

## **Balcerowicz must go!**

### **How Polish (neo)liberals lost the post-communist information war**

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#### **Abstract:**

This paper examines the transition process from the state-socialist centrally planned to the free market economy in the Polish Hard Coal Mining Sector (PHCMS) between 1989 and 2007. I investigate to what extent the reform package known as the 'shock therapy' was accompanied by public relations (PR) strategies and other non-material incentives designed to win broad social approval for the restructuring process. I argue that the PHCMS was a socioeconomic arena where both the legacy of communism and the post-1989 "cultural chaos" were particularly pronounced. I suggest that the extraordinary intensity of that legacy accumulated in the PHCMS rendered PR endeavors imperative. I estimate to what extent the post-1989 governments engaged in endeavors aimed at supporting the PHCMS employees in coming to terms with the rapidly changing socioeconomic circumstances and the prospects of unemployment or vocational retraining. I examine the main currents of public discourse on the post-communist political economy and how they addressed the groups adversely affected by the transition. Furthermore, I examine the scale and the types of social welfare transfers that were eventually granted as a safety cushion for the employees who voluntarily vacated their employment in the PHCMS. Finally, discuss how this outcome fits into the bargaining framework of the political economy of postcommunist transformation.

## 1. Introduction

From a purely economic perspective, the post-1989 transition in the Polish Hard Coal Mining Sector (PHCMS) has been addressed by numerous authors.<sup>1</sup> Most economists are in a consensus with respect to the kind of restructuring that the sector had to undergo to adapt to the post-Comecon reality of open global competition.<sup>2</sup> However, the topic remains underexplored from a discursive perspective. The transition went beyond issues of economic organization. It was also a comprehensive paradigm shift touching upon all aspects of public life, from politics to popular culture. The nature of the impact of over four decades of communist legacy in Eastern Europe on the divergent paths of each country's trajectory has seen a recent revival of scholarly interest as well.<sup>3</sup> I suggest that the PHCMS, heavily concentrated in the Upper Silesia region,<sup>4</sup> was a socioeconomic arena where many consequences stemming from that legacy manifested themselves amidst the post-1989 "cultural chaos"<sup>5</sup> in a particularly pronounced way. The PHCMS thus constitutes a unique kind of research arena for post-communist studies because the evidence of survival, adaptation and functioning of communist legacies to be found there *in situ* was and remains extraordinarily abundant.

The main rationale behind both the necessity and the scale of the 'shock therapy' reforms was the argument that the reforms were unavoidable in light of objective (value-neutral) economic necessity. The PHCMS enterprises had to either become profitable or cease operations. I examine to what extent this basic premise was supplemented by additional public relations (PR) strategies, informational policies and other non-material incentives which could mitigate the intensity of social resistance to the therapy applied.

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<sup>1</sup> For example, see: Anna Fornalczyk, Jerzy Choroszczak and Marek Mikulec, *Restrukturyzacja Górnictwa Węgla Kamiennego : Programy, Bariery, Efektywność, Pomoc Publiczna* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Poltext, 2008). George Blazyca, *Restructuring Regional and Local Economies : Towards a Comparative Study of Scotland and Upper Silesia* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2003).

<sup>2</sup> For an overview of this consensus, see: Fornalczyk, *Restrukturyzacja...*, Preface.

<sup>3</sup> For an overview of this issue, see: Grzegorz Ekiert, *Do Legacies Matter? : Patterns of Postcommunist Transitions in Eastern Europe*, (Washington, DC: Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, 1999), 8-10.

<sup>4</sup> The Upper Silesia has no precise geographical reference. Technically, one should speak of either the Katowice Voivodeship (in existence between 1975 and 1998) or the Silesian Voivodeship (1998-Present). Perhaps the most precise term would be Upper Silesian Industrial District, but this term has narrow economic connotations. On the other hand, the term Silesia (Śląsk) is by far the most popular and has a high symbolic charge; it is commonly used interchangeably with Upper Silesia. For the sake of simplicity the terms 'Silesia' and 'Upper Silesia' are used in the paper, which might render some statistical information less accurate, but does not affect the overall argument in any way.

<sup>5</sup> According to a leading Polish sociologist Elżbieta Tarkowska, this reversal led to a situation that could be described as 'cultural chaos': "postcommunism, as a general condition in which people found themselves after 1989, did not offer any clearly articulated cultural scheme that would allow them to interpret the new reality. As many people began their own individual quests for meanings, diversification and increasing cultural chaos ensued."

Elżbieta Tarkowska, "Temporalny wymiar przemian zachodzących w Polsce", 87.

Quoted in: Aldona Jawłowska, Marian Kempny and Elżbieta Tarkowska, *Kulturowy Wymiar : Przemian Społecznych*, (Warszawa:Polska Akademia Nauk, Instytut Filozofii i Socjologii, 1993).

I examine the main currents of public discourse on the political economy in the 1990s and how they addressed the groups adversely affected by the transition. I also study the subsequent reform proposals designed to make the PHCMS economically viable, the miners' reactions to them as well as the public debate surrounding their implementation. I estimate to what extent the post-1989 governments engaged in PR endeavors that could explain to the miners threatened with unemployment why some unemployment was unavoidable or desirable and why it ended up being so high. I suggest that the extraordinary intensity of communist legacies accumulated in the Upper Silesia rendered such efforts both indispensable and problematic. Finally, I look at the scale and the kinds of social welfare benefits that were eventually granted as a safety cushion for those leaving the PHCMS. I analyze how this outcome fits into the larger bargaining framework of the political economy of post-communist transformation.

There are several theoretical models that help to contextualize this paper's insights. One of them is the notion of historical communist legacy developed by Grzegorz Ekiert, Stephen Hanson and others.<sup>6</sup> In the case of the PHCMS, using Ekiert's terminology, one encounters a particularly powerful entanglement of both Marxist-Leninist and state socialist legacies in one highly concentrated and relatively homogenous socio-cultural milieu. Marxism-Leninism and state-socialism were of course intertwined, but a distinction can be drawn between their societal-psychological aspects such as the portrayal of the working class as the vanguard of the revolution and their material-economic aspects such as the privileged position of heavy industry in the regime's distributive hierarchy and the respectively higher social status of 'strategic' occupations such as soldiers, railway workers or miners. Similarly, the post-1989 PHCMS reforms can also be divided into two analytical categories: tangible effects (e.g. employment reductions, severance payments) and rhetorical packaging (e.g. language, arguments, symbols). The notion of communist legacy, both in its material and cultural aspects, is further examined in the paper as the single most powerful explanatory concept accounting for the strength of the resistance to the post-1989 reforms among the Upper Silesian miners.

Another useful heuristic tool is the notion of 'cultural chaos' ensuing in the wake of the relatively sudden disappearance of communist ideology from public discourse.<sup>7</sup> Following scholarly findings, I assume

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<sup>6</sup> Ekiert, *Do Legacies Matter...*; Grzegorz Ekiert Stephen E. Hanson, *Capitalism and Democracy in Central and Eastern Europe : Assessing the Legacy of Communist Rule* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2003);

Ghia Nodia, "How Different are Postcommunist Transitions", *Journal of Democracy*, no. 4: (1996) 15-29.

<sup>7</sup> Jawłowska, Kempny and Tarkowska, *Kulturowy Wymiar...*; Gregory S. Alexander and Grażyna Skąpska, *A Fourth Way? : Privatization, Property, and the Emergence of New Market Economies* (New York: Routledge, 1994).

Hanna Świda-Ziemba, *Wartości Egzystencjalne Młodzieży Lat Dziewięćdziesiątych* (Warszawa: Zakład Socjologii Moralności i Aksjologii Ogólnej :Instytut Stosowanych Nauk Społecznych Uniwersytet Warszawski, 1995), 294.

that 'cultural chaos' might "increase the vulnerability to symbolic and emotional manipulation"<sup>8</sup> which in turn creates conditions where the influence of informational policy on collective behavior merits special attention. This assumption mitigates a potential reservation that a miner who is about to receive a job dismissal notice is not going to be interested in verbal consolations offered by the authorities. In 1990, the public opinion was facing an ideological, discursive vacuum.<sup>9</sup> With Marxism-Leninism gone, it was far from clear what kinds of overarching narratives were going to succeed it. In this sense, the early 1990s in Eastern Europe can be understood as a moment when the power of words and ideas had more influence than under more stable conditions of mature democracies.

The scholarly literature on the postcommunist transition is already vast. The restructuring process in the PHCMS has received considerable attention as well. However, most publications focus on several conventional topics such as: economic viability,<sup>10</sup> political power-struggles and electoral tactics courting the so-called 'orphans of socialism', social costs of restructuring such as unemployment, urban and environmental degradation, crime and pathologies<sup>11</sup> or comparative histories of industrial regions in decline.<sup>12</sup> In this sense, the paper's contribution lies in developing a new historical and informational perspective on (at first glance) a familiar story. As the title suggest, the paper's main assertion is that the first post-communist cabinets of 1989-1993, the economic policy of which was administered by people defining themselves as classical liberals or neoliberals (e.g. Leszek Balcerowicz, Janusz Lewandowski, Jan Krzysztof Bielecki) have failed not only to win, but first of all: to even launch an effective PR campaign accompanying the reforms that were being implemented. As such, the paper faces a fundamental methodological difficulty: it provides the evidence of absence. I will leave it the readers to judge whether the paper successfully overcomes this difficulty.

