

THE POLITICS OF WORK, WORKPLACE AND COMMUNITY IN NOWA HUTA, POLAND¹

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This paper explores the relationship between work, workplace and community politics in the town of Nowa Huta in southern Poland. Nowa Huta is a town that was constructed, around a major industrial plant (the Lenin Steelworks), as central to the socialist project in Poland, but was also critical to events leading to the collapse of that project. The focus of the paper lies in considering the relationship between local workers and labour unions (especially Solidarity) and community organisations such as churches, other dissident movements and local government bodies in the construction, contestation and collapse of socialism in Poland. Using archive materials and stories from interviews in Nowa Huta, the paper narrates and analyses key events in the town's history and examines the relationship between the steelworks and the wider community. It explores how both internal and external representations of the community were structured by its particular historical development and by the labour politics of late-communist Poland. It concludes by discussing the post-1989 period of Nowa Huta's history and interrogating the changing relationship between workplace and community politics, noting that the close relationship of earlier periods has been somewhat broken down by economic and employment change.

Keywords: Poland, workplaces, communities

Introduction

In recent years there has been somewhat of a revival in labour geography. These new labour geographies have taken on many of the challenges of feminism, postmodernism and poststructuralism by recognising and exploring 'difference' and the articulation of class with other matrices of identity (such as race, gender, sexuality and generation) but has maintained its political economy foundations and its emphasis on understanding capitalism and its relations

¹ Much of this paper is derived from work in the archives of the School of Slavonic and East European Studies, UCL, London. The collections of Polish Non-Official Media (PNO) and the personal archives of Neal Ascherson (ASC) are incredible resources for exploring this period of Poland's history. The archival work complements repeated research visits to Kraków and Nowa Huta funded by the HSBC Holdings of the RGS-IBG and by the Polish Ministry of Education.

with labour. In his foreword to Andrew Herod's 1998 book, Richard Walker argues for a revived political economy of place which interrogates the grounding of difference within employment, work and industry and draws attention back to the social relations of production in 'real' places and spaces (Walker, 1998, p.xvi). Walker also promotes a labour geography which is 'telescopic', able to study labour at a variety of scales, looking at the local, the global and anywhere in between.

In a sense, this paper takes on these challenges and, particularly, aims to give some answers to Andrew Herod's question of "how workers actively mold and shape spatial relations and landscapes as an *integral* part of their political praxis and as a source of political power" (Herod, 1998c, p.5). In addition it seeks to contribute to debates ongoing which focus on the new geographies of relationships between work, home and community which construct new models of union organising and new role for unions in communities (*ibid.*). This paper also continues and develops a tradition of exploring the changing relationship between workplaces and industrial communities undergoing radical economic restructuring. The work of Ray Hudson, Huw Beynon, David Sadler and Fred Robinson is especially useful in this context (see, for example, Anderson *et al.*, 1983; Beynon *et al.*, 1989; Robinson and Sadler, 1985).

In the specific context of east central Europe, there has been a growing body of work which analyses the changing role of labour and of labour unions in a post-socialist context (see, for example, Herod, 1998b). A number of writers have drawn attention to the centrality of work, and specifically heavy industrial work, within the socialist project (Haraszti, 1977; Burawoy and Lukács, 1992) whilst others have explored in detail the relationship between the workplace and the community (Domański, 1997; Ciecocińska, 1993) under socialism.²

Nowa Huta: a town of socialist labour?

Nowa Huta was founded in 1949 as *the* central project of Poland's first Six Year Plan (adopted in 1948). The project involved the construction of both an immense integrated steel works and a town to house the construction workers and steel makers on the eastern edge of old Kraków.³ At least part of the rationale for the town's construction was a deliberate attempt at social engineering, an attempt on the part of the state and Party to counterbalance the perceived

² Stenning (1998) explores the work-workplace-community relationship in more theoretical detail.

³ More details on the history and meanings of Nowa Huta's construction can be found in Stenning (2000).

bourgeois and intellectual character of Kraków. The old city of Kraków was not seen as an area of particular support for the new socialist regime and it was hoped that the location of Nowa Huta adjacent would foster more socialist, more proletarian ideals and attitudes in the region. As Domański suggests, socialist policy making equated socialism quite straightforwardly with industrialisation and urbanisation such that “[s]ymbols of industrialisation such as Nowa Huta, Płock, Puławy and other towns endowed with new factories were principal symbols of socialism as well” (Domański, 1997, p.175). At its height the steelworks (Huta imienia Lenina [HiL], or the Lenin Steelworks) employed 43,000 workers and the population grew to approximately a quarter of a million. HiL was the central institution in the town, involving itself in social, welfare, housing and retail provision on top of employment and, as Ciechocińska suggests, “the workplace was turned into the main axis of organization of social life” (1993, p.32). The socialist character of Nowa Huta was inscribed heavily in its townscape, through Stalinist architectural styles and the naming of streets and districts to epitomise the goals and ideals of the new regime,⁴ and the town was very much represented throughout Poland and beyond as a town of labour.

