it was used “merely to repudiate the Communists and attempted to offer an alternative (Islamic) conceptualisation of the poor” (Bayat 1997: 43). Immediately after the revolution, Bayat charts in detail an escalating kaleidoscope of numerous, scattered actions by the poor, squatters seizing unused land, the homeless occupying empty homes and even hotels after their owners had fled, unemployed actions, including sit-downs, occupations and hunger strikes, and the growth of unemployed action committees. Sometimes there was explicit Islamic intervention, the hotel occupations, (Bayat 1997: 63), but as often it was the Leftist groups or simply talented, courageous individuals giving a lead with no prior political or organisational history. At the same time, employed workers were resisting “lock-outs and lay-offs”, in other words unemployment. Immediately after the revolution this was the cause of twenty per cent of “worker collective actions...the largest proportion if industrial action” (Bayat 1997: 119). Yet Bayat is unable to report any worker shora policy or campaign strategies connecting to the unemployed activists’ movement. In fact the unemployed activists’ movement was momentarily very impressive. In April 1979, delegates from twenty cities and towns met for three days in the House of Labour in Tehran with the aim of creating a national unemployed organisation. It called on all the unemployed to join the Mayday demonstration. It warned the government of “harsher and more resolute measures” if no action was taken to

³¹⁷ Moghadam’s comments are also relevant here. She had asked Tabriz worker shora leader Javad about his family life and the importance of religion. “It should be noted that the Khomeini phenomenon notwithstanding, anti-clerical sentiment within large segments of the population, rural and urban, is longstanding, and can be found in the poetry of Hafez and in popular jokes. Javad’s response to my query confirmed this view. ‘My mother and father didn’t like clerics; they didn’t like beards’, he laughed. His parents were, however, believers: ‘My mother always prayed’. His father became religious, he said, only as he grew old, because ‘he was afraid of what might happen after he died’. The family observed religious periods, such as rowzeh, but otherwise they were, in Javad’s own words, ‘anti-clerical’” (Moghadam 1987: 154).

alleviate their plight (Bayat 1997: 125-6). Sadly the Mayday demonstration was to be the high point of the movement. One reason for its demise was the failure to consolidate links with the organised workers' contingents on Mayday. Bayat in his earlier study of workplace shoras did point to the disconnect with "the mass movement outside the points of production" (Bayat 1987: 96). Yet we see glimpses of the way successful shora campaigns might have raised similar demands for the urban poor.

Ali Pichgah described the Tehran oil refinery shora campaign for its own housing demands.

We did manage to get the land and divide it amongst workers. It meant each worker received 200 square metres of land and some of them started building their houses on that (A-AP: 397).

The oil workers' shora might have taken up housing crisis in the city more generally. In Abadan, oil workers obtained land to build 3000 houses, developing "housing cooperatives, the first of their kind in Iran..." (Jafari b: 538). Oil woman workers' committee member Kobra Qasemi implies that shora sentiment existed to become 'tribune of the people.'

You know oil workers have a high position, economically, compared to other workers. There were not really many things we wanted for ourselves. We wanted to interfere in political issues, for others (A-KQ: 402).

There was even support amongst the most enlightened of the clergy for a debate about the democratisation of political power. Ayatollah Taleghani envisioned a socialistic Islam with emphasis on popular democracy and community control over politics. City and regional councils should run the country (Parsa: 293-4). However the reality is that the shoras had minimal impact on the politics of the urban poor, prior to the undermining of their independence and formal 'Islamisation'.³¹⁸

V. Conclusion

The struggle for popular democracy, the struggle for a workers' democracy

In the early 1990's, Saeed Rahnema interviewed several leading former cadres of the Fadaiyan. They were, anyway, participating in a series of discussions which Rahnema describes as "reformist debates which came to be known as 'the New Insight'" (Rahnema: 2004). In every interview the former Fadaiyan leaders reject the Stalinism or Soviet-style Communism that had

³¹⁸ And even less impact on the much larger rural poor: In a simple but revealing analysis of the class structure of Iran in the 1970's, Abrahamian recorded 32% of the population belonging to the urban 'lower classes', 45% belonging to the rural 'lower classes', composing landed peasants, near landless peasants, landless peasants, rural unemployed (Abrahamian 2008: 140).

dominated their thinking and political action in the Iranian Revolution and instead appear to be embracing variants of liberal democracy. Here are five brief extracts (Rahnema 2004: 257-8)

Ali Keshtgar, a former member of the Central Committee and Political Bureau:

The Iranian left arrives at the conclusion that, without wide-ranging political and individual freedoms, [social] justice is unattainable. ..The new left puts aside the Bolshevik-style party...[and along with it] the notion of “professional revolutionaries”.

Nasser Kakh-saz, a celebrated Iranian Left political figure:

As for the ‘Workers’ question...the theory of class struggle that [believes] workers [should become] masters of society is not valid. The left, while defending the rights of workers, should make the workers conscious that no class should be superior among different social classes.

Nasser Rahim-khani, a former member of the Central Committee and its Political Bureau, and long-time political prisoner:

The most important aspect of the new perspective is that it distances from its past dogmas...The left comes to the conclusion that it cannot explain and analyze the world...on the basis of a once-and-for-all pre-determined paradigm and ideological framework...The main elements of this development relates to a revisiting and rethinking of ideology...and the question of democracy, be it political democracy...in-party organizational democracy...or democracy between parties or within a front...Each ideology turns its believers to a cult...For its believers, ideology becomes an obstructive element in thought, in method and in behaviour...each ideology develops its own set of internal rules and criteria, a set of behavioural patterns, customs, rituals, ceremonies and manners.

Heybat Ghafari, another former Central Committee and Political Bureau member and a long-time political prisoner.

To understand the new perspectives, you need to consider what were the main features of the old perspective. We had a simple unidimensional perception of the world...Our perspectives...similar on many accounts with those of the Islamic Republic...had the following features...We thought if a regime nationalizes the economy and brings it under state control, all problems will be solved...We were advocates of a single party system...and an ideological state...We talked a lot about human rights but in reality we did not believe in these rights...and left them to the bourgeoisie to defend...Our theory of imperialism...and the notion that whoever is against imperialism is our ally...put Khomeini on our side.

Bijan Rezai (pseudonym), another Central Committee and Political Bureau and long-time political prisoner:

We believed that socialism and communism...could be attained through force and dictatorship. The new perspective is the revision of this way of thinking. Of course, Marx himself did not believe in progress through dictatorship and through leadership...he

rejected the notion that society should be divided into a minority of decision makers and administrators, and a majority who follow their orders. Politically [the old perspective]...focused on the role of vanguards...those isolated from the society, yet the ones who should lead the masses. Organizationally...it focused on the role of a minority of active revolutionaries in an elitist organization with sharp boundaries dividing them from the masses...The new developments question all these perceptions.

Similarly Farrokh Negahdar told me.

...not only Fadaiyan but every Left oriented movement around the world was affected by Stalinism...(But) the reason why the shoras crashed has nothing to do with Islamism or Marxism. Shoras have no place in a modern organised society. Nowhere has that experience been implemented so far. We do not have any reliable background history of shoras' governance. We start with the Paris Commune and the soviets in the Bolshevik Revolution – but it's always a very short lived phenomena. You can't say Islamists destroyed the shoras. Shoras would have ended with normal governance, which is not shora based. Shora is a dream, a myth for self governance of the masses... I abandoned many of the unrealistic elements in our ideology and world outlook. First, I believed that the world was divided by two parts, the West is evil and the East is good. I realised when the Soviet Union collapsed that the world is not divided like that. Both these elements exist, mixed with each other, everywhere in our world. The second is about how to rule these societies. What is the best way of organising life? The consent of the people is the most important, the core element of governance is that consent. If you can't deliver that consent you have to go. You have to get rid of mental or practical elements of your policy should be abandoned if the consent of the people is missing (A-FN: 388).

Rahnema concluded that in his opinion.

"None succeeded in clarifying the ambiguities and contradictions of their arguments, and they failed to develop a theoretical framework for the new perspective. It was obvious from the start that they had totally broken with past paradigms and dogmas, but they could not develop new theories and perspectives. Their failure to theorize was a reminder of what Kautsky had said about some European revisionists: "they have nothing to revise, as they have no theory" (Rahnema 2004: 259-60).³¹⁹

However a non-Stalinist, yet Marxist, even pro Leninist democratically-based theoretical and historical model was available during the Iranian revolution. In November and December 1918, at the end of the first world war, workers' and soldiers' councils briefly flourished across Germany. This appeared to be the much anticipated internationalisation of the 1917 Russian socialist revolution. Certainly that's how they were greeted by Russia's revolutionary leaders, Lenin and Trotsky and by Germany's revolutionary socialist leaders-in-waiting, Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht.³²⁰ Alas, it was not to be. Hostile ideological and organisational political

³¹⁹ Lenin would have said the same about Kautsky, nevertheless, the point stands.

³²⁰ There is an enormous literature on this subject. I reference some of it in (Rose: 2015).

forces opposed to the revolutionary overthrow of capitalism but committed instead to its reform through parliament were overwhelming. This found expression in the German socialist party, the SPD.³²¹ The SPD had a majority amongst the workers and especially the soldiers in the workers' and soldiers' councils. Despite the councils momentarily holding political power during those two months, (Hoffrogge 2014: 6), and to that extent they were far more advanced than the workers' shoras in Iran, the pressure to capitulate to parliament proved irresistible. Two developments are particularly relevant: First, Luxemburg's and Lenin's appeal that circumstances now dictated that communists should participate in parliamentary politics. Second, the fight for workers' rights in parliamentary democracies, especially organisational independence in the workplace, should be guaranteed in capitalism's legally binding constitutions. The German Communist Party had just been formed and Luxemburg was to lose this argument, despite the authority Lenin was giving it. Indeed Lenin wrote one of his most famous pamphlets, *'Left wing' Communism, an Infantile Disorder*, insisting that it was "obligatory" for communists to use parliament as a platform to argue for an alternative politics. It "is not possible to bring about the soviets' victory over parliament without getting pro-soviet politicians into parliament, without disintegrating parliamentarianism from within." (Lenin 1968: 64)³²²

In Iran, the workers' shoras were similarly overwhelmed by hostile ideological and organisational political forces, the Islamic movement. However the Islamic movement, unlike the SPD, had no a priori commitment to parliamentary democracy. The Islamic movement was an all-class movement, very dependent upon its base in the mosques and the bazaars. The German SPD was *the* major working class party, its base was Germany's long established trade unions, and it had a strong rhetorical commitment to achieving socialism through parliament. This allowed it to survive its surrender to Germany's nationalist rulers during the first world war and successfully present itself and its democratic credentials to a working class electorate after the war.

In Iran, when it became clear that the workers' shoras could not offer an alternative route for the revolution, a route where the workers' democracy of the shoras would have laid the foundations for the new revolutionary state, an immediate switch in strategy became essential. The Islamic movement was openly split over popular democracy, parliamentary democracy, theocracy versus democracy. The shoras could have intervened in the debate over

³²¹ The complication of the split in the SPD need not concern us here as it doesn't affect the general argument.

³²² See also (Rose: 2013).

the Islamic constitution, calling for maximum democratic freedoms. The shora Left needed a voice in the planned new constituent assembly explaining the enormous potential political significance of the workers' shoras. It was surely "obligatory" to fight for that outcome.

In Germany, the prestige of the workers' and soldiers' councils extracted an ambiguous double-edged but nevertheless legally binding guarantee of workers' rights in the new post-war Weimar constitution.

The constitution's Article 65 sought "to integrate the working class...organisations into appendages of the employers' authority through the *Mitbestimmungsrecht*, the right to participation and to consultation. The workers' organisations had rights in questions of administration and general policy of the firm's working conditions, hiring and firing, and, in addition, they formed the electoral basis for the 'workers' section' of the membership of the Economic Council...the fact that they were elected by all the working people in the firm...meant that revolutionaries could make use of them" (Broué 2006: 608).

Of course, the objective was to consolidate the employer's authority with institutions which were designed to enhance working class collaboration. But to be credible they had to concede a degree of independence to workplace organisation. This meant independently elected factory councils. The employers expected the full time trade union officials to help maintain orderly industrial relations and 'integrate' these factory committees. Nevertheless Heinrich Brandler, the German Communist Party leader, argued that the factory councils could strive for independence even from the trade union officials. During the Communist Party Congress in November 1920, Brandler gave a very upbeat account of the prospects for the factory councils: that they had the potential for workers to assert some "control of production, stocktaking, accounting and records, which would help the workers to learn that the rule of the bourgeoisie had to be overthrown" (Broué 2006: 609).³²³

The German communists in 1919 had one tremendous advantage over their Iranian counterparts in 1979. Both shared the experience of taking part in revolutionary upheavals, toppling tyrannies, as a result of decisive collective workers' action. Both shared the experience of witnessing and participating in very advanced experimental forms, though at different stages of development, of organised workers attempting to establish democratic

³²³ This was not so far-fetched. In 1923 the factory councils, led by the German Communists, would lead a mass revolutionary movement of hundreds of thousands of workers, successfully call a general strike, independent of the trade union leaders, and topple a particularly unpopular government (Rose: 2016).

forms of workers control of production. Both shared the experience of hostile political and organisational forces undermining and ultimately eliminating these experiments.³²⁴

But the German Left had at least secured elementary democratic and constitutional rights, which allowed the German communists and the independent workers' movement time to recover from the defeat. The tragedy of the Iranian Left is that not only was this decisive advantage denied to them, the Iranian Left itself has to share some of the responsibility for this failure. The struggle for popular democracy, including the defence of women's rights, and an independent press, in 1979 was just as important as defending the workers' shoras and defending the new regime's anti-imperialists' stance. This meant different tactical and strategic alliances with different groups of Islamists at different times and on different occasions. It meant elevating the importance of the struggle over the democratic content of the new Islamic Republican constitution to a fundamental priority, including, where necessary, temporary tactical alliances with Islamic liberals.³²⁵ But as Rahnema 's interviews illustrate, the Stalinist mind-set not only ruled out such essential tactical and strategic flexibility, it altogether downplayed the importance of the struggle for popular democracy for the simple reason that it didn't believe in it.

In conclusion, let's echo the words spoken to Saeed Rahnema by former Fadaian leader, Bijan Rezai. Marx did not believe that socialism and communism should be based on force and dictatorship. A socialist society would not be divided into a minority of decision makers and administrators, elitist organization with sharp boundaries dividing them from the masses. Soviet 'communism' wasn't communism at all but a masquerade. Little wonder that Iran's political Islamists could so successfully borrow its costumes.

³²⁴ Sections of the SPD leadership were just as bloodthirsty and ruthless as some of their Iranian political Islamist counterparts when it came to eliminating the Marxist Left. In January 1919, SPD right wing Defence Minister Gustav Noske, working closely with the Freikorps, armed right wing vigilantes, was associated with the murder of Luxemburg and Liebknecht and many more: Freikorps: "nationalist death squads with swastikas on their steel helmets" (Hoffrogge 2014: 195).

³²⁵ The argument here assumes the emergence of a coherent Marxist party during this period which would have campaigned for a united shoras' movement as a society-wide political movement and which, of course, did not happen. The organisation most likely to form the core of such a party, the Fadaian in fact split. Both of the left wing oil workers' leaders interviewed here, Ali Pichgah and Yadollah Khosroshahi, point to the absence of such a party as a fundamental weakness in the shoras' movement.

Conclusion

The independent workers' movements in Poland, South Africa and Iran have sometimes been compared to the revolutionary syndicalist workers' movements in the early part of the last century.³²⁶ There is little agreement on a precise definition of revolutionary syndicalism (van der Linden 2003: 49-84).³²⁷ Here I concentrate on what syndicalism seems to have in common with the workers' movements in Poland, South Africa and Iran, adapting a definition used by the Iranian scholar Assef Bayat. He described syndicalism, in the case of Iran, as workers' action confined to the industrial workplace, assuming in principle that social relations at the point of production were the determining factor in the social structure (Bayat 1987: 146).³²⁸ It will be argued that this focus, or partial definition, also fits both the Poland and South Africa case studies rather well. It raises the crucial question: can workers seize control of the means of production without confronting the state?

The question had been raised particularly dramatically during the mass strike and wave of factory occupations that swept Italy in September 1920, as one million workers took over the running of the factories, with factory councils springing up across the country. As Darlington has observed, "even though workers took control of production, the capitalist class still maintained a firm grip on the institutions of political state power, including the army and police...two irreconcilable forces found themselves locked in mortal combat..." (Darlington 2008: 250) Darlington cites Gramsci's damning assessment. "It is essential that workers should not believe for one instant that the communist revolution is as easy to accomplish as the occupation of an undefended factory. These events, on the contrary...show up with blinding clarity the...anarcho-syndicalist utopia..." (Darlington 2008: 251) Gramsci goes on to insist that

³²⁶ Van der Linden on Poland's Solidarity movement (van der Linden 2003: 66, 79); Byrne, Ulrich, van der Walt 2017: (254-273) on South Africa's 'workerist' movement and syndicalism; Bayat on the Iranian revolution's workers' shora movement discusses comparisons with syndicalism (Bayat 1987: 146).

³²⁷ The classic view of revolutionary syndicalism is usually associated with George Sorel's perspective of the revolutionary general strike "...it counts on expelling the capitalist from the productive domain, and on (workers) taking their place in the workshop..." The state is seen as the protector of capitalism hence the objective of the revolutionary general strike is "to suppress the state" (Sorel 1950: 167). However in practice syndicalism has taken many forms which does not take confrontation with the state for granted. Van der Linden cites research on the emerging trade union movement in France at the start of the twentieth century where revolutionary syndicalists relied on the "liberal state they despised", intervening on behalf of strikers to help defeat the employers to gain concessions (Van der Linden 2003: 77).

³²⁸ Bayat based this explanation on Hinton's description of syndicalist influence on the revolutionary shop stewards, workers' shop floor representatives, in Britain. (Hinton, James, *The First Shop-Steward Movement* London, Allen Lane, 1973).

a political-economic centre, the workers' state, is essential to unite one factory to another and to take over the banks to support workers' self-management. In April of the same year, 50,000 troops had been in the city of Turin, the main organising centre for the factory occupations, with armed reinforcements on the city's outskirts. Gramsci had similarly warned not to limit "insurrectional action to a factory or a town". The factory occupation is "just one element in relation to state power". (Darlington 2008: 251)³²⁹ In the end the Italian Socialist Party and the trade union leaders defused the situation which ended the factory occupations, despite their rhetorical enthusiasm for them. But the employers were severely shaken by the experience. Socialist revolution may have been put on hold but counter revolution now stalked in the shadows. Mussolini and Italian Fascism began their march to power. Of course, this in no way dampened Gramsci's awe and respect for the workers' creativity in the factory occupations. They had indeed confirmed Marx's and Engel's 1848 *Communist Manifesto* prediction that workers could seize control and reorganise production in their own interests. But the question of who controlled the state was left fatally unanswered, which is why Lenin's *State and Revolution* is the twentieth century complement of the *Communist Manifesto*.

This perspective provides the framework for the rest of this conclusion, comparing and contrasting the three case studies at different levels,³³⁰ first, (I), the limitations on even very advanced forms of workers' control imposed both by pre-revolutionary and post-revolutionary national-state structures in the three countries: second, (II), the relations between organised workers at the point of production and the urban poor, the argument hinging on the former winning the support of the latter for a successful confrontation with the state: third, (III), the relations between organised workers at the point of production and the professional technocrats, engineers and managers, again, the argument hinging on the former winning at least some support from the latter: fourth, (IV), the role of rank and file workers' leaders and worker intellectuals at the point of production and their need for a revitalised non Stalinist communist party or revolutionary socialist party to maximise their effectiveness: fifth, (V), the conservative role of the Communist state in Poland and the Communist Parties in South Africa and Iran: how they undermined the independent workers' movements in the three countries and their implicit aspirations for a genuine communism based upon workers' control of production. This made it very difficult to develop new independent communist or

³²⁹ Darlington's Gramsci references: *Selections from Political Writings: 1910-20* (London 1977), respectively *The Occupation* (1977: 327), *Turin and Italy* (1977:182-4).

³³⁰ "You should try and make these case studies speak to each other and address similar topics, so you can compare and draw conclusions." E mail communication (28/05/2019) Peyman Jafari, Iranian scholar, cited in Chapter 4.

revolutionary socialist parties to articulate a revitalised communist narrative which could both compete with the dominant ideologies in the resistance movements and minimise the negative legacy of Soviet Communism.

(I). In Poland, Jacek Kuron and the KOR leadership that transferred to Solidarity brought with them the *Anti-Politics* perspective of the so-called *self-limiting* revolution. Workers' self-management was to be extracted from the Soviet Communist satellite state of Poland through negotiations, without provoking Moscow's intervention with Soviet tanks. But this perspective was shattered at Bydgoszcz, March 1981. The call for an all-out general strike – in response to the police assault on Solidarity leaders - would have brought Poland to a halt (as it had done in the earlier 4-hour general strike). The loyalty of the Communist Party membership and the morale of Poland's police and army were disintegrating by the hour. But just the threat of Moscow's intervention forced a retreat, the general strike was abandoned. Martial law was imposed at the end of the year. At least, however, Poland's independent Solidarity workers' movement had reached its full potential - it had demonstrated a fundamental Marxist principle that an organised workers' movement can provide political leadership for all the oppressed and all others across society, the vast majority.

In South Africa the "workerist" led independent workers' movement did not reach its full potential. It became instead a very junior, indeed, arguably, subservient, partner of the ANC, the African National Congress. It had failed to stand by one of the very principles it, itself, had enunciated. As reported in Chapter 3, in 1982, a white trade union organiser had been tortured to death in a police station. FOSATU, the recently formed Federation of South African Trade Unions, which preceded COSATU, called strikes on the day of his funeral. More than 100,000 workers responded. The solidarity strike helped inspire the legendary speech by FOSATU general secretary, Joe Foster, at the Federation's 1982 April conference. The Foster speech came to be seen as a 'manifesto' for the "workerist" movement, with its very advanced and unambiguous aspirations for workers' control of production. But did those aspirations go beyond the workplace? A recently published paper, defending "workerism" and FOSATU, insists that that they did. "Nor did workerism reject struggles beyond the workplace. FOSATU stated it would 'support any democratic organisation involved in struggles in the community.'" (Byrne, Ulrich, van der Walt 2017: 263)³³¹ But the test of this principle – solidarity - had

³³¹ I would like to thank Eddie Webster for pointing out to me the importance of this paper. Webster is a pivotal figure in the studies of the black workers' movement. Ch3p123fn206.

presented itself very dramatically with the miners' strike of August 1987. "Workerism" failed the test. An ANC induced strategy of "ungovernability" had come to the townships. After the launch of COSATU in 1985, it spread to the workplaces with a strike wave, successful because of solidarity action. With the miners' strike, the largest strike in South African history bringing paralysis to the coal, gold and all the precious metals' mines, the heartbeat of the apartheid economy, ungovernability threatened the apartheid state itself. But the miners could not win without solidarity. James Motlatsi, former working migrant miner and National Union of Mineworkers President at the time of the 1987 strike, and the strike's principal leader, alongside General Secretary, Cyril Ramaphosa, accepted this position in my interview with him. Similarly Bethuel Maserumule, one of the most militant "workerist" leaders in the metal workers' union, NUMSA, deplored the failure of metal workers' solidarity with the 1987 miners' strike. The reality was that "workerism" did tend trap itself within the confines of the workplace. This was illustrated very vividly in von Holdt's study of the "workerist" stronghold at Highveld steelworks, one of South Africa's biggest industrial companies, producer of precious metals, also owned by AngloAmerican, the main mining company. The Witbank region also produced most of the country's coal, in turn producing half of South Africa's electricity. The Witbank mines were also amongst the most militant in the country. But there was no steel worker solidarity with the miners. von Holdt noted a failure at the steelworks to discuss socialist politics. This was historically a classic criticism of syndicalism (Darlington 2008: 233-45).

Maserumule also observed that "workerism" repeatedly underestimated the impact and ideological influence of the ANC and the national liberation movement outside the workplaces. There is an interesting comparison here with the independent workers' movement in the Iranian revolution. The workers' council 'shoras' influence was also restricted to the workplaces. Impressive though the shoras were, they were unable to withstand either the ideological or organisational onslaught of political Islam. Here the question of who controlled the state was crucial. Workers' control of production and even distribution was often very advanced. But in the oil industry, in particular, which was the leader both in terms of the economy as well as in terms of workers' resistance, both before and after the fall of the Shah, the question of state control was never in doubt. Oil workers' shoras might impose far-reaching demands on local management but ultimately they had to contend with national state management. This raises the question of what kind of post-revolutionary 'Islamic' state, democratic or theocratic? At least in a democratic state, the Marxist Left might have had a voice. But it was never going to be a workers' state. This would have meant the transformation

of the shoras into the equivalents of the early soviets in the Russian Revolution. But this necessitated a Marxist Left, which properly understood the complexity of the situation, itself dependent upon open political discussion – anathema to the Stalinist tradition which dominated the Iranian Marxist Left, having far greater roots both in the shoras as well as amongst the urban poor, a decisive base for political Islam. The question of the urban poor will be considered shortly but before this part of the discussion closes, the comparative strengths, as well as the weaknesses, of these independent workers’ movements must also be briefly acknowledged.

Karol Modzelewski remains Poland’s principal witness to the strength of feeling generated by the aspiration to workers’ self-management, the defining characteristic of the Solidarity movement. He might have broken with the Marxism of the *Open Letter* he had co-written with Jacek Kuron, but he remained committed to the Marxist principle of workers taking control of their own lives by taking control of the means of production. He looked on with mounting incredulity as the ‘reformed’ Solidarity leaders, many personal friends now converted to a neoliberal agenda, trampled all over this principle at the so-called Round Table negotiations in 1990 which dismantled the Soviet Communist-style Polish state. Modzelewski took this shock and despair to his grave in 2019. It is also appropriate to recall that Jan Rulewski, one of the Solidarity leaders badly beaten by the police at the height of Bydgoszcz revolutionary crisis in March 1981, was a bicycle design engineer who relished the prospect of workers’ involvement in the design of exciting new bicycle products appropriate for the twenty first century. In Rulewski’s view, here was a source of innovation far more dynamic and potentially productive than reliance on the crisis-prone driver of capitalist competition. Black workers at the South African East London plant of Mercedes Benz in the early 1990’s also proved self-managed workers to be far more productive than workers managed by capitalists. They built a special bullet-proof luxury model as a gift for Mandela. Union power in the plant was such that management had rapidly agreed. Mandela’s car came off the production line so quickly and with so few faults that it provoked outrage and astonishment from the company chairman. As noted, a tribute indeed from one of international capital’s most prestigious corporations. In the Iranian Revolution, Torab Saleh gave the example of the largest battery factory in Iran, employing 500-600 workers, a joint venture company with its base in Japan providing the technology. After the revolution, the Iranian management fled and the workers’ shora took over. Quality control was based in Japan, so they sent samples to Japan to prove they could maintain technological standards. They attempted to establish their own distribution networks, even setting up tents to sell the batteries outside the factory which was part of the

country's main industrial centre. Of course, this could only be a temporary arrangement. It was almost political and economic theatre but that made it no less significant. Inevitably, the Japanese parent company and the Iranian state would undermine their efforts. Yet workers' self-management had been proved possible. But it was sustainable only if had been part of a far wider political movement, rising to the challenge of both a hostile national state and, in this case, an ultimate dependency on international capitalism.

(II). In Poland, the Solidarity workers' movement commanded the support of the vast majority in society. This was confirmed when Rural Solidarity was formed, the countryside backing the towns and cities, the Bydgoszcz crisis perceived correctly as existentially threatening to the Soviet-backed Polish state. In South Africa and Iran, the organised workers' movements alone could never claim majority support. This hinged on the role of the urban poor. In South Africa, this had expressed itself in the tension between "populists" in the townships and the "workerists" in the workplaces. The exiled ANC and the SACP leaderships saw the township rather than the shopfloor worker as the primary agency of liberation from apartheid. In 1985, this was by no means secure. Indeed the launch of COSATU triggered a strike wave which might have shifted that balance, if the miners' strike had been successful. The apartheid state itself expressed this fear by putting on trial for treason in 1986, metalworkers' leader and leading "workerist", Moses Mayekiso, the prosecution papers making it clear that they wanted to break the link between workplace and community-based politics. SACP leader Jo Slovo had described the UDF, (the ANC-backed United Democratic Front in the townships), as the umbrella of the broad legal liberation front. Slovo's 1988 paper, *The South African Working Class and the National Democratic Revolution*, explicitly ruled out a political role for COSATU. The exiled liberation movement led by the ANC and the SACP had a growing and strong internal base in the townships, including the township majority, the urban poor. "Workerist" politics, by contrast, were frail and could not compete, even though Mayekiso was right, shop floor power at the point of production was potentially the decisive ingredient for a successful revolution against the apartheid state. This conundrum can only be unravelled by exploring the politics of the SACP, to which we will return. In Iran, the Islamic movement, with its base in the mosques, was the decisive voice amongst the urban poor, in the cities' slums, shanty towns, and especially the tiny traditional workshops in the bazaars. The mosques were also a decisive influence even in the more modern industrial sector, including the oil industry. And this was not just because most workers were religious. The traditional Left, led by the old Communist

Tudeh Party, was in forced exile. The new Left, in the form of urban guerrilla organisations, mainly the Fadaiyan and the Islamic leftist Mojahedin, with their pre-occupation with the armed struggle, were slow in realising the potential of the revolutionary mass movement gathering both on the streets and in the workplaces. Street demonstrations and later industrial strike plans were often made in the mosques. The leftist groups were late in rooting themselves in the workplaces. Bayat makes a spirited defence of some leftist and independent organisation amongst the urban poor but concedes a vital point of the Islamists' strategy and ideology: "the portrayal of the revolution by new Islamic leaders as the *inqilab-I mustaz'afin*, the revolution of the downtrodden, signified the so called centrality of the underclass to the revolutionary process." In my interview with him, former Fadaiyan leader, Farrokh Negahdar, explained well the overwhelming pressure exerted by the Islamists. The bazaars, as much as the mosques and the factories, were major organising units of the revolution. The innovative interventions of the workers' shoras in the modern workplaces had the potential to assert overall political leadership, to become the "tribune of the people". That was the challenge for the independent leftist groups, belatedly rooting themselves in the shoras. But they could not meet it, unable to abandon the legacy-as-burden of failed official Communist politics both at national state and political party levels.

(III). In their *Open Letter* to the Polish Communist Party, Kuron and Modzelewski, anticipating a revolutionary workers' movement against Poland's Soviet-satellite state, had warned against what they described as the "technocratic current" undermining the resistance. This was the social layer of professional technocrats, engineers and managers, traditionally politically conservative but capable of asserting their own independent political demands in times of economic, social and political crisis. This social layer is indispensable to any system of workers' control or self-management. Even the demand for workers' self-management betrays a potential ambiguity in relation to these professional experts. For some, but by no means all, Polish managers who supported Solidarity, 'self-management' offered the prospect of breaking away from the Polish Communist state system in favour of the 'free market'. An independent workers' co-operative might be proposed which would then seek foreign private investment, some members of the "technocratic current" re-inventing themselves as entrepreneurial capitalists. A perspective very much favoured by the purveyors of neo-liberalism who stalked Solidarity during the martial law period in the mid to late 1980's and who were so brilliantly exposed in those autobiographical extracts of Karol Modzelewski. However Saeed Rahnama, the Iranian scholar cited in Ch4, demonstrated that this was a contested pathway for the "technocratic current" in the Iranian Revolution. Some of the white collar specialists, engineers

and other professionals in the leaderships of the shora movements, including the oil and steel industries, were committed socialists ready to put their skills at the service of a revolution which they saw as potentially socialist. It was argued that this reinforced the view of the sociologist Olin Wright who proposed that this social layer was ambiguously placed in the class structure, in “contradictory class locations” and susceptible to the pressures of rank and file organised workers if it proved possible to align their mutual interests. In Poland too there were outstanding examples of white collar specialists, Solidarity leaders, committed to the workers’ cause. Jan Rulewski, the bicycle design engineer committed to workers’ control and at the centre of the Bydgoszcz revolutionary crisis in March 1981, also Andrzej Gwiazda, professional engineer, was one of Solidarity’s most outstanding leaders. It is worth recalling the report of journalist Tim Garton Ash who travelled with Gwiazda in the early months of the Solidarity upheavals. He described “Gwiazda as a fighter for fundamental principles, with more than a streak of intransigence...more closely in tune with the mood of the workers than the counsellors of caution.” As I pointed in Chapter 2, I interviewed Andrzej Gwiazda and his wife Joanna Duda-Gwiazda, also a founder of the Free Trade Unions which preceded Solidarity, in November 2017 at their home, a tiny flat in a tower block, still overlooking the remnant of the port at Gdansk, Solidarity’s birthplace – seen clearly in Marta Dzido’s magnificent film *Women of Solidarity, Kobiety Solidarności*. The Gwiazdas were middle class professionals who had effectively ‘proletarianised’ themselves. Irrespective of their political outlook today, they proved to be hardened fighters throughout the 1980’s, sharing the contempt expressed by Modzelewski for the Solidarity leadership which collapsed into neo-liberalism. The experience of the workers’ movements both in Iran and Poland proved it was possible to win some significant support from this vital layer of middle class professionals. In South Africa, the apartheid structure made this almost impossible. The “technocratic current” was almost exclusively white and pro-regime.

(IV.) Worker-intellectuals, who emerge as leaders in independent workers’ struggles, are not simply discovering suppressed personal natural talents. They are the most articulate exponents of a fascinating trend in revolutionary periods, the opening up to knowledge, previously understood to be beyond the reach of the ordinary man or woman. Solidarity workers’ leader, Władysław Frasyniuk expressed this extremely well. But Władysław Frasyniuk’s educational programme politically was, perhaps understandably, limited to extolling the virtues of the freedoms available in liberal democracies. Marxist classics were ruled out, assumed to be

tainted by, and even responsible for, the totalitarian practice of the Soviet Union and its satellite state system. This denied Polish workers the ultimate intellectual challenge: how to grasp Marxist ideas untainted by Stalinism. Kuron and Modzelewski's *Open Letter* might have been a start-point. But as we saw in Chapter 2, Kuron was by now aggressively denouncing the pamphlet. This also meant that Polish workers had no idea how similar the Solidarity revolution was, in its early phases, to the Russian revolution, in *its* early phases – not least the enthusiasm for workers to widen their intellectual horizons.³³² By contrast, Bethuel Maserumule, the South African black “workerist” leader, had no such problem with the Marxist classics. He had read Marx, Lenin, Trotsky, Luxemburg, and also Mao, Che.³³³ However I was surprised when he told me that he found Maoism...and guerrilla-ist concepts and approaches to struggle (more helpful). I believe this helped inform his, in my opinion, mistaken judgement in supporting the division between the shop stewards and the strike committee at strategically important Highvelds steelworks.³³⁴ But my opinion is not the point here. The point is the political and intellectual argument itself as illustration of Bethuel, a worker intellectual. And I was delighted when Bethuel attended my presentation of a summarised version of the South African chapter of my thesis at a conference in Johannesburg in June 2019,³³⁵ and participated fully in the discussion afterwards. It is perhaps worth emphasising that Bethuel has enthusiastically endorsed the interview I did with him. There can be no question that many workers’ leaders in the Iranian Revolution were worker intellectuals. Ali Pichgah, oil workers’ leader in the repairs section of the Tehran oil refinery during the revolution, described the unexpected way the repair workers made contact with the wider workforce which would help lay the basis for the Tehran oil refinery shora. Recited poetry helped cement workers’ unity. There were women worker intellectuals in the leadership of the Iranian oil workers’ shoras. Kobra Qasemi was one of the three women activists amongst the sixty representatives elected to the leading committee of the General Shora Oil Employees of Ahwaz, (Khuzestan capital), Iran’s southern ‘oil field’ regional state. They represented shoras in the oil fields, the production units, maintenance departments, and administrative offices in and around the city. She was also one of hundreds of Fadaiyan members arrested in the summer of 1979 as a prelude to the Islamic regime breaking the independent Left in the oil industry. A former sociology graduate, she had a low level administrative office job but this in no way inhibited

³³² The education programme of the Putilov works committee, a vital base for the Bolsheviks, was discussed briefly, Chapter 1 p60.

³³³ (A-BM: 333).

³³⁴ My discussion of this Ch 3 p142-44.

³³⁵ Colloquium ‘Social Change from Below’, 12-14 June 2019, Centre for Social Change, The Future Reimagined, University of Johannesburg. Kate Alexander is Research Chair in Social Change and Director: Centre for Social Change.

her provoking arguments amongst her comrades. It is worth recalling what she told me.³³⁶

Unfortunately, Kobra's political organisation blocked rather than facilitated Kobra's intellectual and political potential.

The most prominent worker leaders, those the regimes most feared because of their widespread influence, were the ones they singled out and tried to silence. They were all developing as worker-intellectuals. South Africa's Moses Mayekiso, the "workerist" metal workers' leader, put on trial for treason in 1986.³³⁷ Andrej Slowik, former bus driver, Poland Solidarity's Lodz regional leader who promoted 'Active Strikes', the euphemism for workers trying to take control of production and distribution, and which helped precipitate the imposition of martial law in December 1982. Slowik, jailed and tortured in the 1980's, became deputy Minister of Labour under Kuron in the 'Solidarity' government in the early 1990's. Slowik vehemently denied he was a worker-intellectual. Yet look again at the extract of his interview with me. Despite himself, he is not only a would-be intellectual but one grappling with the legacy of Karl Marx.³³⁸ Yadollah Khosroshahi who helped create the Iranian Syndicate of Oil Workers in the 1970's and was jailed by the Shah, released, along with others, in 1978 when demonstrations against the Shah began. Khomeini's regime would arrest him again in early 1982, along with other leaders of the Shora of Oil Industry Employees, (*Showra-ye Sarasari-ye Karkonan-e san 'at-e Naft*), following its suppression. A number of them were executed and others sentenced to long imprisonments. Khosroshahi was released in March 1983 and fled the country. He later died in London. A critical concern for Khosroshahi was that the workers' movement had "no vision of socialism", hence the need for a new socialist party (Khosroshahi: 2013). The problem of how to revitalise that vision in the shadow of Soviet Communism and its Iranian apologists, was never resolved. The same applied in Poland and South Africa, it also meant that the nascent worker intellectuals were unable fully to develop their political abilities.

(V). The historic role of the Solidarity-led workers' movement in Poland, in the period 1980-82, before the imposition of martial law, has yet to be properly acknowledged. Ten-million strong, it was arguably the largest, most democratic mass revolutionary workers' movements ever witnessed: its domineering demand for workers' self-management echoing one of the most powerful sentiments of the earlier 1968 global upheavals. Without doubt, it was the most

³³⁶ Chapter 4 p178.

³³⁷ See Kate Alexander's comments Ch3 p139fn236.

³³⁸ Chapter 2 p107-8.

important independent mass workers' movement to confront the Soviet Russian satellite state system of Communist dictatorships in the twentieth century. It played a unique part in destroying those dictatorships, helping precipitate the implosion of Soviet Communism in 1989. And it has left us a web of unresolved paradoxes. It was a revolutionary workers' movement that wanted to avoid a revolution, in its own words, wanting instead a self-limiting revolution demanding reform of the Polish Communist state, yet helped to overturn the twentieth century's largest and most important Communist inter-state system. At the same time, it itself displayed all of the characteristics of a genuine mass democratic communist workers' movement, except for one major and decisive handicap, the absence of a communist theory underpinned by a communist organisation which could have helped develop that theory, test it and revise it as circumstances dictated, generating appropriate strategies and tactics, amongst workers and intellectuals. Zbigniew Kowalewski, a Solidarity leader in Lodz, addressed these concerns in considerable detail in Chapter 2, where he outlined the extraordinary difficulties of posing a genuine communist or revolutionary socialist alternative in the oppressive context of confronting a state system acting both in the name of Communism and using, or rather misusing, its political language and concepts. This will not be repeated here except to emphasise that the absence of communist theory and organisation, or perhaps it is preferable to write the absence of a non-Stalinist marxist theory and organisation, created a political vacuum at the heart of the Solidarity movement. That vacuum was filled at first by Solidarity's theory of a self-limiting revolution which proved to be such a disaster, ill equipping it to confront the aggressive posture of the Moscow-backed Polish state which ultimately made it plain it would not tolerate a self-limiting revolution. After martial law, neo-liberalism filled the vacuum, ideologically cementing the defeat that martial law came to represent for Solidarity. It is worth noting the irony that both victor and vanquished, the Communist authorities and the cowed Solidarity leadership, had both succumbed to neoliberalism when the Communist system imploded in 1989. Chapter 2 argued that this was not an inevitable process. The Left had failed to theorise effectively Poland's crisis in the 1970's, seeing it only through the lens of the stagnation of Soviet Communism rather than the additionally wider stagnation of the global economy which was increasingly dominating both East and West. Poland's politics might have been ultimately controlled from Moscow but its economics was increasingly dependent on the good will of the Western banks, their loans increasingly linked to determining Poland's economic policies. On the basis of this, Chapter 2 posed the possibility of Kuron and Modzelewski responding differently to the weaknesses of their original *Open Letter*. Rather than abandoning it, they might have revised it, re-presenting

it as an up-dated *Communist Manifesto* for our times, developing their original critical analysis of Soviet Communism but linking it to the wider crisis of the global capitalist economy. This might have helped Solidarity leaders see their struggle as being both against Soviet Communism and the global capitalist economy, rather than seeing the latter as saviour. Of course, this argument merits nothing more than a political thought-experiment but it is posed to underline the possibility of an alternative approach. At the same time, it acknowledges the enormity of the negative influence of Soviet Communism, even at, and perhaps because of, the very moment of its historic disintegration, and its capacity to eliminate the possibility of an alternative communism.

Again, in Iran, the potential of the workers' shora movement in the Iranian Revolution of 1979, to have resisted the consolidation of a semi-totalitarian theocratic Islamic state, has yet to be properly acknowledged. Here again the absence of a non-Stalinist marxist theory and organisation proved decisive. The independent leftist groups that belatedly rooted themselves in the shoras, especially the secular Left Fadaiyan, carried too much Stalinist baggage. This prevented them developing the strategies and tactics required to respond to the remarkably innovative phenomenon that was the political Islamic mass movement. This is particularly true of its very effective leftist posture which included class struggle rhetoric mimicking the Marxist left as well as legitimate hostility to Eastern or Soviet imperialism, an argument which the major leftist groups simply could not answer. United front strategy and tactics were required which were not available in the Stalinist repertoire. Again, these arguments were addressed in the Iranian Revolution chapter through the interviews with former Fadaiyan leaders and will not be repeated here. Similarly, the united front strategy, discussed in the chapter, which the Fadaiyan and other leftist groups might have pursued with the left Islamic leaders, critical of Khomeini's plans for a theocratic dictatorship, a mass campaign for a properly democratic Islamic state, will not be repeated here. The workers' shora movement demonstrated beyond doubt that capacity for workers to control production in many different workplaces. It also demonstrated that these could only be short-lived experiments if the national state was hostile. But if that national state, the Iranian Islamic state, had been forced to concede democratic space, the significance of the shora experiment might have found a public voice to remember and articulate it. That might have become a rallying point for the later democracy movements from below and a focus for far-reaching left renewal.

In South Africa the argument is rather different. The "workerist" led independent workers' movement must accept some responsibility for failing to make the apartheid state

ungovernable by the mid 1980's – the stated aim of the ANC and SACP in exile - when it failed to rally around, and provide solidarity for, the great miners' strike in 1987. It is not at all surprising that many of the best "workerist" leaders went on to join the SACP when it was unbanned at the end of the decade. The argument used by SACP leader Jo Slovo aimed at "workerist" leaders, was explored in detail in Chapter 3. Plausible though it was, its key weakness was its rhetorical claim about the centrality of the working class to the political process both in terms of the struggle to overthrow apartheid and then the struggle for socialism that would follow. This appeared to cut through the traditional criticism of the SACP that it separated the two struggles into distinct stages. If the working class was central to both struggles then, Slovo insisted, this was a false argument, working class struggle would bridge the two stages. But Slovo undermined his own argument, firstly by placing the leadership of the internal struggle against apartheid with the townships and not the workplaces, secondly by asserting, quite mistakenly, a fundamental misreading of Lenin, that trade union federations like COSATU had no claim to leadership in the political struggle. The logic of this position led to the Triple Alliance, ANC, SACP, COSATU in the early 1990's, which would lead the struggle to end apartheid. But this was not an alliance of equal partners as chapter 3 illustrated with several graphic examples. And it paved the way, rather like in Poland, for the almost immediate capitulation by the newly elected ANC government to neoliberal policies with the SACP and COSATU meekly subordinated. Policies like reducing economic inequality, wealth taxes, nationalisation of the mining industry were dumped.

In reality the SACP was completely disoriented by the implosion of Soviet Communism in 1989, posing a unique challenge to Chris Hani, the highly talented and courageous former MK Chief of Staff. Chris Hani was making the transition to become general secretary of the SACP, after its unbanning. Former "workerist" leaders testified to the efforts he made on their behalf: not least "workers' democracy at plant level." Was there a momentary window when the SACP might have transformed itself into a democratic communist party acknowledging a leading *and independent* role for the working class? This would have meant warning ANC leaders that it would not be dragged along with its capitulation to neoliberal policies. It would have meant a fight with the ANC to win COSATU, organised workers, to openly resist neoliberal policies. Of course this is pure speculation but it is not without plausible foundations.

At the same time it underestimates the impact of the collapse of Soviet Communism and the growing doubts about its viability that preceded it. Criticisms of the Soviet Union, its lack of democracy, let alone workers' democracy, rejection of Stalin's genocidal policies in the 1930's

as detrimental to the communist cause, even dismissed as counter-revolutionary, easily flowed over into a demoralising sense that the original socialist revolution in Russia 1917 was itself flawed. It is noticeable that the independent workers' movements in the three countries, Poland, South Africa and Iran were, admittedly in very different ways, both dogged by the experience of Soviet Communism and lacked confidence to develop sustainable ideological responses which would revitalise a communist project centred on their own self-activity. In each case instead they settled for the limited political objectives flagged-up by others, to be sure allies in the original cause in bringing down their oppressors, but wedded ultimately to a new status quo which protected class divisions in a capitalist society. In Poland, it was the model of Western liberal democracy even as it morphed into its increasingly illiberal nemesis of neoliberalism. In South Africa it was the national liberation promise of the ANC as it also collapsed into neoliberalism abandoning even its quite mild reforming proposals for at least reducing social and economic inequalities in a post-apartheid capitalist society. In Iran, political Islam, at first with a leftist tinge, simply proved far more popular than the political organisations promising communist alternatives, haunted by the experiences of their northern neighbour over the border, the Soviet Union.