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<sup>8</sup> Jawłowska, Kempny and Tarkowska, *Kulturowy Wymiar...*, 270.

<sup>9</sup> It was neither literally nor metaphorically a vacuum. The heritage of Poland's thousand years of history has been only partially affected by the post-1945 experience. But there was a sizeable free room left by the disappearance of Marxism-Leninism, however discredited it might have been. Ekiert and Kubik thus wrote about "the relatively open political space created by the old regime's collapse", which was conducive to "the process of defining the public domain and remaking the boundaries between the state and society."

Grzegorz Ekiert and Jan Kubik, *Rebellious Civil Society : Popular Protest and Democratic Consolidation in Poland, 1989-1993* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1999), 11.

<sup>10</sup> Krzysztof Dobrowolski, *Prywatyzacja Kapitałowa w Procesie Transformacji Systemu Gospodarczego w Polsce* (Gdańsk: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Gdańskiego, 2003).

<sup>11</sup> Jan Adam, *Social Costs of Transformation to a Market Economy in Post-Socialist Countries : The Cases of Poland, the Czech Republic, and Hungary* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999).

<sup>12</sup> Karl Eckart et al., *Social, Economic and Cultural Aspects in the Dynamic Changing Process of Old Industrial Regions : Ruhr District (Germany), Upper Silesia (Poland), Ostrava Region (Czech Republic)*, (Munster: Lit Verlag, 2003).

## 2. The Aristocracy of the Working Class in the Silesian Eldorado

Why the emphasis on the PHCMS and not, for example, on the shipyards of the Baltic Coast, the cradle of *Solidarność*? First of all, the PHCMS had been at the very heart of the Polish socialist economy. Before 1989, the energy sector had been completely dependent on coal – only 4 percent of energy consumed in the country came from other sources.<sup>13</sup> For decades, coal had been the highest single source of export revenue adding up to 10 percent of the total export revenues.<sup>14</sup> In 1980, Poland was the fourth biggest coal producer in the world with the highest per capita extraction.<sup>15</sup> Respectively, the Silesian coal miners enjoyed a special status. They were the only occupational group to receive the so-called fourteenth salary. They were eligible for early retirement and other perks such as longer holidays in exclusive resorts. Furthermore, Poland's coal extraction capacity and miners' work ethos was utilized extensively for propaganda purposes. Coal was labeled as the national 'black gold' while the official hammer and sickle imagery was often accompanied by a miner's pickaxe. December the Fourth, *Barbórka* or the Miner's Day, was a national holiday celebrated by festivities comparable with the First of May.<sup>16</sup>

Silesia and her miners enjoyed a special position in socialist Poland, but their true *belle-époque* had begun under Edward Gierek (1970-1980). Edward Gierek, a Silesian by birth and the First Secretary of the Silesian Voivodeship before 1970, directed up to half of national investment to his Silesian powerbase and the Silesian GDP per capita began to markedly diverge from the national average.<sup>17</sup> In 1972, Gierek's leadership launched the construction of the second largest steelwork in the world at the time of its completion – Huta Katowice. Constructed by fifty thousand workers each year for over a decade, this “mammoth prestige industrial project”<sup>18</sup> acquired symbolic meaning in Polish culture and captures both socialist gigantism and Silesia's privileged position. The average miner's wage in 1980 was approximately twice the national average.<sup>19</sup> Important as they were, wages were only a part of the game in the economy in which bureaucratic connections and semi-formal arrangements often decided between poverty and riches. Miners enjoyed exclusive access to holiday resorts on the Baltic Coast, better supplied GEWEX stores and extra allocations of automobiles. Well-connected workers and managers could go on foreign

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<sup>13</sup> Marek S. Szczepański, *Dilemmas of Regionalism and the Region of Dilemmas : The Case of Upper Silesia*, (Katowice: Uniwersytet Śląski, 1993), 8. The 96 percent figure includes brown coal.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

<sup>15</sup> George Blazynski, *Flashpoint Poland* (New York: Pergamon Press, 1979), 195.

<sup>16</sup> Jerzy Eisler et al., *Pomocnik Historyczny Polityki: Dekada Gierka*, (Warszawa: Polityka) 2010, 19-20

<sup>17</sup> See: Główny Urząd Statystyczny, *Mały Rocznik Statystyczny 1970*, (Warszawa: GUS, 1971) and Główny Urząd Statystyczny, *Mały Rocznik Statystyczny 1980*, (Warszawa, GUS, 1981).

<sup>18</sup> George Sanford, *Poland : The Conquest of History* (Amsterdam: Harwood Academic Publishers, 1999), 19.

<sup>19</sup> Blazycza, *Restructuring...*, 105.

'business' trips and cut lines waiting for communal apartments.<sup>20</sup> Miner's mothers were rewarded financially and symbolically with special medals. All these privileges make the virtual exodus of Poles to Silesia under late communism unsurprising and explain why the term 'Silesian Eldorado' became widespread in popular culture.<sup>21</sup>

Material privilege was accompanied by symbolic elevation. The ethos of miners' civilizational mission was especially noticeable in pedagogy. Krzysztof Hetmańczyk was a headhunter and a teacher in a Silesian mining school and travelled through Poland in the 1970s looking for teenagers willing to come and work in Silesia. He recalled those days in the following words:

"I ironed my miner's uniform, packed my bags and I was off. [...] I used to talk about toil, courage, manhood. But I did not forget to mention new apartments, high salaries, educational possibilities, free catering. After each meeting I could not get away from boys from seventh and eighth grades. [...] For their parents, I unfolded a vision of a stable and useful job. Most of them knew that if they send their kid to Silesia they will not have to worry about his upkeep. They rather expected him to begin sending money back to them soon."<sup>22</sup>

In Silesia, the dual legacies of material and symbolic elevation overlapped with the traditional blue-collar work ethos dating back to the nineteenth century. It found its expression in the "cultivation of occupational rituals, strong and extensive family-neighborhood networks and attachment to conservative mores."<sup>23</sup> The traditional blue-collar culture "could become an obstacle in the process of adapting to new conditions";<sup>24</sup> conditions which "required radical adaptive behavior."<sup>25</sup> In light of this singular overlap of strong communist and regional legacies, the milieu of Silesian miners and the post-1989 free market rhetoric might have indeed appeared as two worlds incompatible virtually by definition.

Finally, the PHCMS is highly concentrated in one region – the Upper Silesia. This small area (approximately 2 percent of Poland territorially, but up to 15 percent in terms of population)<sup>26</sup> still remains the industrial powerhouse of the Polish economy. In 1989, sixty four out of sixty six deep coal mines were located there and produced 96 percent of total coal output.<sup>27</sup> The Upper Silesia accounted for 25 percent of

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<sup>20</sup> Eisler et al., *Pomocnik Historyczny*, 25-29.

<sup>21</sup> Marek S. Szczepański, *Opel z Górniczym Pióropuszem : Województwa Katowickie i Śląskie w Procesie Przemian*, (Katowice: Śląsk, 2002), 51.

<sup>22</sup> K. Hetmańczyk, "Najemnicy. Te czasy już nie wrócą", *Dziennik Zachodni*, nr.212, 25 October, 1996.

<sup>23</sup> Kazimiera Wódz, ed., *Górnicy wobec wyzwań restrukturyzacji. Raport z badań w woj. Katowickim*, (Katowice: Uniwersytet Śląski, 1997), 133.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 133.

<sup>26</sup> Dorota Czakon, *Województwa Katowickie i Śląskie Oraz Ich Mieszkańcy w Procesie Zmian : Społeczne Koszty Transformacji* (Częstochowa: Wydawnictwo Wyższej Szkoły Pedagogicznej w Częstochowie, 2003), 13.

<sup>27</sup> Blazyca, *Restructuring...*, 26.

the Polish GNP and 20 percent of the export revenues before the transition.<sup>28</sup> The scale of the post-1989 restructuring was of unprecedented magnitude. The peak extraction capacity of approximately 200 million tons in 1988 dropped to 100 million tons in 1997 and to 70 million tons in 2010.<sup>29</sup> The reduction in employment had been, proportionally, even greater: from almost half a million in 1989 to 140 000 in 2006.<sup>30</sup> Unsurprisingly, the restructuring of the PHCMS became one of the hallmark cases exemplifying what the term 'social costs of transition' implied both in Poland and abroad.