This image of a straightforwardly proletarian community is however hard to sustain. The construction of a new town meant that the population was built from scratch and was largely built on the basis of migration from the countryside in the Kraków region. As late as 1970, 74% of the district’s population was of peasant origin (Soja, 1990) and, as Fisher notes, their largely conservative “rural attitudes and mores were incorporated into the newly constructed urban environment” (Fisher, 1962, p.262). Fisher’s research in the late 1950s and early 1960s in Nowa Huta describes how the new residents of Nowa Huta attempted to bring their old rural lifestyles into the new town, to keep livestock and tend gardens (to the extent of housing pigs on balconies and coal in baths). There was no clean break with the past and the early Nowa Huta population was certainly as agricultural and rural as it was industrial and urban. They may have worked in the new steelworks, but they were by no means the class conscious proletariat that had been hoped for. Nor were they wholeheartedly committed to the ideologies of

⁴ From 1953 until the post-socialist era, the town possessed, amongst others, a Six-Year Plan Avenue, a Lenin Avenue, a December Revolution Avenue, an Avenue of the Shock Workers, and streets named after Polish-Soviet Friendship, the Soviet Army, Marx, Engels and the Great Proletariat. Many of the names of the neighbourhoods represented the intended social and economic characteristics of the town - Młodości (‘youth’), Stalowe (‘steel’) and Hutnicze (‘metallurgical’), for example - and were twinned with names reflecting both ‘traditional’ Polish cultures, such as Krakowiaków and Goralii (‘highlander’), and the optimism of construction - Słoneczne (‘sunny’), Zielone (‘green’), Zgody (‘harmony’) and Urocz (‘charming’). Even the names of cinemas were not immune to ideological appellation - the first were named Stal (‘steel’) and Swit (‘dawn’) (Kalendarium, 1973).

socialism. Notwithstanding their role in the construction of this atheistic project in Poland, the population's origin caused it to be seen as "a community traditionally very attached to religion" (Press Office of the Polish Episcopate, 1983).

Nowa Huta was built without a church and many of the early struggles in the town were focused around calls for the construction of a church in the town. These struggles testified to the growing intertwining of the life of the community and the life of the workplace, and wider labour politics. The people of Nowa Huta first erected a wooden cross in the heart of the town 1957 and replaced this with a steel cross on April 27th 1960. The regime's response to this was heavy-handed and struggles for the cross became closely linked with broader opposition to the regime. The construction of a steel cross in a steel community is symbolic enough, but the 'consecration' of this cross in April 1960 was accompanied by the singing of both religious hymns and the Internationale. It is clear that the religious and class identity of the people of Nowa Huta was merging, that the church, previously a site of rural conservatism, was becoming associated with quite radical, worker-based activities.

These links between the church and labour in Nowa Huta and in Poland more broadly were reinforced by the election of a Polish Catholic, former Cardinal of Kraków Karol Wojtyła, to the Papacy in 1978. Not only did this election engender widespread national pride and hope for the future, but the new Pope sought every opportunity to link the struggles for religion to the importance of labour and work, engaging with the discourses of the socialist regime. He did this particularly in Nowa Huta and during his first visit to Poland as Pope in June 1979, Wojtyła visited the town and spoke at length on these issues. He underlined the historic importance of churches and crosses on the terrain that became Nowa Huta, stating that "the history of Nowa Huta is also written by means of the cross", that

"the arrival of new men to begin new work ... brought with them the new Cross. It was they who raised it as a sign of their will ... This church [at Bieńczyce, the first in Nowa Huta, consecrated in 1977] was born from the new work. I make bold to say it was born from Nowa Huta. For we all know that man's work bears deeply engraved on it the mystery of the Cross, the law of the Cross. In it comes true what the Creator said after the fall of man: 'In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread' (Gen 3:19). Both the old work in the field, which makes wheat grow, but also thorns and thistles, and the new work in the blast furnaces and the new foundries are always carried out 'with the sweat of one's brow.' ... The Cross cannot be separated from man's work. Christ cannot be separated from man's work. This has been confirmed at Nowa Huta." (Press Office of the Polish Episcopate, 1979)

Wojtyla continued to stress the importance of the dignity of work in the dignity of man [sic], arguing that Christ would not accept that “man be considered, or that man consider himself, merely as a means of production” (*ibid.*). He repeated these themes on each of his visits to Nowa Huta throughout the Solidarity and martial law periods (see below), proclaiming in 1983 as he consecrated another church in Nowa Huta:

“Men and women workers! I wish to thank you today from the depths of my heart for this church dedicated to Saint Maksimilian, and for all the churches in Nowa Huta! They have risen here against the background of the foundries and chimneys of the factories, thanks to your faith and thanks to your Christian solidarity” (Press Office of the Holy See, 1983)

Saint Maksimilian is the canonised Father Maksimilian Kolbe, a Polish priest who gave his life for the life of a Jew in Auschwitz and is closely associated with Polish martyrdom at the hands of occupying forces. The Pope’s references to Kolbe and to ‘solidarity’ (albeit ‘Christian solidarity’) in 1983 as Poland was still under Martial Law are clearly meaningful.⁵

The 1980s and the rise of Solidarity

Throughout the 1960s and 70s Poland witnessed a series of one-off actions by workers in industrial cities, mostly sparked by price rises but developing into bigger political protests. The most sustained and serious of these was in Gdańsk in 1970 but this too was repressed by the state, more violently than in the past. Prices were frozen for ten years until July 1980 when, without announcement, meat prices were increased. As in previous years, the price rises were immediately followed by strike action in the country’s largest industrial enterprises. By the end of July, the strikes had spread to much of Poland, involving over one hundred factories.

On 14th August, the strikes spread to the Lenin shipyard in Gdańsk, sparked off by the dismissal of Anna Waletynowicz, a veteran of the 1970 protests. Within days of striking, the Gdańsk workers established an Inter-Factory Strike Committee (*Międzyzakładowa Komisja Strajkowa* or MKS) to coordinate the demands of strikers across the region.⁶ As Bivand notes, these MKSs, which were replicated elsewhere, were explicitly local organisations which

⁵ Jan Lytynski, a member of the Committee for the Defence of Workers (KOR) and editor of *Robotnik*, an oppositional newspaper, argues that the mixing of religion with both worker symbolism and expressions of nationalism can be explained by popular faith in Catholic Church as true defender of rights of Polish people (*New York Review of Books*, 1980).