And yet something did stir in these independent workers' movements which kept alive a spark for the future. Demands for workers' control of production surfaced in all three cases. Implementation was attempted, even if only temporarily, with varying degrees of success. Workers' leaders, potential worker-intellectuals, with deep roots in the mass movements, emerged, perfectly capable of becoming political leaders. One of 1968's greatest slogans 'self-management' resounded across three continents. Alas, they were ideologically and organisationally disarmed at critical moments when circumstances created openings that might have thrust them forward.

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APPENDIX

Unedited interview transcripts from Poland, South Africa and Iran, sources for chapters 2, 3, 4, with biographical comment

Chapter 2

Władysław Frasyniuk , Andrzej Gwiazda and Joanna Duda-Gwiazda, Zbigniew Kowalewski, Karol Modzelewski, Josef Pinior , Jan Rulewski , Andrzej Slowik

Poland's Solidarity worker activists and professional intellectuals who were part of the movement's national and regional leadership

These interviews were carried out with the assistance of Polish language translators except in the cases of Zbigniew Kowalewski and Josef Pinior who speak and write fluent English. My questions and comments are in italics, except in the case of Zbigniew Kowalewski. Brief biographical information is provided at the start of each interview, in one case with additional biographical comment at the end.

Władysław Frasyniuk

Former bus drivers' trade union leader from Wrocław who became leader of the city regional Solidarity. After martial law, he led the underground resistance in the city until his arrest in 1982. Today he is Managing Director of *Fracht*³³⁹ a lorry fleet company. The interview took place in his Wrocław office in November 2017.

Translator Tr Matthew La Fontaine

Interviewer John Rose, JR

Referenced in Chapter 2 as (A-WF)

JR: First of all thank you very much for going to see me this morning. I've read some of the interviews you've already given which have been translated into English. I'm mainly focused on the high point of the 1980-1981 period, the 16 months before the martial law. And you've described in a very exciting way, in my opinion, how profound the movement was, in various ways you described the changing attitudes of workers to each other, tremendous collective spirit.

WF. The strikes are taking place in three different industrialised regions....people who emigrated and arrived in these regions, they're not (just) the natives, the indigenous population. This is important because people, first of all, people needed to be open to one another and needed to be able to communicate and they had to get over any complicated or difficult matters from Polish history. These people also had to, like typical migrants, they had to construct their own identity from the ground up, which means that their desire to work and their eagerness to go out and work were much greater than perhaps in places where people had established identities and histories. I'm talking about these three regions because in totalitarian systems changes always are the effect of work done by the minority, and not the majority. And also the very important phenomenon of August 1980 are young workers, the young working class. And the best generation of Poles in modern history comes from those who were born in 1954, so people who were 26 years old at this time. This is the first group, the first cadre of highly qualified workers in that period who entered the world of work. They understood that the communist system was a barrier to their personal growth and development. Workers (were) organised badly - The workers' qualification and party membership were the determining factors of who became crew leaders, flow leader, etc., in the workplace.

³³⁹ <http://fracht.pl/>

Looking back at it honestly, and paradoxically at the time I wasn't thinking about such things as freedom or the Soviet Union, but ... more thinking about, let's say, lower level - just to become responsible for matters and participate in running his own workplace. I was a bus driver - education is in automechanics, vocational education...I felt that the job of a bus driver was the one that gave him the most freedom. I drove buses, I wanted to drive lorries on international routes. Those workers who had a secondary education, during the strike period, they also represented the threat to the old workers. The old ones would say: we want 2000 a month and we're ready to go home. We, as the younger ones, he said, we can earn the 2000 on our own, but we want an influence over what's happening in our workplace, and that was what they fought for. This was the way that young people thought in August 1980. But then of course in a course of our work our awareness grew exponentially. And it wasn't just the basic workplace conditions that were the point of our interest, what we had to focus on was the comfort of our work which extended beyond the workplace also to our contacts with others.

So what we can say in a course of those 16 months from the moment we locked ourselves off, closed ourselves off at the workplace, to the end of that period, when we arrived at the 'Self-governing Republic', it was a sort of a great school of life: the university, a way of learning and experiencing and understanding, how not only the workplace but also the city around us decided about the conditions of our life. And this was what needed to be focused on. And another thing about workers: when you're 26, you don't have any complexes. So we understood that there were people around us that were more intelligent. And so at the time we were able to communicate and to work with the intellectuals who had more knowledge about the world, more knowledge about law, greater experience, and that was the first time in the communist system, that those communist class divisions between workers and intellectuals ceased to function, ceased to exist. In my opinion if we compare this period in Wroclaw, Gdansk and Szczecin, we can see that here in Wroclaw it was the first place where this elimination of the class barriers took place in the course of the strike. But this was because it was dominated by people who were my age, about 26 years old. Whereas in Szczecin up the north the strike was led by a much older generation and there was a much greater sort of distance between them and intellectuals. So there was a serious problem of Solidarity, they didn't have such a good base of intellectuals to work with, and to this day it still causes a sort of distance and difficulty with the workers dealing with intellectuals in that region. And then you've got Gdansk, where the Warsaw intellectuals came to. And during that time, the workers in Gdansk did not create a sort of their own force or staff of intellectuals. They weren't able to make contact with local ones. And this was especially visible after the 13th December. So we

can see this also today in Cracow region, especially in Nowa Huta - during the martial law period, there was a very, very active worker movement in Nowa Huta. The very radical, very tough worker movements, with even taking over police commissaries, but they were totally separated from the intellectuals, and there was no contact, they were not working with one another. I had better contact with the intellectuals from the Cracow region, than the actual workers who were there. So, a little prison anecdote. There's some strong language which is part of the story. I was in prison and I ran to a colleague who was from Cracow. And he says: Oh, you're from Cracow, and the other man says: No, motherfucker, I'm from Nowa Huta, not from fucking Cracow. You remember that.

[laughter]

JR: *You introduced the question of intellectuals and you talked about workers themselves, how they had this fantastic enthusiasm for knowledge. It was that workers themselves could become intellectuals in this period?*

WF: That's true. I'm an example and I'm a type of person, and in today reality is hard to assign me to any particular class. The workers say: 'Ah, he's no worker, come on.' Whereas the professorial class say: 'well, he seems like an intellectual, but he hasn't got any titles.' When I go to parties I don't know whether to drink straight vodka or whisky. [laughter]

Anyway there was an incredible thirst for knowledge, everyone at the time was seeking to learn more, there was the first sort of school or university for young. Something like a university operated and ran by a trade union, it was actually founded at the workplace. So there was this incredible thirst for knowledge that was just bursting on all sides amongst young people. And this of course came out during the period after the political transformation in more free, liberated Poland, the political environment worked hard so that every young person had at least secondary education. The key was understanding that in order for democracy to function, there are certain tools that you need to be able to use, and that knowledge of how these tools work was the way to make democracy function properly. You could see this particularly in the first years of the Third Republic. So, very quickly, in September, we organised a sort of a trade union university ... September 1980. And there was so many people there that we couldn't even all fit into a large concert hall. We took the decision to decentralise the education to hold those courses in universities in different places in order to give anybody the chance to participate and take the knowledge. And I felt that by

organising it this way I was building a sort of responsibility and leadership at this lower level by creating a bond between larger workplaces and the smaller organisations. I called it a sort of a 'line of factories' – building a defensive structure putting up barriers that would help protect Solidarity by having centres of intellectuals, and of the workers, students, and workplaces, and that it was a sort of building this sort of fort, this larger form of complex. In practice this was very effective, because the strongest resistance was here in Wrocław. (They didn't exactly call it 'Festung Breslau'. Muszę wytłumaczyć 'Festung Breslau': it comes from the German Nazi defence in Wrocław, when they turned the city into a fortress which actually capitulated after Berlin during the war). But what it was, it was a sort of fortress of Solidarity. The strongest centre of resistance, here in Wrocław. It even slipped into popular music, there's one popular musician called Kazik and he sings a song which is titled 'Wrocław always capitulates last', 'Wrocław is always the last to give in' [Tr: The actual title of this song is 'Mars napada' 'Mars Attacks', and the above quote is part of the song's verse].

JR: *And the demand for self-government, self-management, also grew in this period?*

WF: The strike demonstrated that workers identified very closely and very strongly with their own workplace. So the leader of one of the strike committees at another enterprise which worked in the energy sector, he was describing some sort of a large device, he's not sure what exactly, but the question was whether to load it up with energy or to leave it unpowered. And so the leader of the strike in this particular organisation came to him and said: well, we're striking so I don't know what to do. Should we juice it up or should we not do it? And the question was, is this important for you there? And the answer was, It's not important to us, but it is important for the power station in Kozienice (another city outside the region). And the answer was: if it's important for the power station up there, then yes – go ahead, turn it on, juice it up, get it going. This was also a person from the same generation, just one year older, so a young man. And so you can see that these young people were thinking in a very responsible and a sort of enterprising categories, feeling responsibility for the state, and they even felt that, in spite of the fact that they were striking, they still had to do what they could to contribute to the development of the state. So during this 16 months of course we did decide, we did understand that the workers' councils, the self-governance in workplace, was of course an important thing, but to look at it honestly it must be said that it was much less important than the trade union Solidarity, which in that period was the primary political and social force. But after the introduction, the imposition of the martial law on 13th of December - the underground leadership met - and there was an appeal issued to boycott any official

institutions. And I said: OK, and what about worker self-governance? And so they said, We're going to avoid those as well, we are not going to enter into any participation at all with the authorities. I disagreed.

We can't go underground, because, first of all, we go underground and there's no democracy, and also the workplace self-governments are not going to be able to take care of the matters they should.

And so they agreed, and the Wroclaw region was the only region where workers councils and self-governments were able to function openly and cooperate directly with Solidarity. It was the best decision and it made a tremendous difference at the time.

JR: *The national conference, before the martial law was declared, carried the resolution that seemed to combine the two positions: a call for self-governing republic with self-managed workplaces, it seems to me to be a very progressive demand, which is very progressive also in Western capitalism.*

Tr: We've both got a little bit lost. You're talking about the resolution which was proposed and you mentioned workplace self-governance and what was the other...?

JR: Self-governing republic.

Tr: i... he's not sure what the question is exactly.

JR: *So you're saying that back then Solidarity union was more important than workers' self-management. But this resolution seems to combine the two.*

WF: So what you're saying is true to the extent that we understood that in order to improve... we couldn't only be co-managing the workplace, but we also had to have the direct influence on the nation and the country as a whole to create better conditions. So of course here at the top is the communist party, there's Russia which is dominating Poland, but everything below that is local: Wroclaw, Warsaw, Cracow, these are the local governments, the local self-governments, which have the greatest impact on our quality of life. And this is of course linked with one of the postulates in Gdansk agreement that it shouldn't be party membership that allows people to make decisions, but it should be knowledge, skills and competence, that the decisions about how the state is ran should be based on skills and not only the membership card. So for these workers with the second education and qualifications these qualifications were incredibly important.

JR: *Let's talk the general strike...and Bydgoszcz...The strike was called off.*

WF: Two important things.

The first thing is that I supported Walesa's decision. And my voice was one of the loudest. There were two more things, two reasons, two motivations to this thing. One of them was fundamental and had a tremendous impact on the future of Solidarity. We took the call for strike here in Wroclaw very, very seriously. We organised the strike committee, which combined the two largest industrial workplaces in Wroclaw: Dolmel and Pafawag. What's more, we were prepared for confrontation.

So we prepared everything we could to stop tanks from getting in, we even took oxygen bottles, gas bottles, we took everything we could that could possibly be used as a weapon, it's also important to understand that we were the first generation that served in the army as conscripts, so we were prepared for fighting. And of course what I can say is: 26-year-old people, not only were we without any complexes, we also simply weren't aware of danger, we didn't have the awareness of the threat we're facing. And so these preparations actually helped make us aware that confrontation is always a sign of failure. So it was this compromise, the Bydgoszcz decision, that helped make the people of my generation aware that the key thing was compromise. The compromise gave space for building and extending the structures of Solidarity. And also created the space for building civil society, which needed to be constructed at the time. That was an incredibly important lesson that was learned by the people of his generation. That was the fundamental decision that changed the way the workers thought and perceived Solidarity. And for this decision alone Walesa should have received a Nobel Prize. It's necessary to understand Polish history that is one unsuccessful uprising after another. And that the hero is the one who goes to the barricade and loses violently. So we were the first generation that said: we're going to draw the right conclusions of the lessons from Polish history. I've always said to Professor Gieremek, who passed away, that during these 16 months maybe the workers didn't read, maybe they didn't write, but they thought.

Tr. He says that it's a reference to Walesa, who was not a fan of book reading.

JR: *Many people thought that... I hear from many activists that it was a defeat to call off the strike?*

WF: It's no accident that I said that there were 3 centres of... that I mentioned only 3 centres of the strike committee. It was much easier to be courageous after the fact, and also there

was this desire to show yourself as a leader, as one of the people who was at the front, the desire amongst many of these people outside the striking areas, it grew with time. And I can understand that. And then the 13th December came. And the martial law. Suddenly all those people who said that we needed to strike hard, to punch their teeth out in Moscow, emigrated. The people who remained were not active in the underground. There are two aspects of the events in Bydgoszcz. The first is fundamentally important, and the second...local, environmental.

Tr. It's difficult to translate, but I'll try to get more out of it.

I'm a worker, I'm from the working class neighbourhood. We are observing what took place in Bydgoszcz. And for me, my working class milieu, that was a disaster.

So, when I got into some conflict on the street, I got my friends together and we knocked some heads around together. So, when I took it on the chin, I wasn't mad because I knew the reason why I had gone there. So if I win... So if I walked in and I tried to block the council...

Tr: He's also talking about the conversation which he had about the events in Bydgoszcz with Jan Rulewski³⁴⁰ and so he told him that he should have gone there and crack their heads.

WF: When you go in and you set this kind of blockade, when you prepare for this kind of confrontation, then you have to take the consequences of everything that happens, you have to be ready for everything. If he (Rulewski) had cried about getting beaten up, they would have told him: well, sorry, but you knew what you were getting into.

The first thing is...the fact that we were able to come to the sort of compromise at the time, instead of going and fighting at the barricades, created much a greater chance for making improvements in society, that should be obvious. I was a member of lumpenproletariat, so this was the approach of people from that milieu.

JR: *He says he was a member of lumpenproletariat?*

Tr: This is how he refers to himself, yes.

JR: *Oh. But he was a bus driver, he's not lumpenproletariat.*

Tr: He says: of course, in today's reality the meaning of the term is of course different, it's correct, but he says back at his time in his neighbourhood the majority of young men around

³⁴⁰ See my interview with Jan Rulewski p? WF Rulewski should have fought back (explain)

him was either sitting in correction facilities or were unemployed. So he's talking about the milieu.

JR: One more question. The movement in those 16 months achieved a very high sense of expectations not just about defeating Soviet domination in Poland, but something greater than that, a different kind of society, and my question is: now, a generation later, 2017, do you think that you're moving towards that or do you feel that in a way that was lost?

WF: Of course you're right. It was a tremendous revolution in intellectual sense. There's more. During those 16 months in the conditions of totalitarian regime and the absence of the market economy we had a stronger civil society, and compared to today when we have democracy, parliament and market economy... Polish society has never been so free as it was then, and free of complexes, as well, after the events of August 1980.

In Solidarity we didn't ask people where they came from, it was a place where people could come and gather and participate, because they all wanted to achieve something better. This phenomenon unfortunately after the...After 1989 this never happened again. When it comes to the martial law period, I don't have the biggest problem with the fact that I was a prisoner for 4 years and I was treated as one of the most dangerous people, and I was heavily beaten on several occasions, that's not the biggest problem for me. The martial law sort of killed a sort of decency and positivity that had emerged among Polish society. And the martial law period taught me that poverty and suffering demoralised people, it wasn't a ground for any sort of noble attitude. Not in the sense that Catholic Church hierarchs would say it, but with August 1980 there was a kind of moral renewal of Polish society. Yes, I feel I am a representative of that moral revolution, moral renewal of August 1980. An anecdote, a sort of reflection...During the period of those 16 months I met a worker from Lublin who had been a personal bodyguard of Władysław Gomułka. At the time when Gomułka was sent from Russia to Poland. And he said that he was responsible for killings that have been ordered by verdicts of the communist party. After the war, in the communist system I was sent back to work in the lorry factory. And I was part of executive body of the party cell that was present at this factory. And they threw me out of the executive because I constantly demanded that the new social system should be a fair one and a just one. So I went to see Gomułka.

Comrade Wiesław, they threw me out of the communist party because I dared to remind them that the communist system was supposed to be just. Gomułka said – I'll put you back to the

party. But remember - it's very possible that in Poland there are only two real communists: you and I.

[interviewer laughs] And today when I meet my friends... I say: Don't complain - Perhaps from that whole giant Solidarity we are the only real ones”.

[interviewer laughs again]

There's one other thing that people would say about those 16 months, everyone calls it - the Carnival of Solidarity. Not because vodka was flowing down the streets. Because people were open, joyful, they wanted to learn about the world around them and beyond borders, and they believed that they were better, and they wanted to be better. After 1989 that never returned, never happened again. Maybe we made some mistakes. Maybe after the Round Table and the election of the 4th June . Maybe we should have told people to go out and celebrate, just smash the windows, get some beer, get drunk and enjoy, cause we've just regained our freedom. But unfortunately – We'd been in prison. And suddenly we were burdened with incredible responsibility for a state that was in total ruins. And we were aware of unbelievable responsibility. And so that's the reason why we failed to do anything that would have linked or referenced, reminded, recalled that first day of freedom that we experienced. I think to this day we have a problem with identification...Perhaps, because we don't have some sort of symbolic event like falling of the Berlin wall, we don't have a particular day, a moment in which we celebrate those events. And maybe it caused that communist tradition, a way of thinking has dominated over that openness that we've experienced at that time.

And now I'm going to say some very nice things about myself - And now about all those people who were in these 16 months on strike, then they went to the underground, then they went to prison, all the terrible things they experienced in that regime. About that shock that we experienced in 1980, something that would last with us to the end of our lives. After we got out of prison, we said that democracy is something that gives us another life. It gives it to communists - It gives it to those who were not brave enough. And that we have to judge people based on positive things they do in the free nation. And that's the phenomenon of Solidarity. Unfortunately it's always the minority that leads revolution in totalitarian systems. And just like after the events in Bydgoszcz there were a lot of people who were upset that we did not call the general strike. Now, based on the assumption that 3% of society took part in the underground resistance movement after the imposition of the martial law - there's 97% of people who have to come up with some sort of justification in their heads to explain to

themselves that they weren't worse than Walesa or Frasiński. So, in other words, today these people have to find some sort of...We have got to find something on these people.

Tr. He's referring to the charges some people are making against Walesa. So we have to find something on Walesa, we have to find something on Frasiński, we have to show that they were as low as we were.

WF. Then Rulewski can say: The whole Poland didn't come out for my defence. Now people are upset that he didn't go and hang the leading communists in Poland in the centre of Warsaw. If you look at the contemporary history of Poland - the events that are taking place today in Polish society are direct results of failure of society to be educated. Later in the new free Poland I was reading the words by Marie Curie-Skłodowska, a great Polish chemist, she wrote that revolutions don't happen in the workplaces and the streets, but they take place in the schools and universities. And this is absolutely true. Perhaps we, the working class, we understood this intuitively, this is why we founded trade union universities.

But what happened is after 1989 we didn't have the reflex, we didn't initiate the sort of education, the sort of conversation with Polish society to show that... the reason why I (he's speaking for himself) am a hero is not because I looked like Rambo in 1980, but because I managed to go through the experience and survive the worst the system could throw at me.

JR OK. We're good. Thank you. **WF:** Thank you, dzięki serdeczne.

Andrzej Gwiazda and Joanna Duda-Gwiazda

Andrzej Gwiazda and Joanna Duda-Gwiazda were amongst the original founders of the Free Trade Union movement which predated Solidarity in Gdansk. The interview took place in November 2017 in their tower block flat which still overlooks the remnant of the port in Gdansk.

Referenced in Chapter 2 as (A-AG) (A-JG)

Recorded in Gdansk, 14th Nov 2017

AG - Andrzej Gwiazda, **JG** - Joanna Gwiazda, **JR** - John Rose, **Tr** – Maciej Pienkowski translator

[pleasantries, asking for a permission to record]

AG: We have been wiretapped for 40 years without our consent... *[laughs]*

JG: I dislike the long cables. One time I took one to the loo...

JR: *First of all, I'd like to thank you for this interview. I saw your interview with Marta Dzido, [featured in] "Women of Solidarity".³⁴¹ I was very impressed with some of the points you've made and I'd like to ask you about them. You understood the Round Table negotiations as a disaster, a failure of Solidarity and the entire movement. I would also like to ask you about the Open Letter to the Party by Kuron and Modzelewski as well as the demands for worker's self-management during the period before martial law.*

JG: Wait a moment, what letter? The one written in the seventies?

AG: 1964.

JG: Let's start with the letter. It's the reason the whole opposition was referred to as "the dissidents".

AG: The letter wasn't very influential or widely distributed. A little echo, word of mouth... We knew they locked them [the authors] up. We knew some lunatics were crazy enough to try to reform the Party *[laughs]*... In 1982 when we were walking together in prison...

JG: ...with Modzelewski.

³⁴¹ Polish writer and director, Marta Dzido's film about the Women of Solidarity, *Kobiety Solidarności*. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tAmcnAw4Cu0> (English language subtitles). The film includes interviews with Andrzej Gwiazda and Joanna Duda-Gwiazda. See Ch2p?fn?

AG: I said "prison", but it was an interment centre. But our group did time in remand prison, with the most dangerous inmates... Some colleagues from the internment centre were being sent to us for three days as a punishment. We were sure our cells were wiretapped, so we used our daily 30-minute walk to have a [*private*] chat.

JR: *In 1982?*

AG: Yes. Inmates from my and Modzelewski's cells were taking a walk in the prison yard during the same time, so I took advantage of that to talk. I've asked him "What was your point (in writing and publishing the Open Letter)?". Karol was hesitant at first, so I said "I'll tell you how how we perceived it." We were cheering: Praise the Lord! The Communists are locking each other in!" That broke the ice and for the next 30 minutes he told me about the letter. We were like the Northern and Southern Poles - similar, yet thousand miles away... (Modzelewski has sent me his autobiography)... We were like the polar opposites, positive and negative. We both spent our childhood years in the Soviet Union. Karol... as an activist's son, me... as the enemy of the Soviet people. For both of us, Russian was our first tongue. Especially for Modzelewski, because he started to learn Polish even later than I did. From 5 to 11 years old I've read exclusively in Russian (if there was anything to read, that is). Another difference that my time in the USSR, my deportation, institutionalised a strong sense of belonging to a nation and individuality. Karol, on the opposite, was truly devastated and shattered when he'd learned he's not a native Russian. He's honest in his autobiography. His childhood heroes, we know the people they were, we know their ways, we know their names. For him they were heroes and role models, for me - enemies.

Tr: Any names?

AG: We were 10 at the time. [Aleksandr] Matrosow... A lot of activists, popularised among the children... We've both read Wysocki's "How the steel was tempered". The book about the revolution, about the revolutionaries, the preparations for the October (uncontroversial ones). Karol spent his childhood in the same country I did - in the same nation. We were deported to kolkhoz in the northern Kazakhstan village...

JR: *Sorry, I'm really confused. What is going on here? This is their childhood? Joanna's also?*³⁴²

Tr: No, just Andrzej Gwiazda's and Modzelewski's.

JR: *In the Soviet Union?*

³⁴² See my explanatory biographical notes at the end of the interview: **Andrzej Gwiazda and Joanna Duda-Gwiazda, tragic symbols of Solidarity's crisis and defeat**

Tr: Yes.

JR: *What was Andrej doing in the Soviet Union then?*

Tr: Were you deported?

AG: Yes, I was deported. I was qualified as "wrag sowieckiego naroda", meaning enemy of the people.

JR: *How old were you?*

AG: I think Karol's family fled to the USSR as the communists. I've celebrated my fifth birthday during the transport.

JG: With his mother and grandmother.

JR: *What year?*

AG: 1940.

JR: *Listen, I need to move off this. (We'll need to come back to it). I understand his relationship with Modzelewski is very long period... If Joanna and Andrzej regarded the Open Letter as an inspiration, as a way forward for people in Poland...*

Tr: Was that letter inspiring, did it influence your life?

AG: Absolutely not. We only applauded it as a sign of dissent inside the Party...

JG: ...that might be a bad thing for the Party.

AG: We've represented the opposite ideas. Them [the Modzelewskis] returned from the Soviet Union as children of the very people that we regarded as the enemy. The very people I was ready to shoot at. And I would do so without hesitation.

After their return, Kuron and Modzelewski began to be activists in the communist youth organisation. And we... The society... fought back. Fought on the level of 12 or 14-year old, but successful nonetheless. I went to different school each year because I was thrown out.

JG: During the time of the letter's publication, we were members of the opposition. We've watched what they were trying to do: the return to the young Marx...The Party would not hear them out. Andrzej asked Kuron why he supported the system, knowing about the Katyn , knowing about the deaths and the deportations, and the terror...

AG: He couldn't say he didn't know. because at least 1 and a half million were deported, it wasn't difficult to get in touch with them to see the real face of the communist system.

JR: *What year are we in?*

JG: 1977.

JR: *What were you doing in 1977?*

AG: I've worked at the Polytechnic. I was an assistant.

JG: I've worked at the research centre.

JR: *I understand that you perceive the Open Letter differently than I do. One can see Solidarity being forseen there.*

AG: Nothing groundbreaking for me, really. I've changed high schools three times, been kicked out... There was an distinction: in so called good, Inteligentsia-dominated ones, where the teaching level was perhaps higher, everyone was a communist boot-licker. Not necessarily a party member, but no one dared to oppose the Party. On the other hand, in the working class-dominated schools, the resistance was hard and determined. I would be sent to prison if not for the solidarity of fellow students. Because colleagues knew what we were up to, they knew, who – but no one denounced us. And when in the other, intellectual environment I've tried to organise – I was kicked out of that school. For me, it was, err, a practical thing: I was down in it, down among the working class people opposing communism, in not just passive way, but active resistance. On the first page of the communist youth paper there was one section, labelled: They Want War - featuring the western leaders. And we took it and wrote our names with the message, we want [the war] too. All the boys from the entire class signed it with their full names. And those less brave feared us even more than the system's revenge.

JR: *There is one thing in the Open Letter and then with the free trade unions that goes beyond just resistance. The demand for worker's self-management. It supposed to be a communist demand, but it wasn't. What is your opinion about it?*

JG: It's not the time yet. That demand – that idea crystalized only after the strike action. Whereas in the 1976, when the Komitet Obrony Robotników, KOR, was formed, we were full of appreciation for them, that they were brave enough to act under their real names. That was one of the reasons that we've invited Kuroń, we wanted to see what's that about. But the whole idea to organise the workers was ours, and it was put to live against the KOR line.

AG: The KOR was formed. An anti-communist group, in a way, independent, acting in the open. We were raised in the Stalin era. The time of a bloody terror. So we've reckoned if they are crazy enough to act openly, there is no other way but to go to prison with them.

JG: *[laughs]*

AG: We wrote a letter to a parliament. But combining Kuroń and Modzelewski's letter and worker's self management – whoa, you've just skipped an entire epoch. ..That was the 1956, which was in the past, but was a foundation on which all of this grew. Then there was 68 and

the 70. You cannot compare those periods, skipping. Because it was totally different country, different political police, different communists.

JR: *How important was the demand for the worker's self-management when it materialized in 1981?*

AG: We, as the unionists, observed it from the side. There were other basic issues concerning the working world left unsolved. There was the struggle going on. We started from the opposite positions [*other than the government*], the idea of self-management was inextricably connected with entering the joint structures. One cannot introduce self-management inside of the communist enterprise...without entering the system, some kind of interlocking. The way I see it, the self- management project was breaking the front line. A front line [composed] of the workers on the one side, and enterprise owners, represented by the party, on the other.

JR: *Was that a good thing?*

Tr: Was that a negative thing?

AG: No, it was not negative. That's why I used the expression: to look from the side.

JR: I understand that the worker's self-management was impossible under the communist system. Let's say we get rid of so-called communism but we do have worker's self-management. Is this a good thing? Worker's self-management without communism?

AG: In the democratic system (no matter the flavor), such hostility between the enterprise owner and the workers is nonexistent. A similar type of hostility, as in communism, can be observed inside right wing dictatorships: the juntas of Latin America, Salazar, Franco... The same problem arises, being interlocked with the system itself. If Poland were then successfully democratise, I don't know if we will leave the union movement to pursue worker's self-management, but it will be something completely different. And no one is going to agree because the historians are not trained to perceive the things under such angles. But we can be sure, because people that were engaged in it, told us. We know that the worker's self-management movement of 1981, of Solidarity, was organised by the secret police. During my time in prison, I've read some testimonies from the trial that didn't go on. Those self-management people were ready to take the power in the biggest shop floors, throwing the Solidarity out and taking the power away from the state. No one is going to confirm that and those files were probably destroyed. But we knew, we knew at the time of its conception, that it was the idea of Rakowiecka street (that means Wałęsa), we knew that the self-management

movement will overthrow Solidarity and will take its position in the work place. As a general note: in all western texts about the Solidarity (and most Polish ones), the actions of the secret police are not taken into the account.³⁴³ And that makes the picture completely false. And no one wants to update their point of view, cause it will make fun out of sociologists and political scientists. For instance: Wałęsa, generated volumes, entire libraries, [was later] revealed to be a secret police agent...And the scientists overlooked it. We knew that from the beginning of the strike action, that he's an agent. The scientists overlooked it.

JR: *Let's jump to 1989. In Marta's interview you say that the Round Table negotiations were a disaster.*

AG: Observing the opposition's and the Party's actions, you could see the readiness for some kind of an agreement. No doubt, you can rest your back at the fixed bayonet, but you can't sit on it eternally. It was obvious that the Martial Law must lead to some kind of an agreement. Secret police's actions, the Party's actions, actions attributed to the Solidarity, and the published texts were the preparations for that. We were sure (we are technicians, you can calculate these things). If the two negotiating parties are equally able, the compromise reflects the balance of power. Martial law weakened the citizen's side. The state, on the other hand, had everything: money, the security forces, the apparatus of repression, the courts.

JR: *Still, because the Soviet Union disintegrated, and the system finally come to an end and there were free elections and you had Kuron, the minister of labour, introducing shock therapy. This must have been a shock for you?*

JG: He lost our trust way before that.

AG: With Kuron, we moved from confrontation to cooperation. The Bible says that one reformed man is worth more than 70 righteous men. And we've considered Kuroń, Modzelewski and Michnik to be so-called 'reformed' communists. And a little too early we assumed them to be on our side. Acting on that belief, I used to defend them during public meetings. I used to say: Folks, you've got no idea about the extent of the communists' crimes. And they, the dignitaries' children... So if they are coming to our side, we should accept them, for they know communism better than we do. But the new converts should be closely monitored. And so we watched Kuroń and by the end of 1981 his 'conversion' was doubtful, so

³⁴³ In my opinion, this is a fallacious conspiracy theory. However, my opinion here in no way casts doubt on the integrity of the interview.

we only watched and opposed him. Michnik was trusted only through the Martial Law. When it was lifted, we were members of the opposing camps.

JR: *What do you mean by "our side"?*

AG: It's hard to fully grasp... with WZZ [Free Trade Unions of the Coast] we couldn't even draw an internal charter and pursue classic democracy, because we were certain the 150 [secret police] agents would join and we'll lost everything at the first attempted vote.

JR: *But you did it!*

AG: We couldn't even create the list of our members! The police work was top notch.

JG: Going back to our stance on the Round Table. When did Brezhnev die?

AG: Autumn 1982.

JG: The Brezhnev Doctrine was called off.

AG: But not immediately after Brezhnev's death but when the Gorbachev came to power (1986), The Brezhnev Doctrine was called off. That doctrine was giving the USSR the right to the military intervention inside the dependent countries. So that means we've got our independence back in 1986. It begs to ask, what were the self-proclaimed (under shadow of tanks) underground leaders were doing during this three year period? Since 1986 it was guaranteed the Soviet Union would not perform military intervention.

JG: Our programme was dead simple: each one [unionist] leaving prison starts being active in the open. There was a lot to do because Martial Law was used to strike at the workers. We should resume our activity. There were site committees.

AG: People still had union ID cards, positions, functions in the Union. Maybe new round of elections should be organised, but the restart of the union activity was the top priority. Mind you, the Union survived tanks being stationed on the streets. Martial law stopped just the democratic procedure.

JG: Of course the losses were high. People lost their health, lives, but there some that left the country, and many among them were the union organizers. A lot of youth became active at that time.

AG: Those of the union people that were not incarcerated nor left were numerous enough to ensure quorum in the Domestic Comitee, and therefore its resolutions being valid. In 1986

none of them did time, they were all freed. The only losses were those from the emigration. According to the charter, the number of domestic committee members, residing in Poland, was big enough to pass resolutions (way beyond threshold). During the so-called 1986 working class pilgrimage to Jasna Góra, 26 members of the Domestic Committee *[Komisja Krajowa]* signed the call for a nationwide assembly of said committee.

JG: There was no need to wait for a consensus, to act *[because it was already there]*.

AG: But it was against... the card dealers. During the 1983 or 84 meeting binding together the European ministers of internal affairs in Germany, General Kiszczak has stated that the only goal of introducing Martial Law was to push the change of leadership inside of Solidarity. On the other hand, assembling the Domestic Committee undoubtedly would confirm the old leadership. Unfortunately [for us], with Wałęsa as its member. So it's plain to see that putting the union activity on hold was the strategic goal of the communist regime. It was the only way to safeguard the Round Table. Because if the Domestic Committee would resume, it will took the negotiations, but they will be conducted in compliance with the [union's] statutory charter. So we wouldn't have the Round Table, but the rectangular one.

JR: *In your opinion, today, in 2017, has "your side" won?*

JG: Yes, we think we had won. And by *our* I mean: patriotism, the free, sovereign, independent state. Rightful one. A state that does not forget about the poor and the one's that democratic enough that every citizen is feeling well.

JG: It's confusing, what's left wing, what's right wing...

AG: If someone asked me in the 1950's, I would position myself as an rightwing nationalist. And then we landed on the left – without changing our set of beliefs. At the moment, we're back on the right side. So one can say our beliefs are constant, it's the political scene that's spinning around. But because of that spinning and our standing still, we're sometimes on the left, and sometimes on the right.

JG: From before the war, we identify closest with the PPS *[Polish Socialist Party]*, who combined the notion for independence and the social demands.

AG: Great focus on social affairs and the independence, well, Piłsudski was a founder and a main activist of a socialist party.

My last trial took place in 1984. The Secret Police was so absorbed in an upcoming to the Round Table, they made accusers contradict themselves. The sentence was fully predictable, that was the natural *modus operandi* of the communist system. It was a common thing, and no one was shocked or suprised by it, that's just the way the things were. We didn't cared about the Kuroń's political acceptance, we cared that the conception of WZZ [Free Trade Unions of the Coast] being announced in the radio Free Europe transmission.

JR: *But in their "Open letter" Kuron and Modzelewski wanted a worker's movement.*

JG: *Movement, sure. But not necesarrily an union.*

AG: Possibly. And I'm not even sure if we've ever fully read the [Kuroń's and Modzelewski's] letter [*laughs*]. – First mentions of planned transformation of communism can be traced to 1967, maybe the Kuroń's and Modzelewski's letter forseen it? Notions like eurocomunism, La Fayette and so on. The plan to fool the West by dismantling the Warsaw Pact, as pictured by the Czechoslovakian intelligence officer, Jan Sejna. And so on.

Translator Maciej Pienkowski's supplementary interview with Gwiazdas 30/12/2017

(i) '1968'

"In 1968 almost alone [Andrzej] tried to mobilise working class support for the student movement". (Touraine 1983: 146)

Please tell me how you tried to build union movement's support for the students in 1968.

AG: The labour union movement? It was too early for that. You know, students do know their way around. They come to me, delegations from different schools, asking to help them organize and shape the '68 rebellion...

Gomułka was all about turning students against workers, and you've seen through that...

AG: I was speaking at one of [their] meetings (not from the lectern, because I didn't feel like a leader there). I said: "We all have colleagues, we all have families. We have colleagues in the evening school... So through them all, we need to get to the workers and invite them to rally together. To get along". The next morning, 11 o'clock at the Provincial Committee they delivered 2 thousand 200 of a handwritten flyers, inviting to a joint workers' rally. They were

distributed in the workplace, [people in] dorms were sitting through the night, writing those leaflets. In Gdańsk, police was trying not to let workers close to the students.

JG: They were kettling them at the "Polytechnic" station, because there's an underground passage. Workers from the Remontowa Shipyard, Gdańska Shipyard, Northern Shipyard... Most severe clashes happened there. It was after the IPN research that we realized that was not the exception it seemed to be. March '68 was portrayed by Michnik and Szlajfer as the rebellion of...

AG: The rich kids.

JG: [Portrayed] as a rebellion that is fundamentally Varsovian and fundamentally student. But then there were riots in Tarnów, which does not even have an university or college at all! And across the country, the biggest arrested group of people were the workers! Then the students and then the school youth. So it's clear the '68 had entirely different character than the one from the Michnik's tale. [At that time] we were thinking that Gdańsk was the only place where the workers did not go against the students (excluding Wałęsa, that is, but he's an entirely different kettle of fish)...

AG: Professor Staliński, [collaborator] of the secret police, got punched in the face by the workers. I was trying to explain to them, that the student movement is fragmented, does not possess the capability to rebel at the moment... "Like you are not capable every single time...". But it is developing, you can be sure, next time we will go together.

JG: And that happened in the 70'.

(ii) **Marta Dzido's film 'Solidarity According to Women' shows women playing a decisive role in the formation of Solidarity at Gdansk by insisting on shipyard solidarity with the smaller workplaces**

"Steelworkers have put their negotiations on hold so the librarians would not be the last group negotiating their raise. And it worked, their rise was higher by 30 zlotys than the one negotiated in the Gdansk Shipyard. One can find many examples of incredible solidarity. Members of "Solidarity" decided that the teachers and doctors should not go on strike, so heavy-industry went on strike for them, during the pay negotiations."

Okraska, Remigiuszem ('Remik'), (interviewer), *Gwiazdozbiór "Solidarności"*, ('Constellation in

Solidarity'), *Joanna i Andrzej Gwiazdowie w rozmowie* (Łódź Poland 2009, Stowarzyszenie "Obywatele Obywatelom"). Electronic edition (Loc 2876-2880)

Maciej Pienkowski interview

JG: I guess that on the 7th August Anna Walentynowicz was fired. WZZ [Free Trade Unions of the Coast] responded with their standard operating procedure: leaflet defending Walentynowicz, suggesting the strike action. After this call the Gdansk Shipyard went on strike (Wednesday the 14th). And the strike action belonged to The Badger [*Bogdan Borusewicz's nickname*] and Lech Wałęsa. They were the leaders, we weren't admitted into the Health and Safety hall [*MP note: Strike Guard let Joanna and Andrzej enter the Shipyard, because the guard members recognised them from their WZZ activity. However, they were not allowed into the (now historic) Health and Safety hall, because there were separate guards there, under Wałęsa's charge*].

AG: Strike was demanding allowing Walentynowicz back to work...

JG: They've drove her back, so that demand has been met. They were [two] other demands as well, but rather foggy -- about the December [1970], regarding the remembrance... Signed without any warranties. And so the strike has finished, definitively, on Saturday, 1 o'clock. [Workers were] ordered to clear the site. At the same moment, many different plants were striking. including Shipyard of Gdynia. The strike [there] was initiated by our brave colleague, Andrzej Kołodziej. It was saturday. If the striking workers would all go home, the game's over. And then two things occured: we organized the Inter-factory Committee, inviting everyone [to meet] on the saturday evening, and that has worked out well. [The second thing] Three ladies has succesfully stopped workers from exiting the workplace (I think it's true - we weren't there)... They were: Anna Walentynowicz, Alina Pieńkowska and Ewa Ossowska. Then Ewa was erased [from the cards of history] (which was discovered by the [Dzido's movie] crew. They've contacted her and, in a way, Ewa was brought back into the history. [The erasure was] complete, including the exchange of the photographs from the time.

Interviewer: Smells like Stalin to me.

JG: [nods]. So Ewa was gone for good. Maybe it was easier for the ladies to do? [act, inspire]. Imagine Alina Pieńkowska or beautiful Ewa Ossowska standing and delivering a speech...

AG: To put it simply, the crowd of guys is leaving, and a lady tells them "you cowards!".

Andrzej Gwiazda and Joanna Duda-Gwiazda, tragic symbols of Solidarity's crisis and defeat

Here I summarise, elaborate and comment on aspects of my interview with Andrzej Gwiazda and Joanna Duda-Gwiazda.

It was by chance that I discovered Andrzej Gwiazda's extraordinary personal history when I asked about the *Open Letter* of Kuron and Modzelewski. Andrzej discussed the *Open Letter* of Kuron and Modzelewski by reporting his Martial Law detention centre conversation about it with Modzelewski in 1982.

"Inmates from my and Modzelewski's cells were taking a walk in the prison yard during the same time, so I took advantage of that to talk...I said 'I'll tell you how we perceived it (the *Open Letter*). We were cheering. Praise the Lord! The Communists are locking each other in!' That broke the ice and for the next 30 minutes he told me about the letter. We were like the Northern and Southern Poles - similar, yet thousand miles away... (Gwiazda added that Modzelewski had recently sent him his autobiography)... We were like the polar opposites, positive and negative. We both spent our childhood years in the Soviet Union. Karol... as an activist's son, me... as the enemy of the Soviet people. For both of us, Russian was our first tongue...Another difference that my time in the USSR, my deportation, instituted a strong sense of belonging to a nation and individuality. Karol, on the opposite, was truly devastated and shattered when he'd learned he's not a native Russian. He's honest in his autobiography. His childhood heroes, we know the people they were...their names. For him they were heroes and role models, for me - enemies."

So both of them had childhoods in the Soviet Union?

Andrzej: "Yes, I was deported. I was qualified as "wrag sowieckiego naroda", meaning enemy of the people. I celebrated my fifth birthday during the transport...in 1940."

Joanna: "With his mother and grandmother."³⁴⁴

His father was seized by the Nazis.³⁴⁵

So Andrzej Gwiazda, aged five, was a rather special victim of the Nazi-Soviet pact which decimated Poland in 1939.

³⁴⁴ A description of his deportation as a child can be found in (Okraska 2009). I am grateful to my Gdansk translator Maciej Pienkowski, for supplementing the interview with a reading of some of this and other Polish literature about the Gwiazdas, who are legendary figures in Poland.

³⁴⁵ (Kwiatkowska 1990: 27)

“More than one million Poles (roughly one-tenth of the population of Soviet occupied Poland) were deported eastwards...fewer than half of them returned, carrying children who would not forget Siberia. One such child was Andrzej Gwiazda...His tender feelings towards the Soviet Union may be imagined.” (Ash: 4)

Andrzej Gwiazda and Joanna Gwiazda had originally applauded the *Open Letter* but only because it was “a sign of dissent inside the Party...”

“I’m not even sure if we’ve ever fully read the letter.” (*laughs*)

AG: “We represented the opposite ideas. Them [the Modzelewskis] returned from the Soviet Union as children of the very people that we regarded as the enemy. The very people I was ready to shoot...And I would do so without hesitation.

After their return, Kuron and Modzelewski began to be activists in the communist youth organisation. And we... the society... fought back. Fought on the level of 12 or 14-year olds, but successful nonetheless. I went to different school each year because I was thrown out.”

JG: “During the time of the letter’s publication, we were members of the opposition. We’ve watched what they were trying to do: the return to the young Marx...The Party would not hear them out. Andrzej asked Kuron why he supported the system, knowing about the Katyn,³⁴⁶ knowing about the deaths and the deportations, and the terror...”

AG: “He couldn’t say he didn’t know. because at least 1 and a half million that were deported, it wasn’t difficult to get in touch with them to see the real face of the communist system.”

AG: “With Kuron, we moved from confrontation to cooperation. The Bible says that one reformed man is worth more than 70 righteous men. And we’ve considered Kuron, Modzelewski and Michnik to be so called ‘reformed’ communists. And a little too early we assumed them to be on our side. Acting on that belief, I used to defend them during public meetings. I used to say: ‘Folks, you’ve got no idea about the extent of the communists’ crimes. And they, the dignitaries’ children, do have [the idea]’. So if they are coming to our side, we should accept them, for they know communism better than we do. But the new converts should be closely monitored. And so we watched Kuron and by the end of 1981 his ‘conversion’ was doubtful, so we only watched and opposed him. Michnik was trusted only through the Martial Law.

³⁴⁶ The Soviet massacre of thousands of Polish officers during the war.

(In 1989) when it was lifted, we were members of the opposing camps.”

Both Kuron and Michnik had embraced neoliberalism and Kuron, infamously, became Labour Minister introducing ‘Shock Therapy’.

Joanna Duda-Gwiazda explained in the film *Women of Solidarity, Kobiety Solidarności*.³⁴⁷

“The Round Table was a huge success for the Solidarity elite who sorted out something for themselves, and sorted out something for the country. Free elections, freedom of the press etc. But if you look at it from the labour union’s point of view, the Round Table was catastrophe.”³⁴⁸

The Left appeared as a trap and a snare – two sides of the same coin. Communists and their former Communist critics, briefly heroic leaders of Solidarity like Kuron and Michnik, and now agents for globalisation and its neoliberal ‘reform’ agenda for a post-Communist Poland. Throughout the Gwiazdas remained principled trade unionists, but with a left wing option now firmly blocked, we witnessed the deepening of a right wing trend in Solidarity which would result in the remnant of the once great movement offering support to today’s right wing nationalist governing Law & Justice Party. The political evolution of the Gwiazdas reflects this trend. The accusation that Solidarity, and particularly its intellectuals had betrayed the Polish workers in whose name it was founded rapidly spread. Andrzej Gwiazda and Anna Walentynowicz helped develop it as a distinctive political formation.

This “Gwiazda group attacks globalisation and free-market capitalism. But its members also warn of a creeping return of communism...Above all, they allege that Lech Wałęsa is a careerist traitor to Solidarity ideals, who sold out to crypto-communist politicians and once, long ago, acted as an informer code-named “Bolek” for the communist counter-intelligence service...” (Ascherson 2005)

This pre-occupation with “Communist conspiracy”, as well as the Communist origins of Solidarity’s intellectuals, becomes obsessive and continues to this day.³⁴⁹

The tragedy of the Gwiazdas and Walentynowicz is that the persuasive pressure from the Polish nationalist right in the 1990’s is successful, partly at least, because of the vacuum

³⁴⁷ See Ch3 fn30.

³⁴⁸ These arguments are developed in their book of collections of articles and their speeches (Gwiazdas 2008: 37-46).