In 1989, Poland was still the fourth largest coal trader on the globe. The *Wspólnota Węgla Kamiennego* (Hard Coal Commonwealth) grouped 72 mines and was nominally one of the largest single businesses worldwide with 600 000 officially registered employers.<sup>31</sup> In consequence of the employment reductions and mine closures, overall productivity climbed from 1942 Kg/pdn in 1989 to 3955 Kg/pdn in 2006.<sup>32</sup> Only between 1998 and 2001, almost one hundred thousand workers left the PHCMS, which was equivalent to 30 percent of the 1998 workforce.<sup>33</sup> While some mining sectors in other regions of the world had been liquidated completely, hardly anywhere was the process of decline so abrupt. In Western Scotland, for example, traditional industries had been in decline at least since the Great Depression only to be closed down definitively in the 1980s.<sup>34</sup>

In addition to objective deprivation measured by material standards of living such as real wages or consumption per capita, the subjective experience of deprivation had a powerful relative dimension. It entailed a degradation of status and prestige. Piotr Sztompka expressed it succinctly in the 2000s:

“These groups [miners and farmers] still think they are the salt of the earth. The kings of life. This is a kind of awareness inertia. The workers from giant factories justifiably consider themselves to be the fathers of the [1989] revolution and now this revolution devours them.”<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Główny Urząd Statystyczny, *Rocznik Statystyczny Województw 1997*, (Warszawa: GUS, 1998), 34.

<sup>29</sup> Ministerstwo Gospodarki, *Strategia działalności górnictwa węgla kamiennego w Polsce w latach 2007-2015*, (Warszawa: Ministerstwo Gospodarki, 2007), 3.

<sup>30</sup> A. Karbownik, M. Turek, "Restrukturyzacja zatrudnienia w polskim górnictwie węgla kamiennego w roku 2002", *Wiadomości Górnicze*, nr. 6, 2003, 255.

<sup>31</sup> John Edgar Jackson, et al., *The Political Economy of Poland's Transition : New Firms and Reform Governments* (Cambridge, UK.: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 30.

<sup>32</sup> Kg/pdn – kilograms per employee per day.

Ministerstwo Gospodarki, *Informacja o przebiegu restrukturyzacji górnictwa węgla kamiennego w 2006 roku z uwzględnieniem syntetycznych wniosków dotyczących niepełnego wykonania założeń programowych na lata 2005-2006*. (Warszawa: Ministerstwo Gospodarki, 2007), 6.

<sup>33</sup> Fornalczyk, Choroszczak and Mikulec, *Restrukturyzacja Górnictwa Węgla Kamiennego : Programy, Bariery, Efektywność, Pomoc Publiczna*, 35.

<sup>34</sup> Blazyca, *Restructuring...*, Preface.

<sup>35</sup> Andrzej K. Koźmiński and Piotr Sztompka, *Rozmowa o Wielkiej Przemianie* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Wyższej Szkoły Przedsiębiorczości i Zarządzania im. Leona Koźmińskiego, 2004), 81.

While the financial constraints imposed by the World Bank, the IMF and global completion allowed for little flexibility in terms of employment reduction, symbolic degradation created an opportunity for various types of public relations strategies to mitigate its negative consequences. The urgent need to use this opportunity was further underscored by the fact that the Silesian miners formed the single most powerful occupational lobby in Polish politics. Their main trump card was the “subjective feeling of power”<sup>36</sup> originating from the local concentration of labor that facilitated virtually spontaneous protests up to 300.000 strong. Silesia was also a crucial railway hub connecting vast stretches of southern and central Poland – a fact exploited to organize disruptive blockades on numerous occasions. Poland was facing imminent power outages without a steady flow of coal and the entire country could be brought to a standstill within weeks if the authorities did not come to an agreement with the striking miners.<sup>37</sup>

The prospect of Silesian miners paralyzing the country was one of the main public scares at the turn of the millennium. It is reflected in a scene from a cult movie *Dzień Świra* (Day of the Wacko, 2002). After receiving his monthly salary (about a third of the average mining salary), a high school literature teacher reflects on his (in his words) “mongrel” social status in the following way: “Why am I not a prole with a bat in my hand? Someone would listen to me if I tossed the brick!”<sup>38</sup> These words were a clear reference to the miners’ demonstrations in Warsaw in the late 1990s (with the most spectacular one in May 1998) that occurred with systematic regularity and often led to violent clashes with the police and widespread damage. His words are representative of the mixture of contempt and respect with which the Polish intelligentsia viewed the post-communist working class.

### 3. Public Relations: Information, Discourse, Rhetoric and Symbols

#### 3.1 The Shock Therapy: Actions Will Speak for Themselves (1990-1993)

The 'shock therapy' was a phrase embraced both by its critics and its proponents. It referred to the plan of radical economic reforms authored jointly by Leszek Balcerowicz, the Harvard economist Jeffrey Sachs, the World Bank and many others. The first day of January in 1990 was the first day in Poland since September 1939 that prices could be freely set, employees freely hired and fired, foreign currency freely obtained without administrative permission and foreign products freely imported. However, no particular

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<sup>36</sup> Habuda, *Transformacyjne Decyzje i Decyzyjne Procesy*, 95

<sup>37</sup> Leszek Balcerowicz, Jerzy Baczyński and Jerzy Koźmiński, *800 Dni : Szok Kontrolowany*, (Warszawa: Polska Oficyna Wydawnicza "BWG", 1992), 98.

<sup>38</sup> Marek Koterski, *Day of the Wacko* [Dzien Swira], 2002.



industrial policy program with respect to the PHCMS had been developed until 1992. The gigantic Hard Coal Commonwealth was simply disbanded on January 1, 1990 and each mine became an autonomous enterprise.<sup>39</sup> While the price of coal was still subsidized until 1993 and some export regulations remained in place, enterprises were expected to generate profit or go bankrupt.<sup>40</sup> By 1993, the PHCMS was generating heavy losses despite the continuing inflow of subsidies to keep it afloat.<sup>41</sup>

The first tensions between the Silesian miners and Warsaw crept up to the surface of public life in the fall of 1992. The leaders of the PHCMS argued that the price of coal set by the state (12 USD per ton) was artificially low in light of the rising production costs.<sup>42</sup> Export was becoming impossible due to high taxes, the liberalization of the USD-PLN exchange rate and the radical anti-inflationary measures of the shock therapy that led to the Zloty's appreciation. Accounting was rendered impossibly complex by the galloping inflation (which fell to double digits only in 1992) and currency exchange fluctuations which meant that the state had to adjust the guaranteed coal purchase price virtually on a daily basis and any predictions about future export revenues were purely speculative.

The economist (and historians) who had shaped the course of the Polish road to capitalism were mainly from the Baltic port city of Gdańsk<sup>43</sup> and were centered around the newly established think-tank called the Centrum Badań nad Gospodarką Rynkową (Center for Market Economy Studies). Gdańsk was the cradle of such figures as Donald Tusk (Prime Minister since 2007, today: EU President), Jan Krzysztof Bielecki (Prime Minister in 1991) or Janusz Lewandowski (the first Privatization Minister and later a EU Budget and Finance Commissioner). Leszek Balcerowicz cooperated with the Gdańsk circle closely. There seems to be a consensus, especially among their opponents, that those figures, who self-identified themselves as neoliberals or classical liberals, were dominant in terms of not only being in power to shape policy, but also to supply the mainstream narrative framing the developments in Poland both for internal and especially for foreign audiences.<sup>44</sup> The President of the Polish Economic Society at the time, Zbigniew Sadowski, explained the nature of the neoliberal influence in the following way:

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<sup>39</sup> Leszek Balcerowicz, Jerzy Baczyński and Jerzy Koźmiński, *800 Dni : Szok Kontrolowany*, 94.

<sup>40</sup> Zamierzenia rządu w dziedzinie restrukturyzacji gospodarki, 16 May, 1991.

As reprinted in: Kamola-Cieślak, *Polityka Gospodarcza w Programach Rządów Polskich z Lat 1989-1997 : Wybór Źródeł*, (Toruń: Wydawnictwo Adam Marszałek, 2009), 107.

<sup>41</sup> Ocena skuteczności instrumentów polityki przemysłowej w latach 1993-1994, March 1995.

As reprinted in: *Ibid.*, 410.

<sup>42</sup> Wojciech Błasiak, "Sytuacja polskiego hutnictwa żelaza i stali w kontekście europejskim i światowym", *Kurier Związkowy*, nr 23, 2003.

<sup>43</sup> Hence the term the 'Gdańsk Liberals' which became somewhat synonymous to the term 'Chicago Boys' in Polish culture.

<sup>44</sup> Jacek Kochanowicz et al., *Kulturowe Aspekty Transformacji Ekonomicznej* (Warszawa: Instytut Spraw Publicznych, 2007), 235-238.