⁶ For more on August 1980 and the history of *Solidarność* (Solidarity), see MacShane, 1981; Laba, 1991; Kennedy, 1991; Ascherson, 1981; Ruane, 1982 and Touraine et al., 1983.

reflected “local abilities, including knowledge of local informal contact networks (for example, parishes) which could be harnessed by local people taking initiatives in their own interests” (Bivand, 1983, p.399). Their creation as local organisations was critical to the later form and function of Solidarność as a trade union.

The BBC World Service recorded Warsaw Radio as reporting ‘rhythmic’ working in Huta Lenina on the 18th and 19th August, but a reported overhauling of a furnace may well have hidden a go-slow or walk-out (*BBC Summary of World Broadcasts*, 20.8.80). Certainly by 20th August, much of the steelworks was out. The diffusion of the strikes to Nowa Huta and the rest of the industrial south, including the Upper Silesian industrial region, was interpreted as “an ominous sign for Poland’s Communist Party leader, Mr Gierek, who owes his own political support to the working class in the south” (*The Guardian*, 21.8.80). It was reported that “near Kraków, in southern Poland, workers interrupted production at the steel mills of Nowa Huta - one of the country’s industrial showpieces ... the first shift at the Nowa Huta steelmill reported for work yesterday only after reaching an agreement with management on unspecified demands ... two departments at the plant began a strike on Tuesday, but it ended after ‘several hours’” (*ibid.*). This apparent settlement did not hold. In the days to come more and more departments walked out. The irony of the strikes taking hold in Nowa Huta was not lost on foreign journalists who noted, as they did throughout Martial Law, that this was a town “which the government built as a model of socialist planning” (*International Herald Tribune*, 21.8.80).

Without treating the strikes of late August overly superficially, it is enough to note here that they culminated in the signing of the so-called Gdańsk Agreement between the Party and the strikers on 31st August 1981.⁷ Though originally agreed in Gdańsk, similar terms were subsequently agreed across Poland and those demands which had national significance were replicated from workplace to workplace and from town to town. In the context of this paper, the most important of the Party’s concessions was the right to form free trade unions. This led directly to the formalisation of August’s strike committees into Solidarność (or Solidarity) and its registration as an independent trade union. The months after the Gdańsk Agreement, in late

⁷ The Gdansk Agreement promised the right to strike and form independent trade unions; an increase in wages; public broadcast of Catholic Mass; relaxation of censorship; reform of welfare provision; selection of managers on the basis of ability not politics; and a commitment to thorough economic reform with worker consultation, but maintained the touchstones of orthodoxy and leading role of the Party.

1980 and 1981, were a period of consolidation and institutionalisation within Solidarność. Membership was expanded and the structures of organisational management were established.

The Solidarność union took its organisational structure from the units which had emerged during August 1980. It remained a union based on regional and local units rather than sectoral, branch or occupational structures. The local and regional Inter-Factory Strike Committees (MKSSs) which had emerged during August 1980 were converted into Founding Committees (KZs) which maintained the link between major local enterprises as the basis of organisation. In cases where no MKS had been in existence, Inter-Factory Founding Committees (*Międzyzakładowa Komiteta Założycielska*, MKZs) were established on the same basis. The Kraków MKZ was founded in early September 1980, bringing together workers from 134 workplaces under the leadership of Stanisław Zawada and a seventeen-strong presidium. Zawada and three other members of the presidium were Nowa Huta-based,⁸ with two working at HiL and two working at allied enterprises (*Stadium*, 1980, p.17). The creation of MKZ Kraków was followed by a meeting of 5000 delegates from the 134 workplaces in the People's Theatre in Nowa Huta on 15th September 1980 and, although the information point for MKZ Kraków was in old Kraków, the people and places of Nowa Huta played a critical role in the organisation's development. By 18th September 160 workplaces had joined the local MKZ and individual membership was growing fast (*op. cit.*) and within weeks of the Gdańsk Agreement, ninety percent of HiL's 38,000 workers had joined the new union.

Solidarność's national structure reflected its local and regional base with the national KZ (Founding Committee) being made up of leaders from the regional organisations. Key enterprises (such as Huta Katowice) and major industrial regions (including Gdańsk, Lublin, Kraków and Jasterzēbie Zdrój) were represented by additional members. Kraków's representative was HiL's Stanisław Zawada (*op. cit.*). This structure was supported by the so-called *Siec*, or Network of Leading Enterprises, established on 10th March 1981 which stemmed from discussions between Solidarity activists in the Gdańsk and Szczecin shipyards and soon grouped together seventeen leading enterprises. Those enterprises included many of the coastal shipyards which had been home to Solidarity, the Cegielski works in Poznań, HiL in Nowa Huta, the Wujek mine in Katowice, the Ursus tractor factory in Warsaw, the Marchlewski textile plant in Łódź and "other similar major prestigious bastions of Polish

⁸ These were Jerzy Kucera (HiL), Mieczysław Gil (journalist, *Głos Nowej Huty*) and Andrzej Cyran (Biprostal).

industry” (Holland, 1983, p.13). *Siec* acted through a series of meetings rotating from city to city, contributing to policy debate within *Solidarność* and these factories became key sites to watch in the development of Solidarity over the next few years.