³⁴⁹ See fn353.

created by the failure of the Left intellectuals in the previous decade. Today the Gwiazdas support the right wing nationalist governing Law and Justice Party.

Gwiazda, the toughest Solidarity negotiator with the government, Gdansk 1980.

Top government leaders, including Deputy Prime Minister, Jagielski, were forced to “privately appeal” to him. (Ash: 85) With the agreement of both sides, Jagielski negotiated with him alone, especially over the political prisoners and Kuron in particular.³⁵⁰

³⁵⁰ Gwiazda’s own intriguing account of this, including Gwiazda AND Jagielski searching for secret wire taps before the conversation began is in (Okraska 2009: loc. 355, 2/1105, Appendix II). “When we were leaving the shipyard, Gajka (Kuron's wife) said to me: ‘You are leaving, but they are still locked up’. That time between signing the agreement and the prisoners' release was, I guess, the hardest time in my life.”

Zbigniew Kowalewski

Zbigniew Kowalewski was a Solidarity leader in the Lodz region. He regarded himself as a revolutionary socialist in the original tradition of the principles of the *Open Letter* of Jacek Kuron and Karol Modzelewski.

Zbigniew Kowalewski has fluent spoken and written English so a translator was unnecessary. What follows is our unedited e mail conversation 26/11/17 – 30/11/17. (p258-269)

Referenced in Chapter 2 as (A-ZK)

2017-11-26 Dear Zbigniew

Back in London after what I regard as a very successful 12 days in Poland. Pinior was excellent and returns greetings to you. And having just re-read your superb account of Lodz 1981, 'A Polish Petrograd', the abridged translation, in the 'Socialist Action' pamphlet, of the chapter from your book, I realise that there is more than enough material there for my case study. There is just one question I want (you) to develop - your relation with Andrzej Slowik in 1980-81.

When we met on Wednesday night in the Kurdish restaurant, you described his brilliance at building working class organisation not just amongst the bus drivers but amongst the city's working class more generally, not least the women. In your words, you stated: "I learned class instinct from Slowik." Indeed "the educator was himself educated" to paraphrase Marx! But here we have the problem of workers and intellectuals - very particular to the Polish Solidarity context. Intellectuals could not intensify the politicisation of militant worker leaders like Slowik, as I understand it, either (a) because they did not want to and hence risked simply 'tailing' a syndicalist movement with inevitable consequences of leaving the 'politics' to others, or (b) they brought the wrong 'reformist' politics of the 'self limiting' revolution - in effect limiting the revolution to the 'liberation of Poland' from the grip of the Soviet Union (and its version of 'Communism') and hence, even if inadvertently, leaving a vacuum to be filled by the nationalist right, or (c) attempting the (probably) impossible task of initiating a revolutionary socialist dialogue with Andrzej Slowik and his fellow rank and file worker leaders and activists, but in the context where the principle theoreticians Kuron and Modzelewski had abandoned, indeed openly undermined, the essential political framework for making such a dialogue possible. 'Communism' had to be exposed not simply as a monstrous bureaucratic tyranny, (that was obvious to all), but as a legitimate experiment in workers power and democracy, signaling the prospects for human emancipation at a global level, which had fundamentally

failed. Explanations for that failure, the impossibility of 'Socialism in One Country', especially an economically backward one like Russia, had to be advanced

Lenin's remark about a successful revolutionary workers movement being impossible without revolutionary theory could hardly be more appropriate, which, in turn, brings me to the core of my phd hypothesis. Andrzej Słowik was potentially one of Lenin's 'purposeful workers', Gramsci's 'democratic philosophers'. Worker leaders who begin thinking creatively politically as well as organisationally, becoming , in effect, worker revolutionary intellectuals.

On Monday, 27 November 2017 Dear John,

You have misunderstood me. I said that Słowik had a strong class instinct and class reactions to the situations, and that I learned a lot from him, because I had a Marxist formation but, being an intellectual, I lacked the working class instinct. Concerning intellectuals and Solidarność: the fact is that sectors of "intelligentsia" active alongside or behind Solidarnosc or trying to lead politically this workers' movement were not socialists and, often, were even anti-socialists. But, in itself, it is neither strange nor specific for Poland in 1980-81. The problem is that there was no socialist intelligentsia (if there was one before it disappeared during the two decades preceding 1980) and not only that there was no organised socialist political current, but also that there were no dispersed individual socialists you could try to group and organize. Or if there were individual socialists, they were extremely rare, extremely dispersed and isolated among them. It was a huge contradiction of this political situation: an enormous upsurge of the working class, and even a workers' revolution, but at the same time a total lack of any, even incipient socialist political organization.

You say: revolutionary theory. I think that Lenin's remark you quote is not very good. In reality, there cannot be a revolutionary movement without a revolutionary program and strategy. And, of course, to have a revolutionary program and strategy you need a revolutionary theory, but theory is not enough, without a program and strategy, a theory is politically powerless. What a revolutionary organization must materialize is program and strategy; it cannot materialize, directly, a theory.

There was no organization that could materialize a revolutionary program and strategy. And it was impossible to form such an organization during the 16 months of Solidarność. It was impossible even to began to form it. I was a self-made or self-formed Marxist (Third Worldist and Althusserian) becoming Trotskyist, but a Trotskyist without any contact with Trotskyists. I met first Western Trotskyists only in October 81, during the First National Congress of

Delegates of Solidarność. And I joined immediately their organization, the FI, strongly engaged in the support for Solidarność and relatively well informed about our movement.

Returning to the question of theory. The level of (world wide) Marxist theoretical knowledge of the Soviet bloc as social formation was pitiful. There was not even a Marxist knowledge of the forms and particularities of the exploitation of the working class in the societies of the Soviet bloc. There was not a serious Marxist knowledge of the functioning of their economies and societies. There was not a serious theory of workers' democracy. Marxism was in crisis, but Marxists, with some rare exceptions, were not aware of it.

To understand why there were upsurges of the Polish working class and why, during these upsurges, there was a strong dynamics toward what, since 1956, was called "workers' self-management", it was necessary to understand well the nature of the labour and production processes in this society and how the working class was exploited: why there was an extraction of the absolute, and not the relative, surplus time and surplus product, and how workers resisted it. This is why my first theoretical reflexion in 1980-81 was about it (and in a developed written manner I elaborated on it during my exile in France publishing there an article, 'The Exploitation of the Working Class in the 'Actually Existing Socialism').

Strategy: For example, in 1981 in Poland you did not need suppositions about the inevitability, possibility or improbability of the Soviet military intervention, because both an intervention and a lack of intervention could be reasonably supposed, but what you needed was a good Marxist knowledge of the social nature and phase and tendency of development of the Soviet Union; you needed to know if this state was relatively stable on a long term or close to a collapse, and why. In the Marxist literature of this period you had practically nothing about it. What Marxists rather inertly or in an impressional manner supposed, at least silently, was a relative stability of the USSR. The state and tendencies of the Soviet economy were not studied seriously, and the potentially explosive nationality question was not perceived and studied.

When, at the moment of the death of Chernenko and the rise of Gorbachev, I said in Paris that the Soviet Union would collapse very quickly and disintegrate, following nationality lines, into 16 different states, there were no Marxists - Trotskyists - in the West imagining it. But I said the same in Poland in 1981, and it was one of the most important bases of my reflexion on strategic issues, intertwined with the idea that Poland was the weakest link in the international chain of domination of Russian bureaucratic imperialism. So the problem, for me, was how this chain can break in Poland, what can be expected as a result of this break for the whole chain,

and how the fall of the bureaucratic rule can be combined with the rise of the workers' power establish a regime of the workers' and socialist democracy.

Best Zbigniew

2017-11-28 Dear Zbigniew,

If it's possible, and of course only with your agreement, I want to incorporate at least part of this e mail conversation into my case study. It may be we should conclude it when I have finished the rest of the work on the case study, but for the time being at least, I'd like to concentrate on the following.

I want a double focus to this 'thinking aloud' conversation 1. The 'Open Letter' 2. Andrzej Slowik, both the man himself but more importantly what, potentially, he represented.

In other words, to use your formulation

"There was no organization that could materialize a revolutionary program and strategy. And it was impossible to form such an organization during the 16 months of Solidarność. It was impossible even to begin to form it."

1. The 'Open Letter' at least in principle provided the beginnings of the theoretical framework that could have provided the basis for such an organisation to "materialize a revolutionary program and strategy". We know, in a sense, it was 'still born' and we know the reasons, but there is still a legitimate struggle to be waged over securing its proper historical legacy. Here was the start point, again at least in principle, for a different strategy for Solidarność, including an independent organisation for its left wing.

2. Andrzej Slowik, or rather at least some of the Andrzej Slowiks, and there must have been hundreds, if not thousands of them, would have related to such an organisation, a worker cadre to form its backbone. It would have provided an alternative way of thinking about both present and future. After all, even without this organisation, the two of you and others helped frame, despite resistance, a left wing outcome to the 1981 National Conference. And he was a powerful influence in the 'active strike' strategy - with its genuinely revolutionary implications.

He also told me he opposed calling off the general strike after Bydgoszcz. This could have transformed the situation in 1981.

Thanks John

On Tuesday, 28 November 2017, Dear John,

I think what you say about the possibility, during these 16 months, to have a party or at least an independent organisation for Solidarność left wing, is abstract. There was not a left wing. There was growing an elementary differentiation, not even between the left and the right, but only between radicals and moderates, between those looking for negatiation and compromise and those looking for mass struggle; those looking for a coexistence of an independent mass movement and the bureaucratic power, or (Kuron) a "self-limited revolution" and those tending (tending only, not even consciously) toward an overthrow of this power, without any idea about what to establish after the overthrow of this power.

Ideas of a political organization was still rejected by the most radical militants of Solidarność, fundamentally as an effect of the generalized discreditation of the idea of a party by the regime. For them such an organisation was seen as divisive of the movement, manipulative, looking for minority power over the masses, etc. For this reason the first independent party we had in Poland in this period, the right-wing Confederation of Independent Poland (KPN), and the KOR, seen by many people as a secret party, were considered by the radical workers, including specifically people like Słowik, as "alien" to Solidarność: "alien" not due to their political orientation, but due to their (actual in the case of the KPN, and supposed in the case of KOR) party form.

Myself I was elected to the regional leadership of Solidarność and to its executive, together with the majority of members of this executive, on the base of a platform (with elements of an immediate program) we presented for the internal regional elections. We, the militants regrouped around this platform, the most advanced collective paper produced in this time (the spring of 1981) inside Solidarność, by a group of its plant and regional activists, called ourselves Independents, because we declared that we would defend the independence of Solidarność from any political party (the ruling one, but it implied also the KOR, the KPN, and so on). It is obvious that radical militants needed to be regrouped in different manners, and this platform was one of such steps, but they needed also to overcome progressively, learning fundamentally from their own experience, their anti-party prejudices and understand that a radical left-wing political organization is not only necessary for them, but also compatible with and useful for their militancy inside Solidarność, as well as compatible with the independence of Solidarność from political parties.

In October 81 I had a discussion with the comrade from the FI established in Poland in this time, on how to take preparatory steps to form a political organization, and the crucial problem was: with whom. She asked me to be invited as observer to a national-level meeting of our (radical) wing of the movement for workers' self-management, in Lublin, and after the meeting she concluded that there were individuals that could be regrouped in a perspective of the party building. She was right, but at the same time she was aware, like me, that the same elements reject, for a while, any idea of a political organization and that transitional steps should be taken, to accelerate political radicalisation, differentiation and maturation of these and other similar elements. In December I travelled to Paris, to have meetings with French unionists, but also (in reality essentially) to meet the leadership of the FI and to discuss the issue of party building. With this purpose the FI started to produce a journal in Polish. Three days after my arrival to Paris the martial law was established in Poland.

During the 80s, in Paris, we produced, smuggled to Poland and diffused among Solidarność militant circles, a special political journal of the FI in Polish, destined essentially to Solidarność militants..

I hope this mail explains some things and clarifies some problems.

Best Zbigniew

2017-11-29 Dear Zbigniew,

Ok, I'm satisfied that you've settled this. Many thanks - the argument is extremely important

But isn't there an even more fundamental issue at stake, symbolised by the 'Open Letter'.

The 'Open Letter' was, and remains, a major breakthrough, but it was weak ideologically. It neither explained the roots of the Soviet bureaucracy nor, more importantly, whether the attempt at socialist revolution in 1917 was justified - even whether the 'project' was in principle justified.

Of course it's call for workers power was communism - or rather the 'first step' towards it - as Marx & Engels put it in The Communist Manifesto - without making that explicit. But the 'Open Letter' wasn't, and in fairness wasn't intended to be, 'The Communist Manifesto for the late 20C', which, as well as confronting Western capitalism, confronted the criminal regime which dared to speak and act in its name. (Though, that was the promise of '1968' and the 'Open Letter' was 'adopted' as one of its most important documents. - if not THE most important. Paradoxically Modzelewski remains proud of this).

One of the outstanding features of Steve Smith's Red Petrograd, imo, the best book on the subject, was his evidence for the overwhelming acceptance by the working class that 'socialism', however vaguely understood, was the objective. For reasons, similar to the ones you advanced about 'the party', even the mighty expression of 'workers power', that was Solidarność, couldn't overcome the 'common sense' assumption that Communism had been tried and proved to be a catastrophic failure.

John

On Wednesday, 29 November 2017, Dear John,

You say: "Though, that was the promise of '1968' and the 'Open Letter' was 'adopted' as one of its most important documents. - if not THE most important. Paradoxically Modzelewski remains proud of this)." If I understand well, you say that it was one of or the most important document adopted by the students' movement in 1968. It was never "adopted" by this movement. It was unknown outside the very small circle of Kuron and Modzelewski's comrades, near all of them arrested immediately after the first manifestation on the campus of Warsaw University, and, for this reason, non active in the movement that developed in March 68. In many, many resolutions and declarations adopted in the student meetings in the whole country I never found any reference, direct or indirect, to the Open Letter.

You say: "[The Open Letter] neither explained the roots of the Soviet bureaucracy nor, more importantly, whether the attempt at socialist revolution in 1917 was justified - even whether the 'project' was in principle justified."

Concerning the first point, the Open Letter explained the roots of the Soviet and all other ruling Stalinist bureaucracies, but it did it in a wrong (and, in reality, apologetical) manner: as a historically necessary class rule after the overthrow of capitalism in the backward and dependent countries, where industrial revolution should be still accomplished, and could be accomplished only by bureaucracy as a "new class" situated above all other classes that remained after the fall of capitalism: the working class, the peasantry, the intelligentsia, the technocracy. We discussed it during and after your first stay here.

Concerning the second point: In the Open Letter there was no justification of the attempt at socialist revolution in 1917 in Russia, because it was a letter to the ruling party members (not to the working class! or to the independent workers' militants) where existed an universal (even if, actually, a purely ideological) approval of the Russian revolution, and it was not necessary to justify it. Still it was written inside an "ideological family", and for this reason,

logically, it justified the first phase of bureaucratic rule as a historical necessity. This is why the Open Letter was ambiguous.

You say: "Even the mighty expression of 'workers power', that was Solidarność, couldn't overcome the 'common sense' assumption that Communism had been tried and proved to be a catastrophic failure." It was not like this. to say it shortly and necessarily in a simplified manner, there were two levels.

On the first level, of the public discourse, there was a tacit agreement inside Solidarność to not speak the same language the ruling bureaucracy and its party spoke: no to use terms appropriated by the official ideology. For these reason, in the programmatic resolution adopted by the First National Congress of Delegates of Solidarność, in October 81, we invented the term, "Self-Managed Republic". There was also a tacit agreement to not use, publicly and internally, an anti-Communist language. Of course, these consensuses were not universally respected, but in general it was the case, with the special (but, obviously, not a unique) exception of Kuron and his comrades from the KOR, who spoke about "Communist regime". The majority of leaders and militants avoided it.

On the second level, inside Solidarność, a lot of militants said: we struggle for a "true socialism", a "democractic socialism", or a "workers' socialism", and - in any case this is my personal experience - there were never hostile or negative reactions to it.

In the fall and the beginning of the winter of 1980, I represented the Solidarność regional leadership at founding meetings of Solidarność in 40 factories and enterprises, and always I said there that we were fighting for a "true, workers' and democratic socialism", and later, when the movement for workers' self-management began, I said that we were fighting for a "workers', democratic and self-management socialism".

When I presented myself as a candidate to the regional leadership of Solidarność, during the internal electoral campaign, in the spring of 1981, I said that I am "Marxist, supporter of workers' democracy, workers, power, workers' and democratic socialism, and, finally, a partisan of building a classless society, in Poland and elsewhere".

There is an important document: "The Electoral Program of the Group, 'The Independents'", presented on May 7, 1981, by 14 candidates, including me, to the regional leadership of Solidarność. It was not a program of a political organization, but of a current formed inside the union. The first chapter was an "ideological declaration", where we explained why we are for socialism, why there is no socialism in Poland, and what socialism means for us.

It stated: "It is our conviction that the regime we have until now cannot be considered as a socialist one. (...) The ideology of this regime affirmed that socialism means the passage of fundamental means of production to the society and the passage of political power to the working class. In reality, during the last 36 years, all political and economic power belonged to a centralized bureaucracy alienated from the society. The working class was submitted to a regime of factory despotism, an exploitation destroying it physically and morally, and a police repression, while the whole society was deprived of the right to self-determine its destiny. (...) What will spring from the social revolution initiated in August by the working class will be a truly humanist socialism (...) oriented toward the satisfaction of material and intellectual needs of the society, This revolution opens the road toward the self-organization and self-management of the society, ends with the omnipotence of the bureaucratic apparatus and breaks its monopoly on the disposition of the means of production, and makes possible the establishment of political democracy. (...) We conceive the historical task ahead of Solidarność as a general union of working people and as a powerful social movement unequivocally: it consists in assuring the victory of the moral and social revolution, and thereby in realizing a true socialism."

Thus, "The Independents" spoke openly, but inside Solidarność, about socialism. They were successful in this electoral campaign: finally four of them became members of the nine-person regional executive committee; all other members of the executive were elected individually, without a common platform.

Following the book by Steve Smith you say that in Petrograd in 1917 there is "evidence for the overwhelming acceptance by the working class that 'socialism', however vaguely understood, was the objective", and that it was not the case in Poland in 1980-81. I don't think that in Poland it was fundamentally different, even if the self-proclaimed "socialist" character of the bureaucratic regime complicated the matter. Even ideologically non sophisticated workers believing that the country was ruled by a Communist regime had a manner to solve the problem: often they said that they wanted socialism, but without Communist dictatorship. But at the mass level the most important thing was not the terminology, but the overwhelming sentiment inside the working class that the factories belonged legitimately to this class. They didn't demand bureaucrats: give us your factories; they demanded them: give us back our factories. It is a critical difference.

2017-11-30 9:46 Dear Zibigniew,

I knew about the 'Open Letter' and Poland '68. In fact Modzelewski told me that Peter Uhl, Czech student leader translated it to Czech from the French edition (ie not the Polish) in 1968. I also first came across the English edition in 1968 as a student at the London School of Economics - promoted by the International Socialists. It fitted well with their slogan Neither Washington Nor Moscow but International Socialism - especially after Prague.

I think we can now pause our immensely productive e mail discussion - parts of which I will be incorporating into my case study - I will of course e mail you, for your agreement, whatever it is that I intend to use.

One very final point - for the time being.

My interview with Josef Pinior was very successful - and he returns greetings to you. He mentioned the Conference '81 Manifesto with its proposed "equilibrium between plan, market and workers councils."

I'm aware that this opens up a massive question (and the proverbial can of worms) that neither an interview nor an e mail exchange can do justice. Nevertheless, if it's possible for you very briefly just to outline your thinking about the market and how "equilibrium" could have been maintained without the market undermining plans (and workers councils) - however well intended.

Again, many thanks

John

- 30 November Dear John,

Pinior's very inexact reference is to the Programmatic Resolution of the First National Congress of Delegates of Solidarność, adopted on October 7, 1981. Of course, the term "programmatic resolution" is an exaggeration, because mass movements or mass organizations have not programs; only parties can have them. So it was rather a general platform, and not a program.

The Thesis 1 and its explanation was co-authored by me, and the final version, submitted to the Congress, was an effect of a compromise between me and Ryszard Bugaj, an economist, both representing two different currents.

The Thesis 1 said exactly: "We demand the introduction of a self-management and democratic reform on all levels of management, a new socio-economic order that will combine plan, self-

management and market." (The word self-management in this sentence is, when first used, an adjective - a self-management reform -, and when used the second time, a substantive).

The order or succession of words is very important here (this order was an object of a debate): a combination of the plan, put in the first place, the (workers') self-management put in the second place, and the market put in the last place. The plan was put deliberately in the first place, as the most important among the three, and the market was put in the last place, as the less important element of the combination. The workers' self-management was put in the second place, even if the Thesis 20 said: "The authentic workers' self-management will be the base of the Self-Managed Republic."

Best, Zbigniew

Zbigniew Kowalewski's view of the National Congress

"This finds expression in the Programmatic Resolution of the First National Congress of Delegates of Solidarność, adopted on October 7, 1981. Of course, the term "programmatic resolution" is an exaggeration, because mass movements or mass organizations have not programmes; only parties can have them. So it was rather a general platform, and not a programme.

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second place, even if the Thesis 20 said: "The authentic workers' self-management will be the base of the Self-Managed Republic."

Karol Modzelewski

Karol Modzelewski was jailed in 1964 along with Jacek Kuron for jointly authoring, the *Open Letter to the Polish Communist Party* in 1964. Both men were Communist Party members. The *Open Letter* challenged the credentials of the Polish Communist regime and its claim to

be communist by applying a Marxist analysis. A generation later both men played a major part in founding, and then leading, Solidarity, though by that time they had rejected the *Open Letter* and its underlying Marxist principles.

The interview took place at the University of Warsaw in September 2017.

Referenced in Chapter 2 as (A-KM)

Below is KM's authorized version of the interview after he had made some changes to the transcript of the original interview. My view is that he checked the interview against his published autobiography. For details of his autobiography see Chapter 2 p?

JR = John Rose **Tr** = Matthew La Fontaine (translator) **KM** = Karol Modzelewski

Tr. So I introduced you to him... told him you are a Marxist, working on Poland, South Africa, and Iran as case studies for a PhD thesis of workers' movements that confronted regimes, but because of the political situation didn't succeed in actually in toppling them.

JR. *Succeeded in toppling them, but not taking it as far as socialists would've liked. Let me begin by... this is the Open Letter published in 1968, in England. (I showed him my copy). I was a student in 1968 when I discovered it.*

Tr. He mentioned that it was translated into Czech in 1968.... was translated into Czech in 1968 as well, by Petr Uhl, who was an activist...

KM. Petr Uhl the leader of the Czechoslovakian Student Movement. And he had translated, not from Polish, but from French, translated the Open Letter, and it was published in Czechoslovakia under the communist regime, but in the period of, I don't know, to call it revolution is perhaps an exaggeration, but you know that 68 was a very important moment in Czechoslovakian history.

JR. *I continue to believe, its importance is underrated because it is, there is no document like it which, first of all, analyzed the Soviet bureaucracy, and secondly accurately predicted its demise under pressure from a workers' movement. And I'm fascinated by the paradox that you and Jacek Kuroń rejected its conclusions by the time the very workers' movement you predicted blossomed, and indeed broke the Stalinist tyranny.*

Tr. At what moment? He says at what moment? The moment of Solidarity

KM. In 89 or 81?

JR. 81.

KM. That's not perhaps so easy, not so simple. ..Rejection of that axiological perspective... Was more advanced in the case of Kuroń, went farther... It was difficult later on to re-read this very doctrinaire Marxist text. I felt it had, perhaps, failed to maintain its relevance. Of course, it was not so relevant in 1980-81, because of all of the workers that I spoke with, none of them were familiar with the open letter. I was acting at that time as the press officer for Solidarity, and participating very heavily in that workers' movement, and there was not any familiarity with that text at the time. After the crushing of the Prague spring, which included Polish military involvement. And also the earlier experience with the Hungarian revolution. I stopped believing in the possibility that a revolution, the flame of a revolution in one country could spread to others, especially to the Soviet Union. The most important thing, because of the authority that it had amassed, was, that in the event of any sort of revolutionary movement here, the most important goal was to prevent Soviet military intervention. This was a very very strong possibility, and that if such an invasion had occurred, there was no revolution that could have withstood it. Of course, revolution is a phenomenon independent of the calculations of strategists and tacticians. This is the case with the revolution in 1980-1981. Particularly after the Czechoslovakian events, I didn't want to engage in any sort of conspiratorial, underground work or any sort of preparation for a sort of revolution, but when it did come in 1980-81, it was actually generally a peaceful movement, but brought about by a forceful general strike. Jacek Kuroń had been active before in the Committee to Protect the Workers. I was not active in that Committee. The charge always leveled against the Open Letter is that it is utopian in terms of its programmatic content. The charge is true in the sense that particular postulate, such as eliminating the army, replacing it with a workers' militia, rather ideas that could not simply be realized, but also in a greater sense that any vision which is sort of a radical contestation of the existing order is by definition utopian. Because you are a Marxist, I will allow myself to formulate an idea which I don't know whether it will offend you, or you will find it agreeable.

JR. *Good, excellent!*

KM. Just as every other intellectual tradition in Europe, Marxism as well, Marxist philosophy has Christian roots. In particular this concerns utopia...comparing utopia to eschatology. The kingdom on earth in the Christian sense is – was – necessary in order to formulate a radical criticism of the existing in the world order at the time. By the same token, the utopia set out in the Open Letter, was an axiological condition necessary in order to formulate a radical criticism

of the existing social and economic regime at the time. That it had to be put in that way for such a criticism to be advanced. Those interventions, the Soviet interventions which had taken place previously, led him and Jacek Kuroń to start thinking in more pragmatic terms about how to deal with the social unrest and upheaval that had started to take place here as well. I joined Solidarity the moment the strike broke out. Immediately. I went to Warsaw right away, but Jacek Kuroń and his friends were already in prison. I received what was, in fact, misinformation from an underground conspiratorial member of the Committee to Protect the Workers that in Gdańsk, at the time, a sort of panel of advisors, intellectuals, in the liberal democratic tradition had been convened as a way of moderating and softening the demands of the Solidarity movement in order to avoid any sort of direct confrontation with the regime.

A short break in the interview

Tr. That's just how it happens, he's answering questions you didn't ask.

KM. I went to Gdańsk, but they didn't want me there. They were afraid I might be too radical.

(Translator interrupted)

Tr. Excuse me, *not* because of that. Przepraszam, Panie Profesorze. They didn't welcome him with open arms, *not* because they were afraid he would be too radical...The reason he wasn't so enthusiastically welcomed was because, owing to his history of having been imprisoned and having openly challenged the authorities, his name and presence was a sort of waving the red flag in front of a bull. And there was a fear his presence would spook off the other side of negotiations. He was in Gdańsk for one day, observed the negotiations, saw what was happening, and came away convinced that a real revolution was taking place.

KM. It was a movement of masses, of the masses, who had finally felt they had achieved sovereignty, they were governing themselves, as opposed to their previous condition of conformism. And also the 700,000 people who were striking at the time. Around the country became the rulers of their own workplaces. It was a sliver of a free sort of Poland, the beginnings. I told my professor, who had fought in the Home Army, was a general, and also fought in the Warsaw Uprising. In response, he said this is an exact copy of the atmosphere of the first few days of the Warsaw Uprising. I returned to Warsaw, and became a representative of the Polish Academy of Sciences.

Tr. He was a member of the presidium. First he was sent as an observer from the Polish Academy of Sciences, later on he became a member of the presidium of that founding committee.

KM. I forced through, at a meeting of the different regional committees, ...a resolution which was contrary to the prevailing line both in Gdańsk, so with Lech Wałęsa and his partners there, and amongst other advisors... a resolution which said that instead of forming a trade union in each individual region, it would be one national trade union, and also suggested the name that was used then and remains used to this day. The government at the time had already...When it came to the new trade unions which were being formed, they had either wanted local trade unions, or branch unions based on industry, but they did not support a national trade union at that time. Forming one national trade union, at the time was considered very radical, but it carried the day amongst the trade unionists themselves because each of them individually was afraid that they would be crushed by the government in succession, until ultimately Gdańsk would then be crushed because they then would have no allies left. The other intellectuals, such as Geremek, Mazowiecki, etc., first they thought this was a very radical idea. They were afraid of the masses. They were intellectuals who were used to speaking. The crowd is not able to understand rational arguments, because they only react to emotions. It was of crucial importance was, within this movement, to forge an alliance between intellectuals and the workers involved, and this was only possible when the workers could accept as one of their own the intellectuals they were dealing with. Before that he mentioned Mazowiecki and some of the other intellectuals' assumptions about their inability to deal with the crowd came from their previous experience, that was why, let's say, making Wałęsa the leader of the movement was a stroke of genius, because he was able to communicate, with the workers, with the crowds. But also, Professor Modzelewski and Jacek Kuroń had the same talent, as intellectuals, to forge a bond with the workers and with the masses. For the 16 or 17 months where this activity was taking place, in different areas, among different groups, their objective was to convince the masses during this time that there needs to be some sort of realistic element, some pragmatic element involved in their thinking and in their activities. One of the postulate that they succeeded in implementing was a change taking the state enterprises and turning them into what he termed *social enterprises*, where the director of a given workplace and the strategy of the workplace was actually established by a workers' council elected in general open elections within the workplace. There were a lot of conflicts going on in the beginning of 1981, one of the most difficult of which was adopting the resolution, the motion, the statute to make the trade union a national one. There were also secret negotiations going on with the

government...including Andrzej Gwiazda. Andrzej Gwiazda was one of the leaders of the Solidarity syndicate in Gdańsk. And they were negotiating in secret with the government, but during this whole period there were many different conflicts erupting, which is a natural phenomenon during a mass workers' movement. The draft, the program for creating, for implementing these workers' councils, in the summer of 1981 was developed by a joint committee of the 17 largest employers in the country, plus a number of economic advisors. This proposal, the workers' councils, it led to sort of a closing of the ranks within the party, because the party at the time was split. Lower-level activists, working in the factories and on the shop floors, sympathized with the Solidarity movement, but this postulate caused the party to unite against Solidarity. This is because this idea, the project, it went against the nomenklatura, the party nominates directing the factory, the crews, even, at those levels. At the time, there had been a conflict and quarrel between the party convention – excuse me, the Solidarity convention and the party central committee about these workers' councils, but a large number of members of the parliament at the time had actually decided it was desirable to come to some sort of compromise with Solidarity, and so they passed a bill concerning state enterprises and workers' councils as a compromise measure which Solidarity had managed to force in their negotiations with the government – excuse me, with the party. This is the only success that managed to both survive the martial law era, and lasted up until the implementation of the Balcerowicz reforms. You know who Leszek Balcerowicz is?

JR. Yes

KM. Ok. Another incident, there were two more incidents or conflicts which should be mentioned, one of them was the physical attack and the beating of a Solidarity activist in Bydgoszcz during a meeting of the provincial council. Solidarity passed a resolution demanding that those responsible for beating the activist be brought to trial and be punished, and they said that on 27 March they would go on a warning strike of 4 hours around the country as a way of reinforcing their demands.

Tr. Of course, you can find this in his book.

KM. So, as the strike neared, he and other members of the regional committee went to sleep, they slept in one of the larger cities of Wrocław, where he was based at the time, called PaFaWag. Around 11,000 workers were there, and also I went around and visited many of the different factories and workplaces and shops in the city, to get a sense of the atmosphere. And at these different facilities, there were gates. And the gates were open during the time of the

warning strike. Generally they would be guarded by a sort of, say, state official guards. Industrial guards, we could translate them into English. These guards were relieved of their responsibilities, and the gates were guarded by workers from different organizations which were represented by armbands they were wearing. And what is most important here is that on these armbands, you can find, for example, there would be three workers, one would have an armband representing Solidarity, another with an armband of the government-aligned trade unionists, and yet another had an armband representing Party membership. What this was a symbol that the government had no support, had no leg to stand on, that all of these different centres, all of these different groups were participating in the strike, against the government. The negotiations started. And for 4 days the regional activists, (such as the professor *[Modzelewski – transcriber's note]*, they remained in the factories and the workplaces, waiting to find out what would happen with the negotiations in Warsaw, whether they would go on a general strike in four days, or whether an agreement would be reached. The advisors to Solidarity at the time were basically panicked, and they were very frightened that a general strike would lead to intervention by Soviet troops. At the time, there was reason to believe this was very likely, especially because they, the strikers, the workers had the numbers, the power and the strength to engage in a direct conflict with them. During the negotiations, an agreement was reached that, on paper, didn't look so bad for the trade union and for the workers. However, it was not the negotiation team's, it wasn't within their remit to actually call an end to the strike. Formally, the resolution of the national council declared that only the national council could break off the strike, however, the negotiators exited the negotiations, went out before the cameras and said they had achieved a good agreement, beneficial, and that they were suspending the strike. It was not so much a formal decision, but in fact it replaced the formal decision that was necessary from the national committee.

Tr. Being inside the factories and being directly engaged with the workers at the time, he recalls that the mood was one of resignation, that if we have to go to war, if we have to fight, then we are ready to do so.

KM. And this is when, from the negotiating team, Gwiazda went on camera, next to Wałęsa, and Gwiazda announced that the strike was being suspended, which in reality meant that it was being called off and was not going to come to fruition. He recalls that it was a feeling of almost one giant, heaving sigh of relief among the workers that the confrontation had been successfully avoided. So later on, at a meeting of the National Committee, as the representative of that committee, I gave a speech, heavily criticizing the negotiators, including

Wałęsa, for breaking procedure and for violating the rules that had been established. The negotiators were heavily, roundly criticized at this meeting, but ultimately the dynamics of the situation had changed so much that the strike was out of Solidarity's hands. There was no way of them regaining control of this, let's say, threat or weapon at the time. And what happened was a change, a sort of transition from preparing to deal with a potential Soviet intervention to preparing to deal with what, in fact, happened in Poland, that is the imposition of martial law.

It should be emphasized that the threat of Soviet intervention was not an empty one. Apart from two Czechoslovakian divisions and two East German divisions, also 14 divisions of the Soviet Army amassed on the Eastern border, and they were kitted out and prepared for war. They had field kitchens, field hospitals, these were armoured divisions. This was a real and immediate threat at the time, one year before the imposition of martial law. The invasion was avoided at the time because of the activation of the "red line" between Washington and Moscow. And the Americans were informed of these Soviet preparations by a spy which they had in the general staff of the Polish army, Kukliński. And of course their own electronic surveillance - Satellites. The Americans warned the Soviets that such a large shift in the military balance of power in Europe, moving these Soviet divisions 900 kilometres to the west, would necessitate a proportional response, a shifting in American firepower, including the deployment of new missiles, such as Pershings. This led to the Soviets, whenever there were some greater tensions and conflicts occurring in Poland, that the Soviets put pressure on the government in Warsaw to have them impose martial law under threat of a Soviet invasion of the country. Without going into too much greater detail, martial law was imposed on 13 December 1981. There was a sort of informal resolution that he wrote, and which was sent around to all the different factories and shops in the country, this was on the 3rd of December, which said that in the event of martial law, operating under the assumption that the highest authorities in Solidarity would immediately be arrested, without waiting for any further orders or instructions that they immediately go on strike General strike. Particularly in Warsaw, for example, there was a very strong show of force by the military. Tanks were deployed, patrols were going around the streets, and within factories and workplaces there were announcements put up that violating the martial law would lead to, actually, workers going on strike would be court-martialled, brought before military courts, and they faced penalties up to the death penalty. So the whole sort of theatre of war that was activated has a very frightening and depressing effect on the workers. Tensions had been so high in March in Solidarity, because of the expectation, not necessarily because of the desire, but the expectation that revolution was coming, that after, when it didn't in fact happen, the air was

let out of the balloon of Solidarity. But some occupation strikes in different regions and areas did, in fact, break out after the imposition of martial law.

Tr. He's not going to discuss the story of the 'Wujek' coal mine because he's sure you are familiar with them. But he does want to relate something he heard after he'd been arrested and interned, from another arrestee, who was a member of the committee in a Warsaw factory. It was the crown jewel of the military junta.

KM. This factory was invaded by the militia, which were called ZOMO. A tank was brought in to clear the path, and 700 of these militia were sent in, armed with automatic weapons. The leader said first, he addressed the strikers who were occupying the factory, he said "Leave. Exit the factory." They refused. So he then instructed the militia to load their weapons and aim them at the workers. And so after a moment, the workers finally got up and left the factory. Of course, we can say that they didn't really have any other way out, they were simply empty handed, being faced with soldiers or militia armed with automatic weapons, but there is something in the knowledge, in the self-awareness that you've had to capitulate or submit to this sort of armed force, the threat of armed force being used against you, and when you find yourself in that situation, something inside of you is irreversibly, irrevocably changed. And the same thing happened also in Wrocław, where the vast majority of factories both large and small had gone on strike, where a division of the militia accompanied by a couple of army tanks went simply from factory to factory, and either broke down the gates, or drove simply through the wall, the militia entered the factory and ordered the striking workers out. They just went one by one by one successively to factories around Wrocław. Wrocław had been pacified in that way in about a week. As a result, the mass movement did not, couldn't continue, it was broken.

Tr. The conspiracy, let's say, of cadres – Sorry, I'm trying to think of a good translation – conspiratorial movements did survive and continue. So they didn't have support within the crews in factories, but the conspiratorial elements managed to keep functioning. Primarily we're talking about intellectuals here.

KM. The language that was being used in workplace newsletters changed at that time. The editors and the writers, in response to the charge by the government that Solidarity was an anti-socialist movement, they in fact reversed the charge and said "No, it is you, the government, who is anti-socialist, not us." There was between 8 and 12 thousand – he's making a rough estimate – 8 and 12 thousand people, intellectuals involved in this

underground conspiracy, but of course there's no card catalogue, no records kept of exactly who was there, so the number is hard to establish. Books were printed and distributed. Including the most popular from the West, they were being printed. Bestsellers. Von Hayek, Milton Friedman ...Those types of Polish intelligentsia, during the time of martial law, changed the language being used by Solidarity to one of a very anti-communist sort. Of course, their eyes were turned towards the West, at the time there was a very neoconservative collection of governments and regimes, that of Reagan, that of Thatcher, etc. And so the neoliberals became the champions of thought among Polish intellectuals.

Communism collapsed not because of Solidarity and the mass workers' movement that succeeded in toppling the regime and preventing Soviet intervention, but rather because of Gorbachev. The war in the Persian Gulf made Gorbachev and the Soviet elite, both political and military, aware that they had ultimately lost the arms race with the Americans, because they were able to observe how Hussein's armies, which were equipped with the most modern Soviet warfare technology, were simply destroyed unceremoniously by the American war machine. Gorbachev's objective was not to destroy the Soviet Union, but to modernise it. He knew it was necessary to pen up to the west, to engage in far-reaching disarmament so that the weight of military spending would not crush the budget and the economy, and also he understood that some elements of democracy had to be introduced into the Soviet system.

What remains after "Solidarity" was not "Solidarity" itself, but the myth and the collective memory that for 16 months in Poland we lived in a real and tangible freedom which we practiced as our own masters. In 1988, when the two large waves of strikes broke out, they were not initiated by the underground intellectuals in those circles, because those had lost their influence over Solidarity. In fact, they were initiated and they were led by young workers who, during the events of 1981, people in their twenties, who at the time were attending school. So they didn't have the same experience of martial law and the same memories, they hadn't experienced those defeats, and they were leading economic strikes. But they borrowed some of the language, some of the slogans from that myth of those 16 months from that time. And so the generals who were running the country at the time, of course it was a military junta in charge, they came to the conclusion that maybe it was a good time to begin talking to Wałęsa, even though they knew perfectly well that Wałęsa was a general without an army. And they told him, "If you're such a powerful figure, why don't you go there and tell those people to stop striking?" Knowing full well that it was not Wałęsa's people who were responsible for the strikes. But when he called for the strikes to stop, they did. Because

although Solidarity itself, as it was, had ceased to exist, the myth of Solidarity remained alive and was represented in the person of Wałęsa and the advisors and people from his circle. Of course, this led to the round table negotiations and agreements being concluded between the different parties. All of this took place with the knowledge and permission of Gorbachev and Moscow, that they were allowed to carry on these talks, they were allowed to make agreements, they were allowed to introduce some limited democratic elections, and even to hand power over to those leaders of the former Solidarity movement. This agreement, what they called 'the contract', gave Solidarity automatically 35% in the lower house of parliament, plus whatever they were able to win in the remaining elections. There were free elections to the Senate, of course, they were not proportional, but rather first past the post. Solidarity took all 35% allotted to it in the lower house, and 99 of 100 seats in the Senate. This was not the trade union, Solidarity, nor was it a mass movement. It was more of an *ad hoc* structure formed under the "Solidarity" banner, which at the time continued to be carried by the intellectuals. It was a triumph of the myth, of the symbol.

I became a senator from Wrocław, and Jacek Kuroń was elected to the lower house as an MP. So at the time, when the government led by Rakowski, still led by the communist party, saw that the economy was starting to collapse, and ended price controls on food, and hyperinflation then ensued, they made the determination that perhaps it was time to hand power over in the government to Solidarity. So Tadeusz Mazowiecki, one of the main advisors of Solidarity, became Prime Minister, Leszek Balcerowicz became the minister of finance, so he was essentially in charge of the economy, and Jacek Kuroń was nominated minister of labour. At the time I argued that they should not enter the government for the simple reason that the communist party would still retain all the real levers of power, including the police, the military, the mass media, and others, and that Solidarity, let's say portion of the government would be charged with the task of administrating an economic catastrophe. I was partially wrong about that, in the sense that of course the communists retained control of the police and of the military, but as for the mass media, and for diplomacy, which was one of the other levers of power he mentioned, the situation was not so clear. Jacek Kuron, as minister of labour and social policy, helped in, let's say, implementing the shock therapy applied at the time, because he was persuasive, particularly on television. He tried to include, let's say, workers' circles, to have them participate in the process. Unsuccessfully - because Balcerowicz succeeded in eliminating their final remaining success from the Solidarity period, the workers' councils. Within the parliament I formed a parliamentary group which 'Solidarity of Labour', and later on... Union of labour. And this party in the second elections to the parliament, in

1993, received 7.5% of the vote, 41 seats. I did not himself stand in those elections, he returned to academic work. Later I left that party following a conflict over whom they should support in the presidential elections. I wanted to support Jacek Kuroń, but in the end they selected another candidate, who received 3% of the vote in the next presidential elections. Kuroń became sort of the *enfant terrible* of the party. And while perhaps he didn't return to the *Open letter* per se, he did renew his very harsh criticism of the capitalist order of the time. He became sort of a guru for younger leftist activists at the time, who, after his death, these activists founded a political party that the called Razem, which received 3.5% in the last parliamentary elections. This is more or less the history of events, somewhere between doctrine and practice.

The interview had taken two hours, a timetable which we had agreed in advance, mostly KM talking. I asked for clarification of some points by e mail but KM asked me to state the points then.

KM. Specifically?

JR. *I would begin with asking you more about the 'utopian' dimension of the Open Letter, I would like clarification and more discussion about that.*

KM. By utopia - a sort of project which is so extremely different from the existing state of things as to itself perhaps not be at all reasonable or practicable, but rather it exists as a way of forming a horizon that can be used and a perspective from which one may then engage in a radical criticism of the existing state of things and as a way of, let's say, putting on display, in view, all of its weaknesses and its flaws and its negative aspects. As a historian, I can't answer the question of whether this was an impossible vision or not.

JR. *But I think he did answer the question, if I may just quote one sentence. The sentence, which is very fascinating, following from the utopian discussion is as follows: Memory of Solidarity afterwards (survived) as a myth that we lived as our own masters for 16 months. But my question is, it wasn't a myth, you did live as your own masters, this was not an illusion, it wasn't a myth, you did for 16 months live as your own masters...My point is, that those 16 months, in principle, could have been the basis for a transformed society.*

KM. Based on my personal experience, we can forget about all the definitions of revolutions that we hear of from political science, that they can be binned. Revolution is more a sort of collective state of consciousness, state of the soul of a mass of people, which negates the previous existence and lives, course of events and lives of those masses. In other words, the

existence of people who are chained, who are living as conformists, it is a rejection of that conformism, a rejection of that type of life. The revolution begins at the moment when the masses are able to shake off the yoke of conformism. And they behave as Joanne D'Arc. They are the ones, they decide about their own fate, and collectively together with their friends and their community, decide about their workplace, about their cities, and about their government and their country.

You know the word *gleichschaltung*? I use it as an analogy, he's saying that a real revolution cannot be suppressed. This German word describes the process by which Hitler and the Nazis successively took over and subjugated aspects of social - Trade unions, cooperatives, parliament, political parties and so on and so on. So the revolution destroys the illusion of, basically, the puppet theatre which all of this order and rule is based on. We did in that sense experience revolution. The transformation, economic, social and political transformations, basically buried, firstly, those large factories, those workers' masses that had participated in the revolution at the time. The transformation that was conducted under the banner of Solidarity ended up as the sort of undertaker of itself.

In 1990, as a senator, I visited a factory in Wrocław which employed around 16,000 workers, I met with representatives of Solidarity in the factory, which produced hydraulic elements for aircraft engines used for airplanes in the Warsaw Pact countries. It's important to note that this Solidarity was not the original one, but a sort of "version two", a new iteration, which counted less than 1/10 of the original membership of Solidarity, which at the time had 9,000,000 in its original edition, and now, in 1990, counted around 800,000 members. It was a different Solidarity. At the factory I presented his criticism of the Balcerowicz reforms, which were implemented, and also he had criticized in the Senate, where I was one of six senators to vote against the plan, whereas it should be kept in mind, that out of 100 senators, 99 had been elected under the Solidarity banner. And in the lower house, in the Sejm, it was passed unanimously, no one voted against it. The first reaction, I had a good feeling for crowds. There was a reaction of surprise, a negative reaction to his words, I had caused some sort of discomfort or unpleasantness in my words. I recall one female employee of the factory who spoke out in a similar vein of the criticism of the Balcerowicz plan ... she said she was a woman in her 50s, who had given her life and her health to the factory, her husband had died and she had children to raise, and now because the factory itself was considered economically, let's say, inefficient, unjustified, and was slated to be restructured and closed, that she was

supposed to go and become an entrepreneur, to start her own business. And she said “tell them they can go to hell!”

Interview ends.

Józef Pinior Interview in Wroclaw 23/11/17

Józef Pinior, former Solidarity leader from the Polish city of Wrocław and the movement's National Treasurer. Famously, he concealed Solidarity's funds when martial law was declared in December 1981. (See page 4) Later as a member of the European Parliament he helped expose Polish government complicity in allowing NATO's so-called 'black sites', used for the 'rendition' programme of torture of terrorist suspects, on Polish territory.³⁵¹

JP- Józef Pinior JR John Rose interviewer, conducted in English / 'btw' means 'by the way'

JR began the interview by asking JP about the 'Open Letter' of Kuron and Modzelewski

JP. 'Open Letter' fundamental text for Solidarity movement even if this letter was not well known within the working class. It was a classical way about how to organise and how to be in struggle against the state: an absolutely fundamental text.