“For many years we had been dominated by the [Marxist] doctrine against which many of us revolted, but which intangibly influenced our ways of thinking. [...] After the systemic change – a prominent throwback reaction occurred towards the other extreme – the neoliberal doctrine was adopted virtually overnight [...] to the extent that practically everyone who tried to go against the current was accused of trying to return to the command economy.”<sup>45</sup>

The dynamics of the paradigm shift in the former Soviet Bloc economies was aptly captured by a joke told by Joseph Stiglitz in his 1991 lectures at the London School Economics: “Milton Friedman is the most widely respected economist within the Soviet Union – though his books and articles remain to be read.”<sup>46</sup> The neoliberal cause was further promoted in Poland through “strong pressure for financial orthodoxy from the international financial institutions.”<sup>47</sup> Without World Bank’s support, Poland would not have been given the millions of dollars in cheap loans and its national debt would not have been cut in half by the Paris Club in 1992.<sup>48</sup>

An example of the kind of public rhetoric employed by the neoliberals can be found in the so-called *expose*<sup>49</sup> given by the Prime Minister Jan Krzysztof Bielecki on January 5, 1991. *Expose* is the first opening speech in the parliament given by the Prime Minister of an incumbent government in which the overall direction of the new policy is outlined. He addressed the parliament with the following words:

“The task of my government is to awaken new individual and national aspirations and to endow the reforms with new vigor. We will base our policy on entrepreneurship and efficiency. We understand that unpopular decisions have to lead to socially desirable outcomes. [...] *What will count are not words*, but actions and tangible evidence that we are able to capitalize on the freedom we have recovered. [...] Our reform will not be taken from a textbook. We will entrust it to the practitioners of the market, who know its problems, take the risks and act out of self-interest. We will accelerate the education of personnel that will constitute the tissue of our future market economy: managers, bankers, stock brokers. [...] We are well aware of the key to reanimating the state sector and setting it on the path of long-term growth. This key is private property and competition.”<sup>50</sup>

Bielecki promised praised the “society which demonstrated great courage and great sacrifice in accepting the necessity of partial unemployment.”<sup>51</sup> However, he dedicated merely several words to the vital issue of informational policy. He declared: “the government will lead an open informational policy; we will speak

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 238.

<sup>46</sup> Joseph E. Stiglitz, *Whither Socialism?*, (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1994), 3.

<sup>47</sup> Myant, M. R. and Terry Cox, *Reinventing Poland : Economic and Political Transformation and Evolving National Identity*, (New York: Routledge, 2008), 15.

<sup>48</sup> Program gospodarczy rządu: stan obecny (rok 1990) i dalsze działania, 4 June 1990.

As reprinted in: Kamola-Cieślak, *Polityka Gospodarcza w Programach Rządów Polskich z Lat 1989-1997 : Wybór Źródeł*, 72.

<sup>49</sup> The opening speech in the parliament after elections or change of government given by the Prime Minister in which he outlines the chief policy aims of his government.

<sup>50</sup> Expose prezesa Rady Ministrów Jana Krzysztofa Bieleckiego dotyczące programu działań rządu, 5 January 1991. My own emphasis. As reprinted in: Kamola-Cieślak, *Polityka Gospodarcza w Programach Rządów Polskich z Lat 1989-1997 : Wybór Źródeł*, 155-156.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 158.

not only about successes, but also about failures and why they took place. Nevertheless, we hope that the independent press, radio and television will do it better.”<sup>52</sup> These words aptly characterize the default neoliberal approach between 1990 and 1993: we will focus on the reforms, our actions will speak for themselves and will leave to others to explain why they are necessary and desirable.

Leszek Balcerowicz was more skeptical of the independent media. Before 1989, he wrote, the communists had full control of the media and could indulge in *propaganda sukcesu*<sup>53</sup> with no limits. After censorship had finally been lifted, “the media naturally focused on what had been hitherto censored, i.e. on the negative phenomena of the new reality. [...] Television viewers might have been confused by the increased visibility of undesirable phenomena such as crime and poverty and thus they underestimated the real growth.”<sup>54</sup> This observation was in particular applicable to the controversial issue of privatization. Balcerowicz argued that “someone who formed his opinion on privatization based on what the Polish Public TV broadcasted would be like someone who has only seen an old nag and from then on believed that all horses are lame and emaciated.”<sup>55</sup> The prevalent negative sentiment toward privatization was expressed by Jan Olszewski, the Prime Minister in 1992, who, in his *expose*, called for “more efficient controls to limit the excesses and the plunder of national wealth. Privatization can no longer be perceived as an operation thanks to which those who already have the money get more money and those who do not - become even poorer.”<sup>56</sup>

A survey of neoliberal writings and public statements in the early 1990s allows to spot two other common positions on the increasingly visible social costs of transformation: ‘deny the problem’ and ‘blame the victim’. The first one is best exemplified in Jeffrey Sachs’s *Poland’s Jump to Market Economy* (1993) – a short book based on his lectures at the London School of Economics delivered in 1991. Sachs argued that the therapy was not as shocking as it might have seemed and that the patient was at least not worse off than before while the rising unemployment figures were largely caused by new, more accurate statistical methodology. However, the take-away message that the Silesian miners might have received<sup>57</sup> was that

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<sup>52</sup> Kamola-Cieślak, *Polityka Gospodarcza w Programach Rządów Polskich z Lat 1989-1997 : Wybór Źródeł*, 161.

<sup>53</sup> ‘Propaganda of success’ was a term often used to refer to how the communists tried to built their legitimacy, especially during the relatively prosperous years of the early 1970s. Eisler et al., *Pomocnik Historyczny*, 49.

<sup>54</sup> Leszek Balcerowicz, *Socjalizm, Kapitalizm, Transformacja*, 177.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 297.

<sup>56</sup> *Expose* prezesa Rady Ministrów Jana Olszewskiego dotyczące programu działań rządu, 21 December 1991.

As reprinted in: Kamola-Cieślak, *Polityka Gospodarcza w Programach Rządów Polskich z Lat 1989-1997 : Wybór Źródeł*, 276.

<sup>57</sup> Jeffrey Sachs was a recognizable figure in Poland. According to Wojciech Błasiak, a sociologist, politician and trade union activist from Silesia, he was the “mastermind behind the plan to remove the competition of Polish coal” to help Western producers. Wojciech Błasiak, *Jak niszczone górnictwo węgla kamiennego w III Rzeczpospolitej*, March, 2011.

<http://prawica.net/opinie/25150>

Leszek Balcerowicz's friend was telling his London audience that Polish society was "excessively egalitarian" under communism and that most of the post-1989 unemployment was merely a manifestation of "hidden unemployment" already in existence before 1989.<sup>58</sup> This claim could have been factually accurate, but the kind of reverberations it produced among the Silesian miners could not have been positive. Even if it was unlikely that the London lectures ever reached the miners directly, Sachs's figure soon acquired a symbolic dimension. For many, he embodied the elusive figure of 'foreign experts' who provided incorrect or purposefully malignant advice responsible for the travails of the PHCMS in the 1990s.

'Blame the victim' was another popular attitude and Leszek Balcerowicz was not immune to its convenient embrace. In his book *Socjalizm, Kapitalizm, Transformacja*, Balcerowicz made the following argument: it is obvious that the reforms will be costly, but not to reform would be like "not to walk because it causes friction". The reason why people are getting frustrated is because they make a "methodological error". Namely, they compare their current lives to how their lives used to look like, "instead of comparing them to an alternative real income scenario which would have taken place if the reforms had not occurred."<sup>59</sup> In other words, the unemployed Silesian miners were making an erroneous judgment about their state of wellbeing. Balcerowicz offered different, more persuasive and balanced explanations as well, but it is clear that point to "methodological errors" could not have helped to sway the Silesian miners in favor of the reforms. This example is illustrative of a larger trend. Balcerowicz's analysis was in many ways accurate and insightful just as his shock therapy was arguably a necessary remedy. But his professed and intelligible repulsion at the kind of propaganda tricks practiced by the old regime must have influenced his conscious unwillingness to engage in any kinds of PR operations. He perhaps considered them to be an unnecessary post-factum sweetener, but such sweeteners could have helped to mitigate the intensity of social resistance to the reforms.

A philosophized version of the 'blame the victim' argument was popular in centrist and Christian democratic milieus concentrated around the *Gazeta Wyborcza* daily and the Freedom Union party. It was embraced by such figures as Father Józef Tischner, a spiritual leader of the Solidarity movement. He based his analysis on the concepts of 'Homo Sovieticus' and 'escape from freedom'. He wrote: "[c]ommunism was a secular version of the religious theory of predestination. It is striking that such a faith was so widely accepted in the twentieth century. This acceptance can be accounted for only by the fact that this faith is

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<sup>58</sup> Jeffrey Sachs, *Poland's Jump to the Market Economy* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1993), 22.

