SHAPING THE ECONOMIC LANDSCAPES OF POST-SOCIALISM? LABOUR, WORKPLACE AND COMMUNITY IN NOWA HUTA, POLAND.

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Abstract

For years, the countries of east central Europe and the former Soviet Union were described as workers' states. The formal commitment of the governing parties to the construction of states run by workers for workers was reflected materially and ideologically in the landscape. The end of communism in 1989 has brought new challenges for workers and workers' organisations in the region as the processes of transformation lead these countries towards neoliberal and globalising economic and political systems. This paper explores these transformations in the case of Nowa Huta in southern Poland, mapping the role of workers in the shaping of economic landscapes. After considering the importance of labour in the construction of Nowa Huta, the paper considers the place of workers and workers' organisations, especially Solidarity, in shaping political and economic issues at both the local and national scale as socialism in Poland began to falter. The latter half of the paper explores the role of labour in shaping the experience of reforms after 1989. This discussion is set in the context not only of wider literatures on post-socialist transformations but also the growing body of work in labour geography. The paper argues that the particular development of labour movements and institutions in Poland presents opportunities for a community-based renaissance of worker influence, but that other historical and political factors, such as union support for marketisation and the divided nature of Polish labour politics, have in practice hindered the ability of Polish labour to shape the economic landscapes of post-socialism. The paper concludes on a note of optimism, recognising that the faltering of the Polish economy might open spaces for a successful labour intervention.

Introduction

For years, the countries of east central Europe and the former Soviet Union were described as workers' states. The formal commitment of the governing parties to the construction of states run by workers for workers was reflected materially and ideologically in the landscape. The end of communism in 1989 has brought new challenges for workers and workers' organisations in the region as the processes of transformation lead these countries towards neoliberal and globalising economic and political systems. This paper explores these transformations in the case of Nowa Huta[1] in southern Poland (Stenning 2000), mapping the role of workers in the shaping of economic landscapes.

Recent work in labour geography has encouraged a more active conceptualisation of labour in understanding the shaping of economic and political landscapes. Writers such as Herod (1997; 2001) and Sadler (2000) call attention to the ways in which labour shapes space through activities relating to, for example, local labour markets, conditions of employment and wider aspects of local economic, political and cultural life. The focus of such work is explicitly on the landscapes of capitalism, offering a labour intervention as a counter to accounts of the economy which prioritise the interests and actions of capital. Taking up this challenge in a post-socialist context entails a number of additional questions. Whilst it is possible now to explore labour's role in the shaping of post-socialist geographies of capitalism, attention to the historical and geographical contingencies of labour's agency demands also that we explore the past experiences of labour's shaping of space.

This paper then begins with a review of this issue, asking what role workers did play in the making and remaking of the geographies of workers' states. I then move on to discuss the attention that has been given to labour in the passage of post-socialist transformations, documenting the growing accounts of post-socialist transformation which reject the orthodox account of reform and focus attention on the everyday experiences of change. This section also explores the key themes in the remaking of industrial relations in post-socialism, focusing particularly on issues which resonate with debates in the west over trade union reinvention and survival. The focus of the paper then shifts to an account of contemporary labour politics in Nowa Huta which seeks to describe and explain the nature of workers' activity in the town in the wider context of Polish and central European reforms. I conclude with a discussion of scale

and fragmentation, exploring the potential for a more proactive labour strategy in Nowa Huta.

Workers' spaces in a workers' state?

Perhaps surprisingly very little of the work on the geographies of socialism in east central Europe and the Soviet Union (see, for example, Pallot and Shaw 1981 and Dingsdale 2002) explores the contribution of workers to the making of economic landscapes in the region. Far more attention is paid to the bureaucratic determinants of economic geographies, focusing on the impact of the plan on the production of space under socialism.

The post-World War II era in east central Europe was characterised by the engagement of both states and populations in concerted programmes of social and economic transformation. Policies were adopted which, in theory, reoriented attention to the workers and their needs in the construction of socialist landscapes. The re-making of space to reflect and support the new socialist order in this region demanded developments which would provide new workers and their families with the space for social mobility and personal transformation.

Anders Åman writes that "[e]ach people's democracy included, or was supposed to include, a new city, built up around a steelworks or some other industrial facility occupying a key position in the first five- or six-year plan" (Åman 1992). These spaces were seen as the iconic sites of socialism (Dingsdale 2002), venerated and admired in official propaganda as much as the workers themselves; they came to epitomise the new worlds of work, new labour processes and socialist competition.