JR. *But K & M rejected it by the time the movement took off.*

JP. To some extent, yes, btw, do you know that Modzelewski was here in this city, Wrocław? After he was freed from prison in early 1970's, I think, '71. It was a proposal from the Party Central Committee. You can work in the Academy – but not in Warsaw! So it was kind of refugee status for him from Warsaw! As you know he was born in Moscow, but as a young man, a student, he was in Warsaw. You know for Modzelewski, Solidarity, it is his declaration. Solidarity is the most important part of his life. Solidarity for him is everything. Even if he formally reject platform of 'Open Letter', deeper, mentally, he felt that Solidarity was a child of the projection in his 'Letter'. I would like to say (it) on Saturday, he is 80. It is psychological, Freudian. Solidarity was a kind of projection from his '64 'Open Letter' to the Party. Of course the situation was completely different, he was still close to the Party when he and Kuron wrote it. Solidarity was completely outside the Party, a rejection of the Party, it was a rank and file working class movement. Nevertheless, the creation of this movement was in view ('as a result', my edit?) of the 'Letter'.

JR. *And the analysis of state capitalism, did you accept that aspect of it? It was not communism, at all. It was state capitalism.*

JP. I'm not sure if they were in the classical Marxist debate in the Trotskyist movement between state capitalism and the degenerated workers' state. But it was their view after the experience in Poland in 1956, the movement of workers councils, they were both very deep in

³⁵¹ <https://www.economist.com/blogs/easternapproaches/2014/02/poland-and-rendition>

this movement ('deeply affected' my edit?) by this movement. So it was their own analysis of the situation.

JR. But it mattered to have a theoretical analysis that stated definitively that this is not communism?

JP. It is not communism and it is not our state. Because what was very clear in the Solidarity movement and, btw, in this 'Letter' it was the rejection of this existing state. It was a very clear Leninist position, even if they didn't name it as a Leninist position, but it was clear as in Lenin's State and Revolution: aha, we are meeting today just 100 years after the Russian Revolution.

JR. Let's come on to you. You were here in this city?

JP. I was 25 years old, just after my Master of Law degree, I'd studied philosophy. At that time in Poland, if you wanted to study other faculty, you had to take a job. So I was in a bank as a translator. At the same time I was in a Philosophy department to finish my Philosophy studies. But as a young lawyer I had around me a kind of workers' group, to help them with their problems in the factories. Because as a student in the Law Department, I organised with my friends, around 1977, after protest in Radom in 1976. In June 1976 there was a huge strike movement, in Radom, an industrial city, further east from Wroclaw in central Poland. In June there were strikes against higher prices, particularly for food. For my generation it was a rationale, an awakening (my edit, JR) experience. But the state suppressed workers because of the strikes. Police beat workers. So it was a kind of existential experience in my political life, one of my most important political experiences in my political life. And we decided, as students, that we didn't go to official students' organisation, that we couldn't work in the office of official student organisation because of the situation in Radom, but we must organise outside official organisation. We tried to organise our own student association. Of course it was not possible. We even published a samizdat without repression. But nevertheless the city administration didn't agree with the existence of this students' association. Btw, when we met in the municipal office there were two men in the room, me and my colleague and two men from the official side, the administrator of the city council and another guy, he simply sat and was silent. Some years later when I was arrested during the Martial Law period in 1983 and was sent to secret police prison I met him again! He said, "we grew up, we meet again!" (Laughter) I didn't realise the first time I met him that he was a secret agent.

JR. So you were in the bank in 1980, bank workers, bank clerks, did they form unions?

JP. Sure, even at the time when there was a strike in August, the start of Solidarity in Gdansk, in my bank, I organise, it was at first not a trade union but a workers self-government association, 'autogestion', employees council. So I wrote a manifesto and put this manifesto on the wall of the bank. My first projection was that this will be a classical trade union but in the style of 1956, a kind of workers council. So I organised in my bank this 'autogestion' as a small organisation to be active within this broad national movement of Solidarity.

JR. *What sort of numbers were involved in the bank?*

JP. Huge support: almost everybody was very enthusiastic after this so-called agreement between the Party and Lech Walesa committee in the Gdansk shipyard. It was very clear, absolutely a revolution. Huge support from everybody, even from the Party, at least its rank and file structures. Almost everybody tried to be a member of this new union.

JR. *So together you build this huge movement everywhere but then you reach the climactic moment of Bydgoszcz.*

JP. It was a climactic moment for Solidarity but in a negative sense because the March mobilisation, it was a peak mobilisation from the people, it was a revolutionary moment...(inaudible word something the state or stop 15.54). In my opinion, still today, I think it was an error from Solidarity leadership, from Walesa, to make this deal with Rakowski, with central government, with the Party to stop this strike. I was prepared for this strike, it was not factories, but workshop office but organised around my bank. There was a nuclear bomb shelter in the basement. I used this shelter because I was formally leader of a trade union and I could access this shelter. At this shelter I organised a strike committee for this March mobilisation for all offices, all workshops around the old market. I even prepared food for three months. So I had everything prepared for these strikes.

JR. *What would the Polish police and army have done? Would they have supported the strikers or would they have been used by the government to break the strike?*

JP. It's a post factual history. We don't know. But I remember the evening, before the declaration on TV that there will be no strike, the conversation with the Director of this bank. He asked to talk with me and he said I'm going home. You are now here. You must take responsibility. I tell you in the night the commando units will be here. The Director said, I know about it. The Director was a very high level guy in the Party. So probably he knew about government decision to use violence in the way they did with the declaration of martial law in December '81. But the problem is that we were better prepared for such confrontation in

March. In December it was after de-mobilisation. So probably – but I repeat it's a counter-factual history...

JR. But that night the commando unit didn't come...it was an empty threat?

JP. Sure, it was an empty threat – but later there was a decision about the deal. So to answer your question. Probably such confrontation would have resulted in the divisions of the military apparatus and state structures. Preferably some soldiers will go to our side but I don't know, it's a counter factual history. But nevertheless we were better prepared in March for such confrontation.

JR. It sounds slightly pretentious but this could have changed the whole world historical picture, the strike following Bydgoszcz?

JP. Absolutely. It was a demobilisation for Solidarity.

JR. Solidarity could have taken power?

JP. Absolutely. Because in my opinion, at that time in Poland, it was a classical dual power situation. There was still a state with military apparatus and police of course. But the real power, day by day, went to workers councils, to factory councils. I remember in the fall (ie Autumn) with Karol Modzelewski, we organised a plebiscite in the biggest factories in Wroclaw about who has the power to choose the director, manager, the Party or workers' councils? And in every factory we won this plebiscite. So it was a classic dual power situation. So in my opinion it was a tragic decision not to go to the strikes in March.

JR. And in a way the movement begins to fragment?

JP. Absolutely right. There is demobilisation

JR. And demoralisation?

JP. Yes, demoralised.

JR. And the other event of that year is the national conference which, despite the movement coming down, still expresses the highest aspirations of the movement which can be summed up in the sentence: self governing republic with self managing workplaces. This is open to different interpretations, but one interpretation is a profoundly transformative vision, set of objectives.

JP. Absolutely. Even I don't know whether you know the manifesto of this conference because the official manifesto, official programme of this conference is a text on self governing republic

– it is not on official Solidarity website - with very interesting programme to equilibrium between state plan and workers councils. Very original, ideologically. Easily available.

JR. Probably in Friszke?

JP. Yes, Manifesto when this new situation should be equilibrium between plan, market and workers councils.

JR. *And then we get Martial Law. Of course you had been elected treasurer?*

JP. I became treasurer in 1981. In spring and summer there was an election within the movement and I won the election here in the region (Wroclaw). I prepared a programme – What is to be Done with Money... I was delegate to Conference from all the banks. I prepared this programme how to organise money, how to be active, a visionary programme for Solidarity and they voted me, I became a kind of financial person for the union. It was an official position.

*We then discussed the very famous (at least in Poland) event when JP concealed the union's funds, 80 million zlotys, just before Martial Law was declared. It is the subject of a book in Poland, **80 Milionów: Historia Prawdziwa**, by Katarzyna Kaczorowska, Wroclaw journalist with the city's newspaper, Gazeta Wroclawska.³⁵²*

JR. *For me now the big question: I have asked it to every Solidarity activist and leader I have interviewed, whatever their political standpoint. These months, 1980-81 until Martial Law, this is a very extraordinary historical period not just for Poland but for the twentieth century. It's major challenge to this thing called Communism which itself becomes a trigger, one of the major triggers for its disintegration. But, in a way, it also takes down the idea of Communism, it takes down the vision of a left wing alternative to capitalism. We're still with this legacy into this new century, the second decade and it's fantastically damaging for us, for all of us on the Left. I just wondered what your thoughts were on that and the degree to which, without romanticising the period, those 16 months, 1980-81, serve as a kind of model for the future in terms of a collective spirit, the demand for workers control, in terms of, however ill thought*



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I would like to thank Matthew La Fontaine for providing me with this English language summary. Matthew was my indispensable Polish language translator in Poland. Józef Pinior told me that the film of **80 Milionów: Historia Prawdziwa**, credited the book. This Hollywood-style film was a Polish candidate for the Oscars.

out, a vision of an alternative not just to Stalin Communism but also to Western capitalism. In a sense you experienced the future, this was a different future, or is this a romantic interpretation?

JP. We have nothing else. Because it was a real revolution. The disillusion about 1989 which now affects the nationalistic, populist government. This is what now happens in Poland, this nationalistic xenophobic populism and hybrid of authoritarianism. To much extent is a result of disillusion of 1989 because people, society, had in their mind that a real alternative works. It works, in 1980, 1981. And they remember it. Do you know Hannah Arendt about "The Lost Treasure of the Revolution."³⁵³ It was a lost treasure. In the peoples' mind, we lost something. It's very brilliant. Arendt is always brilliant. The degeneration of Polish politics today, the xenophobic nationalism, the racism, populism, I think is a result of this disillusion, that it was not possible to really provide this revolution, to a real alternative not only to Stalinist regime but to global capitalism, markets.

JR. *You got rid of Stalinism and embraced neoliberalism? The extraordinary image of Jacek Kuron introducing 'Shock Therapy' as Minister of Labour, the symbolism of that and, of course, he later regrets it...*

JP. Modzelewski and me were on the other side. We criticised it.

The discussion closes with a reference by JP to the Polish Socialist Party in the early 1990's and his contact at that time with the Socialist Workers Party in the UK.

Biographical notes

Modzelewski also provides an account of Pinior's legendary status in the movement at this time.

"In the beginning of May 1988, when in some of the factories the proper strikes begun for the first time in years ... Josef Pinior tried to encourage Dolmel to go on strike. He made

³⁵³ See Stefan Auer 'The lost treasure of the revolution' *Osteuropa*, 25/10/2006 on Hannah Arendt and the fiftieth anniversary of the 1956 Hungarian Revolution and its Workers Councils. <http://www.eurozine.com/the-lost-treasure-of-the-revolution/> Auer concluded.

"It is useful to remind oneself of the open ended nature of all genuinely political projects, including our attempts at understanding revolutions. 'The lost treasure of revolution', to use Arendt's unforgettable phrase, (in *Between Past and Future* 5. Hannah Arendt) may never be found, but this should not prevent us from trying."

arrangements with their clandestine workplace commission and he was smuggled in somehow. He was a living legend, therefore when he suddenly appeared in the factory, a lot of people gathered around him. The intervention of so called 'workplace guards' (the workplace's ORMO squad) was enough to prevent the strike, forcibly see Josef out through the gate and hand him over to the militia."(Modzelewski 2013: loc. 6513-18)

Jan Rulewski

Solidarity leader in the Bydgoszcz region. He and other activists were assaulted by the police during negotiations between Solidarity and government officials in March 1981 for three million peasant farmers to join Solidarity. This became the major flashpoint, or turning point, in the clash between Solidarity and the government in the period August 1980, Solidarity's launch and December 1981, the imposition of Martial Law. A planned general strike in response was unilaterally suspended by Solidarity leader, Lech Walesa.

Jan Rulewski, a professional bicycle design engineer, today is a Senator in the Sejm for *Platforma Obywatelska, Civic Platform*. The interview took place in his Senator's office in Bydgoszcz in November 2017, with translator Matthew La Fontaine. (p290-298)

Referenced in Chapter 2 as (A-JR)

Just a very simple question to begin, what job were you doing at the time, what was your employment?

At the time, I was the Chairman of the Solidarity Trade Union Founding Committee in Bydgoszcz Region. I was delegated, formally, to act in trade unions, based on regulations which actually remain in force to this day. And professionally, I was an engineer mechanic, a constructor in Romet Bicycle Works. And simultaneously, at Romet, I voluntarily acted as the head of trade unions, in a semi-scientific institution, a research and development centre. But in order to get some distance, part in me is still connected with these works, which no longer exist, and I consider, for the general good, developing a new concept of a bicycle, because the one we still use originates from the 19th century. Yes, these bicycles were designed when the only vehicles on roads were horse carriages. Many people just walked on roads, nobody interfered with anyone. And a bicycle was used only for recreation purposes, right? Even as a social thing. It showed people's fitness, first used only by men, then also by women. And these days... a bike rides, surrounded by heavy lorries, splashing water everywhere, lights, the road is different, so much better. And the cities are larger. Apparently it was possible to ride across London on a bike, but today, I would doubt you could do it on a motorbike.

When the general strike was called and Lech Wałęsa called it off, what was your opinion?

I believe, that not the full striking force was actually used and taken advantage of, and it could have won us much more, the strike could have been so much more effective. There were 5

postulates, the first, as far as I remember was the security of the trade union, the second was the registration of peasants' unions, the third: access to the media, the fourth: control... Access to the media at the time was understood as access to electronic media, but also to paper, so that we could have better production [printing] capacity. And the fourth, or fifth, I lost the count a bit... it was about any kind of control over security forces and the security apparatus. It was referred to as the media, but understood as access to paper, on which we could publish our own publications, but public media were also included here. And control over trade union media involved access to paper, and other means obviously, edition means... printing machine.

So to be clear, you were opposed to the strike being called off?

Calling off... the trade union paid too high the price compared to what it achieved, hence I support the opinion which appeared at the time, that this compromise that was actually reached then was a rotten compromise.

The argument was: we are risking an invasion from the Soviet tanks, this was the best argument that it was too dangerous to continue?

It is true that during this period of several days, because it lasted from 16th March to 31st March, many various arguments were made in various locations in Poland, but mainly in Gdańsk and in Warsaw, but none of them quite proven. One of these arguments was that there is a possibility of the Soviet Unions' and neighbouring states' intervention in Poland. The counterargument was the fact, that since the beginning of Solidarity, even earlier, the public rhetoric enforced by statements from party management in the USSR, was that Poland was considered the hostage of the Jalta Treaty, and anyone, who wants to attack this country, even for social reasons, the existence related reasons, wishes to, in fact, to make this this arrangement go upside down. The Polish communists additionally supported this with an argument, that the borders are guaranteed, and it is the Soviet Union who guarantees these borders in the layout that derived from the Potsdam Treaty. During the implementation of this compromise, in Warsaw, some people claimed, that they saw some mysterious signs moving on the sky, some light flashes, which indicated movement of... some of them said "airplanes", others "satelites", and therefore, some people used this as a crucial argument in their attitudes that were, let's say, seeking compromise. I would say that these calculations, exactly at that time, were not credible, because first of all, whatever erupted in Bydgoszcz and its consequences, mainly the social movement, which was a peaceful revolution, in mass and general scale, unknown in Poland, and probably in Europe, were so utterly surprising,

shocking... it had to surprise everybody and it did. I was surprised too. The scale of these demonstrations was a shock to me, because I thought I was just a member of the trade union council, but not the most important one, and that the issues we dealt with were valid on local scale. But instead, I'm about to finish this, it absolutely exceeded all our expectations here in Poland and internationally, and it can be compared, if it only, to the revolution in Iran. You are familiar with these topics, as you research them, so you can compare my credibility here, while reading this, I noticed that during the revolution in Iran, in 1980, a situation occurred, that the king, royal court, army all were present there and existed, but nobody listened to the king anymore. And similarly in Poland, we had our government, the party held strongly, media were state owned, security apparatus, the army, the militia but they only obeyed orders on the level of the provincial party committee.

This means that the majority of the Polish police and the majority of the Polish army supported the general strike?

Not directly but they were sympathetic. I even received flowers and telegrams from organisations... They adopted relevant resolutions. And when I say that it had the features of a modern national uprising, without weapons, shooting, barricades, this is because the local incident was a catalyst causing the awakening of whatever was left dormant up to that point, in August, that people not only wished for social gains, but they understood, that these gains are not enough to guarantee anything and act as a their safety guarantee for the future.

The government could not rely on the army or the police to defeat the general strike?

No, it could not.

On the wider questions, one of the most exciting demands raised by your movement, was for workers self management. And I think that the National Congress, few months later, the one and only National Congress in 1981, to sum up the resolution, called for the self governing republic, that would self manage workplaces.

In 1981. Am I right that you mean the Solidarity convention?

Yes

Because there were also other ones. You're right, the need for self-governance arose together with the need to transform the August [events] into an institution. With regard to defending labour rights, I believe that we achieved all we could and even more, than we expected and that was possible. At the same time, in August, at the National Convention forum, during

which a debate was held on changes, in the permanent transformation, and we then actually took advantage of the Solidary assets, in their available form at the time, namely the network of leading enterprises. But in my opinion, at this time, the race was already on, toward, let's say... they already placed the HAPPY END frame [as if it was the ending of a film]. The communists, already reached their "happy end", "the end". They had the full access to news on the condition of the economy, on connections of Poland, the Polish obligations and they knew, I think they knew, that this outbreak of Solidarity will lead to the confrontation between the economic reality, the postulates of the Union and will cause its discrediting. The end was therefore, the return to the strong-arm government which will pull Poland out from the growing crisis, increasingly deep crisis. In other words, they will give us the bill to pay for that crisis. In order to prevent that, we decided to count on the economy in its reformed version, which was at the time the only available compromise, but possibly, even in our perception, this solution involved taking over the economic functions in enterprises and in other institutions by self-governments. Assuming that the nomenclature that existed at the time was the source of crisis, one of many sources of crisis, mainly in enterprises, we decided, that it must be replaced by worker's self-government, and in fact, by an enterprise that works under the 3xS rule, i.e. acting as a self-financing, self-governing and self-sufficient enterprise. This obviously caused a confrontation. The communists also spoke about this. But rather in the context of undeveloped changes that have no merit. And definitely they did not agree for an independence [self-sufficiency] of an enterprise, understood as the choice of management, or shaping the authorities in the enterprise. So they supported the doctrinal thesis that the director in an enterprise, even if there is a self-governmental council, will be appointed by the party organisation. And this way, in fact, the olive branch offered by Solidarity, was broken.

So I would suggest, that Solidarity, almost by chance, stumbled upon, the true meaning of communism.

Yes, the thousands, hundreds of thousands of people in this practical environment, in these contacts, negotiations with the authorities, actually managed to look under the standard façade, not only with regard to the macro socialism but even see the backstage from the inside. If I may, I will use an example here. I had an advisor, who assisted me in the matters related to setting up the union, but also... I was in fact ordered by the Union to deal with the postulate of food supplies to the nation, which was one of Gdańsk postulates, numbered 10 or 13... In Poland we had this general belief at the time, not the first time though, that the food produced here by farmers disappears somewhere, most likely in the dungeons of the Russian

Imperium. So during the negotiations, the problem was discussed and a question was asked: what is the price for we in fact export the food to Russia. And the response we were given from the government representatives was that they could not possibly share this information with us there, because it was a Polish *raison d'état*. And then this solicitor, who was a moderate type, and whose mission I think was to temper my revolutionary outburst, he told me in private, and then he said it in public, that he could not imagine a state where its citizen cannot find out what we sell and how much we are paid in exchange. I think he became more radical than me. So this is this seeing it from the inside of the machine

Linked to this discussion, a puzzle for me, the original open letter of Kuroń and Modzelewski predicted a movement like Solidarity and predicted a genuine socialism or communism where workers control production, and the paradox is that by the time Solidarity emerged, Kuroń and Modzelewski rejected their own open letter, and this for me a fascinating paradox.

Yes, and believe me or not, I was in the prison cell with Kuroń and Modzelewski, when they were accused for writing this letter, this publication

Really, in what year?

Tr. In 1965 and 1966 in Warsaw.

As far as I understood their message, they had a suggestion how to revise the actual communist line in Poland, eliminating mainly the bureaucracy [red tape]. They thought at the time, that the reason of this deformed socialism was the bureaucracy of the party, also various mistakes, no civic freedoms. And they, as members of the party, who acted in good faith, thought that this must be revised, most preferably just abolished, and something new should start. The subjectivity would be reinstated, bureaucracy discontinued, and the workers would exist as people before the law. The demonstration for this subjectivity was to have the form of giving the economy, particularly enterprises to workers' councils. Still, the situation worsened, or the backwardness of communist parties deepened. Another idea, by Gierek, involving the connection of socialist relations with western technical achievements, caused economic backlash. And the socialism without weapons, and communist secret police connections, even though these existed always, and were a threat, also proved misguided. More increasingly, the people who had a bit more contacts at the time and who could participate in international conferences in Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) in Helsinki, based on the mandate granted to them thanks to the conference, they could travel, and they read a lot, these people concluded that the third way, which was again revised by Modzelewski and

Kuroń at the Solidarity forum, is not the best one, that it is not the only solution. But we were still in Poland, the red hat still governs the country, meaning the party, army and security service. And building any alternatives under this red hat may only involve pretending that we also like wearing this hat on our heads.

Tr. This could be a reference to Kingsajs, a satirical comedy by Machulski.

And the “red hat” says, that there is no chance for private ownership of means, particularly the production means, for free market economy in the countryside, which once again starts the longest war in Europe. And this is the reason of the deepest crises not only in Poland, the food situation. And the situation regarding food and agricultural production was the direct cause of great conflicts in the history. Obviously, it all must be based on planning, not the market, but planning and bureaucracy. Only within these limits, and in this context can we actually move, we use self censorship, although, particularly Jacek Kuroń and Modzelewski, had positive feelings about changes, and this third way, as we said then. But this was more of a political compromise, than a compromise for which starving people wait, and starving economy, as well as international environment, I think. Hence the self-government appeared, in accord, to some extent, I participated in negotiations in their favour, also Professor Balcerowicz appeared then, as a supporter of self-governments of workers. This crippled law was finally approved and entered in force, crippled in the sense that finally a director was from a party cabinet, brought in by the party. And the central planning is not abandoned, and therefore, central planning excludes market and money, and instead of money... we did not possess “money” as such, we only had “tickets” of the National Bank of Poland. Formally, their value depended on the mistakes/errors committed by the central planner, and these errors happened all the time. Whatever happened in my plant was the best example of this. The bicycle factory, you know, bicycles are market goods. Everyone wanted to have a bike, the youth, children, they wanted to get bikes in spring, for the First Communion. People have the money, they worked, they saved it, not much but they have saved for it. But the central planner failed to plan the currency in order to buy nickel in Canada to cover the wheels. So there was a contrast between work, the capital, as there was work, we had “tickets”, money, because we still called them money, but it said “tickets” on them, and on the other hand, this was not balanced with anything. The planner kept saying “there is no foreign currency available.”

In the open letter Kuroń and Modzelewski used the concept - this is not communism, it comes across as state capitalism, I wonder if you would accept that?

Yes, of course you could, because... the production means, in fact everything was state owned, everything, starting from flats, work places, production means, raw materials, and even, as I said, the money. This is not money, but tickets. An individual did not have anything... surely there were shops, but at the phase of late Gomułka, already food was in shortage in the market, and instead market there are limits assigned, of meat for instance, its most basic type. In general, the state capitalism meant only that, not only they held the capital but the authentic, credible capital, but that this was the object of some sort of fancy arrangements, as if we just sat here and decided what can be thrown in the market right now. In fact, there were no reasons in Poland at the time for the food market at least to exist on the simplest, low level, event in the capitalist economy conditions. It worked a little like in the German Democratic Republic, where you could always buy sausages and beer, or in the Czech Republic where you could always buy schnitzel, but only on Sundays. Unfortunately, in Poland they already claimed that it all goes to export, it was this Russian problem, but, surely, nobody believed, that there is a demand for kopytka (potato dumplings) abroad, particularly in the US, or for pork knuckles. So finally, we go back to the question about Bydgoszcz, because I'd like to finish this topic, where this radicalism came from, why such a movement of people took place. Before Bydgoszcz, I must say it again, there was the biggest war, the longest war Europe, in the East, because there was no war in the West, and this war was over the food, bread. It started in 1951 in Berlin, as far as I remember, when they closed the Berlin wall, and introduced mark [Tr. Deutsche Mark], because shortages in supplies started at that time, which were easy to verify, because on the other side, and in fact, on the border that did not exist, it could be verified that for western marks one could buy sausage. Later, we come across our year 1956 and workers in Poznań shout "Give us bread!", while we add, and sometimes this was the case, "Give us freedom!" But [this was] a war, because workers were demonstrating with empty hands, while confronting actual tanks. In 1970 it happens again. And in 1976 once again. So in 1980 the workers do not say "we will go demonstrate, protest, but we will establish an institution, which can take care of this." But in 1981, in March they introduced ration cards [for food] in Poland. Moreover, the peasants are told, that whatever is here, these forms of management, trading, are very good, and if anything goes haywire, it is because someone keeps stealing/ hiding things. And the nation is being fed these stupid stories, and even Andrzej Gwiazda believed these mystifications, and Wałęsa, that the reason is the excessive export to Russia. Their attention is directed there, they try to follow this, with their approach was different, because Gwiazda actually wants to inspect the planes flying away to Moscow, while Wałęsa is too afraid... At that time, I on the other hand, created an institution, possibly

the only such body in Europe, the Food Conference, and we could see all that was happening in Poland during the production, distribution and shaping food prices. At this Conference meeting we came out with a postulate: freedom for peasants, not only for workers, that the freedom train which started in Gdańsk, and made a stop in Bydgoszcz, this stop was made so that a wagon for peasants could be tagged along this train. There was no justification whatsoever, except for this Soviet collectivisation doctrine, the socialist one, for which Poland should not have a stabilised food market. And this was due to good agricultural conditions, the agricultural structure, the fact that farmers loved their work, they wanted to work a lot and wanted to enrich themselves. And also, I would say, the sociological structure of the peasantry, they lived in their own culture of having their own farms, they dreamt about it and they loved it. They despised any other type of capitalisation or other careers. Maybe I went slightly too far here...

After 1990, Round Table Agreement, you have the free market, you have the western model of the free market, but is this really what you fought for?

I could tell another anecdote, if it's ok. We were like Columbus in 1492, and we set out and sailed for gold to India. The gold meant the real socialism, socialism with the human face. Due to the sudden changes that were needed we landed at Hudson River, in New York... With all the consequences of imitating them, unfortunately, with the mortgage that encumbers the American capitalism. Therefore, we lost Solidarity, we parted our ways with it, understood as a concept, supported also by the Church institutions, and instead we bought money and individualism. And I think we became some sort of normal state, but we lost the solidarity state. And it is my tragedy too (I have to live with it too). But this can be justified by the fact, that such choices were made in Poland by the nation itself, many times.

This is a question for the whole world, not just for Poland?

Yes, you're right. Why do people get so easily drawn to the simplest temptations, which so many times caused so much trouble in the world, and never actually proved themselves right. And above all, the most important one, possibly the moral result of this revolution was at that time, the fight for human dignity, for the dignity of workers, most importantly. Understood in a way, that this human being who performs all the heavy work using machines, get his hands dirty up to his elbows, is the one that the director needs, other people need him too, and he must be appreciated and valued.

The communists used to say, that he is a planning unit. We will throw people here, some materials there, we will mix them and then we will thrive. This is how the central planner managed things. These people's ambitions, their imagination, their dreams, were just ignored... Because the first secretary of the party was the one who decided whether a worker could have any dreams, what is his right to have dreams, imagination, expectations, even moderate ones, let's be honest, but still So now, there is no central planner, but there is the owner, the entrepreneur (businessman), for whom on the other hand, a human being is not what he dreamed of, he personalises business costs. Today what we have now is the owner of the firm for whom the worker is not a person that he thinks of, but just a cost. So identically as the planner earlier, he throws, or throws away the costs, decreases the costs, introduces cost-cutting. On the other hand, a human being is not what he dreamed of, he personalises business costs.

It's the same system. So, we must end, but this is the most important point, so it's the same system, in a way it is the same system, but you saw something what I believe was the vision of the future and as you make it very specific, you design bicycles, you work along the workers who made bicycles, together you are a very powerful force, and that force could also design an economic model, find a way of not just producing, but also distributing to people's needs. This is neither the communist model, nor western European model, and that really is my last question.

Tak, zgadza się.

Yes, exactly.

ENDS.

Biographical notes

A personalised brochure showcases Jan Rulewski with the Pope, Lech Walesa, Solidarity's best known leader, Karol Mozelewski and a host of other dignatories. His Senator's role with *Platforma Obywatelska, Civic Platform*, a mainstream neo-liberal Sejm (parliamentary) party seems at odds with views expressed here. The contradiction between the past and present lives for nearly all of these Solidarity leaders does not seem to have affected their enthusiasm for the 1980-81 Revolution.

Andrzej Slowik

Former bus driver and workers' leader for the Solidarity's Lodz region. In late 1981, in response to major food shortages, he was one of the organisers of a highly successful 'Hunger March' in the city. This was immediately followed by a plan to implement the *active strike* strategy where workers threatened to take control of food production and distribution.

A meeting with Andrzej Slowik at Solidarity's Lodz office took place in November 2017. But the planned interview did not because of a misunderstanding over the need for a translator. We agreed instead to an e mail conversation with a translator. Our resulting e mail exchanges in January and February 2018 are reproduced here.

January 15 2018

Dear Andrzej,

First many thanks again for sending me your book³⁵⁴ and agreeing to take part in this e mail exchange. I appreciate it very much.

Jacek Syzmanski, my friend in London, has now translated two sections of your book, (a personal memoir based on interviews), the part about the Hunger March and Active Strikes and the part about Bydgoszcz.

He has translated this message to you from me into Polish.

I would like to ask you four further questions by e mail. Please answer in Polish and Jacek will translate the answers for me.

1. If active strikes had taken place, workers would have been in control of food distribution. For example, workers in the abattoirs, the meat slaughtering premises, would direct meat products to food distribution centres where it was most needed, according to Solidarity advisors. Would the abattoir workers have agreed to these arrangements?

2. Also, would the housewives have agreed?

3. Was it also possible for the housewives to be involved in this democratic decision-making procedure?

³⁵⁴ Andrzej Slowik's interview – memoir. (Warzecha 2014) Warzecha, Jaroslaw, *Nie Kracz Slowik, Nie Kracz* (Narodowe Centrum Kultury, National Centre of Culture, 2014)

4. After Bydgoszcz, if Walesa had not called off the General Strike, would the workers in Lodz have supported it?

If you would prefer to answer questions by telephone in Polish, we can also arrange to do so.

Once again, many thanks

John

Dear John,

translated version Jan 25

I'm sorry for the delay but so much is going on recently... I promise to change my ways in the future.

1. To be honest we thought that an active strike will not take place, and the authorities – seeing our determination in our preparations to this action (which we knew only theoretically) – will back down. Nobody in Poland never tried that before. In our plans we envisaged taking under our supervision the whole production cycle of selected goods, including securing delivery of raw materials and semi-finished fuels for transport purposes. All this made a great impression on powers that be. At that time for example I have received a question from a petrol refinery in Płock: should Petrochemia's (refinery) workers take care of securing the pipeline on its entire length in Poland, or just production and distribution?

Petrochemia's management was expecting that Solidarity Factory Committee will commit itself to keep the pipeline secured. That we could not accept and Solidarity's answer was negative. We left the issue of security for the management. Most probably it was just a test of our determination's level. At that time fuels in Poland were rationed. Without control of delivery it could come out that transports of cattle or packaging cannot reach meat factories. According to my own assessment at the time a level of acceptance for that kind of strike, namely active strike, was much higher than for an occupational one, involving stopping of production. It was a result of propaganda style, adopted by the authorities, which blamed 'Solidarity' and strikes for shortages in supply. They even published a number of pairs of shoes, which didn't reach the market because of one-day strike in a shoe factory. And shoes were also rationed. Preparations to an active strike showed us that starting it in one workplace means in practise that we need to extend it on several other factories, which are its sub-contractors. The active strike in factories should be conducted under supervision of trade union strike commissars. We treated the whole action and publicity about our preparations to an active strike rather as a form of propagandist pressure than a real threat to the authorities. The reason was that

starting such an action would mean a necessity of gradual extension of the active strike, practically on the whole economy.

Housewives you're asking about were in their majority members of our union. Few women could dedicate themselves to housework only, without engaging into wage labour. It was especially true in our region, where big textile factories employed thousands of women, working on a 3-shifts system. Earlier in 1981 we had bad experiences with supplying workers with meat directly by Factory Committees, which brought to workplaces unprocessed pig carcasses. Of course there were no proper conditions to store meat in workplaces, and no skilled workers able to cut it properly. It was a grassroots initiative of 'Solidarity' leadership in those factories. Its end result was that part of the meat was wasted, and the committees had to cover losses.

Taking part by housewives in a procedure of democratic decision-making was rooted in their membership in the Union. That were them who demanded from the union an effective actions for improvement of food and consumer goods supply. The rationing system was ineffective. For example the mayor of Łódź claimed that lack of cover for ration norms in Łódź is caused by people from neighbouring counties, coming to our city and buying up groceries. It was obvious nonsense. Why they are coming to Łódź? They should have enough supplies in their towns, but their shops were as empty as ours.

When preparing the active strike I got to know that the whole country was divided into eight areas, responsible for meat supply in their respective districts. Industrial areas manufacturing goods which were in high demand had bargaining chips, and could increase food supply in return for increased supply of for example coal, household products and other goods in high demand. The whole chaos and mess in the rationing system was laid bare after the hunger march in Łódź, when it came out that nobody knows a real figure of ration cards, which were issued to workplaces on the ground of rough estimates. After the march ration cards in our county were numbered. It limited frauds associated with issuing them, but it had no impact on improving the supply.

When Wałęsa called off a general strike after the Bydgoszcz crisis a level of support for a regional strike radically dropped. Therefore we didn't take into account going on strike in Łódź Region only.

Andrzej

Jacek Syzmanski then translated and forwarded the following e mail proposal to Andrzej Słowik.

Point 4 is a suggestion about a separate interview with Janina Konczak-Gotner, woman organiser of the Hunger March, which, unfortunately, did not take place.

1. One question on workers and intellectuals. Would he comment on the following?

The Solidarity intellectuals deserted the workers in the 1980's. Their arguments at the Round Table negotiations represented a defeat for Solidarity, symbolised by Kuron, as Minister of Labour, later introducing the neoliberal policy of 'Shock Therapy'.

But we should not judge the worker intellectual relationship on this unacceptable experience.

I think your relation with Zbigniew Kowalewski during the period between the Hunger March and the imposition of Martial Law in 1981 teaches us a different lesson.

You learned from him but he learned from you. You, yourself, emerged as a rank and file political and well as a trade union leader.

I want to suggest it proved that it was possible for worker leaders also to become worker intellectuals.

2. Slowik told me about the extraordinary degree of state surveillance he was under in 1981 - as exposed in the archives which he has been examining. Can you ask him if he has located and read the secret police file on his political activities during the period between the Hunger March and the imposition of Martial Law in 1981?

3. This is a question about the book. Slowik told me he was badly beaten in prison during Martial Law detention. He has been pursuing a court case against the prison officer. After 14 years he still hasn't obtained a satisfactory conclusion. It's mentioned in the book. Please translate 1 or 2 paras - or briefly summarise what it says. Please tell him you are doing this.

4. Janina Konczak-Gotner. In 1981 she organized the Lodz "Marsz głodowy" (Hunger march).

Please can you contact her, tell her what we are doing and ask if I can interview her via email (and via therefore via you!)

Andrzej Słowik's reply January 30th

Dear John

The claim that intellectuals deserted workers in 1980s would be unfair towards those who stayed in 'Solidarity', or were working to achieve its ideals as local and nationwide politicians or university teachers. The accusation of outright betrayal of not only trade unionists, but also a large portion of community, is addressed towards those participants of 'Round Table' talks, who were making deals with Kiszczak and Rakowski since the end of 1982. By that I mean mainly circles around Geremek and Mazowiecki. Of course they wouldn't be able to do this without Walesa's knowledge.

For 'Solidarity's future the key decision was an agreement to build the new union from top, on principle of selection of its leadership by Walesa. The same way so called 'Komitet Obywatelski' (The Civic Committee) was created, consisting of selected trade union activists and so called authorities in fields of science, art and culture. They were supposed to play a role of claqueurs and apologists for 'Round Table' agreements, in exchange for taking part in new power structures. Only part of them was aware what they are taking part in. Those initiated into the knowledge of the essence of the deal with communists were people, who from the beginning treated 'Solidarity' as a tool and a pass to a power.

Balcerowicz is viewed as an author and executor of the shock therapy. On the other hand Kuron is considered to this day as a giver of unemployed benefits, a kind of good lord; a man who would like to help everyone but is unable to. That's a popular view among people who cannot see the essence of political games. In the union itself there was a group we should call 'round table commissars'. Their task was to make sure that the union remains loyal, and to reach an unofficial agreement with new authorities regarding limits of compromise in case of conflicts.

According to info from IPN all materials on me from the periods 1980-81 and 1984-89 were destroyed by Home Office. All that remains are protocols of their destruction.

What I've got at my disposal are documents obtained from Mokotów and Barczew prisons, and those found in other people's files, in which my name popped up. I've got also several files of SB secret agents, including two apparent MKZ workers from the time you're interested in. I'll take a look at those and send you copies if I find anything interesting.

Just one more curiosity regarding the last sentence of your mail. On 29th January a court for the third time called off a trial of deputy prison governor in Barczew, whom we (me, Jerzy

Kropiwnicki and Tadeusz Stański) accused of mistreatment during our time there. I gave my first evidence to a prosecutor from IPN in 2007. At first the investigation was opened as an ex-officio case, because our mistreatment was considered 'a communist crime'. At that time five of our torturers were still alive. When the investigation was closed IPN decided not pursue a prosecution because the crime's statute of limitations expired, and four of the accused guards died. In the current trial we take part as auxiliary prosecutors, without IPN's support. Since last August only two court hearings have taken place: on the first one the accused refused to give evidence and answer court's questions; on the second one I gave an evidence. The next three hearings were called off without giving an explanation.

I will take a look at the secret agents' files I've mentioned earlier on Thursday, because today I'm pretty busy. In case I've missed something please ask for details.

Regards

Andrzej Słowik

Additional face to face interview Andrzej Słowik 28/05/2018 University of Warsaw

Translator Jacek Syzmanski

JR: We're discussing with Andrzej Słowik worker-intellectuals.

AS: My colleagues from a university were not eager to be in touch with so-called physical labourers, not to mention public transport workers. Those of them who worked with us on daily basis distanced themselves from fellow workers. They were driving trams but kept thinking about their academic job, about what they were doing there, and were not interested in their toiling buddies' problems. So that wasn't a comfortable situation for them.

JR: I would suggest that you are a worker-intellectual.

AS: That would be problematic to say because I finished vocational school only. My school aimed simply to make good workers. I was in a baker school. I don't remember any lectures in philosophy, literature, history and other subjects. Thanks for playing road cycling I was living in a different world, meeting different people. At that time it was very important that those people were travelling to the West and saw what's going on there – they were sportsmen, Olympians, my senior colleagues. I was looking for knowledge in books on my own, like a blind cat among pigeons, which could have an influence on my living conditions, but it was all very amateurish. Later on, it came out that I lacked so to say an upbringing and foundations to

acquire a knowledge on my own. One can say I was offered a chance by fate because I had three years of imprisonment to catch up on, then 6-7 years of unemployment, but this wasn't it – maybe it was too late for me. Jerzy Kropiwnicki, my cell-mate, was teaching me for example economy in English, to make it more difficult. We managed to study first chapters of capitalist economy by Keynes and others. Afterwards we were busy with playing games with prison guards.

JR: *But when in a Solidarity period 1980-81, when you were playing a very important role in a workers' movement, you were meeting Solidarity intellectuals, and you were meeting them on an equal basis - it had to be on an equal basis – for it to work, so because your judging being intellectual by qualifications, and I think the word has a bigger meaning. And your experience in the union, and your experience as a leader in that movement gave you a great deal of authority to argue with intellectuals both about principles, about strategy and about tactics, and (...) on equal basis, so they learnt in a best situation they learnt from you when you learnt from them, and you both developed. And I would put to you that "Solidarity" at its best, not at its worst but its best, closed the gap between workers and intellectuals, because the movement was creating leaders like yourself – hundreds, maybe thousands, certainly hundreds.*

AS: That was a great chance, and theoretically one could achieve what earlier didn't work, namely cooperation between intellectuals and workers in order to achieve some temporary, but also a strategic success. At the beginning I was thinking that we've got a common aim, that everything what happened earlier on doesn't matter – where who was, whether on the right or maybe on the left hand side, or maybe someone was collaborating with the authorities – and we have a chance to erase all of it, make it even and start everything from scratch together. Today one can see it especially vividly because a part of people active in the "Solidarity"'s period stood on opposite sides. Their past has spoken up, some political roots have spoken up, resulting in hatred we can witness on daily basis among political elites. That has translated itself into divisions among the wider community as well.

For me being in contact with people from academia, with intellectuals, was necessary and attractive. I expected them to answer questions or give me an advice on addressing many problems, emerging every single day. I know I also was an attractive partner for them, because I could be an effective mediator between a thought and a deed through reaching out to workplaces, workers and union members. But it all wasn't so sweet and smooth. I can remember my first meeting with someone from academic circles – I was presenting papers on the economy and market supplies, prepared by our consultants. "Are you an economist?" - he

asked. “No” - I replayed - “I’m just a bus driver”. “Well, thank you very much then”. It meant that if I was an economist perhaps we could discuss the papers. But when it turned out that I am just a driver he barely had anything to talk about to me, despite the fact that I was presenting papers prepared by consultants – so to say his colleagues, and the subject was very serious – food supplies, which had a great influence on people’s mood and our possible action, exploiting the situation. Fortunately one can say it was just an individual case. All in all, I was looking in academia for effective ways for introducing long-lasting changes, especially in the economy because it was a decisive factor in living standards of those I represented.

When the first opportunity presented itself to make changes in the union’s leadership in the region in May 1981 – I’m talking about first elections to executive committees, based on the union’s statute – I used it to introduce to the region’s executive committee Jerzy Kropiwnicki, Ph.D. in economics from Łódź University, and Grzegorz Palka who at that time was preparing PhD on Łódź University of Technology. They became vice-chairmen of region’s executive committee and stayed on till the end – till the martial law, in case of Kropiwnicki even longer. Kropiwnicki also became a member of the national executive committee. Later on, Kropiwnicki and Palka became mayors of Łódź. So I was trying to exploit possibilities, existing in the university city in order to actively engage academia into the union’s activities. Both Kropiwnicki and Palka – but also the whole academic circle – done a lot to prepare “Solidarity’s” agenda. So we had an awareness we need their support, the point was how to do it. First leaders emerged from the strikes. Universities didn’t strike in August because of the summer holidays. When they came back to work all positions in the union’s executive bodies were already filled in. We were waiting for the elections, which brought a qualitative change because not only them (Kropiwnicki and Palka? - JS) had a university degree among members of the Łódź executive committee.

JR: I mean the problem is that there is a defeat with martial law – this is a major defeat for “Solidarity”, and in a way “Solidarity” never recovers. But the period before then – your relationship with Palka is a good example of a positive relationship with an intellectual, where you’re learning from him, he’s learning from you because you told me before he was critically important in developing the active strike strategy. So this is you – worker-leader, Palka intellectual, working together on a political strategy of a fantastic importance for the movement.

AS: Yes, but it was a common goal. Neither he nor I had any earlier experiences, but I was relying on his help and skills to face the situation we were in. I knew how to speak to workers of particular workplaces and factories, how to encourage them, but I also wanted to know what should I encourage them to – what will be the first and following steps. He could better develop that idea than me. I think that if I knew then what one can read now in a book about trade unions activities in South America, given to me by Zbyszek (Kowalewski), certainly it would be much easier for us back in 1981. But we lacked that knowledge.

JR: So this is my argument, my argument is exactly what you've just described. And a difficulty emerges, the gap between the workers and the intellectuals deepens after martial law, and the gap becomes unbridgeable, but at least for those 2 years we saw a moment – I will call it a revolutionary moment – of possibility for change, where the gap between workers and intellectuals closes, where you work together, and you have a vision of a different society, which is a very exciting vision, which you came close to fulfilling because of your relationship with people like Palka and Kowalewski.

AS: That's right. Regarding the reasons, for which the gap emerged: before the martial law both groups felt very uncomfortable because the situation was very dynamic. We were caught unaware by developments. Not only I but also intellectuals were surprised by what was going on in Bydgoszcz, Szczecin, or even in some factory in Łódź. There was no time back then to hold deep discussions between the authorities and intellectuals over assessment of the situation, and righteousness of one side or the other. For they were also caught unaware by developments. People of power were accustomed to work from 8 to 4; to ordering analysis, doing research and receiving a white paper after a month or two etc. But then the situation was constantly changing on daily basis, and they were taken by surprise. In those circumstances we were navigating our way much better.

The period of the martial law and after was a time of bureaucratization of the union's structures, of much slower pace of developments and regaining control by the government side. The authorities started then to select from so-called social side partners convenient for themselves. The final result of that process was the team which sat at the round table. The martial law was used to eliminate so-called extremists and radicals from a circle of potential negotiating partners. What started just after the martial law reached its apex by the round table when accusations of selling out workers' interests were raised on daily basis toward that

side, which usurped for itself the right to represent the whole community in the negotiations. That claim was false because as I've mentioned all currents called by the government radical and extreme were removed. Here a mechanism repeated itself, which is known since the beginnings of human history. One can see it in slaves' uprisings in the Roman times, in the Reformation with Luther and peasants' rebellions, in the Spring of Nations, and then in the whole pseudo-revolution in Russia. In all cases the mechanism is the same: contain masses at the moment when they threaten those holding power – whether it's economic power and wealth, or political power. In order to do it and pacify masses, bogus leaders are created and concessions are made to bring some comfort, but the essence of exercising power remains unchanged. This is what happened in Poland. We were left without our workplaces, which were sold out in order to heal the ailing economy; without jobs, because our factories were sold out. Banks are in foreign hands, loans are going elsewhere, taxes are not coming to Poland because somebody made some kind of a deal and found a temporary way for making our system and country look better on the outside.