<sup>59</sup> Leszek Balcerowicz, *Socjalizm, Kapitalizm, Transformacja* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, 1997), 327.

the most recent incarnation of 'escape from freedom.'"<sup>60</sup> The 'orphans of socialism' preferred to escape from freedom into etatist-statist attitudes and preservationist trade union activity. Cultural legacy of communism, on the other hand, had been underappreciated by the neoliberal camp. Jeffrey Sachs wrote: "events have disproved the idea of 'Homo Sovieticus' spoiled by decades of communism. As soon as economic and political liberties were established, new entrepreneurs surged forward with energy, determination and capacity."<sup>61</sup> This inconsistency is reflective of a larger rift that emerged between the neoliberals such as Jan Krzysztof Bielecki and the Christian Democrats such as Tadeusz Mazowiecki soon after the common enemy, the old regime, was gone. It is also indicative of the fact the first post-1989 cabinets failed to work out a common strategy to approach the 'orphans of socialism'. Those who blamed the victim often viewed the problem fatalistically: *homo sovieticus* had to leave the scene, his overbearing heritage was too heavy a burden. Free market enthusiasts, on the other hand, often ascribed more social capital (spontaneous entrepreneurship) to some post-communist milieus than justified by reality.

The shock therapy as a term is an example of how emotionally charged and intellectually shallow the transition discourse became. It was a term taken from clinical psychiatry, which obviously did not equip it with a positive set of immediate associations. Balcerowicz correctly predicted that it "was going to antagonize the public opinion and make it skeptical toward radical economic measures."<sup>62</sup> On the other hand, people who suggested following the continental model of a social market economy instead of the Anglo-Saxon one were automatically accused of a crypto-communist orientation. This growing polarization and doctrinal disputes did not help the first post-communist governments to form a common strategy to approach those on the losing end of transformation.

The amount of social trust and political capital in the hands of the anti-Communist opposition in 1989 was of historic proportions.<sup>63</sup> In Balcerowicz's words, it was a period extraordinary politics which facilitated extraordinary solutions. The shock therapy might have been the only way to stop the hyperinflation of the late 1980s. The long-term success of the Polish economy is hardly thinkable without it. It is even more true, however, that the measures applied were far from self-explanatory to many. By 1992, 'ordinary politics' was back in place. With over seven thousand strikes and almost four hundred thousand people on the streets in 1993,<sup>64</sup> the remnants of national unity were gone. With the poverty rate rising to

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<sup>60</sup> Józef Tischner, *Nieszczęsny dar wolności*, (Kraków: Znak, 1993), 123.

<sup>61</sup> Sachs, *Poland's Jump...*, Preface.

<sup>62</sup> Balcerowicz, *Socjalizm, Kapitalizm, Transformacja*, 294.

<sup>63</sup> Ekiert and Kubik, *Rebellious Civil Society...*, 113-114.

<sup>64</sup> Marjorie Castle and Ray Taras, *Democracy in Poland*, (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 2002), 178.

20 percent in 1995 compared to 6 percent in 1987,<sup>65</sup> Sachs's international recognition and his words about declining unemployment could only irritate those who felt they ended up on the losing side.

If one takes Prime Minister Bielecki's words literally, the neoliberals (purposefully) neglected to support the reforms with public relations policies. They certainly did not translate their macroeconomic arguments into the everyday language of Polish workers, they did not engage in social dialogue and assumed that the free-market transition and the decline of traditional industries and the old welfare state were axiomatic. That they were not is documented, for example, by the fact that in 1992, 80 percent of Poles wanted to see social programs expanded, and only 14.8 percent thought their curtailment was a good idea.<sup>66</sup> According to a study by the libertarian weekly *Wprost* in 1992, most respondents believed that high politics with its divisive partisanship had little or nothing to do with social concerns and that this situation led to alienation and passivity.<sup>67</sup> *Wprost* researchers also found that the high level of electoral absenteeism was highly correlated with a negative assessment of the Balcerowicz Plan.

"Balcerowicz must go" (*Balcerowicz musi odejść*, in the early 2000s it meant: Balcerowicz has to be dismissed from his post of the head of the central bank) became one of the most popular anti-establishment slogans used both on the streets and in the parliament. Andrzej Lepper, the Deputy Prime Minister between 2005 and 2007 and the founder of the populist Self-Defense party, had constructed his public image by ending many of his parliamentary speeches (2001-2005) precisely with those three words. This fact suggests that the discrepancy between the generally unquestioned economic necessity of restructuring and its meager informational support was of critical importance and led to acute knowledge deficiency about the reforms among social groups such as the Silesian miners. The hybrid nature of this entanglement was well-summarized by Andrzej Koźmiński, the founder of the now most prestigious private business school in Poland: "the solution to these problems [of restructuring] requires both high levels of public-opinion-engineering [*socjotechnika*] and good economic policies at the same time."<sup>68</sup> Without the two components in place, the postcommunist electoral victory in 1993 comes as less of a surprise.

If there was one distinct PR strategy devised by the neoliberal (and continued by the post-communist) elites to showcase the benefits of transformation, it was the emphasis on foreign direct investment. In the Silesian context, the Opel automobile factory was meant to play such a role. In 1996, the

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<sup>65</sup> Adam, *Social Costs of Transformation to a Market Economy in Post-Socialist Countries: The Cases of Poland, the Czech Republic, and Hungary*, 164.

<sup>66</sup> Jerzy Indraszkiewicz, *Demokracja i Gospodarka: Świadomość zmian ustrojowych w Polsce*, (Kraków: Universitas, 1994), 64-65.

<sup>67</sup> *Wprost*, June 28, nr. 23, 1992, 2.

<sup>68</sup> Koźmiński and Sztompka, *Rozmowa o Wielkiej Przemianie*, 80.

German Opel decided to locate its new plant in Gliwice, one of the Upper Silesian cities. The total value of the investment was estimated to be 300 million USD and the total number of workers to be employed – 3000.<sup>69</sup> The plant had been built in a record time of twenty two months. The construction and the opening ceremony were widely reported in the media, the first shovel dig was performed by President Alexander Kwaśniewski.<sup>70</sup> The Solidarity-liberal coalition (1997-2001) and the pro-market oriented press attempted to turn the Gliwice Opel plant into a kind of a symbol of the benefits of the transition.<sup>71</sup> This type of investment was too isolated, however, and fell on the Silesian ground largely hostile to foreign capital, especially with its long history of Polish-German complexities.

Another strategy was to point to countries that had been in a similar underdeveloped position as Poland and had successfully utilized their 'advantages of backwardness' to 'catch up with the West'. Balcerowicz and others often painted the 'Asian Tigers' and South Korea in particular as models for Poland on its way to capitalism.<sup>72</sup> The presidential elections of 1991 are now commonly remembered under the heading "we will build a second Japan" coined by Lech Wałęsa.<sup>73</sup> This phrase has made it into common parlance, but more often as a derisive symbol highlighting the developmental gap between the two countries. The same strategy was used by the current Prime Minister Donald Tusk in the 2007 parliamentary campaign, but he spoke of "a second Ireland".<sup>74</sup> Ironically vindicating the elusive fortunes of such strategies, Japan experienced a decade of stagnation in the 1990s and Ireland came close to bankruptcy soon after Tusk won the elections.

### 3.2. Postcommunists and the Return of *Socjotechnika*

The results of the 1993 elections came as a shock to many in Poland and abroad. What seemed unthinkable in 1989, did take place: the Left Democratic Alliance (SLD), as the Polish United Workers' Party now rebranded itself, was back in power with a democratic mandate. They were "catapulted to power" thanks to their success in capitalizing on "worker discontent in the sprawling industrial regions" and in Silesia in particular.<sup>75</sup> The neoliberals accused the left of a cynical exploitation of social discontent for political purposes. Populism was also the main accusation thrown against their former Solidarity camp

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<sup>69</sup> Szczepański, *Opel z Górniczym Pióropuszem...*, 45.

<sup>70</sup> Marek Dreszer, "Pierwsza łopata pod fabrykę General Motors / Opel made in Gliwice", *Gazeta Wyborcza Katowice*, 10 March 1996, 1.

<sup>71</sup> Marek Dreszer, "Prawnukowie wracają / Bankiet, jakiego dotąd nie było", *Gazeta Wyborcza Bielsko Biala*, 10 March 1996, 2.

<sup>72</sup> Balcerowicz, *Socjalizm, Kapitalizm, Transformacja*, 21.

<sup>73</sup> Lech Wałęsa, *Moja Japonia*, Tygodnik Powszechny, 2000.

<http://www.tygodnik.com.pl/japonia/walesa.html>

<sup>74</sup> "Druga Irlandia: Rząd zabierze ulgę prorodziną i na internet, podnosi VAT. Stracimy do 650 zł", *Super Ekspres*, 13 October, 2010.