Work and workers were centred in these towns materially as well as ideologically. Most were constructed around a sole workplace set at the end of long impressive avenues behind monumental entrances; street and district names too reflected the centrality of work and the worker; the workplace and other workers' organisations, particularly trade unions played a defining role in the shape of the community and the patterns of everyday life. The industrial employer was very visible on the new urban landscape, involved not only in production, but also in daily activities outside work - the publication of newspapers, the support of cultural and recreational facilities, the provision of health care (Shomina 1992; Ciechocińska 1993; Domański 1997). Workers and their families in factory towns under socialism lived routinized, connected lives grounded in the locality of the enterprise (see Robinson and Sadler 1985). In this context, trade unions were charged with the responsibility for social provision and the transmission of political doctrine to workers and their families (Pravda and Ruble 1986). They were subordinated to the Communist Party (in its various incarnations) but secured a central position within political structures based on the regimes' formal commitments to building a workers' state (Crowley and Ost 2001).

In the case of Nowa Huta, the intention was not only to create a working class space, but also to create a working class in a notoriously bourgeois city. It was consciously constructed as a town of labour, in which workers, their workplaces and institutions were accorded primary importance. As elsewhere, the centrality of labour politics in Nowa Huta went beyond its built form, reflecting the economic and social importance of the town's principal and, to all intents and purposes, sole workplace - the Lenin steelworks (Huta Lenina, or HiL; now Huta Sendzimira, HTS) - where both the Party

unit and the main workplace union, founded in 1949, were the largest such institutions in the country (Choma *et al.* 1999). In 1976, membership of the steelworkers' union in Nowa Huta peaked at 40,000 members, corresponding with a similar peak in Party membership (ibid.).

At its height in the 1970s, the steelworks employed approximately 43,000 workers and the population of Nowa Huta grew to approximately a quarter of a million. Huta Lenina was the central institution in the town, supporting a health service employing over 500 health workers, a cultural centre which organised a wide range of clubs and evening classes, schools, bars and restaurants, sports clubs and holiday facilities (Dziekan and Niwiński 1970; Choma *et al.* 1999). In addition, the steelworks' unions supported the cultural and recreational lives of their members and offered those members both material and advisory assistance. Although the defence of workers' interests within the workplace was part of the remit of the unions' activities, the majority of time and financial resources were focused on supporting workers and their families beyond the workplace. Briefly put, the workplace and the unions in Nowa Huta, as elsewhere, became the 'basic unit' of daily life (Ashwin 1998), shaping everyday geographies. The early to mid-1970s, when production and employment peaked at Huta Lenina, were seen to be a period of rising living standards. Edward Gierek's economic expansion in the early 1970s was marked by an increase in the provision of consumer goods and housing, fuelled by western credits (Simon and Kanet 1980). In Nowa Huta, the strategic importance of Huta Lenina assured the residents a particularly large share of these improvements and both statistical and interview material suggests that these were the town's glory years. Not only was production and employment at its peak, but the shops were full, the town's sports

clubs and cultural associations recorded their heydays and the number of meals provided through collective facilities was at its highest (Choma *et al.* 1999).

Of course, as literatures on company towns and paternalism suggest, there is a significant difference between spaces built *for* workers and spaces shaped *by* workers. Whilst the evidence from Nowa Huta shows quite clearly that workers' institutions were playing a significant role in the shaping of everyday life and social and economic landscapes at the local scale, the autonomy of these institutions from the state was negligible; these were workers' organisations co-opted into the regime to serve and transmit its policies. Throughout the 1960s, '70s and '80s there was growing evidence across the region that workers did not accept the leadership of the Communist Party and that some were attempting to forge autonomous spaces for the discussion of alternatives and the planning of political action. Many of these strengthening movements were focused on the organisation of the workers in bodies independent of the state. Whilst other east central European countries had their equivalents, Poland's Solidarity (Solidarność) was perhaps the most influential example.

Solidarity and the scales of labour[2]

The failing promises of Gierek's expansion, witnessed through dramatic price rises, sparked the strikes which culminated in the birth of Solidarity. An ample literature already analyses Solidarity's growth (see for example, MacShane 1981; Touraine *et al.* 1983; Misztal 1985; Mason 1989); here the focus is on exploring the union's spatial praxis. In a paper on Solidarity's geography, Roy Bivand notes that the nascent union, through its inter-factory strike committees, was an explicitly local

organisation which 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 1983:399). When Solidarity was legally constituted after the Gdańsk Agreement of August 1980, it took its organisational structure from the units which had emerged during earlier months. It remained a union based on regional and local units rather than branch or occupational structures (although the latter did exist); as MacShane notes, "from the very beginning, Solidarity was organised on a geographical basis. Workers drew strength from the sense of unity and mutual solidarity provided by organising all workers within a town or region, irrespective of industry or profession" (1981:67). The Kraków founding committee was formally established in early September 1980, bringing together workers from 134 workplaces under the leadership of a Huta Lenina steelworker. This committee, though eventually incorporating 160 workplaces, was dominated by steelworkers and the steelworks became the site of the committee's meetings. By mid-October, when Solidarity's national membership stood at six million, 97% of Huta Lenina's workforce had joined the new union (Touraine *et al.* 1983:197). In an ironic echo of earlier Party and union membership, the steelworks' Solidarity organisation, with 38,000 members, grew to be the largest in the country.