JR: So you've just developed an intellectual theory of history. You just did so, and it's a very pessimistic view with respect. I think you can turn this intellectual theory of yours on its head. And I suggest that first of all it has been progress; secondly it is possible for ordinary people to take the power from authorities, and to reorganize life in a way that suites them, and you came close to doing it. You personally led a movement which came close to reorganizing production and distribution in the interest of workers. You have lived experience of this.

AS: That's close but as I said before that was not the point. We wanted to treat active strike as a tool, as a mean to apply pressure in order to sort out a concrete issue. But it was clear to us that we could not go on without systemic changes, because otherwise, we would replace one team managing the economy with another one, perhaps even less prepared for this task.

The historic process I've been talking about became my knowledge only recently; back then I couldn't put it together. John is saying it's a pessimistic view – yes, but of course, the country is changing. The point is whose effort plays the main part in those changes, at what cost it is happening, what price we pay for all those mistakes. So maybe there is a lack of that kind of vision, but where one could develop it? Should I think it out behind a wheel in my bus? Or my colleagues?

Tr. So you didn't have a vision of systemic changes?

AS: We did, that vision was developed just before the national congress. The idea was already emerging somewhere, we knew what we want to do. In the end, Grzegorz Palka was thinking about an idea competitive toward Kuron's concept of interim government with prof. Trzeciakowski as a prime minister. Those visions were emerging somewhere, but in the period of preparations to an active strike, they were not sufficiently developed to be presented and accepted for a limited implementation. First, we wanted to regain control, to cool down moods, and only then talk in a calm manner about what we want to do from start to the end. It was obvious that the authorities didn't want to offer us a time to act on this, not to mention accept our ideas.

Only today pieces of information come out that Piotr Jaroszewicz, former prime minister, allegedly delivered an official speech before 1980, in which he proposed some kind of finlandisation of Poland – a subject which Kuron was talking about a little bit earlier. Those pieces of information come from Jaroszewicz's son, who during police's investigation (when his father was murdered) said that maybe that speech was the reason why Jaroszewicz was killed. So here is a coincidence between what Kuron was saying earlier, probably in 1977, and Jaroszewicz who was talking about it before the strike in Gdansk shipyard in 1980. That means some discussions were held.

JR: Sure, but when we met you summed up Kuroń for me in three words – I remember very distinctively in English, you summed up in three words: compromise, compromise, compromise. So this was not a good intellectual leader for you. In fact you understood the situation better than Kuroń.

AS: No, I was watching his activities on daily basis from the end of 1980 on, when he started to turn up in National Executive Committee. I noticed that his connections with the authorities are closer than his cultivated myth of oppositional activist would permit. So there was a meeting of National Committee at the time when the roundabout in Warsaw was blocked – Kania was a first secretary of the party. And during that meeting Kuron was calling Warsaw from the National Committee's office; he was calling secretary Kania to talk to him about the current situation. So I was asking myself a question: where am I? Whom am I talking to? What's going on? Where is the power? I was a member of the executive committee with a mandate; he was an advisor – formally one would not know whom he is. And that guy is calling from my union's office to the first secretary of PZPR to discuss the current situation – because what else he could discuss? Later on, I was a junior minister in his ministry, when Kuron was a minister of labour. His mode of action, namely "compromise, compromise – let's talk, let's

talk”, influenced how the whole department was functioning. Under Kropiwnicki’s leadership meetings of the ministry of labour executive took 1 – 1.5 hour; under Kuron they started around 10-11 pm and lasted sometimes till 4 am. But that didn’t prevent Kuron from sending police against farmers blocking a road – just like during the communist time. So Kuron sent police to chase farmers out of roads with batons.

JR: The argument for me is that Kuroń is a terrible leader; Kuroń is not an intellectual of any use to the workers now in his position you’ve described – either in 1980, or in 1982, or in 1990. But you have I think agreed that some intellectuals at the best at the high point of the movement, were useful to you, that together you could’ve made the changes that were required. And this is what I was interested in establishing, and I think earlier on we established that.

AS: Fortunately, we had something to choose from. I personally was looking for contact with the Confederation of Independent Poland (KPN) and Young Poland Movement (RMP), asking them about their agenda. Those were oppositional structures older than “Solidarity”, created before 1980. But they were unable to present such agenda, an idea which the union would accept or be carried away with. Why? They just couldn’t do it. Till this day those people are active in academia but don’t play any political role. They are dealing with their specialty – a history. Back then the range of topics our union was interested in was really wide, and we have a trouble with finding out relevant ideas and propositions.

In Mokotów prison I had a chance to listen to such a constitutional presentation by Leszek Moczulski – it supposed to be a KPN’s agenda. When he finished his lecture after two days I told him: “That’s very cool, but when you take power and KPN will be a ruling party in Poland I will be running out of the country – as soon as possible”. “Oh no” - he replayed - “The borders will be open, but one way only: one would enter the country, but nobody would be leaving”. Thank you very much for such an agenda.

ENDS

Chapter 3

Ronnie Kasrils, Makoma Lekalakala, Bethuel Maserumule, Moses Mayekiso, Darlene Miller,

James Motlatsi, Rob Petersen

ANC leader and Communist Party leader, workers' leaders, including two metal workers' leaders and a miners' leader, two women workers' leaders, and the editor of the magazine of the largest Trotskyist organisation

Some biographical information is provided at the start of each interview.

Ronnie Kasrils

Ronnie Kasrils was a commander in Umkhonto weSizwe (MK) Spear of the Nation, armed wing of the ANC, African National Congress, member of the Central Committee of the SACP, South African Communist Party and an ANC government minister from 1994 until his resignation in 2008. He is author of his memoir *Armed and Dangerous*, memoir of his deceased partner Eleanor, *The Unlikely Secret Agent* and *A Simple Man, Kasrils and the Zuma Enigma*.

This is an e mail interview.

Response to Questions Concerning the 1987 Miners Strike:

Posed by John Rose to Ronnie Kasrils: 10 June 2018.

JR – Q 1: *In retrospect, are you satisfied when you look back at how the SACP Central Committee in exile responded to the miners' strike 1987, the largest strike in S African history, in the context of the deepening destabilisation of the Apartheid regime induced both by the earlier township uprisings and the generalising worker discontent threatening the regime's productive capacity?*

RK - Answer:

The answer requires a historic context. In assessing the SACP's ability to directly lead the workers struggles, rising to unprecedented heights in the 1980s, and to intervene or adequately respond on the ground, regard must be given to the constraints of its capacity and size. Add to this the difficult obstacles an outlawed organisation had to confront, more especially from exile at considerable distance from its geographic theatre of struggle. In this regard I don't think the word "satisfied", raised in your question, can ever be an acceptable notion regarding a historic process. It is far too subjective a term. The ability of an organisation, particularly one based in exile, to have been fully competent and adequate in responding to social upheavals, is difficult to measure or judge. However, let us attempt to consider how the SACP sought to cope and get to grips with the situation. What limitations did it face? What was the extent of its contribution to guiding, strengthening or influencing the NUM? What was the extent of its success? Then by all means seek to hone in on a specific though historically significant event such as the 1987 mine workers strike, the dynamics of which you are researching. One more thing: comparable attention should also be given to the

1946 African Mineworkers strike to which the CPSA (as it was named before being banned in 1950) mobilised all its available forces in solidarity.

The miners' strike of 1987 was within the context of a virtual rising mass insurrection of community struggles, numerous other strikes throughout the country and increasing Umkhonto we Sizwe (MK) military actions as well as an SADF (South African Defence Force) incursion into Angola. It was a time too of a government state of emergency unleashing a virtual reign of terror. In attempting to form a judgement arguably the best yardstick would be to consider how the leadership and members of the NUM for instance came to value the role of the outlawed SACP. The workers and masses of South Africa certainly showed in the way they voted in 1994 that they appreciated the SACP's sustained role – as close ally of the ANC – up to that historic juncture. All sample surveys of the black population showed enormous popularity for both the ANC and SACP. The level of acclaim for Party leaders such as Joe Slovo and Chris Hani was close to that of Nelson Mandela. Those were difficult, complex, tumultuous and very dangerous times. After a decade of apparently dormant struggle following the 1963 Rivonia capture of top leaders the national liberation struggle had taken a dramatic upturn. This was marked by the 1973 strikes and 1976 students uprising in which some 1,000 youth were gunned down in the course of that fateful year. Perhaps those deaths drew wider attention than the more significant awakening of the workers. I will return to that later (Question 2). In retrospect it is clear that the exiled ANC and SACP paid greater attention to the June 16 uprising and the potential young recruits who flocked to join the armed wing, Umkhonto we Sizwe (MK) in exile, than they had to the 1973 strike wave. 1973 was a harbinger of things to come and perhaps should have influenced far more than I believe it did the dominant thinking in the Party which focussed on armed confrontation with the regime. But then at that time the capacity of the SACP and ANC was nowhere as strong as in the mid-1980s.

There can be no easy straightforward answer to the question you raise. Whilst the SACP constantly worked to keep in touch with the situation on the home front this was no easy task until the possibilities of organisational recovery improved. However, it needs to be recognised that the influx of recruits into the exile structures of the ANC and MK in such rear bases of Mozambique, Angola, Zambia and neighbouring states comprised mainly a young generation which had in most cases not even completed schooling never mind experienced life as workers. And in the first place the influx of new blood was into the ANC and MK. The Party, however, was able to selectively recruit from among the most promising of that generation.

Just how deeply student youth were able to imbibe class consciousness was another matter. The Party certainly did its best to provide Marxist education and training through its own tutorship and in the socialist countries. Much of its teaching had to be carried out through its clandestine cell system and network and through its publications and literature circulating in exile and increasingly throughout the country. The popularity of its leading lights – the hatred they invoked within the apartheid government and white society – was an enormous reflection of the regard the workers and masses held for the SACP. Members of the SACP worked clandestinely within the liberation movement, although many were recognised and accepted as communists. At the 1985 funeral of four murdered community activists in the small country town of Cradock, a crowd of 60,000 defiantly lofted the outlawed flags of the ANC, the SACP and the Soviet Union under the noses of the apartheid security forces. You are correct to pose your question in the context of deepening destabilisation of the Apartheid regime as a result of the ongoing struggle and resistance. The 1980s Mass Democratic Movement (MDM), establishment of the pro-ANC United Democratic Front (UDF) in 1982 and Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) in 1985, adoption by both of the Freedom Charter, and the many huge strikes throughout the country including the great mineworkers strike of August 1987, were high water marks. The insurrectionary mood in the townships and among the youth, the massive marches uniting the people in action, the rise in number of MK operations to 250 per year by 1988, meant that apartheid according to the exhortation of ANC President Oliver Tambo (in his January 8th, 1987 annual address) was being rendered unworkable and the country ungovernable. With prescience, in that January 8th speech, Tambo declared 1987 “The Year of Advance to Peoples’ Power”. The Party’s journal, *The African Communist* (AC), in its editorial notes, statements of the Central Committee of the Party, and articles by numerous communist writers (particularly Ray Alexander, R.E.Nyameko and E.R.Braverman – the latter two are pseudonyms of possibly Alexander and her husband Jack Simons writing together) kept up a constant flow of report, survey and analysis. These were most prolific in the period 1985-1989, covering COSATU’s emergence, the bitter and heroic strike wave of that time and particularly but by no means only those of the NUM, including the August 1987 strike.

Ray Alexander, who with her husband the Marxist professor Jack Simons, resided in Lusaka and was probably more closely in touch with the labour movement than any of the exiles. By the 1980s the ANC and Party were no longer as isolated from cadres at home than previously. Many by then were able to travel extensively abroad. Ray Alexander was a veteran communist, member of the Party’s Central Committee (CC), who had established the Food and Canning Workers’ Union (which became FAWU the Food and Allied Workers Union an important

COSATU affiliate) and was in dynamic contact with that leadership. Joe Slovo and Chris Hani like Ray Alexander, were often meeting with COSATU leaders in Lusaka, Harare, Maputo and London. It is clear the three in particular exercised authority and influence over the new generation of militant workers leaders as did the likes of SACTU veterans based in a Lusaka committee of SACTU (South African Congress of Trade Unions, predecessor of COSATU) such as Mark Shope, John Nkadimeng, Dan Tloome, Eric Mtshali, Moses Mabhida - all SACP leaders. Recruitment of the new generation of trade unionists and newly recruited members of the Party based in South Africa was underway and an impetus was taking place concerning the setting up of clandestine cells within the unions. Undoubtedly the new recruits, trade union leaders and shop stewards, products of the labour battles of the 1970-1980s, were far more in tune with the internal situation than the exiled veterans but they would have gained immensely from the relationship. Those veterans, however, and I would particularly cite Slovo and Hani, possessed impressive qualities and insight and were able to provide invaluable guidance and a theoretical perspective that the newly initiated might have initially lacked. A recent comment to me in a letter from Professor Eddie Webster (June 1, 2018) the academic activist on the SACP's role states:

"At the time I was not aware of any direct response of the SACP to the 1987 strike but I was sympathetic to the overtures that were being made between the SACP (Joe Slovo, in particular) and the NUM. I was uncomfortable with the Stalinist legacy of the party and decided to put my energies into building a strong worker controlled labour movement inside South Africa."

There were other like-minded intellectuals, some based in the universities, others within COSATU and its affiliates, who were in step with Webster – then and now. Their critique of the period (including the so-called *workerist* versus *populist* debate relating to alignment with the ANC-SACP) needs to be studied to attempt to clarify and understand the dynamics at play.

By late 1987 Party leaders such as Mac Maharaj, Sphiwe Nyanda and Janet Love had been infiltrated into the country, established real-time computerised communication links with Lusaka, and were providing leadership to the internal ANC, SACP and trade unions. The Party's capacity to provide leadership by this time had become greatly enhanced and cannot be underestimated. Its ability to provide its literature to increasing numbers at home had developed and was augmented by underground cells capable of producing and distributing leaflets, pamphlets and propaganda material which were eagerly read by activists. Every

meeting of the Central Committee discussed reports from home, and the workers struggle in particular. In January 1988 the CC issued a comprehensive statement after a plenary session with the title: "Leading Role of the Working Class in the Present Situation" (AC, Second Quarter 1988, Number 113). Dealing with the shift in the balance of forces that had been taking place over the past years the statement observed:

"Even before the year had ended it became clear that the events of 1987 are destined to have immeasurable significance in the further development of the struggle and the future of South Africa. The key to such an understanding lies in the state of our working class."

The statement referred to the extraordinary growth and achievements recorded by COSATU in the two years since its creation and its rise in membership to one million members; its composition of 13 federated industrial unions, with 31 shop stewards councils, and according to the CC statement "an industrial army marshalled by 50,000 shop stewards in the factories and 20,000 shaft stewards in the mines." The influence of both the ANC and the SACP would have been profound on that organised core of the working class. The statement highlighted the rising tide of workers' militancy as reflected in the growth of the strike movement, "the highest figures in South Africa's history", evident through 1985-86, and the May 6 and 7, and June 16 general strikes in 1987, which were by far the biggest and most highly organised ever recorded. Identifying the most significant strikes during 1987 the statement listed a ten-week national strike at OK Bazaars - the country's leading departmental store chain; a twelve-week railway workers strike; two major strikes in the postal sector; strikes in the country's sugar mills and tea estates, a massive one-day strike on July 14 by metalworkers called off when it was declared illegal. "Then" the statement continued "there was the largest strike in South Africa's history – the August 9 miners strike involving 340,000 workers led by the NUM which lasted three weeks." The report did not include on which of these strikes the workers had won their demands and where they had failed – as in the case with the NUM strike which was defeated. The cause of that failure was not analysed – in that statement at any rate. The CC statement went on to consider the crucial factors decisive for the liberation and workers struggles – which the Party always saw as needing to be aligned. It highlighted the need to organise the migrant labourers of the country and neighbouring states which the liberation movement had always sought to harness. "As was apparent in the historic miners' strike, the migrant workers came of age in 1987."

From such statements it is clear that the SACP treated the mineworkers strike as of paramount importance. It was not only through its statements and literature which were being widely

disseminated that consciousness was being raised and organisation and action encouraged but also the increasingly dynamic contacts that were being forged between Party and Trade Union leaders as the tide began to turn against the regime opportunities of improved contact emerged.

The contents of the African Communist were a reflection of this.

Not to downplay the significance of the miners' strike, there was much more taking place at the time, particularly from 1985-1990 until the regime finally gave in to mass and other pressure. This included the effect of the international boycott, divestment and sanctions movement; the growing fears and concerns of the business sector both domestic and international that a revolution would break out if reforms were not instituted; and defeat of the regime's military in Angola at the hands of the Cuban internationalists – a singular turning point - resulting in the SADF exiting Namibia, its independence in 1990 and the epic consequences for South Africa.) The enormous range of the struggle was reflected in the SACP exhorting the masses "to battle on every front" (AC Editorial Notes, First Quarter 1989) and continued: "Events during 1988 have made it clear that the days of the Apartheid regime...are numbered...resisting all forms of pressure and displaying magnificent courage and determination, the people fought back throughout 1988."

I have, however, not managed to locate any Party assessment of the outcome of the strike, which as is known was smashed after three weeks. For such detail one needs to consider the most important literature available particularly the definitive and respected account by COSATU historian Jeremy Baskin who writes:

"For the NUM the dispute was over wages and the Chamber's ability to afford a decent increase. For the Chamber, and especially Anglo, it was about regaining control of the mines" ('Striking Back - a history of COSATU', 1991, p226)

Baskin also has some interesting insights on the failure of COSATU solidarity with the miners. Frankly I do not agree with a view that either the ANC or SACP wished to undermine full support for the NUM. I will return to the liberation movement's motives at Question 2, which my understanding is that their interests were 100% encouraging of a robust challenge of the Chamber of Mines; and the requirement to maximise solidarity at every level. The reference in the 1988 CC Statement to the need to organise migrant workers, however, points to the recognition of weaknesses that had surfaced and needed to be urgently addressed. The reference I believe is a clue to the Party's insight into the drawbacks that had contributed to

the collapse of the miners' strike at the end of August 1988. Reflections that have surfaced since by academics that failure led to the bureaucratisation of the NUM and the unions in general need debating. From my perspective I rather favour an explanation that assesses the impact of legalisation of trade unions under capitalism, and the negative impact of newly established trade union investment companies on consciousness, militancy, the high salaries of union office bearers and life style. Aspects of corruption in South Africa today stem from an aristocracy of both labour and political elites linked to such factors.

Let me conclude by stating that despite constraints the SACP responded as well as circumstances allowed in relation to the 1987 mine workers strike. That may appear prosaic but is a factor of concrete conditions at the time. One will always claim, with the benefit of hindsight, that more could be done. For that I turn to your second question.

JR - Q 2:

Again, in retrospect, how do you today view the SACP relationship with the ANC leadership in this period ?

RK – Answer:

I understand that you refer to both 1987 and the period today. My main criticism or concern is that in 1987 we were still too far engrossed and engaged with the idea that MK operations were the decisive force in inspiring and arousing the masses. In a sense it may be considered that the SACP was too dependent on the ANC as the leading force of a national liberation struggle against a racist, white supremacist regime, for freedom, equality and democratic rights. Whatever the Party's left critics have argued, the SACP's view was that class and race in South Africa were interrelated. An exclusive focus on class misses racial and national oppression experienced daily by the black majority in general. An exclusive focus on race (or the national question) loses the ultimate class division and unequal power relations in society. Yet the two are inseparably linked. The Constitution of the SACP adopted at its sixth Congress in 1984 deals with the two central cleavages running through South Africa's socio-economic structure of class and nation (race) and restated its historic aims as follows:

“...The Communist Party aims...to organise, educate and lead the working class in pursuit of this strategic aim (ie. ending the system of capitalist exploitation and establishing a socialist republic based on the common ownership of the means of production) and the more immediate aim of winning the objectives of the national democratic revolution which is inseparably linked to it. The main content of the national democratic revolution is the national

liberation of the African people in in general, the destruction of the economic and political power of the racist ruling class, and the establishment of one united state of people's power *in which the working class will be the dominant force* and which will move uninterruptedly towards social emancipation and the total abolition of the exploitation of man by man."

I am by no means striving to shy away from conceptual errors. I have referred to the 1973 strike wave and in retrospect feel that this should have then alerted the SACP to the gathering storm on the workers front. Apart from the strengthening of the SACTU committee in Lusaka and London I cannot recall any concrete organisation initiative. What did emerge was active assistance provided to SACTU leaders John Gaetsewe in London and Archie Sebeko based in Manchester, by a group of Martin Legassick, Paula Ensor, Rob Petersen and Dave Hemson. The group assembled a range of experience with Legassick an internationally acknowledged historian, Ensor and Petersen who had experience in the formation of independent workers organizations in the Western Cape and Hemson who had been a participant in the 1973 mass strikes which spurred the revival of trade unions and political resistance. The group advocated the development of workers' leadership and socialist policies in the struggle against national oppression. In a short time this became highly contentious owing to what was regarded as presenting a "independent perspective", factionalism and a workerist (rather than national liberation) agenda. A pity because they had a lot to offer.³⁵⁵

The 1976 students uprising clearly captured the imagination of the exiled movement far more than the 1973 strike wave. Perhaps this was owing to the fact that hundreds of youth poured across the borders to join MK. It became a question of "all hands on deck" as the exiles membership were urgently deployed to manage the new exodus. The new recruits were the sons and daughters of the working class but they had no labour experience. We could have done far more in preparing the 1960 MK generation (those still up to the challenges at any rate for many had become "burnt out"), who had been workers, for infiltration, side by side with the best of the 1976 generation, to work directly within the labour front – and did not. What is more our most gifted leaders such as Slovo and Hani, focussed on MK work as Chief of Staff and Commissar respectively, until the former became Secretary General of the Party in 1986 to then focus more directly on the class battles. He was released from MK in 1987 to be replaced as Chief of Staff by Hani.

³⁵⁵ This paragraph refers to the expulsion of the Marxist Workers Tendency from the ANC in 1985. The paragraph was written by David Hemson, one of the four former MWT members mentioned whose recognised leader was Martin Legassick, also mentioned. The paragraph was a response to a three way e mail discussion between Ronnie Kasrils, David Hemson and me. The paragraph was accepted by RK for this interview transcript. (E mail 18/06/2018).

Whilst there is a growing critique that much that is wrong with the ANC and liberation movement today, stems from the Party's alleged incorrect theory concerning Colonialism of a Special Type (CST) and the National Democratic Revolution (NDR) - thus tailing behind the ANC in service of a skewed nationalist agenda in a two-stage march to socialism. My view (without dismissing the criticism outright) would argue that the main deficiency in the Party's involvement in the 1987 Miners' strike related more to the concrete exile limitations I have referred to which had served to diminish the SACP's capacity on the ground and at "the rock face" of the struggle. I am aware that the school of left criticism I have referred to would answer by saying the problem leading to that diminished capacity was rooted in the past when the Party adopted too close an alliance with the ANC at the expense of a direct and independent role that would have placed the struggle for socialism in the foreground. That of course is another whole area of debate that is particularly on-going at the present juncture.

At the same time it should not be denied that focus on MK, and its rising military activity, was a major preoccupation of the Party along with the ANC and created a militarist deviation at the expense of political work in both cases. Even prior to the influx of the 1976 generation the liberation movement's focus was on armed struggle and this undoubtedly affected even the Party's response to its condition of isolation. This meant that the concentration of effort and resources went into armed responses to the violence and brutality of the regime. Undoubtedly if this had not been the case the Party might have been in a better position to influence the rising tide of working class struggle. I use the word "might" since how sure can anyone be that a different outcome could have taken place specifically regarding the strike movement of that time?

I have argued elsewhere, in writing and in talks, including an acknowledgement to a question from Eddie Webster at a seminar on Marxism, that I am of the view that a major error of the post-1994 developments, was the liquidation of the UDF (which could have been turned into a leading force of civil society). I agree that COSATU and the SACP became subservient to the ANC and its government. Both have readily participated in the new democratic government and do so to this day with SACP and COSATU MPs and Ministers answerable to the ANC. The decline in the role and status of both, as advance detachments of the working class, deteriorated to a shocking degree during the kleptocratic Zuma Presidency (2007-2017) which set the country back twenty years. I have also written that a Faustian Pact of mainly economic concessions to big business in the Mandela-Mbeki years (1994-2007), was the disastrous turn to the hard-wired global free market, neo-liberal template and the stepping-stone for Zuma's

crony capitalist faction looting of state coffers. (Ref: A Simple Man – Kasrils and the Zuma Enigma, Jacana 2017)

In their disagreement with Mbeki, and critique of his economic policies (The GEAR economic programme - Growth, Employment and Redistribution 1996-1999), the Party turned to support Zuma against Mbeki who it was claimed during a Party debate in 2005 “represented the best opening for the left”). The die was cast and a slide into kleptocracy and state capture by a Mafia almost succeeded. By that time the Party woke up. With the lurch to narrow right-wing nationalism the SACP had come under increasing verbal attack and marginalisation without Zuma’s protection. Blade Nzimande, the Party’s Secretary-General, confessed to the “marriage of convenience” that had been formed to topple Mbeki and replace him with Zuma. He bitterly added: “our trust has been broken and we have been betrayed.” (Speech to the 14th Congress of the SACP, July 2017). Whilst some Party critics might seek to link such errors to the incapacity I have highlighted in relation to the 1987 strike, I would need much persuasion to buy that thesis. The errors of the Zuma aberration are bad enough but I have identified the cause of the rot in the ANC elsewhere. That lay as I have argued in my concept of a Faustian Pact. I accept that the Party was tailing behind the ANC and particularly behind the leadership of Mandela. But not in the sense of a sell-out. Rather an error of judgement to be sure that had debated the advantages of accepting political power whilst going slow on immediate economic contestation. The argument was that political power would enable an advance towards eventual control of the heights of the economy. I recently came across an excellent interview with Tariq Ali, a leading British Marxist, assessing the outcome of the 1968 upheavals in France which spread throughout Europe. He made reference to what he termed “the dialectic of partial conquest” **(interviewed by David Edgar, London Review of Books, 24 May, 2018 and at <https://portside.org/2018-05-24/tariq-ali-1968-and-today>).**

This was an internal debate in what was then termed “The New Left” in Europe over whether to press on to greater objectives or apply the brakes in order not to risk what had been won and find time to build strength and capacity. This certainly coincides with my own assessment of the position the Party adopted at that crucial historic juncture in the 1990-1994 period. There were real dangers that a transition from apartheid rule to democracy could have been wrecked had there been no reconciliation. The prospect of a bloody civil war was considered very high. The country was spared that with great hopes and an optimistic belief that an advance to socialism could transpire. The reality has been vastly different with a downturn in the economy, massive unemployment and growing inequality. The Party has once again placed

its hopes and expectations in an elected ANC leader - Cyril Ramaphosa who launched a “ new dawn” crusade to clear up corruption in the state and get the economy going. In the latter case there is no difference between him and the three ‘Ms’ – Mandela, Mbeki and Manuel – and adoption of the neo-liberal economic formula with some important aspects of redistribution but insufficient to prevent the obscene gulf between the extremely wealthy and mass impoverishment. South Africa has been classified as the most unequal country on earth.

Tension was evident at the Party’s 14th Congress in 2017 with many delegates pressing for the Party to contest the 2019 elections with its own candidates – but not necessarily breaking with the Alliance. With the Party having backed Ramaphosa against Zuma’s favoured candidate at the ANC’s elective conference in December 2017, that now appears to be a moot point. Ramaphosa won very narrowly and is now both President of the ANC and country – but how secure? The Zuma faction are strong and threaten his position. For them to make a come-back would be the worst possible scenario for the country. The situation is precarious. Again the dialectics of partial victory comes to the fore. The left project is paying dearly for errors of the past, but particularly of 1994. Not that it was incorrect to find a peaceful route to the transition to democracy but owing to the following factors:

- The UDF was dissolved thus robbing the country of what could have been a powerful independent formation of civil society;
- COSATU became emasculated, its militancy and membership strength decreased reflecting the ANC’s turn to the free market economy which as elsewhere undermines local industry and production;
- COSATU along with the SACP tailed behind the ANC because it was thought that breaking the Alliance and weakening the ANC would be disastrous;
- Concessions to big business were far greater than they should have been;
- SACP lost both Hani and Slovo in quick succession - assassination of the former April 1993; and the natural death of the latter January 1995 - and by 2005 the Party’s fatal error of backing Zuma occurred;

- Underestimation of the power of Capital to seduce and corrupt a revolutionary movement and the consequence of attaining lucrative Government positions and the power of co-option.

Finally, if a powerful labour movement and mass democratic movement had been maintained that could have been the bulwark against reaction and a vehicle for the correction of leadership errors and of shameless corruption. In this respect I think there is a case to make in viewing the SACP as not having lived up to the requirements of its historic mission. I count myself – member of the SACP CC from 1985-2007 as guilty of allowing that to happen. At the same time any discussion of the search for a socialist working class agent of change cannot ignore a communist party of 150,000 members.

Makoma Lekalakala – Interview (Skype) 02/7/18

THIS INTERVIEW HAS BEEN WITHDRAWN.

FOR MORE INFORMATION PLEASE CONTACT JOHN ROSE.

Bethuel Maserumule Interview 14/05/2018 Johannesburg

Bethuel, former “workerist”, former shop steward with Barlow aluminium production until 1986 when he became a full time organiser with MAWU and then NUMSA, the metal workers’ union. COSATU had just replaced FOSATU as the main trade union federation. NUMSA was often seen as its most militant and socialist union.

Several e mail exchanges follow the interview – also published here

I asked Bethuel if he believed the workers’ movement, the independent trade union movement could also become a political movement. I mentioned Poland’s Solidarity as a model.

Yes, but we never clarified the relation between unions as a political movement and a political party and you are quite right in suggesting that the Polish Solidarity movement was a most useful reference point. It emerged as almost the only model or option that was closest to the thinking about how a union movement could enhance its political profile. The other option was the Brazilian workers’ party in which the unions had an influential role but were not the only force within it. It appears to me that with time the leading advocate of the political character of the labour movement were swinging towards that option. So if Solidarnosc operated both as a labour movement and a highly politicised movement in a semi political party character, its (impact) lessened quite dramatically over time (*Martial Law December 1982 neutered its impact*) and those thinking about the political character of unions were swinging over to the Brazilian model. But what was never in question was that the union had to be heavily political. Everybody agreed on that. The exact manner gave rise to different interpretations.

What was your most optimistic perspective for the unions to become a political movement. Did you see Cosatu becoming like Solidarity, for example?

Honestly, at the time, I was not informed about the exact way that Solidarnosc operated. I didn’t know whether it relied only on people in the factories. Was it also drawing on unemployed workers? Did it pull in people from rural movements? Are you talking about a party for the working class in its broadest sense or are you talking about a party for the industrial proletariat? A lot of us were persuaded about the potential power of the industrial proletariat but we weren’t sure about the requisite political force needed in order to achieve transformation. And so we realised there were other forces which constituted the broader working class in order to make this class a meaningful agent of change.

Did you see yourselves giving a lead to the ANC at the time? Did you see yourselves as a liberation movement as well as a trade union movement?

In the initial stages I was in MAWU and NUMSA, heavily critical of the ANC, very resentful actually. Our understanding of the history of the ANC was that it did not inspire any hope in transforming the country in any meaningful way. They had a heavily reformist character and inclination into incorporation into the political and economic structures. This meant to us that we'll have an outcome, a political dispensation which would favour any other social class except the working class. And so we were heavily sceptical about any prospects of change coming through the ANC as the leading force. But the reality was that the ANC had established itself strongly in South Africa, that it influenced all militant mobilised formations within society. And the most interesting aspect of that was that the leading elements within the struggle, in every formation, owed their allegiance to the ANC. If you go to the youth formations, the students, the community structures, the rural movements, the leading cadres, the vanguard elements within those formations owed their loyalty to the ANC. And most of them did not have any developed concept of transformation. Those who were influenced by socialist ideas were much fewer and the majority existed outside the ANC. So you had this dilemma where the more consciously socialist elements are few and outside the ANC. And those within the ANC are good at organising struggles, building structures, fighting campaigns and battles against the regime. The fighting elements within the ANC were not with such developed socialist understanding as those outside. So that was our dilemma. That if you really want to advance a meaningful concept of socialist change you had to connect to those forces who, unfortunately, were loyal to the ANC. So that began to influence and moderate some of the resentment towards the ANC. And it gave us the opportunity to actually start interrogating them. What is the ANC? So for some of us it became interesting to develop this sense that the ANC is a broad movement led by middle class forces, heavily influential, but vulnerable to the movement and development of its constituencies. This broad movement consisted of people in urban areas, people in the industrial sector, people in the rural movements. And they were heavily radicalised, and at the height of the radical mobilisation, they would push the ANC to the Left. But as soon as the radical flow would decline, the middle class leadership would assert itself once again. So this made us appreciate an orientation towards the ANC – not in terms of its politics and policies but more in terms of the forces from below that were loyal to it and would follow it.

Wouldn't it have been better if what became known as the Triple Alliance ANC/SACP/COSATU had the lead organisations reversed so that the alliance would be COSATU/SACP/ANC, with the workers' federation in the lead? The crucial moment for this to happen might have been in 1987 when you had both the miners on strike, the largest strike in South African history, along with many of other groups of workers either taking strike action or hoping to – like NUMSA?

The mid '80's following the formation of COSATU, the industrial proletariat became highly organised and became very militant and really assumed the responsibility of waging the struggle against Apartheid, in a very strong way. But this still existed alongside other highly radicalised and organised sections with the youth, the students, the rural communities. So with the brutal repression of struggle, the importance of uniting all radical forces opposing Apartheid became inevitable. By 1987 we had already seen how the Apartheid regime was repressing every other form of resistance. So even if we had hope in the leading role of the industrial sector, the industrial proletariat, we were beginning to be aware that it won't be enough to face the responsibilities of confronting the Apartheid regime. But the notion of this alliance, students, workers, rural movements brought with it the ANC.

But did the ANC have to be the leadership?

But the point was that when the majority of the fighting elements were accepting the leadership of the ANC, the alliance with the industrial working class meant that that notion was transferred to it. But one thing that you mustn't overlook was that those who were posing the issue of the proletariat leading the ANC assumed that the ANC was not influential within the industrial proletariat and I think that was proven to be wrong. A large section of the industrial working class really appreciated the ANC and were also loyal to it.

Let me give you two isolated incidents from NUMSA which became a shock to some of our workerist leaders. There was an organiser that came from a township we call Katlehong, just outside the airport, the industrial heartlands of South Africa, east of Johannesburg. It's where the industries and working class are concentrated with settlements near the industrial areas. That was where some of the most militant working class battles were fought. One of my colleagues from NUMSA was from this township Katlehong. He was indisputably workerist and to our shock one evening he was nearly caught at a road block with members of Umkhonto we Sizwe, MK, and heavy weapons. They had to abandon their car and run. The police found the weapons. And so to us it became clear this comrade was linked to the underground structures of MK. So leading elements in NUMSA got the shock of their lives when they realised that the

person they assumed to be a loyal workerist was actually MK. Another comrade of mine in Pretoria who came from they called the young Christian workers, a Christian oriented movement that trained youngsters for roles in community structures. He was understood to be influenced by workerism as well and just around the '90's we were shocked to realise that she was part of some SACP initiatives. And so at that time the revelations about who was in NUMSA and associated with either the ANC or the SACP were multiplying by the day.

The SACP in the 1980's must have had underground cadres working alongside worker activists. Did they present themselves to you and try and recruit you?

Not me directly. They used to get their newsletter to us. What shocked me was that I was initially critical of them because of their closeness to the ANC. I could not understand how a party of socialism would not only come close to, but subordinate itself to the nationalism of the ANC. But the more I read their documents I found them inviting us and sensitising us to the national question in South Africa. And I agree it has to be linked and related to the class question. And so the race and class question became an important mobilising issue in the union. And that's where they neutralised the influence of workerism – because they demonstrated that workerism neglected the national question and they argued that black workers suffered class exploitation just as much as they suffered national oppression – and that it was incorrect to overlook the national question. Sections of the industrial proletariat began to be sympathetic to that argument. I joined SACP but very late on. Whilst I was persuaded that we needed to address the national question, there were differences. The workerists really neglected it and they were weakened when that issue was brought up. But my sense was that the way you deal with the national question was by settling the class question. There were no prospects for resolving racial inequalities without assuming control, the working class assuming political and economical control of society.

How was this to be achieved?

Through revolutionary struggle.

Did you see yourselves taking power directly at the point of production, actually taking over the factories?

Yes, that's what will be a critical element of that control which is where I found the workerist approach to organisation to have been useful in exercising very strong shop floor structures.

This was originally the position of Moses Mayekiso and you would support that?

I know that in my company Barlow aluminium production, we had attempted to develop our factory organisation in such a way that we were trying to hold factory congresses, annually, with an outside guest speaker which would give us a perspective about our workers' struggle, in order to deepen the workers' consciousness. I wouldn't say how such an approach was replicated throughout the union but we had made that attempt because our shop stewards committee consisted of activists who did value informing themselves about struggles in other countries and building ourselves in the factory that would heighten socialist consciousness among our members. When we had strikes we had serious education sessions about the economy, about politics. The healthiest moment I once felt was during a session in one of our strikes when after explaining where real power is, and showing that power driven by economic control over wealth, the class that controls wealth creation is the class that also controls political power. That's how we showed the connection. And that made us analyse the ANC in relation to that. Where do we locate the ANC sources of power and what it said about controlling wealth. And the workers were clear that the ANC was thinly based on the notion of control of wealth creation as the basis of political control. And therefore they became sceptical about the ANC providing the liberation which would have meaning to workers because of their location in the economy. And so when I posed the question in one session to the workers, what do you make of the prospects of a Mandela Presidency? Do you think we will be liberated if Mandela becomes President? I remember that the guy that answered the question was also a lay preacher in his church and he said President Mandela would not symbolise liberation for the workers because his base is thinly based on political authority and not political power whose origins and sources are control of wealth and wealth generating assets.

That's exactly what happened?

Exactly what happened. Now I never say this aloud but imagine that being a statement mentioned by workers in '86, '87. It gave me this sense of satisfaction that our education was actually reaching across to the workers. Because when you run education and people say they understand, you can never really know that they really understand. But when you pose this kind of question and they answer it in this brilliant manner, and as I say, this was a lay preacher, then I realised that this message was sinking in.

Did you see the workers taking over Barlow and running it themselves?

I don't think we had that vision but we were using every opportunity and every resource and idea to enhance the political consciousness of the union members on the factory floor so that

they saw themselves as a working class, a class for itself, not just itself. So you can define it as an incremental process, instead of a process with an end point where we are working back from it.

What was the mechanism for taking power? How did you see the workers taking power?

Even with the leadership of workerism, we weakened managerial control in the factory in the same way radical elements within communities weakened political control over the Apartheid machine. I think if you consult Karl von Holdt's book *Transformation from Below...* because he analyses and compares two cases of popular and working class control in society using Highveld Steel, a steel mill based in a small rural town called Witbank. What is fascinating about that case is that when I read it today I could see in the operations of the shop stewards committee at Highveld similar things to what we were doing. The difference was that we were slightly stronger in trying to acquire ideas, how we connect shopfloor struggle to socialist takeover, socialist vision. In our case we had more strong orientation towards this. But they were ahead of us in terms of weakening management's control over the workplace, influencing how the plant was run, insisting on management meeting workers' demands which included about how they wanted production to be controlled. And during a strike they established a separate committee (from the shop stewards) to manage the strike, a strike committee which consisted of ordinary workers, the more militant among the members were appointed and not elected into the strike committee. I found this a fascinating notion. Because during a strike the consciousness of the workers goes up quite dramatically and so newer elements among the workers show themselves up as leaders. And so this was appreciated and these workers were included into the strike committee. In other words to avoid having the shop stewards who are already used to talking to management and making concessions becoming the ones that led the war. So the workers who were untainted, uncorrupted by negotiations and compromises were the ones leading the strikes. So they were a bit ahead of us in that sense. Though I have a feeling they were weaker on political education.

Do you remember the 1987 miners' strike? Could more solidarity have been given to the miners for them to win? Could NUMSA have done more?

That's a really important question. The steel industry and the mining industry are really closely connected. In NUMSA we organise the steel factories which means we produce the equipment that is used in mining. So the direct way we are connected to mining existed and should and could have been used as a basis of waging solidarity with the miners. Because we could simply

have stopped producing or sending the equipment needed for mining production. But that didn't happen. 1987 was the year NUMSA was formed. A more moderate union had just joined it. 1987, the union was caught in internal organisational consolidation processes to integrate this more moderate element but also to merge different organisational and political cultures that came with the merging union. To organise its power and its united embers the union wasn't available at that time, the year of its formation, to take up such major militant struggle. I don't remember thinking about it. We may have sent symbolic support messages but we never really discussed it in terms of a stronger role we could play.

In retrospect do you think that was a mistake?

Yes, it was a serious mistake.

Jay Naidoo is quoted saying COSATU did too little too late. An opportunity was missed for COSATU to play a more important political role?

Yes, one fundamental weakness in building the industrial working class as a political force for change. The situation had fragmentation, fragmented thinking. The workerists were so inward looking in terms of union role which was still incomplete in the way I am trying to explain, that while the union pronounced against nationalism and for socialism, it had little by way of guiding or empowering its members on the shop floor on what that vision meant. So we were trying what we understood in my factory. But the battle against the ANC was lost. The battle against the ANC would have required a resolutely and strongly organised industrial proletariat rooted in point of production that would show and say to the ANC, we are an all-round political force able to take our destiny into our own hands. Without that I think the ANC would always have outmanoeuvred us.

Could COSATU have become that political movement of the industrial proletariat?

Not really, the industrial proletariat would have needed a broader attitude towards politics which would have connected them to community struggles. COSATU was too weak politically. NUMSA was formed in 1987. We adopted a resolution that said we wanted a working class programme and not the ANC's Freedom Charter.³⁵⁶ Two years later we have these changes in Eastern Europe, global changes which put socialism in retreat. And even though our movement still hung on to the ideas of socialism, the workerist section swung over to social democracy and abandoned the socialist project entirely. So there were internal weaknesses that were

³⁵⁶ According to Kally Forest, the Freedom Charter was adopted at the 1987 Numsa Congress (*Metal That Will Not Bend, National Union of Metal Workers of South Africa, Wits University Press, 2011, p418*)

intensified by the global developments which really weakened what would have been a strong socialist offensive coming out of the South African trade union movement.

Ends.

Brief discussion on impact of fall of Soviet Union. Was it socialist? Whatever its weaknesses, it as seen as a reference point for organising society differently.

This continues as interview an informal conversation Bethuel began with me about Stalin and Trotsky. I asked him when he first heard about Trotsky.

I was a worker, shop steward on the shopfloor I had come across reading on socialism by Lenin, on Marxism Leninism from that perspective and so my worker education, teaching on socialism, derived from that. When I became an organiser in mid 1986, and after the formation of NUMSA 1987, I then came across other NUMSA organisers who were inspired by Trotsky and began to engage me and challenge me with especially a notion of socialism which was linked to Stalin's Soviet Union. And that's when I began to make distinctions between Stalin and Trotsky.

Bethuel told me he had not read Trotsky's History of the Russian Revolution, but he had read Lenin's What is to be Done, State and Revolution, Left Wing 'Communism'...and Rosa Luxemburg's Mass Strike. He added;

But what I found missing about them for a shop steward was that they were not helping me in the art of building workplace struggle around production. Strangely I found Maoism helping me and guerrilla-ist concepts and approaches to struggle. So the art of war – I remember reading a book about the art of war when I was still a shop steward and then doing some reading about guerrilla warfare. So combining the two became a resource for me in building the workplace organisation around production issues. How do we lead struggles creatively on the shop floor without exhausting the fighting resources of the workers. Building their consciousness through active struggles so that they can realise their power needed to challenge their exploitation on the shop floor and to limit and push back management's control. For me those were fundamental. At the time I didn't find anything in Lenin and Trotsky, it was only the Maoist and people dealing with war providing me with ideas.

In informal conversation Bethuel told me about discussions via NUMSA with Chris Hani. Bethuel said.

“We challenged him on multiclass alliances. He said we are experimenting with these alliances. I wish I had had a closer dialogue with him.”

Bethuel correction to transcript translation – e mail 19/6/18:

Regarding the reflection on our discussions with cmde Chris Hani: I thought I was saying that we challenged him around two issues: multiclass alliances, to which he said they experimented with various forms of alliances, to win more forces on to the side of the struggle. We also engaged him around the revolutionary process and its phases. He pointed out that they believed in stages and not revolution as one big step, and was willing to hear about our view. I must have stated that we felt encouraged by his open attitude towards debate, that he was not defensive. I wished under such circumstances to have had more time for dialogue with him

ENDS

E mail exchanges following the interview

19 /06/ 18 Dear John

Thanks a lot for the transcript. Looks good in my view. Only two minor corrections and two clarification: one is that my surname is Maserumule (not Maseremule), if you notice the difference? Second, the two people I refer to on pages 2 – 3 are males, females. Maybe on the tape I sound like talking about a she but it should be he on both incidents. The issue about the freedom charter – I hope I did not state that Numsa adopted only the idea of a working class programme at the founding congress. I thought I said or should have said that the union adopted the freedom charter as a programme of minimum demands and would strive for a working class programme as a basis of fundamental transformation of society. Maybe I did not come out that clearly. Regarding the reflection on our discussions with cmde Chris Hani: I thought I was saying that we challenged him around two issues: multiclass alliances, to which he said they experimented with various forms of alliances, to win more forces on to the side of the struggle. We also engaged him around the revolutionary process and its phases. He pointed out that they believed in stages and not revolution as one big step, and was willing to hear about our view. I must have stated that we felt encouraged by his open attitude towards debate, that he was not defensive. I wished under such circumstances to have had more time for dialogue with him.

Other than that, I feel good about the transcript. It was from my side as well a great pleasure to talk to you and share my views

Thanks a lot All the best

Bethuel

From: John Rose <johnrose88@yahoo.co.uk>

Sent: 17 June 2018 01:06 PM

To: Bethuel Maserumule <Bethuel.Maserumule@fes-southafrica.org>

Subject: Greetings!

Hi Bethuel,

Please see attached the transcript of your interview with me - and apologies that I took so long to get back to you. I was very pleased to meet you and I am delighted with the interview. Thank you so much for agreeing to it. Please feel free to make any amendments that you think necessary. One point - you will see that I have footnoted that Kally Forest reports in her book that NUMSA Congress adopted the Freedom Charter in 1987.

Best wishes and look forward to hearing from you. John

05 / 07 /18 Hi John

Thanks a lot for the message and the two points you are raising. Your research is really dealing with very important issues about the labour movement in SA in the 1980s.