<sup>75</sup> Castle and Taras, *Democracy in Poland*, 163.

colleagues on the right, who now drew closer to the original base of the Solidarity movement – trade unions and the Catholic Church. According to Jan Kubik and Grzegorz Ekiert, one reason why the neoliberals distanced themselves from their former Solidarity partners was due to the “unsophistication” of the latter: “[t]his phrase was rarely used in the official public discourse, yet it emerged in many private conversations we had with various reformists between 1989 and 1993.”<sup>76</sup> One prominent neoliberal politician was reported to refer to trade union activists as “stinking men with sweating palms”.<sup>77</sup>

The first indication of the changing attitude to the importance of PR was the *expose* by Waldemar Pawlak, the Prime Minister of the newly formed SLD-PSL (Polskie Stronnictwo Ludowe, Polish People’s Party) coalition government. He began by remarking that “Poland needs profound reforms, but these reforms have to be made with people and for the people. Poles are realists and don’t expect miracles. But they do want the authorities to treat them like partners, to tell them the truth and to define aims according to resources and possibilities at hand.”<sup>78</sup> He also promised his government was not going to “race anyone in how fast reformist ideas are being produced” and that social policy expenditures “will not be treated as yet another budgetary liability, but an investment in human capital.”<sup>79</sup> Pawlak attributed the possibility to implement the shock therapy to “the unparalleled selflessness” of the Polish society in withstanding the “very painful operations on the living social organism.”<sup>80</sup> But some costs could have been avoided, he argued, as they were “primarily a result of excessive dogmatism” of the neoliberals.<sup>81</sup>

Some manifestations of this shift could be observed already during the last months of the first post-communist *Sejm*, in particular after the strikes began to erupt in the fall of 1992. In December, 65 mines and 300 000 miners went on strike and coal deliveries to the energy sector ceased. On December 23, all the mines shut down.<sup>82</sup> Poland faced a prospect of a cold winter. Under pressure, the government agreed to set up the Tri-Partite Commission for Miners’ Social Security which was meant to serve as a meeting ground for politicians, managers and workers. What followed was the establishment of a nationwide Tri-Partite Commission on Socio-Economic Issues in February 1994. It was composed of representatives of three interest groups: workers, employers and the government. The Commission was not only a platform for

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<sup>76</sup> Ekiert and Kubik, *Rebellious Civil Society...*, 167.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, 167.

<sup>78</sup> *Expose* prezesa Rady Ministrów Waldemara Pawlaka dotyczące programu działań rządu, 8 November 1993.

Kamola-Cieślik, *Polityka Gospodarcza w Programach Rządów Polskich z Lat 1989-1997 : Wybór Źródeł*, 323.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, 326.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, 330.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, 331.

<sup>82</sup> John Edgar Jackson, Jacek Klich and Krystyna Poznańska, *The Political Economy of Poland's Transition : New Firms and Reform Governments* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 44.



dialogue and compromise, but it was also equipped with instruments such as adjusting the minimal wage and social payments indexation ratios.<sup>83</sup> Both commissions had not prevented new eruptions of social tensions from reaching the streets, but marked significant progress especially given the absence of similar institutions at the earlier stages of the transition.

The new approach culminated in signing the Regional Contract for the Katowice Voivodeship in 1995. It was a “public-constitutional contract” between the central government and representatives of the region, i.e. a document legally binding for the government, the Katowice Voivodeship and its inhabitants. Its importance is marked by the fact that it was the only kind of such legal bill after the Round Table Agreements of 1989. It was “the danger stemming from the lack of willingness to accept the necessary economic changes that was at the roots of the idea. [...] The program of restructuring must be accepted by both actors and spectators; it must be intelligible to each single resident of the region, because only then it is persuasive.”<sup>84</sup> The Contract acknowledged the existence of “a serious economic and social regress in consequence of the mono-cultural model of growth based on heavy industry and extraction” and included a long list of measures aimed at reversing that process.<sup>85</sup> It emphasized the role of local self-governance units in transmitting the goals and methods of Warsaw’s policy to its targets, the role of continuous social dialogue as well as the importance of the tri-partite commissions as platforms for problem solving.<sup>86</sup>

The annual Contract renegotiations were broken by the Silesian side in 1997. The local experts were disappointed not only by the government’s unwillingness to fold to their demands, but also by the lack of knowledge about the regional conditions exhibited by Warsaw-based officials. “The cause of this decision [to break negotiations] is rooted in the fact that the government did not take the negotiations seriously; it was unprepared in terms of expertise and personnel. Further negotiations are not going to produce any effects.”<sup>87</sup> In a survey conducted in 1998, 66 percent of the respondents negatively evaluated the implementation of the Contract; the number of positive opinions was 16 percent.<sup>88</sup> A poll conducted two years earlier revealed that only 46 percent of the Silesians heard about the Contract and only 10

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<sup>83</sup> Geneza i historia TK w latach 1994–2001.

[http://www.dialog.gov.pl/komisja\\_trojstronna/historia](http://www.dialog.gov.pl/komisja_trojstronna/historia)

<sup>84</sup> Władysław Jacher, “Dylematy restrukturyzacji na Górnym Śląsku”, *Gazeta Uniwersytecka UŚ*, Wydział Specjalne, September 1997.

<sup>85</sup> *Kontrakt Regionalny dla Województwa Katowickiego*, Katowice, 5 October, 1995, 2.

Reprinted in: Marek Barański, ed., *Kontrakt Regionalny dla Województwa Katowickiego : Dorobek i Opinie* (Katowice: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego, 1999), 30-110.

<sup>86</sup> *Kontrakt Regionalny...*, 5.

<sup>87</sup> M. Janicka, “Negocjacje w Martwym Punkcie i co dalej?”, *Sejmik Samorządowy*, March 1997.

<sup>88</sup> Marek Barański, ed., *Kontrakt Regionalny...*, 131.

percent claimed to know it well.<sup>89</sup> These results were confirmed by Stanisław Michalczyk, who studied the intensity of coverage the Contract enjoyed in the local media. He noticed a significant increase immediately before elections (1996-1997) and a virtual silence afterwards.<sup>90</sup> He concluded that "a member of the local community easily loses track - he does not know whether the *Contract* is still work in progress or whether it has already been implemented."<sup>91</sup>

Despite the promising start, the Regional Contract turned out to be a well-intentioned failure and remained valid predominantly *de jure*.<sup>92</sup> Nonetheless, despite Silesia's skepticism with respect to the political motives behind the Contract, progress in terms of informational policy and social dialogue was noticeable. The SLD strove "to forge an attractive, coherent [and] convincing political discourse founded on the principles of modern [...] secular social democracy."<sup>93</sup> However, this progress was not paralleled by the political will to enforce the economic reforms in the PHCMS. It was an ironic reversal of the situation between 1989 and 1993 – the *socjotechnika* [PR] was now applied, but the reforms were aborted. The new informational strategy could not have solved the economic problems of the PHCMS on its own. The SLD-PSL government relied on subsidies and debt write-offs and the structural changes in the PHCMS were proceeding slowly. The debts were still accumulating and the average extraction cost was prohibitively uncompetitive.

It was only in 1996 that Jerzy Markowski, a Silesian-born engineer and the Secretary of State in the Ministry of Industry and Trade, designed a comprehensive reform bill which outlined a long-term strategy for making the PHCMS profitable.<sup>94</sup> Restructuring was impossible without a substantial employment reduction and mine closures, both of which were envisaged by the Markowski Plan. As soon as its measures began to be implemented, the relative calm of 1994-1996 was shattered by a new wave of strikes and protests. The political cost of the reform was exacerbated by the approaching parliamentary elections of 1997. In fact, by the time of the elections, only a fraction of the Plan had been realized. As it was observed by some commentators: "Enforcing radical steps in a systematic way [...] was something that this coalition could not afford. [...] As long as political benefits stemming from artificially maintaining high employment

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<sup>89</sup> A. Bartoszek, L.A. Gruszczynski, *Województwo Katowickie '96. Obraz życia i jego warunków w świadomości mieszkańców. Raport o Rozwoju Społecznym*, (UNDP: Katowice, 1996), 116-117.

<sup>90</sup> Marek Barański, ed., *Kontrakt Regionalny...*, 201.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, 201.

<sup>92</sup> According to the local *Trybuna Śląska* [Silesian Tribune], the implementation of the *Contract* was a "farce".

"Farsa, nie Kontrakt...", *Trybuna Śląska*, 6 February, 1997, 2.

<sup>93</sup> Ekiert and Hanson, *Capitalism and Democracy in Central and Eastern Europe : Assessing the Legacy of Communist Rule*, 328.

<sup>94</sup> *Górnictwo węgla kamiennego. Polityka państwa i sektora na lata 1996-2000. Program dostosowania górnictwa węgla kamiennego do warunków gospodarki rynkowej i międzynarodowej konkurencyjności*, 30 April, 1996.

As reprinted in: Kamola-Cieślak, *Polityka Gospodarcza w Programach Rządów Polskich z Lat 1989-1997 : Wybór Źródeł*, 544-547.

are higher than economic gains stemming from higher productivity, the status quo will hold.”<sup>95</sup> As the 1993 elections demonstrated, Silesia was an electoral stronghold of the left and the SLD could not risk an open conflict with its electorate.

The situation in which *de jure* autonomous enterprises were constantly generating deficits covered by taxpayers had eventually generated a fundamentally distorted incentives structure. The management of the PHCMS displayed no interest in reigniting the conflict with the trade unions since it could now rely on Warsaw’s generosity to prolong the convenient peace and quiet. According to press reports, a CEO of a large Silesian mine financed a bus to transport his employees to Warsaw for a demonstration.<sup>96</sup> It was a demonstration against the government’s employment reduction plans and the management’s ruthlessness in their execution. If someone sponsors a demonstration against himself, little further analysis is necessary to diagnose that the PHCPS was in a fundamentally unhealthy condition on the eve of the 1997 elections.