Though national leaders repeatedly stressed that Solidarity was a workplace union, many of its activities were focused on satisfying workers' demands at a local scale. MacShane (1981), for example, documents the attention paid to local transport and environmental issues which needed to be negotiated with local authorities rather than sectoral institutions. As Bivand suggests, as a result of its local constitution, Solidarity 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 1983:402). Much of the time and energy of local Solidarity activists in the early months was taken up with responding to mundane and everyday requests from members, relating to issues such as access to health care and children's holidays which had previously been facilitated by employers and the official union. As MacDonald (1983) recognises, Solidarity came to replace the Party as *the* social centre.

With the declaration of Martial Law on 13th December 1981, Solidarity was banned and forced underground, but its role in the community became still more pronounced. Under Martial Law, Huta Lenina (along with other key enterprises) was formally militarised; the immediate response to this was the reformation of strike committees and a wave of occupation. Soon after the emergence of a strike committee in Huta Lenina, the workers were joined by students from independent student unions, evicted from Kraków's universities (Sabbat-Swidlicka 1982:6), and a number of other community groups (*Informacji Solidarności* 28.12.81). In many ways, the declaration of Martial Law led to strengthening of militancy in industrial heartlands and the local bases of Solidarity. As Solidarity was forced underground and its leaders interned, it was the local units which became critical to continued organisation. Much of Kraków's underground organising took place in Nowa Huta and throughout the early and mid-1980s, the town became the site of demonstrations and violent clashes with the security forces such that Huta Lenina became identified as one of a group of "traditionally maverick factories" (*ibid.*) whose localities became the focus of unrest and state brutality (see, for example, *The Times* 1.9.82, *International Herald Tribune* 2.5.84).

During the difficult years of Martial Law and its aftermath, when economic crisis and political stalemate led to shortages in even the most basic goods, Solidarity's underground incarnation came to play a critical role in Nowa Huta's daily life. Solidarity's network of activists and overseas supporters became a vital resource for everyday survival. Together with priests from local churches and students and academics from Kraków, the union organised the dissemination of underground publications and the distribution of charity to families, especially those of imprisoned activists (*Gazeta w Krakowie* 8.2.01; Kenney 2002). The organisations on which everyday life had earlier been centred - the Party and the official union - suffered dramatic losses of legitimacy. In all, between 1979 and 1983, the steelworks' Party unit lost almost half its members. The official union was replaced by new, apparently independent unions which embarked on a recruitment drive in the Martial Law years but suffered at the hands of Solidarity strength. However, whilst the numbers mobilised for demonstrations in Nowa Huta throughout the 1980s testify to the existence of a strong opposition movement in the town, security forces claimed a network of loyalists and informers in the town (NSZZ Solidarność 1983).

Solidarity's extra-workplace role developed out of a number of key features. The union's spatial structure and commitment to a bottom-up, inter-factory constitution was opposed to a branch-based structure which would have been oriented out of the locality. In Nowa Huta, the founding committee was very clearly associated with Huta Lenina and its allied enterprises and in this way was clearly linked to the community as a whole, dominated as it was by steelworkers and their families. Thus, while the August strikes had begun in key enterprises, support for them stretched well

beyond individual plants. This local orientation and the tight connections between workplace and community also rested on the nature of the construction of socialism in Poland (and east central Europe more widely) and the role of unions in official structures. The centrality of the workplace in communities under socialism and the expectation that unions provide access to everyday services and facilities was maintained as Solidarity grew; in this new political context this connection served the free trade union rather than the regime. The construction of communities such as Nowa Huta, with one central enterprise, gave Solidarity a set of very strong bases for community action.