First point: I remember the 1987 collective bargaining when the union was planning a strike. I was a newly appointed local branch organiser. I got appointed a month before the launching congress of NUMSA. So, I was not part of the NEC myself. But I remember that we had mobilised strongly for the strike – holding member general meetings at different levels: in the workplaces, in the communities, etc. We also used the balloting process to mobilise workers for the strike. In the process I remember there were days when I could not sleep at home, because we would work until late and I would be forced to arrange with colleagues to sleep over at their places. When the strike was called off because of the court action, there was disappointment. For some of us the strike would have been a moment to use to build unity and solidarity among the members of the merging unions and show the strength of the new union. But the argument was that since the union had just emerged from the merger congress,

the timing was not conducive for a showdown with employers and the state. The reasoning was that the union was heavily engaged in internal processes of integrating the structures, offices, staff and members of the old unions that merged. The union was as such deemed not to be ready to pull off a big confrontation. According to this view, the issue was not about the legality or illegality of the strike, but about the readiness of the organisational machinery to shoulder the burden of a huge confrontation. If we went ahead, it was feared that only members of the old union that was part of the wage dispute would have participated with no prospects of internal solidarity.

That is as much as I can remember and even rationalise. I was not aware of the debates that took place in the NEC, and can try and find out – though most of the people involved might be difficult to find.

Second point: I think the failure to draw any linkages between the miners strike and the planned strike by NUMSA derived mainly from the very fact that the NUM strike happened in the same year of the launch of NUMSA. Therefore the same reasons for not going ahead with the NUMSA strike applied in relation to a possible solidarity action with the NUM. But this is certainly an argument resting on organisational formalities – NUMSA had just been launched, it was integrating, there were fears about premature testing of its strength. What was missed was the organisational and political value of acting in solidarity with the NUM and the message it would send to capital and the state. If this was the compelling view, it would have been possible to consider important but less radical forms of solidarity such as lunch-hour pickets or limited work stoppages, for instance. This means the issue of allowing the organisational machinery of NUMSA to first evolve and consolidate – reasonable as it was, was perhaps taken too far and at the expense of the strategic issues involved.

But speaking with hindsight, it is clear that the issue of solidarity – within and between unions in Cosatu, was very weak and never really planted. There are not many cases of mobilisation in support of fellow members or members of sister unions in the national centre.

I hope I have offered explanations relevant to what you are probing

Regards

Bethuel

From: John Rose <johnrose88@yahoo.co.uk>

Sent: 04 July 2018 10:23 AM

To: Bethuel Maserumule <Bethuel.Maserumule@fes-southafrica.org>

Subject: Greetings! NUMSA/NUM/Highvelds Steel 1987

Hi Bethuel,

Trust you are in good health and spirits.

I would like to begin an e mail discussion with you following on 2 points, following what I hope is a close and accurate reading of both Karl Von Holdt's book and Kally Forrest's history of NUMSA. First, the refusal of NUMSA leaders to go ahead with the national strike in July '87 after the government declared it illegal, despite over 90% balloting in favour - an incredible result. Many, perhaps most?, rank and file metal workers were furious. And indeed Von Holdt describes the fascinating solidarity strike at Highveld, forcing the reinstatement of sacked strikers, who went ahead with the strike anyway, at the smelter in Witbank, even though it was not owned by AngloAmerican.

I would like to know more about the decision to call off the strike. Did you agree with it? Do you know of national executive NUMSA leaders who opposed calling it off? Second, I am astonished that there is not a single mention of the August '87 miners strike in Von Holdt's book, despite the fact he reports that 80% of coal production was in the Witbank region, (according to Vic Allen's book, NUM's commissioned history of the union, these were the most tightly organised mines in the industry), and this coal, when burned in the power stations, produced half of S Africa's electricity supply! It was a ready made local target for solidarity. This point is underlined because the Strike Committee had tried to force solidarity for a Highvelds strike from the Mapochs mine earlier in the year - so contact with at least one of the mines had already been established.

I have a further point to propose concerning the split between the shop stewards committee and the strike committee but this can wait!

Many thanks

John

09 /07 18 Dear John

Interesting issues once again. It will be important to keep probing how a strong and militant factory organisation appear to have degenerated or morphed into an agent of coercion.

Let me say something about worker education at the time. As I saw it, workerism was good on worker education to develop organisation and worker leaders. It was deep on shopfloor and industry issues, and would also sensitise about broader ideological issues. It emphasised the issue of a society basing itself on needs of the working people, on democracy and accountability to workers, who form the majority in society. It laid emphasis on grassroots structures as a basis of the bottom-up rule that is envisaged. It was cautious to the extent that it did not tackle issues of how these worker structures would approach the issue of state power and the revolutionary transition. I think people were aware of the security implications – that state would not have hesitated to clamp down on the unions if they went into this direction. The state was certainly monitoring what the unions were doing, aware of the political role the unions were playing. But others believe this weakness is a feature of workerism - that it never had an idea of how workers would take-over control of society. I remember trying to run an ideological training with a group of shop stewards. I gave them some reading. We read and discussed the readings. The engagement was lively and amazing. After the session, they said that is exactly what they have always wanted and was missing in the sessions of the union. So, the issue about revolutionary committees and organisational cells was not everywhere developed. I think the SACP must have run their own cells. So, ideological training was happening elsewhere – not in the formal activities of the unions. Those trained would take issues and arguments into the formal structures to contest for support of their views among ordinary workers. Workers were hungry for clear political direction on how to consolidate their power in the workplace and use it to advance towards a worker-controlled society. Each time they were armed with clarity, they embraced it with courage and enthusiasm. But ideological empowerment was not delivered sufficiently and systematically.

I am not sure as to how much of the role of worker education you covered and the political work done clandestinely by various groups. I think this would give you good pointers. But I think most groups were focussed on the notion of seizure of state power as a basis of transforming society – a more top-down approach to transformation and this made the project vulnerable to being hijacked by the more petit-bourgeois elements.

We can elaborate on this aspect if it goes in the right direction of what you are looking

Comradely Bethuel

From: John Rose <johnrose88@yahoo.co.uk>

Sent: 06 July 2018 08:50 AM

To: Bethuel Maserumule <Bethuel.Maserumule@fes-southafrica.org>

Subject: Re: RE: Greetings! NUMSA/NUM/Highvelds Steel 1987

Hi Bethuel,

Many thanks for your swift and informative reply. I'll get back to you later to test my (hopefully, more developed), thoughts on the Highveld 2 committees. This is critical to my research which, in one sense, can be boiled down to a comparison of the factory committees, in the Russian Revolution, especially between Feb and Oct 1917, and the workplace committees which surfaced in the 1980's in the independent workers' movements, in Poland, S Africa and Iran. Steve Smith's Red Petrograd is the classic study of the Russian revolutionary committees, 'organisational cells' of the soviets, as Lenin called them. Of course, Bolshevik influence on the Russian committees was decisive, though they were very democratic, other political tendencies were involved, and, in any case, the Bolsheviks themselves were sometimes publicly divided over the role of the committees - especially when it came to how hard to push workers' control.

So your point about lack of politics at Highveld is, in my opinion, absolutely decisive. When Von Holdt writes: "...the failure of union democracy to empower the less literate migrant workers led them to resort to coercion (symbolised by the *sjambok*) to empower themselves." (p175), he puts his finger on the political weakness. As I understand it, the great strength of both shop floor democracy and militancy at Highvelds had been its unification of township and migrant workers. In those critical months of July/August 1987, when Von Holdt describes the politics of the "bush" and "ungovernability" coming to Highvelds, workers seeing themselves as liberation fighters, it was the so-called "less literate" who were pushing it. The revolutionary energy was with them - the obvious outlets should have been both NUMSA and NUM strikes - re-uniting the steelworkers. Instead, it seems to me, it imploded with the creation of the two committees - opening up divisions which the employer effectively used to break the union later that year.

It should be remembered that Bolshevik worker cadres were often first generation, from peasant, illiterate, families.

Please consider this as 'thinking aloud' - what was required was for 'left workerism' to have established the beginnings of the SA 1980's equivalent of a small Bolshevik Party. But I confess, I'm not sure at this stage what that means! (Except it doesn't mean the SACP).

Best John

17/07/18 Dear John

Sorry for taking long to answer:

(1) Workerism did take solidarity seriously, including international solidarity. It prioritised the establishment of worker and shop steward structures and encouraged the structures to think about solidarity with fellow workers. More often the worker and shop steward structures would decide on their own as to how to provide support to other workers. But they would not instruct or compel workers to do so. They would inform and encourage the workers to think about the nature of support they could consider. More often workers would think about strikes. But the workerists would then add actions like work stoppages, not full-blown strikes, as well as pickets and demonstrations. Extended lunch-hour stoppage was one action associated with the workerists. On top of their normal lunch, workers would take an additional time of two or more hours as a work stoppage in support of other workers. Such stoppages had a highly disruptive effect on production, especially if taken repeatedly, and were able to force business to concede to demands

(2) There may be a problem in trying to identify individuals as theoreticians or ideologues of workerism. Not because they are unknown. Issue is that factions were not authorised in the unions. So, even if it was easy to identify members of a particular faction – workerist, SACP, ANC, Trotskyist, pan-Africanists, black-consciousness – none of them was authorised. As such to link someone with a faction would render them vulnerable to accusations of causing divisions. Yet all these factions existed in various unions. Some unions were controlled by Stalinists, while others were dominated by workerist. Even among workerist, you had the more conservative – those who rejected the political role of unions. there were also the more progressive, who supported the political role of unions and were resentful of nationalism and the liberation movement. Leading figures of factions would be based within the head offices of unions. as such they enjoyed unrestricted access to members in various regions and provinces. So, for the fact that the majority of workers did not know about the various factions and that most faction members preferred to remain anonymous, it may not be advisable to identify

anyone. The different factions did know each other and all contested for influence over the direction of union politics. The common denominator was submission to the control by workers and members of the union, as well as loyal service and hard work. Workers would love or hate union officials – who formed the majority in factions, depending on compliance with these principles of submission to workers control and loyal service to the union.

I hope this answers the questions

Moses Mayekiso Interview (9/05/18) Johannesburg

Former “workerist” leader, lead defendant 1986 treason trial, former metal worker shop steward and general secretary of the metal workers union, NUMSA

How did you see the workers’ movement in the early 1980’s in relation to the revolution necessary to overthrow Apartheid ?

I was exposed to the challenges facing the workers in the mines – I started working in the mines, Western Holdings, Welkom. I was a miner 1973-4. I left. Conditions were brutal – no space for organising. Also I was not yet clear about working class politics. I was still fresh from school. I went to Johannesburg when after many jobs, looking around after stress of the police, because I came to Johannesburg without having proper registration that were necessary under Apartheid laws that were stifling movement of workers, of African people. Finally I was employed by Toyota Marketing Company – where I got to know about the union, I was recruited into the Metal & Allied Workers Union, MAWU. I became an activist and shop steward. There was fighting for better conditions and union recognition in the plant. I was dismissed – the whole workforce was dismissed and then we were not re-employed as were regarded as having orchestrated the strike and ungovernability in the plant. Then after that MAWU employed me fulltime as an organiser. I was exposed as an organiser to other industries beyond metal industry, auto industry. By then MAWU was an affiliate of COSATU which was mobilising workers across industries. There was paper, food and others. So it was not only metal workers were oppressed. It was across industries. My politics were developing now to say that unless you mobilise not only the metal workers but mobilise all the workers across industries to have power, to be able to address workers’ problems. I looked at the shop stewards’ committees we had under FOSATU, I thought these are grand structures that can really give power to the workers, not only to fight for wages, better working conditions, conditions of employment – but also to change the system of capitalism, to be able to wage a war that can change the conditions once and for all. And, therefore, I was exposed to debates about socialist dispensations in other countries, I was exposed to how the workers are exploited, the ABC of exploitation and oppression of workers internationally. I got exposed to international work because we were working with international unions. It became clear to me that there is a class phenomena. the working class are squeezed to develop wealth for the few , having extracted the labour power at the production level.

Then I developed the strategy of shop stewards' councils covering all the plants in the metal industry. And above that a workers' council of the FOSATU unions. And I was organising in the East Rand Germiston. Those were the first shop stewards councils of FOSATU that became adopted by COSATU. This is in the period before my arrest 1982-86.

Your perspective was workers seizing power at the point of production?

The perspective was that for any revolution to succeed the workers must be able to seize power in the factories. And working together with the communities seizing power in the residential areas – merged that to mount a real revolution.

That's why they put you on treason trial?

That's why.

With those shop stewards councils, we began looking beyond the realm of those workers' areas. We asked where are the workers staying? They are staying in squalid conditions in the town ships. Let's bring our structures. Organise the communities, the poor, in the townships to really topple apartheid and capitalism later. That was the key. Then I got labelled as the workerist because of my emphasis on the worker power at the point of production. You can do whatever outside the factory, but if you cannot stop production then you cannot mount a revolution.

We in FOSATU got into negotiations with other unions, also based on community issues, like SARUL SAWU and others. FOSATU became COSATU. MAWU became NUMSA – the beginnings of the broad working class movement. We got in touch with the Communist Party guys.

How did this happen? Who were they?

For example a guy in Alexandra called Sipho Kubeka³⁵⁷ Looking now for unity in the working class, one started to analyse the Communist Party politics. And I went along with their politics, but not the commandist, the top down approach. I didn't agree with that, but, for the sake of unity, then let's work together.

But what about the two-stage theory – this explicitly denied what you've just said about workers taking power at the point of production?

³⁵⁷ Moses told me much later in the interview (42.54) that Kubeka was a tu organiser with the paper, wood and allied union. Moses said: "a subtle strategist – not taking the cudgels himself")

With that I was adamant – you cannot have two stages of revolution. That's what happened. You use the power of the workers to get the elite into government, then once they are in government they will stifle. We were looking at the ANC, the ANC wants to get into government, once they are in government they will forget about the workers – even gun down the workers. Marikana is a good example. I opposed this but the with the politics of COSATU I said let's allow this as a trial stuff.

This was the period of your treason trial. How many workers do you think were joining the CP?

I would say a majority of the shop stewards got sucked into CP politics. This all happened with the formation of COSATU.

COSATU opened the door to the CP?

Yes

How did you deal with the contradiction in your mind between anticipating correctly how the ANC would behave in government and the fact that the SACP was in alliance with the ANC?

It was a compromise on my side. That this may not work. But the unions were a mass moving in that direction of accepting the CP, accepting the ANC as liberators. We thought let's get in and change the way things work. With people like Chris Hani, I was very close to him, to change the way the CP is working.

When did you meet Chris Hani?

Early 1990's. (I'd met Ronnie Kasrils in London in 1980's)

Hani was a real revolutionary. He believed workers should take power at the point of production. I joined CP in early 1990's after meeting people like Chris Hani after CP was unbanned. We had been working with them but had not joined them. He'd convinced me of participation in the Communist Party. His approach was that if we leave the CP led by people who are leading it now, not by the working class, the workers, therefore it's not going to address the issues of the workers. Well that was a good argument. But I was still sticking to the fact that the two stages is not going to work. I don't think I was appreciated much...

I think you were. You were on the steering committee of the CP . You played a leading role. You went with Jo Slovo and an ANC leader to Mercedes Benz in E London and persuaded striking workers to go back to work. Do you defend that decision now?

As a trade unionist you allow workers to strike for a certain period, when the strike is going to affect them , that's a reactionary position of the unions, you know it's not going to benefit them. You persuade them. This is not helping management. I was general secretary of NUMSA. The local leadership said, assist us because the strike is not getting anywhere and these workers are going to lose jobs. The company is threatening to leave the country. The leadership of NUMSA was fearing and we had to ask the assistance of Jo Slovo to convince the workers that the war against capital is not just in one plant, it's not just one war one battle. If you feel that this battle is not doing you good then you retreat in order to regroup and move forward.

As soon as the Treason trial was over you became General Secretary of NUMSA?

I was GS before that because in 1987 I was still in jail.

And when you came out of jail you had still not joined the CP?

I was still not a member.

Were you at the Cosatu Conference in 1989?

I was at the launch of the Cosatu Conference

This was a later Cosatu conference 1989 where, even before the ANC and CPISA were unbanned, they were very much in evidence with their flags, they are selling their paper. Many workers at this conference identified themselves as CP members.

I had not joined the CP then. But people like Sipho Kubeka will have been there. People who were wanting to recruit us.

You had many discussions with him?

Yes in Alexandra. We were in the unions together in the '80's. We were equals working in the tu movement. He had his ideas, I had my own ideas. I was unable to communicate with him during the the Treason trial but when I was on bail I was able to meet with him because we were together in Cosatu.

Did you discuss the trial with him?

No, those who had access to us during the trial were people like Jay Naidoo, GS Cosatu, visited us in jail, I don't think Jay Naidoo was in CP. There was Sidney Muphamadi who was deputy to him.

The year Chris Hani was assassinated 1993 was the year you left the CP?

Because I could see that it was going to lose the plot – before the final settlement. I lost interest and my membership lapsed. I doubted the interest of the CP leadership to represent the workers in the way Chris Hani was dedicated. The leadership that was left didn't impress me to be able to do what Chris Hani could do to mount the revolution.

So you were convinced that Chris Hani had the same view as you – he wanted a workers' revolution at the point of production?

I was totally convinced. When he took over as Secretary General of the CP I thought CP was going to change. Yes, he was in the ANC structures but I don't think he believed in the 2-stage theory of the CP.

I complemented my view by saying alone workers alone cannot do it if there are unorganised communities next to those factories and who can take over their jobs. Therefore we must organise them. We did this in Alexandra and whole of Transvaal and then nationally, organising the communities to work with the workers, through projects, through fighting the local issues.

Was the 1987 miners' strike a turning point in the struggle? Its defeat weakened the workers' movement?

I'm not sure it failed. I followed it, I would say they were caught up with the same problem (*he signals E London strike, next para*). That if there was just one industry or one factory on strike, and it's a prolonged strike, and if at the end of the day the capitalists were more powerful because there were those other areas that were not on strike and maybe the leadership was led by the fact that this is not yet the revolution to take over. It was about working conditions therefore we are not going to win this battle. Let's compromise for the future. I would not judge the leadership of the strike. I was not close to the conditions, to the facts of the strike. The strike was prolonged a lot. The workers were on the brink of maybe losing the strike .

We were in the same situation at Mercedes Benz. The strike was taking long time and we're not making any progress. Then the next thing the workers are going to lose. E London is going to be a desert because Mercedes Benz was about to get out of S Africa.

In any case you were in prison during miners' strike. You would have limited access to information about it?

Yes, we depended on visitors telling us in the limited time available.

How long were you in prison?

Almost 2 years. 12 months in solitary confinement.

How did you withstand pressure of solitary confinement, mentally?

Mentally, sometime you feel you cracking.

Were you able to read?

Only the bible: I read the bible from cover to cover (*Bursts out laughing*)

Were you able to exercise?

An hour of exercise

The only people to talk to were the prison guard and the police who were investigating the case.

Were you beaten?

Not physically beaten but tortured. Sometimes they make you stand for whole day whilst they are cross-questioning you. Sometimes you say you want to go to the ...they say, no we are too busy. They are testing your capacity to resist. They want you to say what they want you to say. There was no torture like electrocution, beatings no, no. I think what helped the protests mounted by the workers.

There was a big international campaign

That made them fear using torture. People had been killed. Thrown out of the windows. We were not treated that way. But it was very stressful

Of course – solitary confinement was a form of torture

Banging the doors. Let me do something! But afterwards I think I recovered. There was a transition from solitary confinement to the cells.

How often did you see your defence lawyer during solitary confinement?

Once or twice a week. Made solitary confinement more bearable – you get news from home. You are not visited by your wife or children.

The conversations with the lawyers were private – not in the cell.

Did they advise you on the defence to present yourself as a moderate man?

They advise us this is not a beauty contest. This is the real stuff. This is treason. You choose guys how you want to handle your case. There are three scenarios. You can be a real revolutionary, or a politician and articulate your politics or become a coward and deny things. So we chose the middle ground where we articulate what we were doing but denying that it was making the country ungovernable. That is a rhetoric that doesn't assist anybody.

Ok, but It could be argued that your defence was a defence advised by the SACP?

No, no no. Ok maybe (*burst out laughing*) COSATU was involved in the case. NUMSA was involved in talking to the defence. The lawyers were not taking instructions from the unions. COSATU would talk to them because they were defending the leaders of COSATU.

Nevertheless what you call the politicians' defence fits in with COSATU leadership as it prepares for the triple alliance. After all the COSATU leadership are already talking to the exiled ANC. And almost certainly the exiled ANC are interested in your case. It's possible the ANC through COSATU were sending information to you about how to conduct the case?

Well we were not told that.

But anyway you were entirely comfortable with the defence?

We were comfortable with the defence. We didn't want to go to Robben Island. We wanted to continue mobilising for the proper liberation and its not going to help if we add to the numbers that were in jail.

*I then handed Moses the Socialist Worker interview which had been used by the prosecution against him. I asked him to re-read it now and let me know if he stands by now what he had said then.*³⁵⁸

I would say that we got swallowed into those politics (of that SACP/ANC alliance) and what we feared happened. We became members of parliament. There was no feedback. We were not guided by what the people want. The elite was now the elite. 1994-96. This is not what the people want and then I left parliament.

³⁵⁸ After the interview, I asked Moses about the claims made in the Richard Abel book, 'Politics By Other Means, Law in the Struggle against Apartheid 1980-94,' about his 'politicians' defence' That the SW reporter had misheard him, misquoted him, misunderstood his language. That he was really like a Swedish social democrat. That he believed in the 2 stage theory therefore wanted only democracy now socialism later etc. On each occasion he burst out laughing – thought it was extremely funny. At the time I thought It was a convincing display that his defence was only a legal defence tactic.

Brief discussion about Sipho Kubeka repeating earlier points but see fn 1. Moses says he was the first person to discuss with SACP politics, but not necessarily convinced by him. I asked if there were many like Kubeka

Yes, people like Chris Dlamini,³⁵⁹ first deputy president of COSATU. He was arrested with me in 1982 and again during State of Emergency. The SACP managed to recruit individual leaders (like Dlamini)

ENDS

³⁵⁹ "In June 1986 (Dlamini) was elected president of the Food and Allied Workers Union (Fawu), formed after the amalgamation of several unions including the Food and Canning Workers Union, SFAWU and the Retail and Allied Workers Union." <http://www.sahistory.org.za/people/christopher-ndodebandla-dlamini>
"At the public launch of the SACP in Johannesburg in 1990, he was named as a member of the party's Interim Leadership Group."
http://www.saha.org.za/nonracialism/transcript_of_interview_with_chris_dlamini.htm

Darlene Miller – Interview 17/05/2018

National Education Office-bearer 1990-93, for SACCWU, South African Commercial, Catering and Allied Workers Union, the second largest union in the country (after the National Union of Mineworkers): and the largest union organising thousands of women workers.

SACCWU had been recently formed following an internal dispute over its terms for joining COSATU which had included a militant socialist faction in the earlier union federation, CCAWUSA. Darlene begins the interview by discussing how the importance of this earlier argument continued to resonate in the newly formed union.

You had these large company union councils, I think they were called, for example in the retail industry you've got Woolworths, Checkers. So it would be known that Checkers would be sympathetic to the socialist faction, Woolworths to the ANC faction

I went to live in Vosloorus township. It was quite unusual for people who weren't black African to go and live in black African township. Socialists usually didn't do that, they stayed around the city areas.

I was the surrogate for the deputy president who was in charge of the campaigns committee and because I was linked to a Trotskyist grouping.

Expropriation of the means of production were becoming dominant Cosatu positions. And there was a quite a lot of panic in the Cosatu leadership. I had the privilege of sitting in an 8-person steering committee, one person per union, where they spoke openly about the problem of programmatic positions that were coming from workers at the Congress. At national level they were trying to turn us away from a left wing perspective on social and economic transformation and people like Thabo Mbeki were brought in.

It was quite a delicate balancing act. On the one hand they had to keep the union together but also to make sure that the influence of the old Ccawusa socialists and the newer Trotskyist elements, they didn't become too influential – and already the resolutions were winning out at Congress level.

Q If I've understood you correctly, you seem to be saying that the socialist faction from the late 1980's was on the ascendancy in the early 1990's. For example the demand for the expropriation of the means of production is a revolutionary demand. There was no way the

ANC were going to concede that but you seem to be saying that Cosatu came close to adopting that position?

Cosatu did adopt that position. It was not the socialist faction. There were multiple socialist factions. I can't remember whether Salim Vally, (former political education officer with Ccawusa) and the old Ccawusa group supported that position. But it was the programmatic position pushed by our Trotskyist group in several unions. It was a Cosatu economic conference. There was a Cosatu economic policy conference. They were trying to develop a response to the Reconstruction and Development Programme. But democracy was not allowed to take its course. A steering committee was formed that could oversee the resolutions every night. And we went to the 11th floor of the Carlton Hotel in Johannesburg. There were 8 people, one per union, only two women, the domestic workers union and myself from Saccawu.

That was the context of the unification in terms of programmatic positions, political influence through various organisational structures of the union, either these committees that existed or the formal bargaining structures of the institution. So there would be a bit of bantering as well as active dislike, even hatred. But they had to learn to get on with each other in the same structures and they had to see that everybody was represented in the structures.

The (independent) socialists were making significant inroads into Cosatu because that was the way the workers wanted to go.

Darlene identified what she described as an advanced layer of shop stewards who were particularly open to these ideas.

About 10 to 15%. But a very vocal and persuasive 10 to 15% who were able to take whole meetings with them. If you put them on the floor with a clear resolution, they could turn that whole Congress...

So in some ways we had access to the rank and file by proxy because we were sitting with what you might call elite shop stewards. They could read good English, revolutionary tracts, get very excited by Lenin's What Is To Be Done. That's why we called ourselves 'vanguardists' so we weren't quite the same as the other socialist groups. We were for a vanguard party so we targeted those kind of individuals who were smart who understand this literature.

We then discussed how Darlene combined her role as a national education officer for the union with her Trotskyist commitment to building a vanguard party. I suggested the union leadership

were confident that they could contain her and her comrades because by this time the ANC majority were well in command. She responded by insisting that the kind of ideas and policies that groups like hers were putting forward were in her words “with history”.

That’s what the workers wanted. They wanted large scale factory occupations. ‘Olala!’ ‘We stay!’ ‘We sleep here!’ and ‘Wayaya!’ rolling mass action’. Action that doesn’t stop! And Vice President or President of the union, John Gomomo,³⁶⁰ He was close to the workers, unlike Ramaphosa. When these resolutions for factory occupations and general strike were being taken, Gomomo was in favour of these resolutions. So you had factory occupations, expropriation without compensation.

This is between that window moment between democratic elections and the negotiations taking place. So that the unions are changed in that 1990 to 1994 period.

They had to discipline the unions by using the authority of ‘Madiba’ (Mandela) And the messenger boy was Ramaphosa. He would say, that’s fine. That’s what the Congress wants. I will go and check it with Tata (??) So we had to wait, we didn’t know whether we could organise. For the first time democracy was taken out of our hands.

I suggested to Darlene that although there was much talk of factory occupations, rolling mass action, expropriation etc, in reality, there was much less workers’ mass action than in the late 1980’s. She said I misunderstood the situation.

What was happening was that the struggle was graduating to a more intense confrontation, a very very serious class confrontation and it was breaking out in sporadic ways. So you would have an example of an occupation taking place, managers being held hostage at some big metal factory. And then there would have to be negotiations for the hostages to be freed. So you had fragmented activity taking place. You have these resolutions being put forward and you have a panicked ANC leadership, realising they are losing control of the union movement.

It’s a transitional moment. In the end they win. If you are interested in these messy confrontations.

Not so much messy, but moments when the ANC almost lost their hold on the working class, then that’s the story that you are getting from me.

³⁶⁰ President Cosatu 1991-99

Q. But even so, isn't it the case that the level of struggle in the early 1990's is a shadow of the level of struggle in the late 1980's?

Yes and no. There's a meta-narrative which sees the workers' struggle subsiding, waiting for the negotiation phase, waiting for the leaders. Not so, here is a revisionist history to be told.

ENDS

James Motlatsi

James Motlatsi, a working miner and lawyer Cyril Ramaphosa, together played decisive roles in building the National Union of Mineworkers in South Africa, NUM, in the early 1980's. At the start of the 1987 miners' strike, Motlatsi was NUM President, Ramaphosa General Secretary.

Motlatsi, a migrant miner came from Lesotho, the tiny independent impoverished state, landlocked in South Africa and economically dependent on its émigré miners.

'Safety must be our daily song' said James Motlatsi, following after Kincross (Gencor) goldmine disaster which killed nearly 180 miners, in September 1986. In 1974 Motlatsi was himself hospitalised with a broken skull after a rock burst at Western Deep Levels. An NUM study concluded that "a mineworker who spends 20 years working underground risks 1 in 30 chance of being killed and 50% chance of being permanently disabled." (Baskin: 152)

I was born in Lesotho in 1951. I joined the mining industry as a labourer. Then in 1974 I moved to Western Deep Levels owned by Anglo American. I met Cyril Ramaphosa in September 1982. He was given a task by CUSA Council of Unions of South Africa. Cyril was working there as a legal advisor. Cusa took a decision to form the mining union.

Q. Please explain background to 1987 strike.

You have to understand black people were not allowed to organise a trade union until 1982. Black people were not classified as human beings. They were classified as sub human. I must be honest with you – not only by the white employers and the white SA regime. A majority of mine workers, if not all of them, were recruited from the rural areas of SA and the neighbouring states. The mining industry did not recruit anybody from the SA townships. So the mine workers used to be treated as sub humans even by their own people in SA. You could go to any concession stores. They were not really treated like human beings. So when the union began to organise them...the union started to focus not only on the employers but we used to have to focus on reclaiming our dignity from the transport industry ie the taxis, the buses, the concession stores. There were boycotts of taxis, buses, concession stores just to gain dignity. Now there quite a number of illegal strikes in different mines not really for wages and conditions, but for being recognised as human beings, against being ill-treated by the white supervisors. So 1987 strike had its own build up. In 1985-6, we were recognised

internationally as the fastest growing union in the world. We moved from zero in 1982 to 325,000 during 1987 strike. The 1987 strike was inevitable because mine workers were reclaiming on this planet their rightful status as fully fleshed human beings, from the mining employers, from the regime. Low wages and working conditions were on the agenda. Whatever we agreed with the employers couldn't have averted the strike. The mobilisation, the anger in the industry was at its highest level. So the strike began. The employers couldn't believe that we can sustain the strike for more than 48 hours because they thought that the black mine workers were coming from different countries, different backgrounds, different cultures, different languages. The communication...would be virtually impossible. They were surprised. The reason why the mine workers succeeded to command that kind of strike was because the mine workers organised it themselves, organisers of the National Union of Mineworkers were just engines to fill up the hostels. If you do not know, mineworkers were staying in the hostels which were 100% controlled by the employers. No one was allowed to go in unless that person has got the permission from management. So as a union when we started to organising we realised that it would be important for us to make sure we had strong well trained shaft stewards who will be able to command the strike in the hostels. Some of the hostels used to house up to 10,000 mineworkers. Can you imagine how you would be able to command that? Then we had strike committees, individuals who would be volunteering to take command in the hostels. Some of the hostels, we suggested, should be divided into sections, so that other shop stewards will be able to control each section. And the dissemination of information, it was difficult but we made it possible to become easy because we had thousands and thousands trained strike committee shop stewards who were controlling the strike. Management used to make sure that they may cause divisions amongst the workers. Some of the big hostels took a decision that they would rather sleep during the day and be awake during the night so as not to allow individuals from outside who may provoke divisions. So basically we commanded that strike for that 21 days being controlled 100% by the shop stewards, by the strike committees in the mines.

Q. But sadly, in a way, you were defeated.

Well, I wouldn't say we were defeated. In any battle there will be casualties. But I wouldn't classify it as a defeat. From 1987 up today, the mining industry had to change. It became the industry that was different from the one it used to be before the strike. Yes, we lost 50,000 former worker-miner members who were dismissed by Anglo American Gold and Uranium. I was a worker-President. I was dismissed.

Q. Were you still a working miner at the time?

Yes – at Western Deep Levels. One of the reasons why they decided to target me, as I was told later, in September 1986 I was interviewed on British TV at Western Deep Levels and the interviewer asked me question as to whether in order to get rid of Apartheid, would I even be prepared to destroy this mine. I said yes, I can destroy this mine brick by brick. And then Chairman of Anglo American Gold & Uranium Division, Peter Gush, he was in London I was told, he listened to that on TV and he took a decision then: fire that bastard! So in fact Peter Gush fired me in September 1986, the implementation took place in August 1987. Now the reason why they took that decision...The constitution of the NUM by then was saying the president of the union should be a mineworker, should not be employed by the union and he could only become a member after he was dismissed for only 6 months. Now they thought to get rid of me out of the union, they dismissed me from the mine. They thought that after 6 months my membership as NUM would have lapsed and automatically I wouldn't be the president of the NUM. Undoubtedly they were right. But the leadership of NUM, the executive, they met, immediately after my dismissal they took a decision to say no, we have to suspend this clause in the constitution, pending the amendment of it during the Congress. So from 1987 to 1989, I led the NUM under a suspended clause of membership. The constitution was amended in 1989 to allow a full time president of the union.

Now we were defeated, yes or no. But on the defeat side I would say we were defeated because we lost 50,000 members, we were defeated because we couldn't get what we wanted to get which was the 22% pay increase. But we won, we lost the battle but we won the war. We won the war because they thought by dismissing more than three quarters of the NUM executive...(as well as) branch executives, many shop stewards, activists...In actual fact, we had to rebuild the organisation. Now I was banned from entering the mine hostels until 1993. The mistake they made was to reintroduce aggressive measures. They thought that they had done a blow at NUM by dismissing all the leadership right from the shop floor to the national leadership. They thought they can scare the mineworkers. But the mistake they made was to reintroduce the oppressive measures. Oppressive measure which now forced the mineworkers to leave the hostels and approach the regional office of NUM and rejoin the union. Internationally we did get maximum support and the mining bosses had a difficult time to enter into any developed country because of that. Re-organising, re-emerging to be a strong organisation again made possible quite a number of changes in the industry. So we lost

membership, we lost leadership, we didn't get what we wanted to get but we changed the shape of the mining industry. Their intention was to destroy the organisation completely.

Q. Do you know the book that has just been published on the NUM 'Organise or Die – Democracy and Leadership in South Africa's National Union of Mineworkers' (2017) by Raphael Botiveau, a former phd student of Dunbar Moodie? You are interviewed in it.

No

Q. Dunbar asked me to ask if you had read it. I'll tell him that you would like to read it.

Yes

Q. There is a quote from Bobby Godsell, former Anglo American executive, about the strike. (p60). The quote says, to summarise, we need a strike to teach the miners a lesson, a form of industrial relations. In other words, they were quite happy to have a union. But they wanted a union which was in their eyes, a tame union. And my impression is that this is what they succeeded in doing. In a way you confirm this because the best activists, the best militants, were sacked like yourself, And so they (Anglo American) were able to shape industrial relations in the industry. And, more seriously, I would suggest, this had a knock on effect for COSATU, because you were the largest and most militant union in COSATU. This was the most important strike in that period, and it meant that COSATU was also weakened. It would become less of a threat both to the employers and to the regime. And that seems to me to be a tremendous tragedy because the trade union movement could have been a much more powerful force in the overthrow of Apartheid had you won the strike.

Well, yes, we could have been because by then the South African mining industry was one of the main pillars of the South African economy. But, with COSATU, quite a number of the unions were community based. When we were moving towards stay-aways and protests, those other unions of COSATU were the most important ones because they would have influence not only for their members but also for those who were not union members in the community because if we had called a national stay-away, it would be a national stay-away. Those who were not members of the unions would abide by the decision of the majority of the people. Anyway, unfortunately, the strike is like a war. To think that there will be a peaceful strike is pie in the sky. Even in the mining industry, all those who supported the National Union of Mineworkers strike were not all members of the union but they couldn't avoid joining the strike. And, I must be honest with you, to some extent, in other areas, quite a number of atrocities were committed. You see like at Western Deep Level, where I used to work, I was

informed later after the strike, that the strike committee met and they declare a mini state of emergency in the hostel. 1. Mineworkers were not allowed to walk in the hostel in (groups of?) more than two or three. 2. Nobody was allowed to talk about a bad thing about the strike. 3. Nobody was allowed to go out of the hostel without permission. And others, and others...Those who were found breaking those conditions would have been punished, to clean the hostel for the rest of the strike. I didn't have a problem with that. Where I had a problem – every morning they would have to go to the office of the union to get slashes, to be beaten up. That is where I had a problem. So that's what I did get to know. So to think that ... (unfinished sentence) But coming to say COSATU was weakened, yes, but as you are aware, it was not only the NUM which was growing, almost on each and every sector, the engineering sector, NUMSA was growing fast, and Chemical and Transport. You name them. The growth of the trade union movement could not be affected by the dismissal of the miners in 1987. The struggle generally continued to be intensified in the country.

Q. I asked a former NUMSA shop steward yesterday (see interview Bethuel Maserumule 14.5.18) who was active in NUMSA in 1987 about your strike. I said could you not have done more for the miners because he told me every day steel products were supplied to the mining industry. And so I asked him whether the supplies could have been stopped. He said we should have done but we couldn't. In other words he was saying that NUMSA was the most powerful union apart from yours but was unable to provide the sort of solidarity, the active solidarity that you needed. And also at the end of the strike, I read in the history of COSATU by Jeremy Baskin, he quotes Jay Naidoo COSATU Gen Sec almost apologising for not doing enough. I think the phrase he uses is that "we did too little, too late". In other words if the COSATU unions had come in behind you, these dismissals... in fact it could have been a very different outcome.

Well let me say I think their lack of experience of solidarity within COSATU played a negative role, number 1. Number 2 without looking beyond bread and butter issues, because if COSATU took that strike as a platform not only for bread and butter issues for general political changes in the country, if in the second week in the strike, COSATU had taken a decision to say "an injury to one is an injury to all", I can tell you, not only could they have saved the dismissal of 50,000, we could have seen a lot of changes within the country, within the industry. But, as I recall, at the end of the second week of the strike I went to COSATU central executive committee and comrades were asking what kind of support do you want? That is why I am saying that I think the lack of experience of solidarity played a role. People might have tried to defend themselves. I think that if our sister unions, sister federations could come and give

advice and say that in 1972 one of the reasons why the British NUM succeeded to topple Prime minister Heath, it was precisely because the T&G joined the NUM in Britain, because rather than transport the coal from Poland and everywhere, they joined in solidarity. If that kind of solidarity could have come to the mining industry, we would have been talking something different to what we are saying today. But if you ask me I think the lack of experience played a role for COSATU leadership to have taken a decision of solidarity because now when I learned later about how ultimately how NUM succeeded, I think, in 1972...

*Q Yes famously Saltley Gates*³⁶¹

Yes so quite a number of unions, maybe without going on strike could have stopped the services which they were running to service the mining industry, we wouldn't be where we are now.

Q Exactly. You have confirmed this is the moment that could have been transformative because you are saying, yes, the second week of the strike, could have turned it into a political strike with COSATU support and could have threatened the government. I accept your point about lack of experience. But, perhaps, this is also the fault of the South African Communist Party because they should have understood the importance of that strike, its strategic and political importance to the survival of apartheid. Perhaps, they were too pre-occupied with the armed struggle and not nearly sufficiently pre-occupied with the industrial struggle?

Long pause

Well I think they are going to have to answer for themselves. To be honest I really think that even though we aligned ourselves with the ANC and the SACP, we did get good advice and directions from them, politically, ideologically. They were operating from outside. I'm trying to think what they could have done. They could have called a few individuals out of the country and say this is a moment, what you needed to do, you needed to follow other struggles all over the world. The reason why I'm making an example of the 1972 British miners' strike, it is precisely because when we formed the NUM of SA we were trying to emulate and to say that the only organisation, the militant trade union known all over the world was the British NUM. That is why we named our union the NUM. The militancy of that union throughout until Arthur messed it up anyway... You see I knew even before the formation of the NUM about the strike

³⁶¹ Thousands of engineering and transport workers joined miners' pickets in the Birmingham city area to force the closure of Saltley Gate and stop coal going to the power station. A useful summary of what happened
http://news.bbc.co.uk/today/hi/today/newsid_9694000/9694645.stm

of 1972, about how they won. It was precisely because the Transport and General Union joined the strike to make impossible for power stations to get the coal. So now if you are saying SACP was pre-occupied with the armed struggle. Well, to be quite honest with you, when you look at armed struggle in South Africa, it was not as effective as armed struggle in Mozambique, in Zimbabwe. So I think the people of South Africa, the working class and the peasants, played an important role to put pressure on the regime to come to negotiating table and isolate South Africa economically, internationally. Workers' leaders inside South Africa calling for sanctions against South Africa. Look, I can't even think about a prominent intervention between military wing of ANC, PAC and the former SA Defence Force. So I think ANC in exile and SACP should have concentrated their time into mobilising the masses of South Africa giving guidance. Well I don't want to blame people for my failures and say it's their failures. I could have said to them as the former President of the NUM. I was also member of COSATU central executive. I could have said well look 1972 for British NUM won that strike was precisely because they were joined by T&G. That decision was taken at British TUC level (check?). You needed to take a decision based on this. But I can tell you that strike was so hectic for me that maybe sometimes I could think about international whatever...We did get a lot of international solidarity but I don't think that any solidarity we received to say yes you are in this direction, why don't you look at another direction. We did get material, moral, a lot of financial support from all over the world.

Q But again you put your finger on it. Twice you've said the weakness was not to be able to copy the example of 1972 because it's true the miners (in Britain) did not win on their own, they won with the support of the union which could stop the transport from the power stations. That's the missing link in your strike and I think it's very important and it's not your responsibility, it was the responsibility of others, as you say, you were far too pre-occupied.

One final question, I've been talking to former members of an organisation called the Marxist Workers Tendency (linked to the British 'Militant' at the time) and they tell me you were a sympathiser. And I think that they in their publications in 1987, they were arguing for solidarity. I think they saw you as on the left wing of the strike. Solidarity wasn't just a gesture, it was strategically critical in terms of changing the balance of forces in the strike.

Please repeat the question.

To summarise, the Marxist Workers Tendency think you were a sympathiser of theirs during the strike.

It is not true. I knew them. I didn't have many differences with them, I don't want to lie to you. I wouldn't say I was violently opposed to their ideas, but they lacked grassroots organisation. They were theorists. When you are dealing with the masses and, in particular, when a majority of them have never been to school, you can't come with Marxist theories, they won't be able to understand what you are saying. When we organised the mineworkers for instance, coming from the different countries, those countries were independent. If we started by putting a political cart up front, we wouldn't have succeeded in bringing them together. Even the adoption of the Freedom Charter by the NUM. it was not imposed from the top. We talked about oppression of the mineworkers at the mines. You educate them and they understand the oppression, but mineworkers themselves have to say yes but we have got the policy here. Say, go and work in an unsafe place. If you are not satisfied, don't come and complain after. How many were trapped and killed? Mineworkers didn't have the right to refuse to work under dangerous conditions. You fight that. You lose a case - failing to carry out lawful instructions. You go to outside courts. They say, yes, you are supposed to carry out lawful instructions and complain after. Now the mineworkers came to a conclusion that there was no difference between the mining industry and the regime in general. We were patient. We knew where we wanted to go. But we say we can't put a political cart up front.

When I met with them in London (ie 'Militant') in the early 1980's for two days. I said to them. Theoretically, ideologically, politically, does make sense but you must also be able to understand the masses. What you are telling me is too academic. You can engage university students (laughs) but not at the grassroots. So I didn't have a problem with them. I met them in London and I've never met with them other than that...What was important was to remove racial discrimination. Then after that you can say, the expectations of the working class have not really been met, Poland, Iran, South Africa. If you ask me why – I wish I would have an answer...But let me say to you in 1986 I went to Britain to attend British NUM Conference. I also met Norman Willis, head of the TUC. He told me about the British Labour Party. He said when there is a Tory Government in Britain, they know their position. But when there is a Labour Government, they compromise so much...(laughs)

I said the same was true in South Africa. There were too many compromises after the fall of apartheid. You got rid of political apartheid but there is still economic apartheid, still far too many white economic privileges, in general too much economic privilege. You, the workers movement, could have achieved so much more. A different outcome was possible.

But let me say to you again. In 1986 we adopted a resolution to nationalise the mining industry under workers control...There was no clear direction as to how. Immediately after the election here in 1994, I went to ILO in Geneva, we heard about the liberation struggles in other countries. One former leader told us: guys, don't be so excited. In our experience, we fought for liberation, There was no political party. There was a workers' movement. We won the struggle. A party was formed. The very same leaders of the party who came from the labour movement, down the line they abandoned the very same labour movement. Ok, now, within the government of the ANC, from 1994 to today, always there are leaders formally of the labour movement. But if you check the labour movement, it's becoming weaker and weaker. The labour movement today in South Africa, it's much weaker than before 1994. The President of the Republic today is a former General Secretary of the NUM, a person who chairing unity talks to form COSATU, and if you check with him the ANC...NUM produced three secretary generals of the ANC, Cyril Ramaphosa, Kgalema Motlanthe, Gwede Mantashe . But look at NUM, where is it today? So if you ask me when and until labour movement has a clear economic policy which can be implemented. I have been saying to my comrades. We came with GEAR, you opposed GEAR, We came with ???? (unclear) you opposed that. Zuma came with NDP (?) you opposed it. But you don't have a clear economic policy which can be debated. It does not necessarily mean all people will agree with it. You are talking about nationalisation of the mines with or without compensation. With compensation, it's pie in the sky. Without compensation, we are running a global economy. Those big guys will club against you, whether you like it or not. I wouldn't support the union affiliated to any political party because you lose your independence.

The discussion also included the failure of the labour movement post-apartheid to develop or accept clear economic policies as well as in contemporary South Africa, the divisions in the mining industry now between two unions NUM and AMCU and the divisions in the wider labour movement between two trade union federations COSATU and SAFTU.

With recorder switched off, James told me and I quote "I wish the working class would destroy capitalism because we need a much better system." I asked for his permission to quote him and he agreed.

Rob Petersen interview 12/07/18 [edited and supplemented by RP on 25/07/18]

Authorised version

Rob Petersen (RP) was in South Africa, near Cape Town, during the interview — which was conducted via Skype. He reviewed these notes on 25/07/18, inserted some corrections and clarifications in the text, deleted some irrelevant wording, and added some supplementary information and comments after checking his records.

At the time of the events referred to below, RP, a South African then in exile in London, was an editor of Inqaba ya Basebenzi, the journal of the Marxist Workers' Tendency of the ANC (MWT). Together with three others of similar persuasion, he had been suspended from membership of the ANC in 1979, and expelled at the ANC's Kabwe conference in June 1985. As with the suspensions, the expulsions took place without notice or a hearing.