At a local scale, *Solidarność* took on the roles of much more than a trade union. Bivand argues that its spatial construction meant that the local organisation was regarded by the people “as an agency to whom they could turn in pursuit of their rights in any kind of conflict with the State and its officials” (Bivand, 1983, p.402). MacDonald (1983) adds that *Solidarność* came to replace the Party as *the* social centre. He quotes Bogdan Borusiewicz, one of the Gdańsk activists, as stating

“In Poland nowadays, society gathers around the free trade unions ... In the eyes of the people, the new trade unions should do everything: they should fulfil the role of trade unions, participate in the administration of the country, be a political party and act as a militia. that is, detain drunkards and thieves, they should teach morals ...” (*ibid.*, p.31)

In this way, the nascent *Solidarność* organisations and their leaderships became community leaders expected to act in spheres well beyond the workplace. This role developed out of two key features of the August strikes. Firstly, the union’s spatial structure and commitment to a bottom-up, inter-factory constitution was opposed to a branch-based structure which would have had no clear local core and would be oriented out of the locality. In Nowa Huta, the Founding Committee was very clearly associated with HiL and its allied enterprises and in this way was clearly linked to Nowa Huta as a whole, dominated as it was by HiL workers and their families. Secondly, though the August strikes had begun in key enterprises, support for and interest in them stretched well beyond the individual plants. Other workers, families, students and much of the intelligentsia associated themselves with the strikers and gave the emergent *Solidarność* the appearance of a broad-based social movement rather than a narrow trade union. The HiL *Solidarność* association did dominate the local committee and lead the locality in organisation but it did this by servicing the wider community. This local orientation and the development of tight connections between workplace politics and community politics did also develop however out of the nature of the construction of socialism in Poland (and east central Europe more widely). The close association between town and industry and the centrality of the workplace in communities under socialism was maintained as Solidarity grew. In this new political context that close association served the free trade unions rather than the regime and the workplace-community link persisted, albeit in a different form. In particular, the construction by the regime of communities such as Nowa Huta, with one central and critical

enterprise, gave Solidarity a set of very strong bases for community action and community cohesion - the centrality of the enterprise was reflected in a very strong and very influential new trade union organisation.

Huta Lenina, Nowa Huta and martial law

The overwhelming success and strength of the new Solidarność union coupled with waves of strikes in late 1981 scared the regime considerably. Although at this time, Polish radio reported that “all big factories, shops and the transport system in the Polish capital were operating normally [and] in the important city of Crakow [sic], the radio said, work went on in most enterprises without disruption ... western diplomats quoting unconfirmed reports, said that violence had broken out at the Nowa Huta steel works at Crakow [sic].” (*The Times*, 6.12.81). In response to this kind of action, key enterprises (including HiL, Huta Katowice and Huta Warszawa) were occupied by the military and, apparently fearful of Soviet intervention in the mode of Budapest 1956 and Prague 1968, the Polish leader General Wojciech Jaruzelski declared Martial Law on December 13th 1981. The Martial Law regulations stipulated, amongst other things:

1. Army control of Warsaw;
2. Internal and international communications severed and frontiers sealed;
3. Sale of petrol suspended;
4. Schools and universities closed;
5. Militarisation of transport, telecommunications, mining, power and other key industries;
6. Arrest and internment of Solidarność leaders.

Under Martial Law, HiL (along with the Silesian coal mines and the steelworks at Warsaw and Katowice) was formally militarised and dissident workers were subjected to army discipline (Davies, 1986, p.425). The immediate response to Jaruzelski’s declaration of Martial Law was the reformation of strike committees and a wave of occupation strikes in enterprises in an attempt to prevent their militarisation. The most notorious of these strikes was in the Wujek colliery where up to 14 workers were killed by troops trying to take control of the mine but HiL too embarked on a sit-in. Reports from the HiL sit-in called for a fight against fear arguing that “they’re more afraid of us, that’s why they create a police state, intern our leaders” and drawing attention to the strength of solidarity (little ‘s’, but by implication big ‘S’) “we’re strong because we’re together ... we workers, engineers, students and activists from the Regional and Factory Commission ... Pistols, tanks and truncheons are nothing against a

united society” (*Informacji Solidarności*, 1981). The local press reported that, soon after the formation of a strike committee in HiL, the workers were joined by militant students from independent students unions after their eviction from Kraków’s universities (cited in Sabbat-Swidlicka, 1982, p.6). Although the strike was taking place at HiL, it involved people and ideals from well beyond the workplace.

The last two weeks of 1981 played witness to events which were to become all too familiar in the next few years. By December 17th it was reported that combined police and army units had surrounded and forced entry into the barricaded HiL (*ibid.*). The official press claimed that the ‘surrender’ of the occupying workers had been easily achieved and normal work in the plant was swiftly resumed. However, both Nowa Huta and old Kraków hosted major actions in sympathy with the murdered Wujek miners the same day, flying national flags with black bands of mourning and demonstrating at the gates of HiL and at Kraków’s Mickiewicz monument. In a echo of future responses, the crowds were dispersed by water cannon. These reports of repression by water cannon were accompanied by unconfirmed reports of shooting in both Kraków and Nowa Huta. Troops in the city were certainly supported by armoured personnel carriers (*The Times*, 18.12.81).