### 3.3. The Callous Cash Payment: The Steinhoff Plan (1998-2001)

The 1997 elections brought a further, eight percent increase in support for the SLD, but the Solidarity camp now run the campaign unified under the banner of the Electoral Action Solidarity (AWS) and managed to score a marginal victory. A coalition government was formed with the Freedom Union (UW), which was itself a coalition between neoliberal, Christian democratic and center-left forces. In 1998, the coalition undertook four big structural reforms: administration, social security, health and education. 1998 also saw the introduction of the so-called Steinhoff Plan, named after the Minister of the Economy Janusz Steinhoff. It was a new restructuring program for the PHCMS that was, both in its conception and execution, the most comprehensive and radical plan after 1989. It predicted a 25 million ton decrease in extraction, an employment drop of 105 000 and an overall PHCMS financial surplus by 2000.<sup>97</sup> Additional legal regulations were passed in the parliament later in 1998 that allowed for a complete debt write-off and introduced the Miner’s Social Package (MSP).<sup>98</sup> This was the only restructuring program to receive direct World Bank support – a 400 million dollar loan was secured to cover the expenses envisaged by the MSP.<sup>99</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> J. Mujzel, ed., *Przedsiębiorstwo w okresie transformacji*, (Warszawa: Polska Akademia Nauk, 1997), 163.

<sup>96</sup> R. Imielski, "Górnikobus?", *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 23 July, 1999.

<sup>97</sup> *Górnictwo węgla kamiennego. Polityka państwa...*,

As reprinted in: Kamola-Cieślak, *Polityka Gospodarcza w Programach Rządów Polskich z Lat 1989-1997 : Wybór Źródeł*, 548.

<sup>98</sup> *Dziennik Ustaw RP*, nr 162, poz. 1112, 1998.

<sup>99</sup> Jan Dziadul, "Kto pod kim kopie", *Polityka*, nr. 2198, June 19, 1999.

The main component of the MSP was a 44 000 PLN high, one-off severance payment to all the miners who would leave their jobs voluntarily.<sup>100</sup> By taking this decision, the miner also resigned from his traditional occupational privileges such as the Miner's Day supplementary payment and various bonuses guaranteed by the Miner's Bill. In 1998, the average net monthly income in the industrial sector was 1 307 PLN.<sup>101</sup> There were also other opportunities offered by the MSP such as covering the costs of retraining and job search or an earlier retirement scheme, but the one-off payment was the most popular choice.<sup>102</sup>

The Steinhoff Plan became one of the main controversies in Poland between 1998 and 2001 and the restructuring of the PHCMS was no longer a local problem, but a leading theme on the national agenda.<sup>103</sup> The government launched a comprehensive media campaign explaining the prospective benefits of its 'Four Great Reforms' and the Steinhoff Plan. Short videos were aired daily on the national TV for a period of several months. The original MSP package was more limited than the final version and it excluded the possibility of earlier retirement. This clause was added only after violent trade union protests of May 1998. The scenes of destruction from the central districts of Warsaw were vivid enough and were the number one topic in the country for several days.<sup>104</sup>

The sum of 44 000 PLN set the imagination of the average Pole (for whom it was ca. triple his or her annual income) aflame. One part of the overall controversy centered on the question whether the miners were not incidentally free-riding on the incomparably less powerful lobbying position of other social groups. Some observers began to express their disgust at Silesia's "egoism and materialism".<sup>105</sup> The Steinhoff Plan met with criticism from neoliberal pundits (e.g. Jan Winiecki), economists from the Adam Smith Center (e.g. Robert Gwiazdowski) and entrepreneurs from the Business Center Club (e.g. Jeremi Mordasewicz). Witold Gadomski from the *Gazeta Wyborcza*, in an article entitled "Extracting Miners", wrote: "long lines of miners form in front of the HR offices, all of them willing to fire themselves. [...] 24.900 miners decided to use the MSP in 1999, while the plan predicted only 12.400."<sup>106</sup> The pace of employment reduction was so rapid that additional loans had to be secured by the government to cover the provisions

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<sup>100</sup> *Górnictwo węgla kamiennego. Polityka państwa...*

As reprinted in: Kamola-Cieślak, *Polityka Gospodarcza w Programach Rządów Polskich z Lat 1989-1997 : Wybór Źródeł*, 550.

<sup>101</sup> Główny Urząd Statystyczny, *Rocznik Statystyczny 1999*, (Warszawa: GUS, 2000), 483.

<sup>102</sup> J. Kicki, „Socjologiczne aspekty restrukturyzacji przemysłu węgla kamiennego na Górnym Śląsku. Losy zawodowy pracowników kopalń odchodzących z pracy z wykorzystaniem jednorazowych odpraw pieniężnych”, In: J. Kicki, ed., *Szkoła eksploatacji podziemnej '99*, (Kraków: Polska Akademia Nauk, 1999), 582.

<sup>103</sup> There were thirteen first page articles related to this issue in the biggest Polish daily newspaper *Gazeta Wyborcza* between 1998 and 2011.

<sup>104</sup> On the first page of the *Gazeta Wyborcza* for three consecutive days, 12-15 May 1998.

<sup>105</sup> Marek Król, Editorial, *Wprost*, nr. 25, June 3, 1998, 2.

<sup>106</sup> Witold Gadomski, "Wydobywanie Górników", *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 11 March, 2000.

of the MSP.<sup>107</sup> The Ministry of Finance, run by Leszek Balcerowicz, investigated the issue. It found that the losses generated by the PHCMS after the first six months of 1998 were 20 percent greater than the predicted losses for the entire year.<sup>108</sup> The Ministry temporarily ceased severance payments. This fact caused an outrage that deepened the already vast rift between the neoliberals (and economists in general) and the Silesian miners.

From the other side of the political spectrum, the view that what the Polish authorities were doing was cooperating with the World Bank and international financial institutions in order to eliminate the PHCMS, if not completely – then at least as a competitor to Western coal, grew in intensity. The 400 million dollar loan and frequent visits from World Bank officials who made trips to Silesia to inquire on the progress of restructuring became symbolic vindications of that theory.<sup>109</sup> When the EU accession became a more tangible prospect after 2000, this view won even more proponents due to the strict EU regulations concerning subsidies and competition. The Chinese industrial boom and the coal price hikes that it generated after 2003 seemed to confirm it further – it undermined the claim that coal was a thing of the past.<sup>110</sup> In other words, many Silesians believed that the argument about the PHCMS's inherent inefficiency, inevitable decline and inadaptability to market environment were excuses whereas the real purpose was to eliminate Polish coal from international trade. This fact suggests that due to the initial lack of interest of the Polish elites in making the miners sympathetic to the reforms and free market rhetoric in general, an informational vacuum arose which could be quickly filled with conspiracy theories of similar kind.

On the other side, many observers argued that the MSP was excessively generous. Newspapers were brimming with reports of an inexplicable spike in vacation trips to the Caribbean, empty inventories of car dealerships in Silesia, drunkenness and “overall blue-collar profligacy.”<sup>111</sup> An influential Silesian businessman Jeremi Mordasewicz wrote in the *Gospodarka Śląska* journal: “If the miners do not accept the plan, we will call it arrogance; especially because it is going to be the society that will have to fund these privileges. We have to help the miners, but I do not understand why the severance payments are so high.”<sup>112</sup> The initial sympathy toward the problem of Silesian unemployment was put into question,

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<sup>107</sup> Jan Dziadul, “Zero coraz dalej”, *Polityka*, nr. 2217, 30 October, 1999.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid.

<sup>109</sup> Wojciech Błasiak, *Jak niszczone górnictwo węgla kamiennego w III Rzeczypospolitej*, March, 2011.

<http://prawica.net/opinie/25150>

<sup>110</sup> Wojciech Błasiak, “Sytuacja polskiego hutnictwa żelaza i stali w kontekście europejskim i światowym”, *Kurier Związkowy*, nr. 23, 2003.

<sup>111</sup> Marcin Buczek, “Miasto w Stanie Likwidacji”, *Tygodnik Powszechny*, nr. 49, December 8, 2002.

<sup>112</sup> Jeremi Mordasewicz, *Gospodarka Śląska*, nr. 1, 1998, 35.

especially because other occupational groups were incomparably less successful in their bargaining activities. The marks of verbal polarization between those arguing for the economic necessity of the reforms and those defending the rights of the threatened workers reached new highs. It was a continuation of the rifts from the early 1990s, one side accusing the other of malignant intentions with constructive dialogue rarely to be seen.