As MacShane, Macdonald and Bivand all highlighted, Solidarity was a union built on its community alliances; it fed on these coalitions to maintain its strength, especially at times of particular threat, and it acted for the wider community, representing community concerns in dialogue with the state and providing for everyday needs within the community. In the face of official intransigence, Solidarity identified and built on 'common cause' (Wills 2001) within the locality, beyond the workplace, fostering a network of horizontal connections not only to strengthen the union, but also to sustain the wider community. Such a focus on extra-workplace issues and organising was also reflected in Solidarity's identification as a social movement. Though Solidarity was legally constituted as a trade union, at every scale efforts were focused on issues much larger than traditional workplace concerns. On many occasions, strikes begun on the basis of local issues over pay and conditions developed into campaigns targeted at the very nature of governance in Poland. The Gdańsk Agreement, for example, saw the government concede on issues of religious freedom and welfare provision as well as wage increases and the right to form free

trade unions. This escalation to contribute to national policy debates was focused on a network of key enterprises convening to discuss economic policy, especially in relation to the management of state enterprises. While Solidarity's development of policy alternatives rested on an alliance with the liberal intelligentsia, the input of Solidarity's key regional centres was assured by the creation of the so-called *Sieć*, or Network of Leading Enterprises, which grouped together seventeen leading enterprises, including Huta Lenina (Holland 1983).   More generally, the union's national committee reflected its local and regional base, constituted as it was of leaders from the regional organisations, with key enterprises and major industrial regions disproportionately represented. Thus we can identify two interconnected scales of activity, both having considerable influence on the geographies of everyday life in 1980s Poland. A further point worth noting is that, as these accounts of Solidarity's growth and suppression imply, the 1980s saw the characterisation of certain communities as key sites within a wider network of opposition. As I have already suggested, Nowa Huta and other industrial towns were identified both within and beyond Poland as bastions of anti-communism. All of this - the community alliances, the national leadership networks and the identification of leading communities - rested on presence of key workplaces. Thus despite material and discursive activity at a variety of extra-workplace scales, the workplace was still central.

When strike action emerged again in April 1988 (again in immediate response to price rises), these two scales came into play once again. At the national scale "the steel workers' strike in Nowa Huta ushered in a new stage of political changes in Poland" (Nowak 1992:138/9) as 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 the strikes spread throughout summer 1988, the resurrected Solidarity effectively managed to hold the Party to ransom. Finally, eight years after signing the Gdańsk Agreement, the Party met with Lech Wałęsa to concede Round Table talks on the future of Poland. At a local scale, the 1988 strikes echoed earlier actions, as striking workers were joined by students, friends, family, the church and others (Błaszkiewicz *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. Błaszkiewicz *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" (ibid:30), bringing together veteran activists and long-term workers with people who possessed few solid roots in the workplace.

Labour and post-socialist transformations

The challenges facing the post-socialist states after 1989 have been subject to considerable debate and whilst there has long been a critique of the prescriptions advocated by international lending agencies and western governments, it is really only in recent years that there has been a significant level of research which interprets the nature and meaning of post-socialist transformations from both local and non-capitalist perspectives, questioning the inevitability of the orthodox path and putting forward alternative interpretations of change and its lived experiences. Adrian Smith's work on household economies, for example, questions the hegemonic

position of capitalism in shaping the transformations ongoing in east central Europe (Smith 2002) whilst a body of work, largely written by anthropologists (see, for example, Burawoy and Verdery 1999a and Hann 2002), has challenged the centrality of capital by focusing on, for example, the family, the collective or the clan as key loci of transformation (and often continuity). There has however been little work within geography and related disciplines which considers the agency of workers and their organisations in the transformation from socialism in east central Europe and the former Soviet Union.

Burawoy and Verdery draw attention to the "the conflicts and alternatives thrown up by the destructuring effects of the end of state socialism" (1999b:2) arguing that the uncertainties of post-socialism open up spaces for the voicing of alternative accounts and scenarios. At times of radical economic and political change, the remoulding of spatial relations calls for alternative interventions, particularly those of labour (Herod 1997). There are two loose (and related) bodies of work which do begin to make a contribution to this debate; one explores the changing nature of the workplace and one documents the transformation of industrial relations in post-socialism.

Post-1989, the workplace has seen its wider role in communities diminished by the divestiture of both union and enterprise social assets, through privatisation or transfer to the municipality (Ashwin 1999; Domański 1997). The marketisation of consumption has meant that enterprises and trade unions now no longer control access to those goods and services which were scarce under communism. Nevertheless, research has shown that many unions and their members still cling to social welfare functions as the most important role of local unions today (Frege 2000). More

broadly the restructuring of local labour markets has led to both the pluralisation of employment and the rise of unemployment. These shifts have meant that in very few cases does a sole workplace continue to be the central institution, or basic unit, in the life of a community. The changing nature of the workplace has had, as van Hoven (2001) and Ashwin (1999) amongst others have shown, a significant impact on the geographies of everyday life and the nature of local social relations, encouraging the creation of new spaces for support and self-identification.