It was already during these first events that HiL became identified both by the Polish regime and by foreign journalists as one of a group of “traditionally maverick factories” (*ibid.*) along with many of the other *Siec* enterprises. Week after week reports came through from Poland (often patchily) of street battles, the use of tear gas and water cannon by the state, the charging of protestors by police, troops and the detested ZOMO⁹ and other desperate acts of state brutality. Many of these actions were concentrated in a few key sites¹⁰ across Poland and as *The Times* journalist, Roger Boyes, who was in Poland throughout the crisis, wrote in September 1982 “the 6 centres of unrest - Warsaw, Gdańsk, Wrocław, Katowice, Nowa Huta, Częstochowa - are also the cities with the best organized Solidarity cells, the leaders of whom are regarded as the overall leadership of the underground union” (*The Times*, 1.9.82). It was also

9 ZOMO (Zomotoryzowane Oddziały Milicji Obywatelskiej, Motorized Divisions of the Citizens’ Militia) were the élite, heavily armed paramilitary forces, commanded directly by General Jaruzelski, perhaps comparable to the CRS of contemporary France. They were popularly known as the Gestapo and younger activists found Gestapo-baiting an interesting if dangerous pastime (*The Guardian*, 8.10.82). ZOMO forces were supported by Reserve Units of the Citizens Militia (ROMO). The role and make-up of ROMO is discussed further below.

10 Many of the actions were also concentrated on a few key dates - initially, May Day (1.5), Constitution Day (3.5), the anniversary of the Gdańsk Agreement (31.8), the 13th of every month (the anniversary of the declaration of Martial Law).

these centres in which sporadic yet determined action continued through the lean years of the mid-late 1980s when police force intimidated weaker localities into relative acquiescence (*International Herald Tribune*, 2.5.84). In the 1982 words of HiL's Władysław Hardek, "Krakow, with Nowa Huta in particular, looks like a besieged city, with patrols armed to the teeth, dogs and heavy armour; all this was intended to break our morale. But despite all this THERE WAS A PROTEST" (original emphasis; *Voice of Solidarity*, 5.1.83, p.9).

In many ways, the declaration of Martial Law led to strengthening of militancy in industrial heartlands and strengthened too the local base of Solidarność. As Solidarność was forced underground, it was the local units which became critical to continued organisation.

Solidarność became almost centreless as many leaders were interned and those who were not tried to avoid future internment. Organisation was dispersed but activists at the local level knew from whom and where they could find sources of support and advice. In the absence of central guidance, local Solidarność organisations were forced to provide local leadership in resistance against Martial Law. Bivand (1983) argues further that it was indeed Solidarność's decentralised structure that permitted it to head underground and survive there.

Nationally, a Provisional Coordinating Committee (TKK) did emerge but this was itself very much a decentralised and centreless organisation whose members were un-interned representatives from the Warsaw, Gdańsk, Lower Silesia (Wrocław), Upper Silesia (Katowice) and Kraków regions. For the first years of Martial Law, the Kraków region's representative was Władysław Hardek, an HiL worker. Late 1983 saw the reactivation of the *Siec* structure on the initiative of the TKK within which HiL continued to play a role (Coordinating Office, 1984). The Kraków regional organisation, in its underground form, had two district strike committees, one for old Kraków and one for Nowa Huta, with the Nowa Huta committee dominated, as before, by HiL (*Voice of Solidarity*, 7.8.83, p.6).

Much of Kraków's underground organising took place in Nowa Huta, often in the basement of the Church of the Ark, Nowa Huta's first church. Protest in Nowa Huta was centred on a few key sites which repeatedly appeared in contemporary news reports - the churches at Bieńczyce (the Church of the Ark), Mogiła and Mistrzejowice, the statue of Lenin and aleja Roź (in effect,

To these nationwide dates were added other local dates which commemorated particular events in the locality. In Nowa Huta, the most important of these was the anniversary of the murder of Bogdan Włosik, discussed below.

the town's central square) and the gates of HiL. The most common route for marching demonstrators was from the steelworks to the church at Bieńczyce, with protestors often marching from both and meeting in the centre of town. Throughout 1982, 1983 and 1984, key dates in Poland's and Solidarity's history were marked with demonstrations and more or less violent clashes with the security forces in Nowa Huta. What follows are just a selection of the events which rocked Nowa Huta in these years:

“In Nowa Huta a march was held by several thousand steel workers but they too were broken up by the ZOMO riot police. Hand-to-hand fighting between workers and police then broke out and car and shop windows were shattered.” (*The Times*, 1.9.82)

“demo. 13.9.82 at Bieńczyce, children's catechism class disrupted, wall of church damaged” (NSZZ Solidarity, 1983, p.35)

“in Nowa Huta riot police used tear gas and water cannon to disperse demonstrations. Workers marched from HiL, gathering demonstrators on the way; young people clashed with riot police in evening” (*International Herald Tribune*, 16.9.82)

“In the Nowa Huta disturbances, residents of the Krakow suburb - set up in the 1950s as a model socialist industrial community - choked as the tear gas billowed through the streets. Police sealed off the streets around the steelworks, and the demonstrators escaped through back yards and alleys.” (*International Herald Tribune*, 14.10.82)

“disturbances began when steelworkers attempted to march to a nearby church” (*International Herald Tribune*, 15.10.82)

“militia have mounted 24-hour guards on likely objects of attack, including a large bronze statue of Lenin” (*The Times*, 18.10.82)

“water cannons and tear gas used to break up rally in Nowa Huta” (*International Herald Tribune*, 2.5.83)

“Some 10,000 demonstrators were believed to have staged May Day protests in the southern steel producing city and clashes with the police are said to have continued until nightfall.” (*The Times*, 3.5.83)

“in Nowa Huta crowds of people participated in 3 marches to the central square from HiL and from the churches in Bieńczyce and Mogiła; attacked and dispersed many times; at 2pm communication with Krakow was cut off and roads were blockaded” (*Voice of Solidarity*, 10.6.83, p.8)