The MWT was an organised grouping, linked internationally to the Committee for a Workers' International (CWI), of which the Militant Tendency in Britain (Militant) formed the major national section. RP was a member of the International Secretariat of the CWI, but this role was largely nominal inasmuch as he was engaged almost entirely in the work of the South African section. He was a member of the leading body of the MWT, the Political Committee, based at its London centre. Together with a small team, he was centrally responsible for the communications with comrades working clandestinely in the "interior", i.e. within South Africa.

If needed, some further information on the role of RP in the origins and development of the MWT can be found by consulting the index in the late Martin Legassick's Towards Socialist Democracy (University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2007) and in Mark Heywood's Get Up! Stand Up! (Tafelberg, 2017).

I asked RP to explain how the MWT made contact with the South African NUM in 1984.

What we were working on from London...is how to get Militant's quite significant base in parts of the British NUM to reach out to the SA NUM to create direct links of solidarity which can draw us into a political conversation with the SA NUM.

RP says he doesn't remember all the details, but at some point in 1984 [it would have been during the British miners' strike, which began in March of that year]

... James Motlatsi visited the UK as a guest of the South Wales NUM. This was on the initiative of Militant, but it was done NUM to NUM. I think he toured some coalfields, I don't know

exactly which. In SA they were isolated. They were not being given support by the official apparatus of the British NUM. What we were dealing with...was a concerted drive by the leaders of the SACP working together with British Communist Party bureaucrats, and through the British NUM, to refuse any support at all to the emerging National Union of Mineworkers in SA because they could see it was not part of their camp. It was coming up through CUSA. But this was also part of their general approach wanting at that stage to try and stifle, as far as they reasonably could, the emergence of an independent workers' movement. Because they knew from their own history what trouble they'd had controlling it even in the 1950's. They were very aware of the fact that they hadn't recreated it, and that there were (from their point of view) all kinds of 'loose' and 'dangerous' people like ourselves, who had been in on the ground floor and who could easily develop those connections without being under their control. And also they saw we were connected with Militant and that increased their concern. So they actually ran effectively a campaign against direct links. In fact they used the Anti-Apartheid Movement to establish the same line that there should be no direct connections with any SA unions. At one time the argument used was that it is fascism in SA, under fascism you can only have 'yellow' unions, these new unions in SA are therefore 'yellow' unions. Our fight back against that took the form of establishing our own direct links where we could, and encouraging everybody to have direct links with the aim of developing active solidarity with the mass struggle. If your policy is isolation of apartheid, what should be your attitude to direct links with those struggling against apartheid and capitalism? It's not difficult to articulate a proper approach politically. It was Stalinism and nationalism in combination, through the SACP and the British CP and British NUM, which was trying to refuse to have any support for or dealings with the SA NUM. Their slogan was: 'Direct links stinks!'

So, through the South Wales NUM, James Motlatsi was invited for a tour of British coalfields. Militant had a significant base in the South Wales coalfields, certainly a strong influence. You need to look at the issue of the ANC's *Sechaba* magazine, August 1985, where there is an article containing interesting facts which they have gathered, many of which are true, combined with omissions, lies and distortions characteristic of the Stalin school of falsification. The article's about the expulsions from the ANC at the June 1985 conference, but you will see there that they are exercised by these direct links that we were forming. [RP adds: This history is well summarised in Martin Legassick's book cited above, p. 410 *et seq.*]

We'd set up something called the Southern African Labour Education Project, SALEP, which was a way of opening doors without immediately presenting people with the MWT. Perhaps

within the South Wales NUM we had approached people on that basis, but the South Wales miners connected with Militant would have been fully aware of the MWT connection. I don't recall precisely, but it's quite possible that the SA NUM was approached initially by SALEP to set up the visit of James Motlatsi to the South Wales NUM, because I remember SALEP had produced a critical examination of the new labour relations law in Zimbabwe, which I heard had impressed Cyril Ramaphosa [and I also recall now that contact had been made with James Motlatsi by a South African comrade at or after a labour conference in Europe]..

So there was a warming towards us and so James was invited to South Wales, toured some of the coalfields, the comrades in Militant will have talked to him, and then he came on to London. He had very frank discussions with leaders of the British section, in which I also took part — in particular around two things. One was the question of the general strike; the other was about the strategic importance of turning the SA NUM towards unity with the unions that were preparing the launch of COSATU and were now oriented towards the ANC. The discussions continued over a couple of days.

James had formed the view, and I don't know who else in the SA NUM had this view, that a general strike could bring down the SA regime. He was inspired by the rising potential of organised labour in South Africa, which he himself had been so instrumental in building. On the one hand, it impressed me that he was thinking along those lines. On the other hand, I knew from my little bit of learning, that it would not be possible to achieve the defeat of the apartheid regime merely by a general strike. In fact, if it was attempted prematurely it would lead to a big defeat. But he was clearly impressed by the tremendous power of the workers that he himself had organised. You know where James fitted in on the mines? He was part of that administrative cadre that the bosses needed to use to speak to the rock face workers. And he and that layer had been the key to organising people in the SA NUM.

Cyril Ramaphosa — very able, learning rapidly on the job, he had been in political detention, he had family members in the ANC — [had come to worker organisation via CUSA, where he had worked initially as a legal adviser. It was CUSA, which was not aligned with the ANC but rather oriented towards black consciousness, that had taken the initiative to form the NUM]. And from what we heard, he didn't like this idea of turning the NUM towards COSATU. I'll call it COSATU, but COSATU didn't yet exist. But we're talking about a certain line of development. He was reluctant to do that.

Whereas with James, after we'd discussed whether a general strike could lead to workers' power —international precedents showing it wouldn't work out like that — we discussed [what we saw as] the inevitable turn of the organised working class to the ANC in the context of what was taking place. And he could see the point immediately from his own experience.

He came from Lesotho. Another thing which impressed me about James was that he maintained that Lesotho should not exist as a separate country. Nowadays he talks about Lesotho 'sovereignty' — it's sad. But he said, look, we workers from Lesotho have built the wealth in SA, why should we not share it? So he was open to internationalism — on everything except people from Poland! Because a lot of Polish right wingers had come to SA, escaping from Polish Stalinism, [and were working in the mines], and he said they were worse racists than the white South Africans.

So here we are having discussions with James, we explain to him about our organisation. Within a day or two of meeting him. It was an opportunity that was going to immediately disappear because he was going to go back to SA. I asked him if he would join us, to which he agreed. But I must make it clear to you that it never had organisational consequences of the kind that (as you and I would know) cadre organisations like IS/SWP or Militant regard as really reliable. It was more an indication of willingness to work together. Not a member in any real sense but more than a contact.

We then briefly discussed James's contacts with miners who were members of Militant in South Wales. RP did not know how many were members, but they were sufficient to impress James that this was a real workers' organisation. We then went on to talk about Roy Jones, Militant's miner in Staffordshire who later reported the '87 strike for the Militant newspaper. I explained that I had these reports and I was trying to locate Roy Jones. RP had made notes which he then read from about other aspects of the discussion with JM.

...we urged that the SA NUM should actively support the UDF and join decisively in the formation of COSATU. Roy Jones's visit to SA towards the end of 1984 was arranged at this time. If you read that *Sechaba* piece [August 1985], they say Roy Jones was a traitor to the (British) miners' strike because there was an instruction that no striking mineworker was to leave the country!"

We agree that RP will email Nimrod Sejake's Militant article [27/09/85] on Roy Jones's visit to SA (which I now have). Nimrod Sejake reported on the generous donation given by the SA NUM to the British miners' strike. The Labour Party NEC reported that SALEP were not building links

at all levels and that Roy was a white unrepresentative member of the British NUM. The SA NUM on the other hand made Roy their first white member.

Roy goes to SA in Dec '84, back Jan '85. [In February 1985] I went with another comrade to Stockholm for a discussion with James and Cyril. Cyril was always wary towards us, but at that time in a friendly way. The purpose of the visit was to convey to Cyril directly the same we had conveyed to James about political orientation [and the question of the general strike]. it was a very brief encounter with Cyril. My impression was that he was aware he was riding a tiger and that he might have preferred to get off. But that does not mean that he was not himself courageous and determined – as was shown [in some ways] even in the 1987 strike.

We then made an arrangement for a young female comrade from the Western Cape who had been brought out on a study bursary, and was studying in the UK, and was a fully-fledged member of our organisation, to go and work in the NUM head office (beginning in or soon after August 1985) – Irene Charnley (Butler 2007: 174). Her name then was Irene Barendilla.”

We then discussed the misleading way in which Irene Charnley’s introduction to the NUM is reported in Anthony Butler’s biography of Cyril Ramaphosa,³⁶², starting with the sentence “Studying in England...” (Butler: 175) RP believes that the reference to her hearing Cyril Ramaphosa and James Motlatsi “speaking at a rally organised by the British NUM” is a description of later events, perhaps June 1986 when the mistaken earlier policy of opposing direct links with South African workers had been defeated and reversed in the British NUM. RP reiterates that the MWT proposed sending Irene to the SA NUM and that both James and Cyril knew she was a member. RP then tells me that Irene Charnley later became one of the richest women capitalists in the history of SA. But RP recalls Irene as a feisty, militant young woman, a ‘coloured’ person in South African terminology, who came out of the black consciousness movement of students in the Western Cape.

I asked RP if he had discussed Trotsky with James.

No, we tended not to encumber people like that with baggage they would have big problems when they encountered SACP or ANC.

[RP adds on 25/07/18: My immediate answer transcribed above needs correction and elaboration (both generally and specifically). It would be true to say that, whenever possible, we approached political discussions from the standpoint of practical struggle, and addressed

³⁶² Butler, Anthony, *Cyril Ramaphosa* (Johannesburg, Jacana: 2007)

theoretical questions in that context. Thus, while not hiding our adherence to the ideas of Trotsky, we did not have 'Trotskyism' emblazoned on our lapels. Nevertheless, James Motlatsi (and likewise Cyril Ramaphosa) would have been well aware of our affiliations. More specifically, it is clear to me on reflection that we must have discussed Trotsky's teaching on the question of the political general strike. A note of a discussion that I held by telephone on 12 June 1987 with a comrade working in South Africa, reminds me specifically that, when I met Cyril in Stockholm in February 1985, I had with me a volume of Trotsky's writings of 1935 (probably the Pathfinder volume of *Writings of Leon Trotsky [1935-36]*, where the problem of the political general strike is dealt with on p. 136), and that he asked if he could have the book and took it away with him, complete with my detailed underlining! The telephone discussion obviously used veiled language for security reasons, but the note is specific. The telephone discussion took place after SALEP had been expressly attacked by both Cyril Ramaphosa and Elijah Barayi in a SA NUM CC meeting (in March 1987, I was told), accusing us of being "sell-outs" and saying that any member of NUM associating with SALEP should be dismissed from the union. 'SALEP' here meant the MWT. This was after the SACP had secured predominant influence in COSATU and increasingly also within the SA NUM. The attack would have been intended as a warning to Irene Barendilla to distance herself from us and to stifle our small but growing support. The note of 12 June 1987 has also reminded me that Cyril had previously written a letter to SALEP commending us on our excellent work! I have not been able to find a copy of the letter among my papers, but if I am able to get hold of one I will send it to you.]

Did he have any idea of the differences, the different roots, between you and the CP?

Yes. And we would have told him that, despite the fact that they are not helping you, and through the British NUM have tried to stop you, this should not cause you to reject the Congress movement. This is the Ted Grant point again [picking up on what was discussed before the recording of the interview proper]: that there will inevitably be an increasing gravitation towards the banner of the ANC and to the mass organisations aligned with it. So you have to face up to the Stalinist opposition and push through that.

Was he aware that he was talking to Trotskyists?

[RP adds: Yes. See additional text above.] He was well aware that he was talking to people who had been suspended from the ANC – myself and the core of my group were suspended in 1979, but we were only expelled in June 1985, so that was a few months later. But if you read the *Sechaba* article, you'll see that they are highly exercised by their concern that we are

making direct contact with significant forces in the country. The fact of the expulsions (which were no secret) did not at that stage deter James and Cyril: Irene was welcomed into their head office and entrusted with significant responsibilities *after* the expulsions.

Now the chronology here is extremely important in order to understand how things develop and change. The founding Congress of COSATU is the end of November, beginning of December '85. The ANC/SACP apparatus has gained a strong hold by this time. However the first elected president is Elijah Barayi, who is the president of the NUM. So 50% or more of COSATU at that time was formed by the NUM. I believe we were instrumental in bringing this about through these discussions. [RP adds: Nevertheless the main factor was objective: the revolutionary tide flowing towards the ANC, the inevitability of which had been explained to us years before by Ted Grant.] Our discussions were occupied with the question of what should be the political strategy and orientation of the NUM. It was after that that they broke with CUSA and went into COSATU.

But wasn't Elijah Barayi an SACP sympathiser?

That's quite possible. [RP adds: I have no personal knowledge of this, or of influences which drew him in that direction. I can only speak generally of the process that was occurring, as I understood it. Elijah Barayi was a very militant and determined worker leader. He was held in the highest regard by James Motlatsi, who commended him to me expressly. Many of the best individuals in the South African struggle were or became SACP sympathisers, believing what they were told by the political leadership and trusting that it would lead them on a revolutionary path.]

RP says he wants to add:

In June 1986 I think, Motlatsi and Ramaphosa are feted by the British NUM. In other words the Stalinists have turned (changed course). Now the SA NUM is theirs. At this time Motlatsi cools towards the MWT, which makes perfect sense. So come 1987, you'll have to take it from what we published in *Inqaba Ya Basebenzi* in that year to see what connections we retained.

We then discussed whether Irene (Barendilla) Charnley still regarded herself as an MWT member by 1987. RP could not answer immediately from memory [but see addition below]. RP explains that the MWT was not influential in any organisational sense by the time of the strike but that Inqaba Ya Basebenzi

was very widely read amongst the activists and educated layers, which then filtered down, but these mineworkers (the rank-and-file of the union whose views and experiences were reported in the pages of *Inqaba*) were largely illiterate, and a lot of them are still... You will have seen what we reported in 1987... a one page letter from a mineworker who deals with Cyril's mistake of trying to send the workers back to the rural areas. On the other hand to come back to one of your points today, if they'd stayed in the compounds how were they going to be fed? So that needed solidarity and that was not forthcoming.

[RP adds: I am reminded by notes of telephone discussions during 1987 that we strongly urged the development and organisation of solidarity in preparation for the strike. This largely fell on deaf ears within the leadership of the NUM. Among the points we made about the problem of strikers being starved into submission in the compounds was that they could, with proper organisation, be accommodated and fed in the townships so as to remain present in the urban areas and build solidarity during the strike.

[Perhaps earlier, but at least by April 1987 (following the attack in the NUM CC in March referred to above), Irene Barendilla was no longer maintaining direct contact with the London centre. However, she continued to be friendly towards comrades on the ground in SA, albeit difficult to pin down. They remained in occasional communication with her after the strike, but the connection was not organisational. By March 1988 she was avoiding comrades of the MWT.]

Chapter 4

'Bijan', a pseudonym for a former school student and youth leader of the Fadaïyan, the former urban guerrilla group, which emerged as the largest secular Left organisation after the revolution Farrokh Negahdar, a former Fadaïyan leader, Mansor Parhizgar, an activist with the main Maoist group, Ali Pichgah, oil refinery workers' shora leader, Kobra Qasemi ,women's representative oil workers' shora committee, Torab Saleth, national secretary of the largest Trotskyist organisation in Iran, 1979.

Bijan (interview 3/11/18)

Bijan was a 16 year old school boy in North Tehran when he first witnessed the eruption of revolutionary mass demonstrations. He joined in and would quite quickly became a member of the Fadaiyan, and become one of its youth and school student leaders. He has the dubious honour of twice confronting repressive armed forces at the gates of one of Tehran's universities. First, the Shah's army, when the revolution began. Second, three years later, when Khomeini's Islamic army dislodged the revolutionary student university occupation as part of its campaign to destroy leftist influence. On the second occasion he was shot and hospitalised.

I got involved just before school started which was around the beginning of October, 1978. Huge demonstrations passed by where we lived. A year before I had seen the tanks at the university which was near my school. I didn't get involved but I was aware of something going on. But the demonstrations drew me in. I was a bit scared, slogans like The King Must Die! were openly shouted. The government panicked over the demonstrations and declared Martial Law. There was then the massacre in a square in South Tehran where thousands of people were allegedly killed that day.³⁶³ Word got round and when school started there were daily demonstrations. School authorities would lock the door (locking us in), we would break the lock, it was a daily routine. Go on a demonstration, go on the way to another school, happened to be a girls' school...break their gates, get them to join us and went to Tehran University. That became the routine. And on the way you would have street fights with the Shah's army...

This was when we started thinking about a students' movement. I wasn't a religious person and demonstrations were mainly religious. They would pray in the street. We would just go and protect them. This created a gap. I wanted to join them but I wasn't religious. Then I came across the political movements like the Fadaiyan, they were non religious, they were talking about Marxism, socialism, I'd never heard about it before. There was also the Mojhadin but they were religious and Tudeh but they were old. Fadaiyan were young, they had guns, more attractive than any other options. It was literally going to the university, seeing them, they had bookstalls. I would go and stand with them, talk with them, start getting involved with them, reading their books, their history, armed struggle.

³⁶³ September 8, 1978, army opened fire on demonstrators in Zhaleh Square Tehran killing nearly a hundred: known as Black Friday (Kurzman: 74-5). See also Pichgah fn4 and (Moaddel: 161) "several hundred" were killed.

One of the biggest dates in Fadaiyan calendar was when they attacked this police station in Siyahkal ³⁶⁴ northern Iran. The anniversary was commemorated. The biggest fights with the army started immediately afterwards. Then we found out what was happening in the army barracks and especially in the air force. The air force army building was being surrounded by Shah's guard. ³⁶⁵ Khomeini's plane had just landed. As an organisation we were asked to arrange another demonstration towards the air force barracks with a view to having the armed Fadaiyan people amongst us, to hide them. For a youngster like me this was really exciting, seeing all these young men and women on bikes or with coats with Kalashnikovs hanging from their arms, probably just over a hundred were armed.

On the way to the air force buildings, we settled at Fouzieh Square. We were told that lots in the army were turning against the guard. This is when two nights of fighting started. Martial Law declared. I called my dad, I said I'm not coming home, I'm staying with a friend. I placed myself with the Fadaiyan but there was no longer Fadaiyan, non Fadaiyan, we had lots of armed people because army buildings, police stations, had been raided. There were lots of people with arms. They would come and give guns to anyone who had done military service, so I was disappointed not to get a gun. We barricaded the streets. There was a worry that the bulk of the Shah's guards were somewhere nearby and we were told that they would come and crush us. We stayed there. We had sandbags. In each barricade grouping, we had a couple of people with guns. We all made molotov cocktails and that was where the fight gradually started. Shah's guards came but people with guns stopped them. But then we heard that they were sending the tanks, we were all asked by the more experienced around (probably Fadaiyan or Mojehdan) to go on top of the buildings and attack the tanks with the Molotov cocktails. That's what we did that night. At least 10 tanks tried to come through, we set them on fire, the soldiers would come out and people with the guns would shoot them. So we stopped all the tanks passing Fouzieh Square ³⁶⁶ towards the university. The following day every other police station fell. I went through different buildings, really hunting for guns than anything else. They wouldn't give me one. Again there was no Fadaiyan, Mojhadin, just peoples' movement. Finally I went home, told me dad. We went celebrating. He had a gun, a hunting gun. We took it out and drove around.

³⁶⁴ *Siyahkal* (Behrooz: 144-5) commemorating Fedayan first armed operation (Behrooz: 51) Ch5 notes, p3 (not N Tehran) "village...on edge of Caspian forest" (Moaddel: 204)

³⁶⁵ Named by the Shah his "Immortal Guard" (Parsa:244-5)

³⁶⁶ See description of these events (Farhadpour: 65. h-8)

You, your friends, new comrades in Fadaian, all took for granted that Khomeini is going to be leader?

It was a movement led by religious person. The assumption was that this is going to be a democratic country, run by religious guy. Before the revolution he gave lots of interviews where he said it's going to be a democratic country, everyone is free to do what they want. So we had no issue with this. We acknowledged the fact that it is mostly religious people leading the country. We went back to school. Fadaian was very good at creating school groups, Students' branch of Fadaian was called Pishgaam³⁶⁷, we had 50-60 members in school. There were people much older than that led the student branch. We agreed with school management that we will have a wall for our materials, the Mojhadin will have a wall, the Islamists will have a wall. The school management had no choice. We were in control. The school management were just glad that we weren't burning the school down! It was a mature conversation. All representatives of these groups would go and sit down with management. Couple of teachers were Fadaian supporters. It was all about using the opportunity to recruit more and more people. We had a bookstall on side of the road, people would come and talk to us.

I had joined at first because they were non religious. I also saw them struggling for justice, socialism. I started learning and understanding. Part of it was the need for a sense of belonging. Even before the revolution I had started reading about socialism. On the night of the fighting I had a manifesto in my pocket, whilst it was quiet I was reading it. I had started to understand the concept. It was a distinct ideology. The ideology sounded good – for justice, for a fair society. But more important was that organisation around you, that you start engaging with a group of people, you all have the same aim, and you do what you think is right to achieve that aim. We had the organisation in the school which was part of the bigger organisation in the area – all affiliated to one of the Tehran universities, the Tehran polytechnic. Representatives from different schools would go to this university, meet every week, discuss what we were going to do next, what activities. You'd be more political, more understanding of what's going on, more involved in the movement.³⁶⁸ Tension with Khomeini

³⁶⁷ Bijan translated this as "You are in front."

³⁶⁸ In conversation afterwards Bijan described his political education as a new young Fadaian member: pamphlets by Marx, Lenin, chapters of Capital, the Fadaian's own literature. The Fadaian was independent of the Soviet Union but was certainly 'stalinist': 'stalinism' interpreted as the possibility of starting socialism where you were and not waiting for global revolution. There was no detailed discussion of the history of the Russian Revolution. It is also not clear what 'democratic centralism' meant in the Fadaian. Its earlier organisational structure was determined by its urban guerrilla base and armed operations, hence secretive and conspiratorial. In those first three years after the 1979

started over hejab and the International Womens' Day demonstration just a few months after the fall of the Shah.³⁶⁹ I went there and actually got hit with a stone in my face. They had highly systematically organised thugs –not very big.³⁷⁰ Fadaian did not support demonstration. They didn't take a view. We all went because of a sense of justice. We didn't go as an organisation formally supporting it. If I remember correctly, there was an article against forcing hejab on women in the Fadaian's newspaper. My sense, looking back at it now, I think there was confusion. Years later we discussed it. What was important at that time – were we distracting the movement by focusing on hejab, rather than focusing on workers'rights? But this became a norm. We would have our demonstrations. They would come and beat us up. We would beat them up. You knew that, not necessarily the regime, but you knew that an important part of the power of the country does not want you to exist, not to demonstrate. You had to seek legal permission for demonstrations and then you get attacked by the thugs. The security forces would just stay back and let you beat each other up. So you had two movements, the religious people who want to restrict and stop you, whereas your movement was seeking better justice for workers and freedom.

And then you had internal fighting within the organisation. I was by then the Fadaian leader in school, a cadre, also responsible for north of Tehran area. We had about 120-30 student members in north of Tehran. In the city as a whole our largest demonstration numbered over 100,000. Our focus was student movement and local shoras – that local amenities were working, shops have got enough food. Our instruction was grow your base in the university and schools. Also grow your base locally. I would go play football with local guys, try to get them reading books, mountain climbing and gradually convert them. By socialism I meant fairness, equality, stopping the bourgeois taking all the money. At first we didn't think Soviet Union was socialist but later yes. The discussion was about armed struggle. Moving away from armed struggle, the way forward was to grow your base, amongst students, locally, workers. In

revolution , did it make the transition to a more open and democratic organisation? Certainly, Bijan gave no impression that he felt constrained from raising questions and putting his own views forward. On the other hand, the extraordinary gross lack of judgement that Fadaian leaders made about workers' attitudes to the Islamic regime's destruction of the student occupation that Bijan describes so vividly towards the end of the interview, indicates a leadership not listening to the few worker members and contacts it had in the wider workers' movement.

³⁶⁹ Two months

³⁷⁰ "Tied to the IRP were the bands of *chomaqdars* (club wielders) who called themselves *Hezbollah* (Party of God...The bands...invaded the universities, injured and killed members of political groups who were resisting the cultural revolution, (launched in April 1980) and burned books and papers thought to be unIslamic." (Moaddel: 213) The IRP was launched immediately after the revolution so its thugs would have attacked the womens' demonstration. Islamisation of education system was part of cultural revolution. (Moaddel: 213)

summer we were all instructed to go and work in workshops. There was recognition that our working class base was very weak, we are too detached from the working class. I was part of those conversations in terms of formulating strategy. So I went in the summer to a shoe making factory in south Tehran for two and a half months. The strategy was first to see if there were any movements in the factories, second, to identify individuals with whom we could work with. A couple of people I became friendly with, we'd have lunch together, talk about Fadaiyan. I brought them the newspaper then I put them in touch with the area organiser for Fadaiyan to take them and continue discussions with them. It was the right strategy but ultimately it didn't work. The majority of us were students, middle class, intellectuals. Yes, we had some representation in factories but minimal numbers. We never became a workers' movement.

Wasn't a factor the speed with which the Islamic Republic imposed itself? You had the referendum accepting it just months after the fall of the Shah with a massive majority. You supported it?

Yes, because the question was, if I remember correctly, do you want the Shah's regime or do you want the Islamic Republic? That was the question. So it was seen as a vote against the Shah's regime.³⁷¹

But there were divisions within the Fadaiyan?

We'd had the argument about moving away from the armed struggle. Now there was a more fundamental issue. Fadaiyan's overall strategy was based on the Islamic Republic, Khomeini, all have their own faults. They are not perfect. There were lots of issues in terms of freedom, oppression, but, at the end of the day, they are anti imperialist, they are anti capitalist, therefore, we shouldn't be fighting against them. We should try to do what we can in terms of improving working conditions for workers, supports struggles against the US and the West, meanwhile, gradually grow our base. That was one view - what became the Fadaiyan Majority. Then you had the view of the Fadaiyan Minority saying no. This oppression is all part of capitalism. This developed after the occupation of the US embassy. The occupation of the embassy happened on the same day that we were demonstrating on the streets against the

³⁷¹ According to (Moaddel: 207), Fadaiyan demanded a People's Democratic Republic - dismissed by Khomeini.

"The referendum set the stage for the subsequent political discourse. Since the country's political system was defined as 'Islamic', the Communists and those who wanted to dispense with the idea of an Islamic Republic were defined as outsiders..." Also (Rostami-Povey: 35) Left had failed to provide alternative.

killing of Fadaiyan members in east of Iran by Khomeini's forces. They were killing our guys in Kurdistan and the Turkman area.³⁷²

Also at school, fights started, physical fights with supporters of the regime. They took our wall away. The regime established itself inside the school. At the same time there was this debate internally. One side (Minority) saying this is a reactionary regime, you have to fight it. Other side (Majority) is saying the regime is anti imperialist, anti capitalist. They might be rubbish in terms of peoples' freedom but it's best to support them. This was when we dropped the term guerrilla from the organisation. To be honest, which side you supported depended on which part of the organisation you were in. I supported the Majority view, the people I knew best in my area. We were all aware something was going wrong. We were beaten up, our people were being killed, arrested. You go and drop leaflets at night and get arrested. At the same time you stand by the saying, that the enemy of your enemy is your friend (the anti imperialist discourse).

Did the perspective of the working class as an independent political force enter the argument?

Yes, but bear in mind, that the majority working class are religious and supporters of the regime. Our people would get beaten up in factories if they were discovered as leftists. Even for the short period when the independent workers' shoras emerged and leftists were involved, you would not be elected with a Marxist tag on your forehead.³⁷³ The reality is that the country is polarised massively, majority of people, lots of it to do with lack of education, the only thing they have is their religion. Khomeini has come in and made lots of promises, getting rid of all the rich bosses they had. So you had majority of working class aligned with Islamists. The instruction comes from the top of the society, leftists are bad, don't believe in god. This was followed. In my opinion, the religious element played a massive role in restricting any working class political movement. At the same time Khomeini's regime did not seem to represent the capitalists. He appeared to represent the workers. They may have taken up some of the ideas about how to improve the life of the working class from socialism. The regime was an anti capitalist regime to start with. That obviously made it a lot more difficult for the Left to do anything because the alternative you are providing is what?... You are offering the same thing as the regime but without god. And that's a very hard sell! And the regime's anti capitalism was more than a posture. If you look at the initial part of it, at the

³⁷² See (Behrooz: 108)

³⁷³ We discussed this later after the recording. I described an oil worker leader I had interviewed Ali Pichgah who was openly elected as shora leader as a leftist. Bijan agreed this was possible in the advanced modern industries.

beginning. Look at their nationalisation of many many factories. It was different to what was happening now where they put in their own thugs and siphon off money, no. If you really go back, the actions they took in terms of nationalisation, trying hard to reduce the wealth gap. They began improvements outside the towns, in the villages, making roads, introducing electricity.³⁷⁴ These activities were not because they wanted to introduce a modernised version of capitalism. This was driven by the social justice motive within Islam. The Bazargan element in the government did represent the capitalist. But they got rid of them after the embassy siege. You had people coming to power, running the country who had high ideals about the 'just society'. If you look at their concept of 'just society', it's not that different from socialism. The challenge for us is that when you talk to uneducated people in the working class, it was difficult to explain clearly the difference between what you want and what the government wants. But amongst ourselves, the view was that they (the government) cannot do it. They may try but they'll fail. That's why you need a united workers' party to take control. You leave it to them (the Islamists), at the end of the day, they represent the middle class.

The Iran Iraq war justified more our version that you need to support the regime. This was more than the Americans just sending some gunships. Saadaam's army was backed totally by the West. We sent our people to the front next to the soldiers. It's now far more complicated. The regime is being attacked, you support it because of that. This is a struggle against imperialism. You need to support these people, but, at the same time, they beat the shit out of you every time you go out in the street. You try to have a conversation with them and what you get is a smack in the face. The number of nights I slept in prison cells, just for selling papers and stuff like that. Then we had this whole thing with the cultural revolution³⁷⁵ when I got shot and hospitalised. The whole thing about closing down the university and that was the regime's way of stopping the Left because they couldn't control the universities. That was a big part of it. The defeat of the Left in the universities was very important for the regime. And the reason I'm mentioning this is that this had a big impact on me.³⁷⁶ We had stayed and fought. We were under heavy attack. We'd occupied the university and this is when I was shot. But our leaders were telling us "look all you need to do is hold the place over night because in the morning you

³⁷⁴ Rostami-Povey (45-51)

³⁷⁵ April 1980: the cultural revolution was deliberately designed to destroy the Left in the universities. (Moaddel: 212)

³⁷⁶ We established this was three years after the revolution – 1982. It was exactly the same university location where Farhad had confronted the Shah's soldiers (late 1978, start 1979) "We have an expression in Iran, if you were shot by the Shah you are a living martyr of the revolution. I'm a living martyr of the anti revolution!" Farhad was still a school student. The revolution had begun in his Year 1 at school. This is now Year 3 of a four-year high school cycle.

will have buses and buses of workers passing by, (the main road to the factories in the west of Tehran passed by the university), they will stop their buses and come out and support you. Instead we got shouts of Down with Leftists! Down with the Leftists! Now we'd lost the university and we went underground. We went out at night and paint slogans on walls. Then there the attacks on the Tudeh Party. Leaderships of both organisations were arrested. We had to go totally underground. And then we were all given a choice whether we wanted to continue working with the organisation or whether we wanted to step away from it because there was a clear risk of getting arrested and executed. We managed to get most of our leadership out of the country. Tudeh Party didn't but we did. I then got called up for military service. That's when I cut all my links with the organisation – otherwise if I had been identified as member I would have been executed.

ENDS.

Farrokh Negahdar, Fadaian leader³⁷⁷ (interview 21/12/2018)

We began with Farrokh describing the background to his introduction and participation in the Fadaian.

I was a secondary school student when I was introduced to Bizhan Jazani³⁷⁸ and we worked with each other in National Front³⁷⁹ activities, 1963-4. I was 16, 17 years old. By the time I went to university I was a member of Jazani's group. After the revolt by Islamic elements in June 1963, led by Khomeini,³⁸⁰ Jazani's group recognised there was no way that they could continue their semi-legal activities. A new approach was needed: clandestine activities and prepare to launch a guerrilla war against the regime. There was no democracy. It was not possible to participate in government institutions via elections. But we were discovered³⁸¹ and 14 members of the group were arrested, February 1968. I was sentenced to 5 years in prison, I served half of it and they released me in November 1970. After a few weeks secretly I began to work with the remaining elements of our group which had avoided arrest. The leader of the remaining elements was a very close friend of mine, Hamid Ashraf. I met him several times and we decided to do some more activities abroad. He advised me to go abroad and work for the group there. I went to Afghanistan. I was several months there. On my way back to Iran I was kidnapped in Herat, Afghanistan by SAVAK mercenaries. I was jailed for a second time – this time for 6 years. The dictatorship by now was particularly harsh. This was the period when it executed unlawfully seven members of our group of the 14 arrested in 1968, including Bizhan Jazani, April 1975.

³⁷⁷ Organisation of Iranian People's Fada'i Guerrillas. OIPFG, *sazman-e cherikha-ye fada'i-ye khalq-e Iran* (Behrooz:51) According to Behrooz, Farrokh Negahdar led the proTudeh Majority split in 1980 (Behrooz: 106), which supported a conciliatory position towards the new regime, (Behrooz: 109), regarded as "progressive". (Behrooz: 116)

³⁷⁸ The best known of the Fedayan leaders, Bizhan Jazani was their most talented theorist, a philosophy graduate student arrested in 1968. He was one of the very few leftists to understand Khomeini's appeal and predict his rise to prominence. Jazani, in other words, was sensitive to the popular mood and recognised the need for political propaganda to relate to it. He called explicitly for proletarian leadership of any coalition emerging to lead mass mobilisation. Behrooz implies that his murder in jail in 1975, along with other Fedayan founders, was linked to this potential shift of political perspective. (Behrooz: 53, 54, 56)

³⁷⁹ National Front, originally founded by Mossadeq (ch5p1)

³⁸⁰ Khomeini had been exiled in 1964 for accusing the shah of granting the Americans 'capitulations', favours. (Abrahamian 2008: 143) He went to Najaf, a Shia Muslim holy city in southern Iraq. The favours were diplomatic immunity to the shah's US military advisors. He had also claimed the shah was handing the bazaars over to America and Israel. Khomeini had been jailed for two months, the year before, for opposing the 'White Revolution'. He was accused of turning a religious procession in June 1963 into violent street protest. These events transformed Khomeini into the leading anti regime ayatollah. June 1963 can be interpreted as a precursor for the 1979 revolution. (Abrahamian 1993: 10-11, 41) (ch5p2)

³⁸¹ By "internal elements" ie government agents

I was finally released in 1978 when Jimmy Carter came to power in the US. This was about a year after the completion of my sentence. There was a claim that Iran was going to be more democratic.³⁸² We named that 'democracy' a Jimmy-cracy.

When I was released the political situation across the country had changed enormously. Everyone was complaining about corruption, dictatorship, criminal activities carried out by the government. The allegations even appeared in the newspapers. Everywhere you heard complaints about the Shah. Soon afterwards the revolution began to gain momentum. A few months after my release I resumed activities in contact with the Fadaiyan movement. There began a long lasting debate between me and leaders in the clandestine movement. I could see the SAVAK control is melting down. Our clandestine members should come out from their hidden places, go with the people and organise mass movement. This was not the time for guerrilla movement anymore. But the counter argument was that this merely a temporary change in the political atmosphere. Dictatorship will return and we should stay in our hiding places. I decided to join them and go to the guerrilla cells to continue the argument. After a couple of weeks everyone became convinced that the situation has changed and it will not reverse. We are heading towards revolution. And then everyone came out and joined the uprising of the masses on the streets around the country, particularly in Tehran, Khuzestan, Tabriz, Mashad and Qom and everywhere.

I then asked Farrokh about Fadaiyan intervention both in the popular street movement, but also specifically the workers' movement and the shoras.

First, I would like to portray general texture of Fadaiyan movement. Who were we? And from which social groups did we recruit our members? Fadaiyan movement was essentially based on student movement, no working class movement. More than 90% of our members were students. When the revolution began our base, our stronghold, was in the universities. Every university around the country tend to be Fadaiyan followers. It was an advantage for us because the centre of movement in the large cities were the universities: not factories or rural areas – all was quiet. Then there was a debate amongst Fadaiyan members or supporters. Where are the most important elements of the revolution located – universities or factories and workshops? I believed from beginning of 1978, day after day I was more convinced that

³⁸² Carter was using the issue of human rights as a part of a 'Cold War' strategy to embarrass the Soviet Union. But Iran also felt the pressure. "Anxious to cast off the label as 'one of the worst violators of human rights in the world' – as Amnesty International had described him, the shah promised...access to prisons...less dangerous political prisoners amnestied...civilians tried in open courts with attorneys of their own choosing. The concessions however modest chiselled cracks in the façade of this formidable looking regime." (Abrahamian 2008: 157)

the centre of revolution is neither universities nor factories. It's the streets. The people come on to the streets and protest against the tyranny. If we want to join the masses we have to go the streets, to the demonstrations. But there was another argument, influenced by a more theoretical understanding of Marxism that we have to join the working class movement. I didn't take that argument very seriously. Members of Mojahedin, who had converted to Marxism,³⁸³ believed that they had to go to the factories. And they did nothing. They disappeared from the centre of the movement which was on the streets, squares, city centres. My analysis won in the organisation. The consequence of this analysis was to issue as much as possible political communiqués, political statements, spread around the streets and city centres. And it attracted a lot of new comrades to our organisation. Within a few months we became a mass movement! This is the period August 1978 to February 1979, 6 months before shah falls. My argument was that if we want to attract masses to our organisation, we have to do political activities, we have to have policy, we have to explain our suggestions for the future of Iran: politically explain our programme for the masses. From November, December 1978, we started to explain to our members, followers, the answer to the Iranian political turmoil is to construct shoras, to invite people for self government, working people, teachers, students, women, civil servants – workplace shoras. We stressed that we have to build workplace shoras. Workplace shoras would send representatives to local and regional shoras.

I suggested to Farrokh this was a shift in perspective – from the street to the workplace?

No. The first argument was – how can we communicate with the masses, with the people. In response to that question, I suggested we had to go to the streets. We don't need to go to the workplace to communicate with the people, to organise them. We would meet the workers on the street. Through political declaration, communication, written texts we motivate them to join us. No longer was armed struggle the way of expressing ourselves. When we communicate with the people, what is our response to the critical situation which is developing around the country, in terms of collapse of the whole regime and building up a new system? Our proposal was shoras – workplace shoras. And representatives of shoras meet each other in each area and constitute or build their own local governments. This was our dream or plan or programme.

I suggested to Farrokh this was modelled on the soviets of the 1917 Russian Revolution.

³⁸³ Peykar

Exactly, the same model. We were copying the same model. And our understanding is that the process that happened to Bolshevik Revolution from February to October is happening in Iran. We have to prepare ourselves for a socialist revolution based on the transfer of power to the shoras. And this idea was widely accepted by members of our organisation. At the same time we launched another campaign, in this same period August 1978-February 1979, that the main machinery of government is the army, we have to destroy that army, we don't have to take it over. It was the same idea as Lenin's, to make a peoples' army. We made a lot of propaganda around the country about the betrayal of the army against the people. We have to dismantle completely this institution, and, at the same time, that shoras should be armed, that the power should be captured by these new local governments.

Now let's go one step forward and explain what happened in reality.

When we approach revolution of 8th, 9th February 1979, there was an agreement between the clerical religious elements of the revolution and the army generals to surrender army to the ayatollahs, to Khomeini. You are aware of that negotiation?³⁸⁴ We intensified our propaganda against a deal with the army. And the trajectory of our influence was the north west of the capital, where most of the population was influence by us. This was the more affluent part of the city. A logistic part of the army was the airbase at Farah-Abad rebelled against their commanders. We heard they wear our arm bands with our name. We heard they went out chanting our slogans such as 'The army has betrayed the people', 'we have to get rid of that institution'. The people came out spontaneously and went to the barricades. The army base was invaded, weapons and ammunition were captured. This is my understanding, analysis – that Fadaïyan policies had a major role in disarming part of the army bases in Tehran. This was unlike most parts of the country which were more influenced by the Ayatollahs where the people followed their instructions, their orders. Khomeini had issued statements – stay at home, do not invade army bases.

We didn't follow those instructions. We asked people to come out and go the army bases. If we hadn't done that, weapons would not have come into the hands of the people. Some arms found their way into the shoras. Within 2 or 3 days many people were armed, but Khomeini and his supporters already had control of security and law enforcement. They shaped and developed the local "committees" as their base in all cities around the country. Just a tiny part of Tehran remained with us. We were surrounded by armed people who were not followers of

³⁸⁴ (Abrahamian 2008: 161) version of discussions between shah, army and Khomeini's representatives – summarised Ch5p4.

Fadaiyan and we were forced back to the universities. In the workplaces, particularly in the oil industry, the steel corporation in Ahwaz, universities, civil service, municipalities and other government organisations, people themselves formed shoras. They started to decide who should be head of the departments, who should deliver the demands of the employees, the workers. The shoras survived until the summer of 1979, perhaps until the autumn. They lasted about 6 months maximum. After that Khomeini and the government started to maintain their control in workplaces. They appointed who they wanted at the head of the oil industry, universities and elsewhere. Most of these appointees were liberal religious people, like the followers of Bazargan at this time, or Bani Sadr, not radical fundamentalist element. At that stage they did not have the power or know-how to run the country. And that's it.

Farrokh rather abruptly halted the discussion at that point. I suggested to him that two key outstanding questions needed to be addressed. How did the Islamists succeed in defeating the Left so quickly and it seems relatively easily? And wasn't it the case that the Fadaiyan, which split in that first year, had a Majority faction, Farrokh was one of its leaders, which concluded, to some extent, that the new regime had to be supported.

Yes, we are still struggling with these questions. When the shah's regime collapsed and there was no political or legal structure of power, to control the people. But the balance of power between the Islamists and non Islamists was one to ten. Millions of people followed the Ayatollahs. We realised before the revolution that the Islamists had a far great opportunity to win hegemony over the people than the Left. Jazani had predicted this prospect in the early 1970's.³⁸⁵ During the first year of the revolution we never believed that we could gain the upper hand in relation to Khomeini. A few months before the fall of the shah, specifically 8 September 1978, we realised that Khomeini had hegemony over the liberals.

I asked Farrokh if the Fadaiyan should have made the turn away from the armed struggle to mass work and the workers movement in particular, much earlier.

It was a great loss for us. We were late. As early as we could come out and join the people and set up our legal or semi legal structures around the universities, we could have gained much more than we gained at that time. But even then we could not have captured the hearts and minds of the majority of the population. We were not strong enough to reach to them.

³⁸⁵ "With this background, Khomeini has unprecedented popularity among the masses, especially petty bourgeois businesses, and with his opportunities for relatively free political activity has an unprecedented chance of success." Jazani quoted in (Behrooz: 53) Workers in tiny traditional workshops far outnumbered workers in modern industry – an argument developed by Rahnema to explain the weakness of the shoras – see later Ch5p21

I put to Farrokh two criticisms of the Fadaiyan in that first year. Firstly, that it failed to take sufficiently seriously the internal argument in the regime – theocracy versus democracy – which developed in relation to the ‘Islamic’ constitution. Secondly and connected to the first, that it failed to take sufficiently seriously the argument over the women’s question, women’s rights.

I am aware of these criticisms, it crystallises the argument and it’s to the point, especially that Fadaiyan didn’t take part in the women’s rights movement. And that we collaborated with Khomeini to some extent against the rights of women to defend themselves. This criticism is familiar to me. But the main question for a researcher, as an outsider, who looks at the scene of political events in Iran at that time is different. The main question at that time was how to deal with the revolution. This was the core question facing any political activist. There were two approaches. One, to confront the revolution or two, collaborate, co-operate with the revolutionaries who are mostly followers of Khomeini. This is the main question at that time. No major political party can remain indifferent towards a developing revolution. If you opt for the first option, you have to resist against the coming horrors. If you have a positive mind set, you can interpret these upcoming elements as revolutionaries, anti imperialists. It was a real mass movement with their own psychology, their own culture, their own tactics. If you are negative to them, you would probably call them a fascist movement, an oppressive movement, reactionary forces against the people. I do not agree with this second opinion, second interpretation because all major changes, not only in Iran, but within MENA, Middle East North Africa, are influenced by the outcome of the 1967 war between Israel and the Arab world.³⁸⁶ From that point onwards we are witnessing the growth of the influence of the Islamist element – everywhere. Islamism gets momentum, strength and status. Secular elements in these societies needed to think about it. How do we deal with these rising Islamic movements, with their growing power. How do we deal with them? We had to find moderate elements within these movements and collaborate with them. We should avoid resisting the entire new system. If we do so they would destroy us and delay the progressive and democratic process in our country. Some elements on the Left did not accept that the balance of power is not with them. They blindly believe in the power of the working class, power of the masses and peasants. They could not believe that people’s power was not on their side. The masses know nothing about Marxists or communists. They don’t know what they are saying. It’s only the intelligentsia, part of the middle class who are familiar with their ideas. This is my

³⁸⁶ This argument that the defeat of Nasser in 1967 was a defeat for radical secular nationalism and a spur to political Islam throughout the Middle East and North Africa is raised by (Alexander, Bassiouny 2014: 19) who, in turn, references the Egyptian revolutionary socialist Sameh Naguib (Alexander, Bassiouny 2014: 19fn38).

understanding of the situation. I come back to your question and that criticism. I believe that the process of the Iranian revolution has nothing to do with the split between Majority and Minority Fadaiyan. Even if we didn't split the balance of power was not in favour of us. The main question was how to deal with the rising Islamic movement. I followed a specific policy line. We have to find moderate elements within that movement and collaborate with them against their hardliners. And the Left should accommodate that policy with this strategy. This was my line and majority of Fadaiyan followed this line.

I understand this position but nevertheless do you think, in retrospect, you should have taken a firmer position on the women's question in that first year, 1979. After all, after the International Women's Day demonstration in March, Khomeini had to temporarily back off with his imposition of the hejab?

I support any policies with strong positions on women's rights, up to that point that avoids confrontation with Islamic spectrum as a whole.

But they were already confronting you over the women's question. They attacked the International Women's Day demonstration with stones, even bullets.