Whilst this literature on the workplace documents the experiences of labour communities during the processes of transformation, it is the literature on industrial relations which explores the engagement of labour with policies of reform. Across the region, the strongest tendency within the labour movement is to fragmentation following a burst of activity and new trade union formation in the early 1990s (Standing 1997). Standing notes that this period of activity "gave hope that new forms of mobilization would develop powerful voice for workers" (ibid.:140) but acknowledges that the reality has been much more pessimistic, characterised not only by fragmentation, but by an overall decline in unionisation. Moreover, across the region research has shown that union leaders support market reform, the prerogative of management and a limited role for employees in the workplace (see, for example, Ost 2001). The picture in Poland mirrors these regional trends, with Cox and Mason describing Poland's industrial relations as "most vulnerable to increasing fragmentation and conflict" (Cox and Mason 2000:112). For Solidarity, the 1990s were primarily a period of disintegration as different factions established parties and alliances of their own under new leaders and the rump Solidarity progressively narrowed its base of potential support (Wenzel 1998).

Repeated research and social surveys demonstrate that, as elsewhere, union membership is plummeting and popular support for union activity is very low (Gardawski *et al.* 1999). The national Centre for Social Opinion Research (CBOS) records that just 17% of the workforce belongs to a trade union, down from around 60% in the early years of transformation (CBOS 2000; Kozek 2000). Trade union membership varies, of course, by sector with membership amongst state workers being much higher than privately-employed workers. Fundamentally, as elsewhere, trade union presence can be explained by size of employment, type of ownership and share of foreign capital. A small, privately-owned firm with foreign capital is extremely unlikely to support union activity (Kozek 2000).

Assessments of the strength (or weakness) of Polish industrial relations are however complicated by the particularly close relationship between unions and political parties. Until recently Solidarity formed the core of a centre-right coalition - Solidarity Electoral Action (AWS)[3] - and, although AWS is formally separate from the union (Ost 2001), the distinction is not as clear as the party might claim; indeed AWS has been seen as "a party in the service of a union" (Wenzel 1998:155). The post-communist OPZZ (All-Poland Alliance of Trade Unions) meanwhile has forged a close relationship with Poland's post-communist party, the SLD (Democratic Left Alliance). Such relationships are not perhaps unusual, but seem to be taken further in Poland than in many other countries. Indeed, some argue that Poland is ruled by a 'unionocracy' ('związkokracja') - unionists often dominate the boards of major Polish companies and rather than simply supporting the activities of Polish political parties, actually fulfil major roles within them, directing policy and shaping economic

agendas (Pańków 1999; Ost 2001). The presence of unionists in these positions rests, however, less on the authority and influence of workers' interests and rather on the use, especially by Solidarity activists, of the unions as "a stepping stone into business and government" (Ost 2002:42).

Thus, the challenges of renewal and growth which confront trade unions in the West are also important for the labour movement in east central Europe. In his surveys of union leaders in Poland, David Ost identifies a lack of enthusiasm for recruitment (Ost 2001; 2002); very few of his respondents sought to recruit non-members or to organize non-unionised workplaces. Ost is however adamant that only by focusing on such a servicing role can unions in the region be revived. In a direct engagement with western debates over social movement unionism (Ost 2002), he concludes that as a consequence of the specific history of union development in central Europe, such a model will not work. He argues that under both the communist and Solidarity era models workers were left without servicing in the workplace. In the post-socialist period, both major unions have focused too much attention on questions of national economic and political reform, to the detriment of representation and defence in the workplace. Ost employs a strongly normative notion of what a trade union is (see also Frege 2001), insisting that the proper scale of union activity is the workplace. In Poland, he argues, unions have been derailed by the focus of attention at a national scale. But a lack of explicit consideration of the scalar politics of union activity means that he fails to consider the political potential of other scales of organisation, scales which, in the current economic context, might complement (though not replace) workplace organising. The dramatic shift in the Polish economy away from large-scale, state-owned heavy industrial employers to a much more pluralised and

privatised labour market is a shift which needs to be accounted for in debates over the role of unions in post-socialism. Although Ost commends the drives to organise in new workplaces such as foreign-owned hypermarkets, the new economy is characterised more by workers employed in small, dispersed workplaces which are difficult to organise and by an increasing number of unemployed and retired workers whose needs and interests are not met by a traditional servicing model.

These constituencies would be drawn in much more successfully by a model which extends the union's role into the community, a scale at which, as we have already seen, Polish trade unions have historically been very active. That this is also a scale of activity that western unions are developing interests and which might offer an alternative model for the mobilisation of workers around issues of social justice and quality of life suggests that it is worth exploring.