In the final analysis, the MSP and the Steinhoff Plan had achieved their objectives by 2001 and the restructuring process in the PHCMS has been a much less hotly debated issue since then. The total sum of public help for the PHCMS between 1990 and 2001 amounted to 30 billion Zlotys,<sup>113</sup> an equivalent of ca. 22 percent of the national fiscal revenue in 2000.<sup>114</sup> The improved terms of trade after 2003 helped many enterprises to begin generating profits. Some of the mines closed in the 1990s have reopened. By the 2007 elections, the PHCMS had disappeared from the national political agenda and even if occasional localized conflicts still rise to the surface of public life, they do not reach the nationwide clamor of the late 1990s.

#### 3.4. Durability of Communist Legacies

Various opinion polls and surveys conducted in the 1990s and 2000s consistently demonstrate that the legacies of state-socialism and Marxism-Leninism formed a key building block of postcommunist social reality. By 2002, 74 percent of Poles associated privatization with “pillage and underpriced sale of national wealth.”<sup>115</sup> The experience of “accelerated privatization under the AWS-UW government”<sup>116</sup> played a special role in bolstering this view. A survey conducted in 1997 revealed that up to 73 percent of Poles preferred to work in the state sector rather than in the private sector.<sup>117</sup> And most indicatively, a CBOS poll from 1997 suggested that two in five Poles considered their lives better off under communism, with almost half of the SLD electorate sharing this judgment.<sup>118</sup>

The historical legacy of communism could be observed at work in Silesia in an even more pronounced fashion. In a survey conducted in the Katowice Voivodeship in 1996, only 24 percent of Silesians answered the following question affirmatively: “should some employment reduction take place in

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<sup>113</sup> Ludwik Habuda, *Transformacyjne Decyzje i Decyzyjne Procesy*, (Wrocław: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Wrocławskiego, 2005), 101.

<sup>114</sup> Główny Urząd Statystyczny, *Zestawienie wykonania budżetu*, (Warszawa: GUS, 2001), 1.

<sup>115</sup> “Widzialne lęki rynku”, *Gazeta Wyborcza Gospodarka*, 5 June 2002, 4.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibidem*, 4.

<sup>117</sup> TNS OBOP, *Prywatyzacja przed Trybunałem Opinii Publicznej*, (Warszawa: TNS OBOP, June 2002), 5.

<sup>118</sup> *Wprost*, 17 August 1997, 21-22.

order to reduce the cost of extraction?”<sup>119</sup> An even smaller number (18 percent) wanted to see the mines sold to foreign investors. In a survey entitled “Poles on miners, coal and restructuring” conducted immediately after the protests of May 1998, researchers found that 84 percent of Poles considered coal to be “a national treasure”, Silesia - “the heart of the economy” (70 percent), and the vocation of mining as worthy of more respect than other vocations (76 percent).<sup>120</sup> This data supports the claim that the transformation of worldviews and attitudes proceeded much more slowly than the transformation of economic structures. It also suggests that the neoliberal conviction about the self-evident nature of the desirability of the free-market transition was an illusion.

#### 4. Conclusion

There are several conclusions that the evidence presented in this paper permits. First, it was only after the outbreak of discontent in the fall of 1992 that the role of PR campaigns in support of the reforms has been appreciated by the post-1989 political elites. In the neoliberal period between 1990 and 1992, the role of such policies was largely neglected and it was one of the factors with seminal electoral consequences in 1993. A more pronounced emphasis on PR campaigns was placed by the postcommunist SLD-PSL coalition of 1993-1997. However, it was not accompanied by determined reforms in the PHCMS. This combination sent an inconsistent message to the Silesian miners. They observed the authorities paying lip service both to free markets and egalitarianism while retaining the status quo in the PHCMS. Finally, systematic restructuring began under the AWS-UW government in 1998. The role of PR was certainly appreciated, but it was too late to prevent the rift between the supporters and opponents of the Mining Social Package from widening. What ensued was acute verbal polarization and physical violence.

The image of Poles celebrating the New Year’s Eve under socialism and waking up to see capitalism on the New Year’s Day of 1990 is obviously a metaphor, even if many things literally changed overnight. After all, “[p]eople in the transition economies knew for some time [before 1989] that a change of the system would lead to unemployment.”<sup>121</sup> Knowledge about what economic liberalization implied was widespread and had firm roots in the interwar experience. On the other hand, “[k]nowing about it and experiencing it are two different things.”<sup>122</sup> The contrast between the euphoria of 1989 and the disappointing reality of the 1990s required a comprehensive PR strategy to address the widening expectations gap. What emerges as a particularly disturbing conclusion is that the official informational

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<sup>119</sup> PBS, “Ślązacy a Rynek”, (Katowice: PBS, April 1996), 22.

<sup>120</sup> OBOP, “Polacy o górnikach, węglu I restrukturyzacji kopalń”, (Warszawa: OBOP, June 1998), 33.

<sup>121</sup> Adam, *Social Costs of Transformation...*, 102.

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*, 102.

neglect of the crucial first years of transformation was to some extent intentional. Not in the least, it had been pre-determined by regional particularities, especially by the fact that the economic profile of the Baltic port cities - the institutional home of many influential neoliberals - differed fundamentally from the profile of the Upper Silesia. Those in-built differences in outlook could have been mitigated by a more extensive dialogue effort.

The answer to the question about the respective significance of material incentives (e.g. the MSP) on the one hand and rhetorical and non-monetary incentives on the other in securing the willingness of the Silesian miners to facilitate restructuring can only be indirect. Nevertheless, the evidence presented in this paper allows for a hypothesis that the turning point in the progress of the PHCPS restructuring occurred only after the introduction of the MSP. From the government's perspective, it is not only plausible to expect that money solves such issues more decisively than information and rhetoric, but it also a much simpler operation in comparison to the more intangible workings of ideas and language on societal attitudes such as etatism or 'excessive egalitarianism'. Nonetheless, the importance of those attitudes is indirectly confirmed by the amount of money it took to finally overcome Silesia's resistance to the restructuring process.

There is one more consideration that supports the conclusion that material incentives had proven to be decisive. As the authors of *The Conversation on the Great Change* suggest, the conversation was contested and vibrant, but it took place at a conceptual level inaccessible or irrelevant to most Poles in the 1990s.<sup>123</sup> This point becomes even more pertinent if one takes into consideration the educational cross-section of Silesia in 1989: 36 percent of Silesians possessed only elementary education, 31 percent - vocational training, 25 percent graduated from high school and only 6 percent had university diplomas.<sup>124</sup> Silesia was more vulnerable to the social costs of the transition than other regions. To give just one example: poverty rate among non-working class families declined from 9.5 percent to 6 percent between 1995 and 1996, while it grew from 27 to 28 among working class families.<sup>125</sup> Secondly, this culture suffered from a chronic lack of attention from the neoliberal elites. Marek Szczepanski wrote:

"We have all heard of well-prepared and expensive modernization projects that failed because of very prosaic reasons. They were prepared on a too sophisticated and abstract – conceptually and linguistically – level. [Modernization ideas have to be adapted to] "the average level of cultural-symbolic consumption preferences".<sup>126</sup>

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<sup>123</sup> Koźmiński and Sztompka, *Rozmowa o Wielkiej Przemianie*, 44.

<sup>124</sup> Szczepański, *Opel z Górniczym Pióropuszem...*, 46.

<sup>125</sup> W. Staszewski, "Robotnicy'97", *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 25 June 1997.

<sup>126</sup> Szczepański, *Opel z Górniczym Pióropuszem...*, 95.



This conclusion is particularly important in the context of Jan Kubik's argument about "the oversymbolization of public discourses [that] was easily discernible in political debates: these debates turned too often on the (mythologized) identities of political actors..." which hindered the development of ordinary interest-based politics.<sup>127</sup> The failure of the neoliberal elites to create a PR strategy in support of their reforms and ideology is central in understanding the strength of the anti-restructuring sentiment in post 1989-Poland and Silesia and the protracted nature of the restructuring process.

During the Presidential campaign of 2010, the right-wing conservative Law and Justice leader Jarosław Kaczyński came to the Silesian city of Sosnowiec. Impressed by the surrounding industrial landscape basking in abundant sunshine, he praised Edward Gierek's "great-power ambitions". His verdict was that "Gierek was a communist, but a patriot"<sup>128</sup> and that his legacy was praiseworthy. Jarosław Kaczyński is a politician also known for his proposal to outlaw the postcommunist SLD. What is intriguing is not only the amount of electoral cynicism displayed by Kaczyński, but also the reasons that made this seasoned politician to think that cajoling the communist nostalgia of the Silesian electorate was still a profitable tactic after two decades of transformation. His words are a testimony to the remarkable strength of communist legacies in Silesia, the failure of the post-1989 neoliberal elites to develop a coherent public relations strategy to address them and the conduciveness of 'cultural chaos' and 'informational vacuum' to the emergence of ad-hoc, manipulative electoral tactics often deployed to capture the Silesian electorate.

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<sup>127</sup> Jan Kubik, *The Power of Symbols Against the Symbols of Power...*, 266.

<sup>128</sup> Anna Milikowska, "Kaczyński chwalił Gierka, ale Sosnowca nie przekonał", *Gazeta Wyborcza Katowice*, 4 July 2010.

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