“Aug 31st - 10,000 workers clash with police in Nowa Huta” (*Voice of Solidarity*, 10.9.83, p.2)

“31 August demos - ZOMO began firing gas and concussion grenades, trams destroyed, buses turned over; ZOMO brutally beat demonstrators often to the point of loss of

consciousness; fighting spread throughout Nowa Huta and lasted till evening. Also fighting near church at Mistrzejowice (Maksimilian Kolbe) following a short mass; ZOMO also attacked people leaving Bieńczyce church. Over 100 people injured, several score detained.” (*Voice of Solidarity*, 22.10.83, p.7)

Only Gdańsk was able to ‘compete’ with Nowa Huta over the level of violence inflicted during the Martial Law years (*The Times*, 4.5.84) and the town gained a strong reputation as a militant locality. As some of the above quotes testify, Nowa Huta’s expected pro-Party stance was repeatedly held up as contrast to the apparent disobedience of workers and residents. In the Martial Law years, the radical praxis of Nowa Huta’s working class shaped very much both its self-image and its external representations, whilst also shaping the conflict itself. The foreign media were replete with headlines such as ‘Gdansk workers end 2-day strike; police rout Nowa Huta protestors’ (*International Herald Tribune*, 14.10.82), ‘Polish riot police break up fresh protest in Nowa Huta’ (*International Herald Tribune*, 16-17.10.82) and ‘Steelworkers of Nowa Huta in double mourning’ (*The Times*, 21.10.82).

Perhaps the most dramatic events in Nowa Huta during the Martial Law years were the deaths of two protestors, one in October 1982 and another in May 1983. In 1983, Solidarity had registered a total of 56 people who had died at the hands of ZOMO and the other security forces, and each of these deaths was commemorated across Poland, but Nowa Huta’s two deaths in particular played an important role in cohering community consciousness and providing a focus for local protest in the town. The deaths of Bogdan Włosik and Ryszard Smagur were both followed by days and nights of rioting and their funerals were attended by thousands of local people. The ‘double mourning’ cited in *The Times* article above was seen to be a “classic Polish fusion of the private and the political” (*The Times*, 21.10.82). Roger Boyes, *The Times* journalist, argued that “most of the 25,000 people gathered in the hillside cemetery, had come to mourn not only Włosik but also the death of Solidarity”¹¹ (*ibid.*). For weeks after Włosik’s death, the streets of Nowa Huta resembled a town under siege with the security forces repressing any attempt at protest. Nevertheless, the wreaths laid for Włosik formed a mound six-foot high and soon after his death one of the town’s streets was renamed after Włosik.¹²

11 Włosik had died during demonstrations protesting the final dissolution of Solidarity.

12 Although the street reverted to its former name, the square outside the church at Bieńczyce has been adorned with a monument to Włosik and named after him.

The steelworks and the churches of Nowa Huta were singled out for persecution in the Martial Law years. Solidarity and KOR¹³ leaders from HiL, including Mieczysław Gil, Stanisław Handzlik and five others, were arrested and sentenced for trying to organize strikes and ‘refusing to desist from trade union activity’ (*The Times*, 11.3.82; *International Herald Tribune*, 8.3.82; FCO, 1982). Hundreds of workers were detained, arrested and occasionally interned and in August 1983 there emerged insubstantial reports of Władysław Hardek, Kraków’s TKK representative, turning himself in and divulging Solidarity secrets to the security forces (*Voice of Solidarity*, 10.9.83, p.2). The war against the church was formally intensified in March 1982 under the auspices of ‘Operation Raven’ which identified eight ‘extremist’ priests in the Kraków region and sought evidence of their criminality at all security service interrogations and through a network of trained informants (NSZZ Solidarity, 1983). Priests and others associated with the church, including seminary students and altar boys, were repeatedly detained and interrogated and particular surveillance was implemented at the churches in Bieńczyce, Mogiła and Mistrzejowice. Atrocities carried out in and around churches were especially condemned, not least by Kraków’s church leader, Cardinal Marcharski, who, echoing the Pope’s earlier statements, said, after the storming of the church at Bieńczyce on 13th September 1982, “Every house and every church demands to be treated with respect, the Church of our Lady, Queen of Poland in Bieńczyce¹⁴ deserves all the more respect because it is the fruit of the labour of Nowa Huta’s inhabitants” (*ibid.*, p.35).

This image of the church, the steelworks and the wider community uniting against the repression of the security forces is certainly an attractive one. It is empowering to think that in the face of such brutality, communities cohered around a common enemy. It is simple to see the situation in Poland as black and white, as the ‘goodies’ against the ‘baddies’. It is however perhaps too simple. I have already cited a number of activists who identified the foundation of Solidarity’s strength in precisely its solidarity, its allying of students, workers, women and children, intellectuals and priests. This was clearly a powerful alliance and must have been at least part of the truth if 25,000 people attended Bogdan Włosik’s funeral and participation in demonstrations regularly reached topped 10,000. However, the security forces were also convinced that they had a string network of loyalists and informants. A ROMO (reserve)

13 KOR (Komitet Obrony Robotników, or Committee for the Defence of Workers) was an organisation of intellectuals established after the Gdańsk events of 1970 which had very close links to Solidarity.