Nowa Huta and the unions today[4]

In the national context, the labour movement in Nowa Huta appears to be quite strong; the community has a higher union density than the national average, yet even still 47% of workers are not unionised (CBOS 1997:42). Eight unions are currently represented in Huta Sendzimira, which now has a workforce of approximately 9000 workers. The two largest are Solidarity, with approximately 3,500 members, and the Union of HTS Workers, allied to OPZZ, with 2,800 members. Solidarity '80 (a splinter group created in 1990 to evoke the Solidarity of 1980) has approximately 600 members and the Autonomous Steelworkers' Trade Union approximately 200; other smaller unions represent particular parts of the workforce. Branch membership is reinforced by employees from the firms spun-off from the steelworks in the process of

restructuring, adding, in most cases, another fifty per cent to the core membership. In addition to these workers, each union also represents pensioners (both old-age and disability) and unemployed members, who have the right to union membership for the first six months of redundancy. In all, union density in the community has remained quite steady, largely as a result of fears of further redundancy. However, a significant percentage of each unions' membership now consists of non-workers.

All of the unions still declare the defence of workers' interests as their primary function. In the early years of post-1989 transformations, the central focus of activity was ensuring an increase in wages but it soon became clear that the real battle was for the survival of HTS itself. All of the unions support the restructuring policies of management and all signed an agreement with management in 1999 over the further reduction of employment (KRH HTS 1999), setting terms for early retirement and voluntary redundancy. Unionists from Solidarity, Solidarity '80 and the Union of HTS Workers all stressed that modernisation, especially technological modernisation, was critical to the survival of the steelworks, and that some resulting job loss was a price worth paying to avoid the threat of total closure. Thus, because of the almost complete dependence of the town of Nowa Huta on the steelworks, the union focus shifted quickly from the defence of individual workers to the defence of Nowa Huta as a community. In this way the unions' adversaries were no longer management, who also have interests vested in HTS's survival, but other steelworks, foreign investors and the government in Warsaw who had the power to threaten or secure HTS's future. This echoes experiences in the steel industry nationally where Keat identifies a common agenda amongst both trade unions and the steel employers' association, that is "keeping as many firms as possible alive" (Keat 2000:212).

For these reasons, influence and activity beyond the workplace - in the centres of local and national government - have been central to the function of the unions. Mirroring the national connections between labour and party politics, a string of Solidarity-supported MPs from HTS have been elected to the Polish *sejm* since 1990 as have at least two Union of HTS Workers activists. More locally, a review of the list of Kraków councillors highlights a very close intertwining of union and party politics and a disproportionately important role, furthermore, for current and former steelworkers. In some ways, these links between workplace unions and local, regional and national political bodies would suggest that the unionists have useful contacts and influence at the level at which decisions regarding HTS and its future are being made. This influence, it seems, has been relatively successful. The restructuring of the steelworks has been gradual and, up till now, relatively painless. A mass redundancy programme was only activated in 1999 and there still have been no compulsory redundancies. The achievement of more constructive responses, which might build an alternative future for the community, has, however, been less successful. At the local scale, the presence of HTS workers and former activists on Kraków city council from Nowa Huta has done little to counteract the persistent representation of HTS and Nowa Huta as little more than a thorn in Kraków's side. The city council has been slow to initiate a positive policy for Kraków-East (where Nowa Huta lies) and has been even slower to commit funds or time to ensuring the district's future.

The unions have not however focused all of their activity on lobbying at national and regional scales; in a continuation of socialist-era practices, all of the unions focus

considerable effort and money on the welfare of their members, especially those hit hardest by restructuring. The clearest, and most formal, example of this is the negotiations over the 'social packet' offered to those workers taking early retirement and voluntary redundancy. The HTS unions managed to achieve incredibly strong redundancy and retirement packages. Those leaving the plant voluntarily receive a one-off payment of up to 30,000PLN (approximately £5000 or US$7500) plus financial and other assistance in establishing their own businesses or in retraining for new employment. This national agreement (which covers the whole of the Polish steel industry but is supplemented by additional finance offered by HTS's management locally) is coupled with a very wide range of formal and informal assistance provided by the unions, in cooperation with a number of local organisations.

Each union has a social fund which offers financial assistance to members, funded both by regular membership dues and from the profits of firms spun-off from HTS to the unions in the process of restructuring. These funds offer assistance to both current and former employees for the purchase of medicines, children's holidays, weddings and housing renovations, for example. Solidarity's social fund has however grown well beyond the confines of the union and now exists as a humanitarian NGO offering assistance across the region (KRH HTS n.d.). The *Towarzystwo Solidarnej Pomocy* (TSP, or Mutual Assistance Association) began its work in 1990[5] as a 'subcontractor' to the union providing holiday camps for the children of union members but also administered and redistributed donated medicines to the community through a free chemist.[6] In the last two years, this medical aid has completely overtaken any other function and the activities of the TSP have expanded dramatically. The Society no

longer limits its assistance to steelworkers and their families, but much does still flow to this group. It continues to fulfil many of the original roles of a union social fund, subsidising school meals, providing Christmas and Easter dinners and other hot meals for those in need in the winter, donating Christmas presents, clothing and food packages and paying the utility bills of those in desperate need. The work of these union organisations is complemented by the activities of the Health Care and Social Assistance Fund established at the end of 1992 by Solidarity, the Union of HTS Workers and the steelworks' management, which also focuses much of its activity on paying for specialist medical care through health centres in Nowa Huta.