Let me give you another example to explain my position. They introduced the cultural revolution in May 1980. The idea was to shut down the universities and send everybody away. This was their decision. They took that decision to break the Left. What should we do? We opposed this decision. We decided to resist at least for some hours to let people know we are against this decision. But then we would withdraw in order to save our forces, to save the lives of our supporters. A tactical resistance and withdraw. In relation to the women's demonstration, the right decision at that time was to demonstrate our unhappiness, our opposition to compulsory headscarves, and then withdraw and save our lives. One of the clerics gave a good example using the children's story of the cat and the mouse cartoon, 'Tom and Jerry'. We had to play with that cat, not fighting face to face with them. I would like to explain one conversation I had with MKO leader, Masoud Rajavi, before the events of June 1981³⁸⁷. The government invited all political parties to participate in a tv debate. From the

³⁸⁷ "(The government) unleashed a reign of terror worthy of the Jacobins when the Mojahedin – supported by President Bani-Sadr – tried to overthrow the government in June 1981 and instead ended up assassinating numerous prominent figures ... In the twenty-eight months between February 1979 and June 1981, revolutionary courts had executed 497 political opponents as "counterrevolutionaries" and "sowers of corruption on earth." In the next four years from June 1981 until June 1985, revolutionary courts executed more than 8,000 opponents. Although they targeted mainly the Mojahedin, they also went after others – even some who opposed the Mojahedin. The victims included Fedayins and Kurds as well as Tudeh, National Front, and (Grand Ayatollah) Shariatmadari supporters. Many – including

government side Dr Soroush and Mr Mesbah-Yazdi were introduced.³⁸⁸ I was invited as well. But Rajavi abstained in that tv debate. I met him separately and asked him his analysis of the present political process. He believed that if we fight with government, we will win. And if we deliver this fight sooner, the possibility of victory is greater. My argument was exactly the opposite. We should postpone this conflict. The more we delay the attacks on us, the chance of success is greater.

One more point, in 1997 Khatami came to power. 16 years after that discussion between me and Rajavi. That election was postponed 16 years for nothing.³⁸⁹ And it ended up with the killing of 4000 to 5000 of our friends.

Finally, I asked Farrokh about the Stalinist roots of the Fadaiyan – whether it made the organisation insensitive to Khomeini's deliberate evasion of a democratic constitution – in the name of the 'Islamic' constitution.

Slavery was part of liberalism throughout Europe and The US. And Stalinism is part of Left Movement. All parts of the Left throughout the world had some background or legacy of dictatorship – with roots in the early 19th century. There was some element of dictatorship in their mind set. I believe all of us, all Lefts, have mixed with strong elements of dictatorship and cruelty with us in 19th century and early 20th century. Then the process of getting rid of these elements started over time and we reached to European communism and then we reached to Khrushchev and criticism of Stalinism. Left today has gradually got rid of these reactionary ideas in their mind set. It's a matter of time, an evolutionary process.

Shariatmadari, Bazargan supporters, and Tudeh leaders – were forced to appear on television and recant their previous views.

One final bloodletting came in 1988, immediately after Khomeini ended the (Iran Iraq) war by accepting a UN-mediated ceasefire. In four short weeks, special courts set up in the main prisons hanged more than 2,800 prisoners – Amnesty International described them as “prisoners of conscience.” Former Mojahedin were executed on suspicion they harboured secret sympathies for the organization. Leftists were executed for “apostasy” on the grounds they had turned their backs on God, the Prophet, the Koran, and the Resurrection. ..This extraordinary bloodbath has one plausible explanation. Khomeini, in his dying years, was eager to leave behind disciples baptized in a common bloodbath. The killing would test their mettle, weeding out the half hearted from the true believers, the weak-willed from the fully committed, and the wishy-washy from the resolute. It would force them to realize that they would stand or fall together. What is more, it would sever ties between religious populists within his movement and secular radicals outside. Some of his followers had toyed with the dangerous notion of working with the Tudeh Party to incorporate more radical clauses into the Labor Law as well as into the Land Reform Law.” (Abrahamian 2008: 180-2)

³⁸⁸ Abdolkarim Soroush, well known liberal Islamic philosopher: “We can learn from the West without being its slave.” (Rostami Povey: 94) Mohammad-Taqi Mesbah-Yazdi, hard line member Assembly of Experts

³⁸⁹ The implication being that the moderate, reform wing of political Islam would have asserted itself much earlier.

But nevertheless do you accept that the Fadaiyan conception of Marxism was too heavily affected by Stalinism?

I totally accept this analysis – not only Fadaiyan but every Left oriented movement around the world was affected by Stalinism. But it's a matter of time. When do you get rid of it? If you are late **then** the damage to your organisation is greater, if you pioneering de-Stalinisation, then your loss will be mitigated.

Did the Stalinism of the Fadaiyan affect its perspective towards the shoras?

The reason why the shoras crashed has nothing to do with Islamism or Marxism in my view. Shoras have no place in a modern organised society. Nowhere has that experience been implemented so far. We do not have any reliable background history of shoras' governance. We start with the Paris Commune and the soviets in the Bolshevik Revolution – but it's always a very short lived phenomena. You can't say Islamists destroyed the shoras. Shoras would have ended with normal governance, which is not shora based. Shora is a dream, a myth for self governance of the masses. At the time I argued, there is documented evidence, that the shoras are a temporary phenomenon, they cannot last – not because of the Islamists' strength, because of the nature of such governance.

But this is a complete change of political position by you. You are not the same comrade as you were in 1979.

Of course I'm not. I abandoned many of the unrealistic elements in our ideology and world outlook. And then accepted many other things. For example I remember exactly at which stage of my political life I made two decisions and changed my mind. First, I believed that the world was divided by two parts, the West is evil and the East is good. I realised when the Soviet Union collapsed that the world is not divided like that. Both these elements exist, mixed with each other, everywhere in our world. The second is about how to rule these societies. What is the best way of organising life? The consent of the people is the most important, the core element of governance is that consent. If you can't deliver that consent you have to go. You have to get rid of mental or practical elements of your policy should be abandoned if the consent of the people is missing. Before I favoured confrontation. Now I think we have to find solutions to these conflicts, to resolve, to melt, to have better understanding of each part. You have to find solutions to live with them, to understand them, to get more benefit from them. And they should respond simultaneously to this policy.

Ends.

Mansor Parhizgar Paykar³⁹⁰ activist (interview 21/01/2019)

Mansor began by explaining how he joined Paykar and his political activities when he returned to Iran after the revolution.

I joined Paykar when I was a student in the UK in the 1970's. In 1976 I had joined the Confederation of Iranian Students opposing the shah's regime and developed contact with Mujahedin Marxist wing (which preceded Paykar) and was in the process of abandoning Islam. They were inclined to Maoism. Just before the revolution Paykar declared itself a separate political entity. Taqi Shahram³⁹¹ was the Mujahedin leader initiating this transformation from Islam to Marxism. Shahram was expelled – the infighting had actually led to some members of Mujahedin being killed. A group of us, now Paykar members, returned to Iran several months after the revolution, May or June. We were committed to taking the revolution forward – in a socialist direction. Some of us joined the workers' section, whereas other of our friends joined the students' section. Three of us went to another city, Arak, to establish a workers' cell. Arak was a manufacturing centre. We gained employment as workers. I worked in a carpet factory as an operative, it employed about 150 workers. The other two comrades, one a woman worked in a blanket factory, the other in construction. I was using a false name and pretending to be semi illiterate. So we were trying to deepen our links with workers' everyday lives. To some extent we were successful, we created small cells in these workplaces. Paykar also established a good student movement in Arak, we established good links with students in the post 16 equivalent of the further education sector. Maybe 20 students came around us. After over a year in Arak we had established a small base.

There was no shora in the carpet factory. It was run efficiently. There were no upheavals, no antagonism. There was a workers' consultative system. Our woman comrade at the car bracket factory was more successful. She mobilised workers and there was a strike. But after a year in Arak I was disillusioned, I realised there was no way forward for me here. I no longer wanted to be allocated (by Paykar) to work in factories. I had believed that a second revolution was coming and that Paykar was equipped to take the movement forward. Khomeini's Islamic Republic was not yet stabilised. The situation was volatile, the Kurds fighting the regime, the occupation of the American Embassy, the Iran Iraq war – the idea of talking forward the

³⁹⁰ Paykar was a Marxist (Maoist) breakaway from the Mujahedin in 1975. "(It) seems they managed to gain control of the bulk of the organisation" (Behrooz: 71-2) Behrooz also argues that Paykar "looked to Albania for inspiration." (Behrooz: 121-2) This was not Mansor's view who based his Marxism on the Russian Revolution, especially the period before Stalin. (See p3)

³⁹¹ Shahram details (Behrooz: 71)

revolution in a socialist direction still seemed possible. But I wanted a different role. I wanted to use my abilities as a speaker and work with the student movement. But there was disagreement with the Paykar centre. Also I was having doubts about Paykar strategy. It was not keen to have links with other Left groups like Fedayan.

Later in the interview Mansor emphasised this point again – pointing to the sectarianism of Paykar, assuming it alone could assert its leadership in the mass movement, especially of young people, that was still seemed to be moving forward. This was at a time when there was general confusion on the Left – especially when the occupation of the American Embassy began.

I was against Bazargan proposal that the hostages should be released. At the same time Paykar did not have a clear view of this occupation. The embassy occupation reflected infighting within the regime. The fundamentalist, the puritanical, in a way totalitarian Islamists wanted to eradicate the liberal part of the regime. They used the occupation to humiliate that faction and they caused Bazargan's resignation

This was a period of a more general attack on democratic rights?

Paykar defended democratic rights, women's rights and free press. 30% of Paykar members were women, higher than other organisations. Paykar was amongst the first to resist the closure of Ayandegan,³⁹² a daily newspaper dating back to last period of shah's period, it was semi-independent, quite radical and critical. After revolution it criticized Khomeini's regime which had no vision of democracy. This was the time of the Kurdistan rebellion against the regime which was not prepared to give way, also Khomeini was unhappy with workers' resistance in the shoras. Later the way the referendum was conducted was not democratic. Paykar described the referendum as the new tyranny. But Paykar at this time became too radical, too critical of Fedayan and Hezbe Jomhori-e Eslami. They were proud of what they called the third way, against US imperialism, social imperialism of the USSR and also China – by

³⁹² "On August 7th the revolutionary prosecutor closed down *Ayandegan* alleging links with foreign secret services and arrested most of its staff. The newspaper had been printed on Iran's most modern press, which had also been used for other oppositional publications. By seizing *Ayandegan* the fundamentalists with one blow deprived all other critical mass circulation of a printing press (the leftist groups produce their organs in the underground)...One week later, the government announced that more than twenty newspapers and magazines had to close down: all were leftist and secular publications except one." Chehabi, H.E. *Iranian Politics and Religious Modernism: the Liberation Movement of Iran* (I.B.Taurus, 1990) p268. Also discussed in Shahidi, Hossein, *Journalism in Iran: From Mission to Profession* (Routledge 2007) Leftists, like Fedayan's oil woman worker leader Kobra Qasemi at the Khuzestan oil refinery, are also arrested under the pretext of support for the Kurdish rebellion. (A-KQ)

that time China was moving away from Mao's legacy. I went back to Tehran, I left Paykar. I joined a small group, 'Ghiam' which was committed to the worker's movement.

Mansor was arrested along with thousands of other leftists following Mojahedin failed attempt to overthrow the government by force in June 1981. He was in prison for one and a half years and tortured for names of comrades but he refused to cooperate. This brought to a close his political activities in Iran. He came back to the UK when he was released. Until the time of his arrest he continued to believe that a second revolution, a socialist revolution, was likely. The Iran Iraq war did not weaken his commitment, although he doubted the Paykar line that both sides were as bad as each other. Iraq, after all, had started the war and occupied parts of Kurzestan. As a student in Britain before the revolution Mansor had read Trotsky and was familiar with the theory of permanent revolution. This reading helped shape his perspective when he returned to Iran .Mansor continued.

But we were facing the mass popularity of the regime – also a sense of populism. On the streets there were mobs supporting the regime, with motor bikes, terrorising the Left radicals. Also ordinary people were mobilised by the regime because of their religious commitment. I thought how can we bring them out of this infatuation? Despite this, there was hope in the air that the regime would collapse sooner or later, that workers would carry the revolution further. I still believed in the Marxism of the Russian Revolution – especially the period before Stalin. Lenin was a proper leader – although later when I left Iran I also became critical of Lenin.

Paykar's expectations of the political situation were based on its analysis and strategy towards the regime that it was Bonapartist, one part was bourgeois liberal, the other part radical Islamist fundamentalist, the petty bourgeoisie. We had two sides of a coin and there was a conflict. The occupation of the US embassy was about the petty bourgeois wing wanting to dominate the whole regime. They succeeded, according to them, expelling the bourgeois liberal part, the collapse of Bazargan. The response of the regime to the Mujahedin attempt at its overthrow shocked Paykar. It was unprepared for the repression. Hundreds of its members and sympathisers were killed. Paykar slogan at the time was No to Liberals No to Hezbe Jomhori-e Eslami, the Islamic Republican Party,³⁹³ for a Peoples' Fight. By Peoples' Fight they

³⁹³ Khomeini had launched the IRP the Islamic Republican Party. "Tied to the IRP were the bands of *chomaqdars* (club wielders) who called themselves *Hezbollah* (Party of God...(Later) The bands...invaded the universities, injured and killed members of political groups who were resisting the cultural revolution, (launched in April 1980) and burned books and papers thought to be unIslamic." (Moaddel 1993: 213)

meant taking forward the workers' movement. They opposed guerrilla activities, they believed in mass mobilisation of workers, in rural areas, villagers.

ENDS

Ali Pichgah

This is a written response, translated from Farsi, to written questions put by e mail to Ali Pichgah an oil workers' leader, repairs section Tehran oil refinery, 1979, during the Iranian Revolution (19/10/18)

1. *Please introduce yourself, where you worked in January 1979 when the Shah was overthrown. How would you describe your political outlook at that time?*
2. *Please describe your shora organisation. What were its structures and goals? For example, as well as negotiate with managers, did it democratically elected workers' representatives sometimes replace managers? How large was the participation of the workforce and how did it evolve across time? How long did the the shora last as a form of organizing workers?*
3. *The Fedayan was the largest and most successful urban guerrilla organisation when the Shah fell in January 1979. It was very popular in the country. It recognised the decisive role of workers in forcing the Shah's overthrow. It described itself as communist, though insisted it was independent of the Soviet Union (and China). It then made a serious effort to build a communist organisation in the workplaces but failed. Please describe your thoughts about these developments.*
4. *Very quickly Khomeini out manoeuvred the Left. How popular was Khomeini amongst ordinary workers at your workplace, at the start of the revolution, when the Shah fell in the first few months of 1979?*
5. *Could you describe the profile of those who at your workplace sided actively with the line of the new authorities? What was their attitude towards the people identified as "leftists" or 'independent'?*
6. *It is generally agreed that the Left did not give enough support to the International Womens' Day demonstration in March 1979 in Iran which was physically attacked by the Islamists. This was a very important moment in the showdown between the Left, the workers and Khomeini. Please comment on this. Did your shora support the womens' demonstration?*

Ali Pichgah responded with what he calls his memoir *Oil workers struggles during the revolution*'. This included some additional responses to further questions seeking clarification.

Towards the end of 1978 people in Tabriz began street demonstrations against the regime over rising prices and housing shortage. These demonstrations quickly reached other parts of Iran. Students and factory workers joined in. The struggle began in our workplace, the repair section of the oil refinery, (Tehran), the main demand was for higher wages. But our numbers were small and we were not engaged in production (ie the refining process) - the workers who worked in the production of oil materials, petrol, refined oil, gas, material used for asphaltting. Those workers were called employees and they had no rights to organise, but workers in repairs, we were allowed our syndicate, although syndicates under the Shah were basically run from above. Any workers attempting independent activities would have been immediately arrested, imprisoned. Many workers were involved in such activities, arrested then released because of the demonstrations.

We repair workers tried to contact the refinery employees, names mentioned Bohani, Basatani, Hojdarish. We decided to enter the employees' restaurant, our restaurant was separate from the employees' restaurant, we started shouting slogans celebrating (repair) workers and (oil refinery) employees unity. I took the microphone and recited the famous poetry of Khosrow Golesorkhi,³⁹⁴ and other workers made some very useful speeches. We set up a secret unity committee in the restaurant's kitchen, calling it a strike committee: names of 12 committee members, included Hojdarish. We called a demonstration for all the workers and employees at the refinery to get everyone who worked involved. We decided it was too early to strike. The way the refinery worked meant that even if only two workers worked, the refinery could work for four months. We decided in this situation the secret police could easily infiltrate and defeat us. Instead of going on strike we joined the street demonstrations, and when workers are more prepared and united properly, we go for strike. Of course these discussions were kept secret by our committee.

We decided to go to Beheshte Zahra cemetery, (south Tehran, largest cemetery in country) and have a demonstration there because the cemetery is near the refinery. We noticed a

³⁹⁴ Poet, writer, communist, part of arrested 1972 "famous cell, some of whose members had sympathy for the Fadaian...trial...attempt by SAVAK...to achieve...success against guerrilla movement...national tv broadcast proceedings." There were forced 'confessions' but five including Golesorkhi, "refused to confess, even after extensive torture. Golesorkhi and Daneshian used the fact that the proceedings were televised to put the regime on trial, defend revolution and Marxism and refute the charges. They refused to ask for the Shah's pardon and were executed." (Behrooz: 69-70)

helicopter above us. We heard later that the Shah and his top general were in the helicopter...Our aim was to show that we were against the dictatorship and we shouted 'Death to the Shah, Down with the Shah!' And we waved our fists at the helicopter. When we got back to the refinery we continued our demonstration and we pulled down pictures of the Shah from the walls. I read out poetry which was about being optimistic, (but unfortunately this feeling of optimism didn't last very long and we were defeated).

This became a pattern, street demonstrations, getting together in the restaurant of the refinery. One day we went to the company's head office in Tehran. Police and army were at front entrance and stopped us entering the building. They shot at people and two were badly injured and lost their legs. That day we had to escape. But later we went back to the head office. This time we weren't stopped. We demanded workers at head office join us and I read out our demands. When I was doing that a couple of people attacked me and tore up the piece of paper I was reading from. Then other workers stopped them from attacking me and I continued reading out our demands. We then went back to the refinery and had a meeting and decided to go to Tehran University the day after. We marched to the university. We wanted the students to join us and support our demands. I was at the beginning of the march, shouting slogans. We also approached national newspapers Keyhan and Ettilat. We also had meetings with Bazargan³⁹⁵ and Sabbaghian who would become part of the transitional government. Some of them came to our refinery. Bazargan told us when we go on strike make sure people have oil, gas and petrol. I told him we have enough for that purpose, we won't let people down. Another of our leaders said if we are defeated we will set the oil refinery on fire. Bazargan was really scared.

We decided to have a sit-in in the refinery for 48 hours and then call a strike. During the sit in we ate there and slept there and no-one was allowed to leave the refinery. The first day of the sit-in I read out Shamlu's poetry,³⁹⁶ where he writes if we are not victorious it will be a repeat of 25 years ago (it was). On the second day soldiers and army officers surrounded the refinery. They entered the restaurant and asked why we had a sit in and why we don't work. We said nothing. He took the microphone but we didn't react and after a couple of hours they left. That was a kind of success for us. We decided to read poetry about the Zhaleh Square

³⁹⁵ "Liberal nationalist with good credentials from his association with Mossadeq's era of oil nationalisation" (Rostami Povey: 32) Premier Khomeini's first provisional government Feb-Nov 1979 (Behrooz: 102)

³⁹⁶ Ahmad Shamlu wrote a famous poem *Marg-e Vartan* Vartan's Death, Vartan, a Tudeh Party member arrested after coup against Mossadeq, tortured then killed. (Behrooz: 11)

events.³⁹⁷ We then called a strike for 25 days, continuing the strike until the Shah left the country and Bakhtiar became prime minister (Kurzman: 144). We didn't believe that Bakhtiar would be any good. He sent us a message asking us to end the strike and promised to look into all our demands. By that time our final demand was the fall of the Shah's system. But we didn't say what kind of system we wanted to replace the Shah's system., because we didn't know and we were not aware of capitalism and global capitalism. We knew we wanted political freedom, free political prisoners, end exploitation, oppression, but what to replace it, we didn't know.

Anyway we didn't trust Bakhtiar and we continued our strike until Khomeini entered Iran. One of our greatest mistakes was that we were objecting to those who were in power, whilst from the beginning we should have been against capitalism, whether state capitalism or private capitalism. On the other hand America and Western Europe made Khomeini big so that religious revolution come to power because they were frightened that the Left and communists take power. In the strike committees we had communists and religious people and we all wanted the fall of the Shah and the monarchy. We were united on that. After the revolution we were confused about what to do until we came to the conclusion that we needed to create the shoras. The representatives of the shoras were the left wing workers. The Moslems, the religious people also set up the religious shoras. The Islamic shoras were in favour of Bani-sadr.³⁹⁸

After revolution a shora representative sat with managers from different parts of the refinery and the head of refinery. In most cases I was the representative. My job was to take back the decision of this meeting to the ordinary workers. Sometimes we had meetings with the oil minister. Named 3 other workers who came to meetings. We raised our demands with the managers and in most cases our demands were met. For example we wanted part time and contract workers to be officially employed by the oil ministry. We went to Bazargan's office and told him oil workers had housing problems. We wanted those houses and land in north of Tehran which had been confiscated and which had belonged to the Shah's oil minister to be divided amongst the workers. Or for the workers to be given loans in order to buy their houses. At that time Bazargan said they do not recognise the legitimacy of the shoras. Instead of shoras we should create cooperatives. We became very angry and we had an argument over this issue. We went back to the shoras and elected two representatives to follow up the issue.

³⁹⁷ September 8, 1978, army opened fire on demonstrators in Zhaleh Square Tehran killing nearly a hundred: known as Black Friday (Kurzman: 74-5)

³⁹⁸ President December 1980, ousted June 1981, similar politics Bakhtiar (Behrooz: 102)

We did manage to get the land and divide it amongst workers. It meant each worker received 200 square metres of land and some of them started building their houses on that.

When we had the shoras we never had the desire to take political power.

One day we were meeting with Yazdi, Minister of Foreign Affairs, at a meeting of Tehran refinery representatives. He'd just heard about the occupation of the American embassy and he was very upset, told us it was a bad idea. We disagreed and the next day we had a demonstration in support, outside the embassy. We believed that it as the Fadaiyan who had occupied the embassy and that's why we were so keen to support them. I read a document outside the embassy in support. But that day it meant that we didn't support the women's demonstration that was taking place on the other side which was a mistake.³⁹⁹ Named other reps again who with him went to finance offices of refinery to look into salaries of workers. Financial officers cooperated and showed us list of wages of all workers. We discussed matter (assumed to be unfair wages distribution) with oil minister and we resolved issue. After a few days we were arrested and sent to prison. Prison warden told us we had broken the law. Refinery workers came in buses to demonstrate outside prison and threatened to continue until we were released – and they did release us.

All this shows we had some power in this period: but how to increase our power and benefit from our position, we didn't know what to do. We didn't know we had to get all workers involved, not just oil workers, for workers to take power and defeat dictatorship and capitalism. A communist party for the working class didn't exist. But we did some good things. When we had a strike committee we got a list from the central bank about number of very wealthy capitalists and those who were taking their money out of the country. We wanted them to be known by people. I remember when we had a shora and with the representatives of the Abadan and Isfahan refineries. I went to Isfahan refinery. But before we got there the Revolutionary Guards threatened the Isfahan refinery representatives that of they go to that meeting they will be arrested. This was start of RGs interfering with affairs of refineries. Before the revolution there were workers who were responsible for the security of the refineries. No-one could enter refinery without identification card. During time of the shoras they cooperated with us. Once on the night shift I distributed Fadaiyan leaflets. I assumed that no-

³⁹⁹ See the discussion about this (Poya 1999: 133) Fedayan withdrew its support for Women's Solidarity Council, *Shoraye Hambastegie Zanan* day of action, Nov 25, which coincided with start of US embassy occupation. Fedaya, of course, did not organise embassy occup though fact that Ali thought they did is a measure of his over estimation of their influence.

one had seen me but a few days later the security workers warned me that the RGs were watching me.

Sometimes I think if we could have continued the revolution for longer then this would have benefitted the workers. I remember the Mayday workers' celebrations in 1979, many of the left wing intellectuals participated in the demonstration and we started marching from the Workers House⁴⁰⁰. 500,000 workers and intellectuals were engaged in that demonstration. But at the same time the religious people became active to the extent that when we were marching they were having a fight with the other people on the march. The religious groups were told to go to Workers House and take it out of the hands of the Left. Some of them attacked Workers House with knives and sticks and took over there. I was leading slogans on that march – we sat down in front of a minibus. The religious elements attacked us and we were forced not to continue our demonstration. Some of them came to me to start an argument and those who knew me (ie comrades) came and took me away. I was told they planned to kill me. I went home.

Left and communists needed to be more familiar with workers' issues. And workers needed more opportunity to learn more. One of the employees of the refinery who was in jail under Shah for 3 years and was released after the revolution after winning the demand to free political prisoners took part in a sit-in in the refinery. He said that he had been jailed for reading Maxim Gorky's book, Mother! Imagine if it had been a book by Marx or Lenin! This level of repression meant that we didn't study the books on communism. Whereas the Mullahs who have had 1400 years of their organisations, and were able to get together in their mosques and gatherings, and they were free, they were able to organise. Under the Shah they were free to organise and propagate their religious ideas as well as getting money from the government. The communists had no such freedom. They were either in jail or killed.

Ali Pichgah also has an interview in Farsi on U tube⁴⁰¹

Ali Pichgah's U tube interview includes the following extract.

There were 166 shoras, many in large workplaces. Shoras did not connect together. If we had connected we would have been more conscious of our activities and we would have been

⁴⁰⁰ Khane Kargar Workers House TU centre See (Abrahamian:2010) Mayday 1979 description of the competing demonstrations on that Mayday, esp IRP and Khomeini's message.

⁴⁰¹ I would like to thank Zep Kalb, research student at UCLA, (e mail 23/10/18), for providing me with this u tube link. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EWtdDCWljRg&t=1553s>

more successful, especially if we had been able to create an organisation which covered the whole country.

If we had succeeded in creating a mass workers' organisation we would have changed the path of the revolution.

It is well known that it was the oil workers' action which broke the back of the Shah. For a long time the Islamists and the Islamic government, because of their fear of the oil workers, couldn't do what they wanted to do. This means that even if we didn't have the power throughout the country as a result of connecting the shoras...(incomplete sentence but implication is that government cautious)

The interviewer asks Pichgah about the rise of Islamic committees challenging the workers' movement. He replies that the Islamic opposition was led by Ayatollah Beheshti ⁴⁰². Beheshti was educated in Germany and learned these tactics from the German Nazis, the same tactics used by Mussolini's blackshirts. Islamic government used Beheshti's tactics, through Islamic association and Islamic committees, to attack us.

At the time we didn't think they were a real danger to us and our organisation. We didn't think to combat the Islamists.

ENDS.

⁴⁰² See Behrooz discussion of Beheshti and the Maktabis Islamic faction (Islamic 'security' committees) which became the IRP (102). Killed in Mojahedin bomb attack on IRP HQ June 1981 (Moaddel: 216).

Kobra Qasemi (interview 5/12/18) Woman representative on the Ahwaz, Khuzestan province, shora oil committee 1979-80⁴⁰³

Kobra began by describing the repression under the shah and how that radicalised her. She recalls especially that SAVAK could arrest you, and you could get 2 years in prison, for reading a novel by Maxim Gorky. She was attracted to the Fedayan.

During the shah period nobody could say anything. There was no freedom of speech - even reading certain books or watching certain films was reason enough to be arrested. I first read about Fedayan from the newspapers – some group has started fighting with shah regime. I thought that is good when they don't let us even talk maybe this is the way forward. I was 15 or 16 at high school. At school we talked quietly, secretly, so everyone knew who opposed the regime but no-one dare say anything. The youth were very angry about why we couldn't say anything, why we couldn't be active in politics, in social movements. We were only free to dance and sing. I made contact with the Fedayan after the revolution. They were no longer hidden. They were free. For a short period all political parties were free and I knew some of them so I started to work with them. I was now a sociology student at the university in Ahwaz. The most favoured political groups there were Fedayan and Mojahadin. They didn't have any differences in politics or economics but only in ideology, they were Muslim. And I didn't believe in Islam or any religion, so I joined Fedayan.

At the same time as I was a sociology student I was also a secretary for the state owned oil company at its head office in Ahwaz. Before the revolution oil workers were on strike in Ahwaz. We wanted a union and a shora. I was born in MIS, Masjed Soleiman, Khuzestan province, the first city in the Middle East where oil was discovered by the British. There were 60 on the Ahwaz shora oil committee representing 6000 – drillers, production, engineering and construction. There were 3 women. One had been elected by the men in her production unit. The other two, including me, were elected only by women. We represented all the women like secretaries, engineers, administration, hospital - about 600 altogether. Politically, though I had joined Fedayan, I was very naïve. I was closely reading books. I really wanted to learn – that was why I chose sociology. I had wanted to study political science but the shah's government chose the students allowed to study this subject, so I chose sociology instead. By the time I attended my first shora committee meeting I was reading Marx. I also attended local Fedayan

⁴⁰³ See also: Interview evidence given to Peyman Jafari: Ch8 in *The paradox of revolution: the post revolutionary state and war* in Peyman Jafari. *Oil, Labour and Revolution in Iran: A Social History of Oil in the Iranian Oil Industry, 1973-83* (PhD thesis, Leiden University, 2018).

meetings. There was no one there to suggest how I act politically at work. It was more that they wanted to know what was going on.

The best part of the revolution was the shora and its activities. I still remember and I admire it, at that time we didn't talk about the differences, we talked about what we have in common. The leaders of the shoras were obviously religious people from probably Islamic Association but because we all had common needs, so we didn't talk about the differences. That was very good. For example I was on the cultural committee, the shora was divided into different committees. Then for the first time we heard that the oil minister was saying that all shoras must be removed. He said *shora pora maladie*. Maladie is a street word for junkie.

Did you see the shora as a potential political movement?

At that time no, but I said in the shora, the shora is the most important thing for us. It is where we can express our meaning, our views, we can say what we want, our means of expression. The government at that time was not so powerful but we, the people who made the revolution, felt very powerful. And we thought they are our representatives, they should do what we want.

I suggested that Khomeini's insistence that he would establish an Islamic Republic posed a threat to the feeling that the revolution would keep power in the hands of ordinary people.

We knew that from the beginning, from the first day, that they are going to establish Islamic Republic with all the laws derived from the Q'ran. It meant the decisions of Khomeini are the rules, then we knew that we didn't have any power. But many people in shora believed in Khomeini, in Islam, they believed they must obey Khomeini. Only the leftists didn't want this.⁴⁰⁴

Later in the year Kobra was arrested.

It was at the beginning of the fighting in Kurdistan and we in the Fedayan supported them. This was an excuse to arrest Fedayan supporters. I was in prison for 3 or 4 months.⁴⁰⁵ I was able to return to work after I was released, but the shora organisation had been dismantled.

⁴⁰⁴ This suggests that the religious minded workers did not see a contradiction between feeling they were in control, they had the power, and obeying Khomeini at the same time

⁴⁰⁵ https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=3&v=CYvQjCncbri

This is a video made in November 2018. It shows Rieneke Van Santen, Executive Director of Zamaneh Media in ZamanehGala, a Dutch independent media and human rights NGO. In the video Ms Van Santen

Kobra then discussed the politics of the hejab

Khomeini imposed the hejab in 1980, (he had backed off before in response to the International Womens Day demonstration in February 1979). We, the representatives, called a women's meeting. All the women came. We talked for several hours and we couldn't find a solution. I was the moderator of the meeting, chair person. A protest was called by the women in front of the main office. I couldn't attend, I was with my family. But some Islamists attacked them.⁴⁰⁶ They were very rough and the women felt they had to go to work. Some wanted to strike, some suggested protest again in front of main office. But there was no agreement. Also we were worried about the impact of the Iran Iraq war. We were very close to the Iraq border. This was seen as an imperialist threat – even that the shah might be brought back. We decided to accept the hejab, but just as a little scarf. But we also wrote a statement to announce that we accept in protest, that we are against it, we don't want it, you forced it on us. We were threatened with immediate dismissal if we refused hejab. In fact some women who still refused were sacked.

I asked Kobra to provide more details about shora activities in the earlier period

We talked about everything - production, management. But every day they (management) said that we were not allowed to interfere. We thought we had the power, but we didn't. Stopping production was not possible. It was not an option. People felt we had made the revolution now we must make progress. Most of the workers were religious and they trusted Khomeini. Some demands could be raised. For example, kindergarten. Workers also wanted coolers.⁴⁰⁷ You know oil workers have a high position, economically, compared to other workers. There were not really many things we wanted for ourselves. We wanted to interfere in political issues, for others.

I suggested to Kobra that she meant interfere on behalf of the rest of society. She agreed.

We then discussed the split in the Fadaiyan into its 'Majority' and 'Minority' organisations.

Minority continued to believe in the armed struggle. Majority believed a successful revolution had been carried out against imperialism. And we thought the regime was also anti imperialist.

But was anti imperialism enough? What about democratic rights?

provides a horrific account of prison conditions in Iran at this time, in particular, the way prisoners like Kobra could hear the screams of fellow prisoners facing execution.

⁴⁰⁶ See also description in (Jafari 2018: 466-7)

⁴⁰⁷ Air conditioners – this demand was realised (Jafari 2018: 461)

But there was a paradox. We raised the women's question with the Fadaiyan 'Majority'. We couldn't accept our leaders' response. They said the revolution was the priority. Anti imperialism was the priority. The demand for democracy was not given equal priority. Nor was there internal democracy in the Fadaiyan. I felt personally free in the Fadaiyan but I knew that it wasn't really democratic. Personally I did not accept their ideas and I was considered a 'problematic' member, a 'troublemaker'. I was one of the most experienced members of the Fadaiyan cell in Ahwaz. Most of the other members were students. I told them you haven't had to fight for the bread. So you don't what it is. You have read only the books and you are repeating what you have read. When the revolution started I had been working for 7 years. I was trusted in the cell as a friend, a comrade.

And you disturbed them when they realised that you were not loyal to the Soviet Russian version of communism?

I had read many books, many 'romances', novels, from Russia. From my reading I discovered that people are not happy in Russia. They have many questions. They realised they are not really free. I raised these questions in the cell and they said how dare you say these kind of things! Do you know better than our leaders?! I also said that there were differences of opinion about politics within the Soviet Union. They said no, no – there is only the decision of the party. I said that there had been differences of opinion even within the Soviet regime, within the Russian politbureau at the time of the shah – about selling weapons to the shah. Nobody knew about this. When I said it means there is also another voice in the party (The Soviet Communist Party at the time), they didn't know that. They said how do you dare say this. So I found the article and I showed them.

I had heard of Trotsky. There had been lots of discussions in the universities and amongst the political groups who for a short period were able to openly promote their ideas in the universities and on the streets. When I asked about him I was told he was against Lenin. I knew two Trotskyists. They were not bad boys but no one liked them, but I was interested in their questions.

ENDS.

Torab Saleth (skype interview 5/12/18)

National Secretary (dabir-e sarasari) Iran section Fourth International, 1979-82.

I asked Torab about the Fadaiyan.

This was the largest left group immediately after the revolution. Their name was famous. Anybody radicalising gravitated towards this name that they knew – considered by most of the youth - the left group that fought the shah. They became very popular – loads and loads of people went toward Fadaiyan. But there are many criticisms of them.

At the strategic level they were dominated by a Stalinist ideology⁴⁰⁸ – so they have a stages view of revolution, a Stalinist conception of the party. Theoretically, ideologically they are in same tradition as the Tudeh Party. They have modified some little words here and there but basically they don't believe in socialist revolution, they want some form of democratic revolution⁴⁰⁹ with leading role for proletariat. Out of that conception they had analysed the 'White Revolution' within the same framework as imperialism ie there some form of national bourgeoisie which is fighting imperialism and there is some kind of capitalism in Iran which is dependent on imperialism. That there is a block of pro imperialist capitalists ruling in Iran...so as soon as revolution happened they raised slogans like nationalise all imperialist industries, throw out all imperialist capitalists, liquidate the pro imperialist army. The result was that this didn't push them into any sort of clash with the Islamic leadership. They were more or less supporting them though not openly saying so.

About recruitment...

Mostly they recruited amongst the youth - they did recruit some workers - but mainly urban petty bourgeoisie. Some workers did gravitate towards them, but they were not a major force.

Did they have a perspective of building in the workplace?

⁴⁰⁸ The three largest organisations that called themselves Marxist, Fadaiyan, Tudeh, Paykar, with an opportunity of expanding after the revolution were all Stalinist. "They were all introduced to marxism through the experience of the Russian Revolution as seen in Soviet propaganda." (Behrooz: 148) ie in the Stalin period. Tudeh accepted the post Stalin 'reforms', and it remained loyal to the Soviet Union. Fadaiyan and Paykar were critical of the Soviet Union but "still clung to the image of Stalin as the iron will of the international proletariat." (Behrooz: 148) Behrooz accepts and applies Trotsky's concept of the "Stalin School of Falsification" (Behrooz: 158) He describes how the roots and evolution of Iranian Marxism were so damaged by this tradition. (Behrooz: 158-65) – particularly in relation to democracy. "Stalinist norms not only preclude free political activity in society...but demand ideological and political uniformity within the party itself." (Behrooz: 159)

⁴⁰⁹ Note, though, in practice they did not fight for democracy inside the 'Islamic' revolution.

Yes, they come with this idea that we need a 'red' trade union, the concept of a revolutionary union. The Comintern came up with something similar in 1920-21, then they realised this was a ridiculous slogan and they changed it.

But they began to have a few members in the shoras. Did they understand the potential of the shoras?

Not really. They obviously knew what shoras were they were calling for *Jomhoreye Shorayee* which means soviet republic.⁴¹⁰ But their concept of shora is shora as in factory council not shora as in Russian soviet. They had no concept of shora as a city wide organisation which exercises political power.

But even with that limited perspective, did they have a conception of uniting the 'factory councils' as an independent movement?

In the beginning they said all these shoras are all Islamic, most of them were actually calling themselves Islamic. This was not accidental. Most of the young workers were organised, radicalised by the general movement which was dominated by the religious leadership. They got most of their information when they were on general strike through the mosques, so these strike committees after the revolution called themselves Islamic shoras. There were two different organisations which appeared immediately after the revolution, Islamic shoras and Islamic Associations. They appeared in governmental and civil service departments and also in the private sector, industry, banks etc. Whatever was the working class organisation, the Islamic committees themselves organised the little support groups called Islamic Association – these are directly linked to the regime and the forces of the repression of the regime right from day 1. But alongside this the general mass of workers in the factory which are following the strike committees, now obviously they follow the shora. So these Islamic societies, except in very few exceptional circumstances were nothing to worry about as such, They were really minute organisations, the regime's little group inside the factory. But the workers were organised in these Islamic shoras which included everybody, including whoever was part of the Left at the time

The Fadaiyan in their newspapers called them all Islamic so they said as opposed to this lets build revolutionary unions.⁴¹¹ This is an idea from Tudeh Party. Historically Tudah had a big

⁴¹⁰ It seems to have been accepted in abstract but not in practice

⁴¹¹ It seems they fundamentally misunderstood shoras – almost dismissing them as 'Islamic' despite fact that secular leftist at this early stage could work inside shoras – as indeed some of their own members did.

base in the old trade unions. A number of these old trade unions still had people existing like transport, printing – Tudeh before the 1953 coup had quite a big base in them. So Tudeh tried to revive these old unions, so Fadaian, thinking along same line, developed concept of revolutionary unions. They said Tudeh unions are reformist, ours are revolutionary but basically it's the same idea. Obviously this didn't work. After a while, their line, without explanation or analysis, they gradually dropped the slogan for revolutionary unions and adopted the concept of building revolutionary shoras, yet avoiding participating in the actually existing shoras. Yet the actually existing shoras were completely open, all sorts of radical workers were in these shoras. There was a fight over who can appoint managers. These workers who were thinking of calling themselves Islamic councils immediately confronted the Islamic government – driven by the logic of class struggle itself, demonstrating to everybody the lines of cleavage in these shoras, in these councils – between the capitalists and the workers, forget the Islamic bit.

Fadaian did try to build shoras in industry but in the backward sectors in the border areas of the major industrial centres, for example, textile factories, brick making factories, small workshops basically. Now in some of these one young worker would become Fadaian member. Maybe there would be 10, 20 workers so he could easily become dominant force within that factory. So they would organise a council or call it shora. A few of these joined together and Fedayan claimed they had organised revolutionary shoras in south of Tehran. But in reality these were 20, 30 phoney little factories with no more than 20, 30 workers who were not to play any significant role in anything whatsoever. That's not where the major industries were. The major industries, the centre of industrialisation after the 'White Revolution' was on the road between Tehran and Karaj, the next city – at least a million and a half workers were along this route. Here the Fedayan were nowhere to be seen. There was a shora where I participated in some of their meetings at the Canada Dry factory. I managed to get into the meeting. About 100 were present. This was a factory of about 450. Present were workers who called themselves communists, there were muslims, sometimes fascistic muslims, all sorts that you can imagine. By participating in the discussion you would soon know who each one of them is. You had all sorts of ideas within this shora. So Fadaian could not participate within this atmosphere. Most of these little Stalinist sects were exactly the same. They just couldn't operate in this atmosphere where you had to fight for your views, they were not used to working in this mass organisation. So they just abandoned all this and went to where they could dominate which was the small factories.

There is another example – an example which must have been repeated a hundred times in Tehran alone. It was a factory connected to Rayovac battery factory in Japan. Like many industries in Tehran, these are joint venture companies. A foreign producer has provided the technology, the means of production - with some Iranian capitalists producing these under licence for the internal market. This was the biggest battery factory in Iran. It had 500-600 workers. The executive committee of the shora had been radicalised by the mosques. They had learned how to organise strikes from people they had met in the mosques. The Left had no influence on them before the revolution. They had not even met leftists. After the revolution the city is open. In front of Tehran University is the main centre for gatherings, for discussion. Everybody comes there. Newspaper sellers. Book sellers, everybody. Some even became Trotskyists simply by reading our newspapers. They would say ah this is all very good, we agree so let's contact these people, they came and they joined us. It shows how fluid the situation was in terms of the consciousness of the working class. Anyway this factory they had participated in the general strike, for the last three months of the general strike. The owners had escaped, they had left the country but the manager appointed by the owners was still there. They participated during the strike in the local neighbourhood committees also. Most of the members who became the leading members of the shora were also members of the neighbourhood committee. During the insurrection 50 or 60 of the workers from Rayovac actually participated in the fighting. The people who resisted the shah's guards, coming to the airforce base in Tehran to suppress the technicians. In this fight a lot of workers from Tehran participated, organised by the neighbourhood committees. They became armed after the insurrection. In Rayovac factory 30, 35 workers actually carried guns, arms. Immediately after the insurrection, they go to the manager's house, the manager had also escaped. They confiscate his assets and they discover 50 million toumans – equivalent in those days of 5 million pounds which they give to the local mosque. So these were the type of workers who took part in the insurrection, raid the house of the managers, and they were now managing the factory. They elected one of their own as the manager. And they had worked out through the books of the company that the quality control is based in Japan. They have to send samples to Japan for them to be given quality control as a condition for producing goods. In their fight with the government over who can manage this factory, they win the competition with the government by proving they are producing batteries of the same quality as before. So the government could not use the excuse that the factory is not working so we have to appoint a new manager. This was the fight. They didn't want the new manager. These workers are now fighting the Iranian government which has become the Islamic government. The workers have

become so radicalised they say these bastards are all linked to the bazaar merchants, to the same guys who used to screw us before the revolution, so why should we sell our goods through the same distribution network . We can sell batteries ourselves. So they set up tents to sell the batteries outside the factory on the main road between Tehran and Karaj, the main industrial centre. When they realised we supported them they accepted our suggestion to set up tents outside Tehran University. We said nobody would dare to touch you. This was three months into the revolution.

The Fedayan were nowhere to be seen. They made no attempt to intervene in these type of really radical workers' struggles against the new government. But there was another organisation in Iran, Paykar, the so-called Marxist Mojahadin. (Before the shah fell) most of Mojahadin leadership was in jail. The Marxists inside the Mojahadin organised a coup and took over the organisation. After the revolution, the Mojahadin returned to its Islamic roots and the Marxist Mojahadin called itself Paykar and became a separate organisation. Paykar as a Marxist organisation had already made a turn to the working class and sent all their members to work in factories. This is almost two years before the insurrection. So they were there when the revolution happened. So Paykar had a much larger base inside the working class, in Tehran at least, than anyone else. But then, exposing their petty bourgeois roots, they took all their members out of the factories! They didn't fight. They didn't fight for shoras. They didn't have the slogan of unification of the shoras. They argued that they had to turn to the poorer section of the masses, especially unemployed workers. They tried to organise the movement for unemployed workers. And they used their worker-base influence to push for this movement of unemployed workers. They could organise a Tehran demonstration of say 3 to 4000 people. But this was not the time for this type of approach. The main fight was in the workers councils, between the government and the working class.

I asked Torab for more details about his own political relationship with the radio battery workers

When they were in front of Tehran University, they had seen our comrades selling the newspaper – at that time you still freely sell newspapers. Because we were the only group calling for socialist revolution, they became attracted. They read the paper then they

contacted us for discussion. I met with three of them. Two of them later joined our group. They said you are the only group calling for united Tehran shoras' organisation.⁴¹²

How did the religious roots of these workers' organisation affect relations with secular revolutionary socialists?

I asked to attend shora meeting. They said ok but don't say who you are. One of the workers said I will introduce you as my brother, I will say you are a teacher but before you were a worker and you have a lot of experience in these matters. This is what happened – I was accepted. I used to go as a brother of one of the members of the factory council. But if I had declared myself as Socialist Workers Party then Islamic society in the factory would immediately arrest me and take me away. Don't forget Islamic Association is in the factory too. Even in the first few months you could suddenly disappear without anyone knowing. Nevertheless, these Islamic Associations at this time were mainly a bunch of idiots – they were still being trained in repression. If you were careful in such a meeting, not to use obvious 'communist' language, you could help advance the movement. So this shora did vote for a united shora organisation in Tehran – by simply me attending one shora meeting. I continued to attend these shora meetings over a period of 3 to 4 months. They became really radical. They would never join a communist group – they would never believe they were doing anything 'communist' – but they were confronting the Iranian capitalists as though there was no tomorrow. Don't forget it took the regime much longer to defeat the working class than it had taken them to defeat the Left. It took them at least two or three years.

ENDS.

⁴¹² Torab emphasises how small was their group when they returned to Iran after the revolution – nearly 100 - only 30 he would describe as cadres. But because their ideas fitted with the most advanced workers' struggles mood of the time they were able to grow to over 600 – over 400 were workers. The two key slogans: socialist revolution and united shora organisation.