14 The full name of this church is The Church of the Ark of our Lady, Queen of Poland. It is located in the Bieńczyce district of Nowa Huta and is known by many combinations and permutations of this name.

militiaman from Nowa Huta, interviewed by Solidarity, stated "... I got to see how informers operated ... They are people of all ages, from 18 to 70. A guy like that walks long the street towards you and says he's going to the police station. A moment later, he emerges, and we are told that something is happening in such and such a place" (*Voice of Solidarity*, 8.10.83, p.11). Visits to HiL by Communist Party leader Stanislaw Kania in November 1980 (Ruane, 1982) and deputy prime minister Rakowski in April 1983 (*The Times* ??, 27.4.83, archive ref. 47) certainly brought out steelworkers in support of the regime.¹⁵ Furthermore, many more workers and other residents were, unsurprisingly, too scared to be on the streets.

This is not the only reason why it is difficult to maintain a strict division between supporters of the regime and the opposition. The abovementioned ROMO militiaman, pseudonym Rad, was also a member of Solidarity and was not alone in possessing such a split persona. Members of the public were called up to serve in the ROMO forces and could not refuse without severe penalty. They were also frequently called to serve in their home neighbourhoods. Rad described how, having been sent out into Nowa Huta, this "happened to the guy standing next to me. Apparently, we were standing three minutes away from his family home. He says to me 'My parents live four blocks away from here'" (*Voice of Solidarity*, 8.10.83, p.11). Rad claims that they never carried out identity checks, as ordered, "there was nobody 'zealous' amongst us", they never caught anybody from Solidarity and even "when the occasion presented itself and when nobody was looking, we would restick torn or badly stuck 'Solidarność' leaflets." Asked about the typical ROMO militiaman, Rad replied "I'm about the most typical, i.e. I'm a Catholic, a member of 'Solidarność' etc. All the others seemed to have the same convictions as me" (*ibid.*).

When strike action emerged again in 1988 (again in immediate response to price rises), HiL and Nowa Huta once again played a central role in the setting of political agendas and the forging of new deals. The workers of HiL struck in April 1988 and as Krzysztof Nowak wrote: "on April 26th 1988, the steel workers' strike in Nowa Huta ushered in a new stage of political changes in Poland" (1992, p.138/9). Their demands, which included wage hikes, indexation of wages to offset inflation, extra pay for arduous work, sick benefits and the reinstatement of sacked Solidarity leaders, set the standards for strike demands across the country, as enterprise after enterprise followed suit. The town became a site of regular and widespread

¹⁵ In late 1980, an estimated 700,000 to 2 million members of Solidarity were also Communist Party members.

demonstrations and protests, whilst the business of organising opposition frequently took place in the basement of the Church of the Ark. Strikes spread again in August 1988 and the resurrected Solidarity¹⁶ effectively managed to hold the Party to ransom. Finally on the symbolic August 31st, eight years after the signing of the Gdańsk Agreement, the Party met Wałęsa and conceded a series of Round Table discussions on the future of Poland.

At a local scale, once again the 1988 strikes engendered a mixing of the public and the private as striking workers were joined by students, friends, family, the church and others (Błaszkiwicz *et al.*, 1994). The 1988 protestors were not only veterans of the 1980 strikes, but also young workers and other young people whose lives had been built on the formative experiences of Martial Law, marked by the milestones of Polish opposition, both locally and nationally. Many of these protestors, brought up on struggle and dissent, viewed Solidarność as a movement, not a union. Błaszkiwicz *et al.* draw attention, in their work on the centres and meanings of the 1988 strikes, to the ways in which “the days and nights spent together in very difficult circumstances engendered a sense of community - a community of people linked by experience” (1994, p.30), bringing together veteran activists and long-term workers with people whose futures were more uncertain and who possessed few solid roots in the workplace.

Certainly the wider political scene, not least Gorbachev in the Kremlin, coupled with the catastrophic state of the Polish economy, meant that the re-emergence of Solidarity in 1988 was more successful than events at the start of the decade. The Round Table talks conceded semi-free elections and effectively brought to an end 40 years of communism in Poland.

Post-Socialism, Solidarity and the future of Nowa Huta

The elections to the Polish sejm in June 1989, which followed the Round Table discussions, brought Solidarity to formal power in Poland. Solidarity won all but one of the seats they possibly could have done and former activists came to dominate both local and national political scenes. Kraków returned Mieczysław Gil (a journalist, founder and leader of Solidarity at HiL) and Edward Nowak (an engineer and ex-member of worker self-management at HiL) to the Sejm (News, 1-15.6.89) and in consequent local and regional elections Solidarność activists won seat after seat. In the post-1989 period, Solidarność formally took on the role of

16 The strikers of 1988 demonstrated with the slogan “Nie ma wolności bez Solidarności” (“There is no freedom without Solidarity”).

a political party, or more accurately a political bloc made up of a number of allied organisations latterly under the banner Electoral Action Solidarity (*Akcja Wyborcza Solidarność*, AWS). Even today, in 2000, former Solidarity activists and HiL workers hold many positions both locally, and representing Kraków and Nowa Huta in Warsaw. Browsing through a contemporary Who's Who? of Kraków political life (<http://www.krakow.pl/wiw/>) reveals dozens of former activists, members of Kraków MKZ and the TKK. However, few of these represent AWS. Oppositional politics have fragmented nationally since 1989 and this is reflected in Kraków where activists who fought together against the ZOMO forces under Martial Law now sit on opposite sides of the political spectrum.

The internal coherence of Solidarity as a union has also fragmented. The former communist union has regained some credibility after its restructuring and Solidarity itself has seen parts of the union break away to form new unions (*Solidarność '80* split from *Solidarność* and then spawned its own breakaway union, *Sierpień (August) '80*) which aim to take the organisation back to its more conflictual and radical 1980 roots. Reforms since 1989 have also seen a pluralisation of union organisation as dozens of smaller, focused unions have emerged.