In addition to these sources of tangible financial assistance, the unions offer ex-employees, pensioners and their families the use of professional services to deal with problems relating to, for example, pensions and unemployment benefit. During their six months' continuing membership, the unemployed are given advice and assistance in retraining and in seeking new employment. Solidarity and the Union of HTS Workers have negotiated with the management that all new employers in Nowa Huta[7] manage the recruitment process through the steelworks' personnel division in order to facilitate ex-steelworkers' applications for new jobs. The focus of help for pensioners[8] is the Centre for Old Age and Disability Pensioners funded by the steelworks through its Social Fund[9] but managed jointly with Solidarity, the Union of HTS Workers and the Autonomous Steelworkers Trade Union and supported by representatives of the city and district councils, the health service, the social insurance organisation and MPs. The Centre provides a variety of services to pensioners and their spouses - it has funds to distribute to pensioners in need, it acts as a collection and redistribution point for in-kind benefits and as an advocate for pensioners;

perhaps most importantly, it acts as a social centre for pensioners. Board members are available for consultation three afternoons a week and in addition to these regular meetings, the Centre organises Christmas and Easter parties for those most in need. Within the framework of the Centre, each union also offers a range of activities and services. In a continuation of its socialist era practice, the Union of HTS Workers arranges low-cost, or free, excursions, parties and summer holidays. It has however also established a network of assistance and support which plays a critical role within the community. The union board is supported by forty elected activists who act in each neighbourhood of Nowa Huta, visiting the union's pensioners to offer assistance and advice, to feedback to the union board on the conditions of pensioners and their families and to coordinate a kind of second-hand exchange market of goods collected, repaired and reconditioned by workers. Much of this activity clearly echoes practices employed, by unions, churches and other community organisations during the Martial Law years (see Kenney 2002).

Discussion

We can see then that labour in Nowa Huta has acted at a variety of scales, fulfilling a variety of functions, but that is has acted. Since the post-World War II establishment of communism in Poland, trade unions, workplaces, other allied institutions and individual working-class people have been working both within and beyond the community to remake patterns of economic and political practice. Under communism, for example, we saw unions and employers acting as mediators between the national scale and the community, facilitating the reproduction of working-class lives and shaping local institutions; during the Solidarity era, organisations of labour maintained these roles at the local level (though through different institutions and

networks) and acted at the national and regional scales to contest the policies of the regime, promoting and fighting for alternatives. At times the actions of labour organisations were contradictory, reflecting the antagonistic politics of Poland's post-war history and the complications this caused for understanding traditional left-right continua (a point to which I will return), but they were built on an accumulated history of labour politics which both enabled and restrained the potential range of activities.

As I have already suggested, the post-socialist period has been characterised as a moment for alternatives, in which choices, though structured, are particularly 'up for grabs'. In the field of labour politics, as with politics more widely, the post-1989 period has witnessed a number of shifts and restructurings. In Nowa Huta what we have seen is that despite a questionable commitment to challenging the inevitability of redundancy and to defending workers' interests in the workplace, unions and their allies have practised a demonstrable commitment to the community beyond the workplace. Using and building on the strong network of community organisations and employing armies of volunteer workers, workers' organisations have continued to service the community's needs, especially those of the people hit hardest by the reforms of the last decade. Whilst much of this activity could be seen as a response to austerity, as Smith (2002) suggests in his work on household economies, it is not only this. The network of support offered by labour institutions in Nowa Huta is part of the fabric of community life, rooted in the particular work-community relationship and founded on years of similar practice by both official and free labour movements. This historical continuity and the importance of these practices demands that they must be taken into account when exploring the nature and meanings of post-socialism.

In contrast perhaps to the accounts of community unionism in the west, the activities of unions in Nowa Huta, both within and beyond the workplace, seem to be focused more on the survival and sustenance of the community than the growth and renewal of the union. In part this can be explained by the continued relative strength of unions in places like Nowa Huta, but the low level of debate over union renewal in Poland (and the rest of east central Europe) also offers some answers. A further explanation of this focus on community survival is the immediacy of these demands. Despite its long heritage, most labour activity in Nowa Huta is responsive, reacting to the demands of economic reform and smoothing the transition, rather than shaping the transition itself. The impact of this activity has been marked, but has altered the patterns of everyday life rather than the larger economic geographies of post-socialism. Whilst the unions have been involved in, for example, retraining and the administration of start-up loans for small business, their impact on the economic shape of the community has been marginal.