As both a union and a major partner in government, *Solidarność* has stepped significantly to the right. The arguments over Solidarity's succession and its political philosophy have been debated elsewhere (see, for example, Garton Ash, 1999; Wenzel, 1998) but it is clear that *Solidarność's* relationship with other social groups, not least the church and the intelligentsia, has been reworked in the post-1989 era.

The fragmentation of Solidarity structures has also been played out in Nowa Huta. At HiL (now Huta Tadeusza Sendzimira, HTS), the years immediately following 1989 were dominated by a fight for the steelworks' survival and by the adoption of varied tactics by the different unions. The steelworks now have representations from more than six different unions - the largest three are Solidarity (6500 members), NSZZ Pracowników HTS SA (Independent Self-Governing Union of HTS Workers, i.e. the former communist union, 4000 members) and Solidarity '80 (500 members). Other unions having up to 150 members include those representing electricians, engineers, young workers etc.. All of these unions are represented in management decisions and although they do work together, not least in negotiating terms for redundancy (see *Porozumienie*, 1999), the notion of a relatively coherent workplace politics, as

existed in part in the 1980s, is now unsustainable. Nevertheless, Solidarity at HTS, though shrunken from its 90 percent membership, remains not only the largest Solidarity branch (factory commission or *Komisja Zakładowa*) in the country but also the largest branch of any union (Oferta, 2000).

However, the place of the steelworks in the community has itself been reworked as the steelworks have been modernised and restructured and as employment at HTS has fallen to 17,000 (with a further 'downsizing' of 8-10,000 workers ongoing). A number of new employers have grown up in Nowa Huta and many more people commute to and from Kraków for both work and leisure, such that neither the employment nor wider social relationship between Nowa Huta and the steelworks is as important as it has been for the past 50 years. Nevertheless, the steelworks and their unions remain the main sources of financial and welfare assistance in the town. The plant has a social fund, as stipulated by Polish law, which is jointly managed by the unions to provide financial help in the event of family illness, death or accidents and to offer funding for vacations for children in poverty. The fund also offers employees and pensioners low-rate loans and distributes vouchers for local shops at Christmas and Easter. The Solidarity social fund (*Towarzystwo Solidarne Pomocy*), based at the steelworks, offers similar help to individuals and acts on day-to-day basis as a site for assistance and advocacy.

There remain both on Nowa Huta's townscape and in its social and political structures legacies of the Solidarity era. Not only has aleja Lenina (along which many thousands of demonstrators marched in the 1980s) been renamed aleja Solidarności but there are memorials to the dead of the Martial Law years and a church is finally being built on the site of the cross. As in Kraków as a whole, community leaders in Nowa Huta - members of the district council, union leaders and priests - largely consist of former activists and it is interesting to speculate what impact this has on contemporary community politics.

Conclusions: Workplaces and Communities

The rise of oppositional movements in Poland in the 1970s and 1980s and the formation of *Solidarność*, both before and during Martial Law, was certainly an amazing and awe-inspiring period of European history. Its wider influence in contributing to the collapse of communism across east central Europe and the former Soviet Union can not be underestimated, but it also

had important local legacies which feed in to contemporary political, social and economic settlements. Solidarność's spatial, not sectoral, structure which was founded on building alliances between diverse social groups and political movements in individual towns and cities, forged a level of community cohesion and consciousness perhaps unparalleled in recent historical struggles. The alliances built up around key sites - workplaces and other community centres - in places like Nowa Huta built a strong oppositional movement which could weather the violence of Martial Law and could rise again when wider political structures were more favourable.

Nowa Huta (and the other bastions of the anti-communist struggle) was critical to the struggle for Solidarity and for solidarity. So too was Solidarity (and solidarity) critical to the (re)construction of Nowa Huta. The Solidarity years built on and transformed the central workplace-community relationship in Nowa Huta and redrew the town's wider image. As the regime had hoped, for years to come from Nowa Huta implied an automatic personal association with the socialist project and its economic, political and social goals. By 1989, to come from Nowa Huta meant so much more. It meant an association with Solidarity, with radical worker activism, with troublesome priests and street battles. But notwithstanding these dramatic shifts of meaning, Nowa Huta has always been associated with workers and with a tight and important workplace-community relationship. That relationship, built by the socialist regime, was replaced by a reformed relationship built by Solidarity in opposition to the regime. In this post-socialist and post-Solidarity era, the question arises, how now is that central community-workplace relationship configured? How now are community politics articulated with labour politics?

As we have seen the post-1989 era is characterised by fragmentation and polarisation on the political scene. The fragmentation of economic and social structures across Poland, but especially in this case in Nowa Huta, has signified the end of common goals. Timothy Garton Ash, quotes Lech Wałęsa, another casualty of post-Solidarity fragmentation:

“During the war the rabbi and the bishop walk side by side - there is no difference between the two. But when they arrive at Freedom Station, the rabbi rallies his own people round him - because he knows them best and trusts them more - and the bishop rallies his” (Garton Ash, 1999, p.375).

Now that the journey to Freedom Station is complete, the sometimes strange but cohering alliances of earlier years have broken down. They are not all workers now and the time for building alliances has gone. The de-centring of HTS has decentred workplace politics and the complication of political goals and dreams in recent years has fractured the image of Nowa Huta. But the years of opposition have left their mark and the centrality of the workplace-community relationship has not disintegrated altogether. Indeed the threat of its disintegration, through further redundancy and the revived threat of closure at HTS may well be enough to build again an alliance which coheres the interests of labour and the interests of the wider community.

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