Unlike in western forms of community unionism, there has been no attempt to engage in medium-scale questions such as the maintenance of municipal amenities or public transport. There has also been limited involvement in the development of proactive strategies for economic and social development through, for example, job creation schemes, infrastructural developments and so on. Such programmes have been promoted in Nowa Huta but they have rarely gained the active support of labour organisations. In part this results from an apparent disjuncture between the local and national scales of activity. For both the largest unions, Solidarity and the Union of HTS Workers, at the same time as local activists are witnessing, documenting and

responding to the fallout of post-socialist transformations, their representatives in regional and national policy circles are promoting the very policies which are weakening their members.

Engagement with medium and large-scale issues of economic policy and practice to build economic geographies of post-socialism which promote the interests of workers, at the local or national scale, rest on developing labour institutions on the basis of historical experiences, reshaping these institutions to confront contemporary challenges and building wider and stronger alliances with other committed organisations such as the post-socialist NGO sector, local economic development fora and other movements for social justice. As Jane Wills suggests, the challenge is to move 'beyond the fragments' to build coherent community movements (Wills 2001). Yet, in the Polish case, whilst under late socialism, during the birth of the independent trade union movement, there was a clear identification of common cause amongst oppositionists at both the local and national scale, post-socialist political and economic reforms have meant that it is increasingly difficult to build alliances with commentators noting instead a tendency to particularism. A key feature of this is the peculiar left-right (and labour-capital) allying of OPZZ and Solidarity. Much of the literature on community unionism (and indeed social movement unionism) notes that union renewal can be focused on campaigns for wider social justice, built on alliances with other left-wing organisations. Solidarity, whose heritage lends itself so well to a form of community unionism, is an avowedly right-wing and conservative union which shares little in terms of broader goals and political motivation with other potentially progressive groups. At the same time, OPZZ, as a direct successor to the communist era union, is viewed with suspicion by progressive movements and social

justice activists. As we have seen in the case of Nowa Huta and Huta Sendzimira, with neither union is their a distinct definition between the interests of labour and capital. In short, both institutionally and ideologically there are weaknesses in attempts to build, at the national or local scale, workers' movements with their own projects (Pollert 1999).

There are, however, some signs of hope as new unions and a new generation of unionists begin to challenge the inevitability of marketisation and build grassroots organisations which service the immediate needs of members (Ost 2002; Hardy and Stenning 2001). The faltering of the Polish economy in recent years, the growth of unemployment to around 18% and rising discontent with the social costs of marketisation are encouraging the beginnings of debate over future development paths. Such debates may create more favourable political structures for the revival of community alliances, allowing activists to build on historical strengths and secure for labour a role in shaping the landscapes of post-socialism.

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[1] Nowa Huta is a district of the city of Kraków, located just to the east of old Kraków in southern Poland. It was founded in 1949 together with the then Lenin Steelworks.

[2] Parts of this section are derived from work in the archives of SSEES, UCL, London, especially the collections of Polish Non-Official Media (PNO) and the personal archives of Neal Ascherson (ASC).

[3] In the September 2001 *sejm* election, AWS formed part of the Solidarity Electoral Action Coalition - Right and saw its support plummet to just 5.6% of voters. By falling below the 8% threshold for coalitions, the Solidarity grouping went from being the party of government to having no seats in the *sejm*.

[4] This section is based largely on interviews carried out in Kraków and Nowa Huta between July 1998 and September 2001.

[5] The TSP was born out of the Social Fund for Workers' Self-Help established during the Martial Law years, see Kenney (2002:40-42) for more details.

[6] Free chemists, which redistribute drugs donated from western countries, emerged in Poland during the 1980s.

[7] The steelworks are surrounded by a 'protective zone' in which, until recently, economic activity was prohibited. This zone is now managed by the East Kraków Development Agency and a special economic zone which are charged to attract new workplaces.

[8] Because the steelworks were founded in 1949 with a predominantly young and new workforce, recent years have seen a large cohort of workers retire. The promotion of early retirement as a means of reducing the workforce and relatively high levels of

invalidity in such heavy industry have increased this flow from the steelworks. In 1998, HTS had 24,000 registered pensioners (both old-age and disability) and in the last few years this is likely to have grown. Thus, today Nowa Huta supports three times as many retired steelworkers as employed.

[9] This is a compulsory fund, stipulated in Polish law; social funds are administered jointly by the unions and management and oriented to the provision of social services such as funds for housing, cultural facilities, holidays and other forms of material and financial help (see *Ustawa z dnia 4 marca 1994 r. o zakładowym funduszu świadczeń socjalnych* [*Dziennik Ustaw* 96.70.335]).