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BEYOND THE IRON CURTAIN

EXPERTS, CONSUMER RIGHTS AND THE CHALLENGE OF THE POLITICAL IN POLAND (1980–89)

In the transatlantic American and Western European history of the twentieth century, the expert consumer was one of the most characteristic figures associated with a shift from the era of necessity to the postwar era of affluence.¹ With the emergence of nutrition science and large-scale health and social policies, and thanks to the postwar boom of mass consumption, experts in the sphere of consumption operating through organized activism for and in the name of consumers significantly gained in importance. At the beginning, the development of consumer expertise was linked with working-class and cooperative movements. In the aftermath of World War I, the state entered the scene of consumer activism. Within the next decades, marked consecutively by the economic crisis of the 1930s and politics of food rationing in World War II, consumers became an object of the broader process of the professionalization of social and economic policies.

In the era of post-1945 state interventionism, the idea of organized consumer representation came to span the entire globe.² However, not only mass consumption and comparative testing were prominent issues for consumer expertise at that time, which was marked by the Cold War and decolonization. Expanding internationalism defined issues of necessity such as hunger, nutrition standards and access to basic goods as a social problem, or, even more broadly, as a global concern. Characteristically, recent contributions on the humanitarian discovery of hunger place the expert

¹ *Au Nom du Consommateur. Consommation et Politique en Europe et aux États-Unis au XXe Siècle*, ed. by ALAIN CHATRIOT/ MARIE-EMMANUELLE CHESSEL/ MATTHEW HILTON, Paris 2004 (English edition: *The Expert Consumer. Associations and Professionals in Consumer Society*, Ashgate 2006).

² MATTHEW HILTON, *Prosperity For All. Consumer Activism in an Era of Globalization*, Ithaca 2008.

consumer at the centre of modern politics leading towards the recognition of consumer rights.³

But how does this narrative fit into the history of the Communist regimes in East Central Europe? Was the expert consumer, like in Western European countries, an intermediary between the state and the ordinary buyer? Taking into account three decisive features of the region after 1945, namely Soviet influence, dictatorship and shortage economy, one should first ask whether consumerism, defined as the institutionalized activism of consumers and their representatives, emerged on the eastern side of the Iron Curtain at all. And if so, what sorts of forms did it assume in terms of political language and action?

The historiography of Communist Poland, which serves as a case study here, has so far not delivered exhaustive answers to these questions.⁴ The very notion of the expert consumer does not relate to any established narratives of contemporary Polish history: In the last two decades, historians have talked about the 'intelligentsia' and the 'workers' without introducing further distinctions between 'intelligentsia' and 'experts' or between 'workers/citizens' and 'consumers'.⁵ Similar problems become apparent when reviewing the current literature on human rights, which is only beginning to historicize economic and social rights.⁶

This article aims to integrate a history of experts and consumers in the Soviet bloc, embedded in recent accounts of transnational and international politics of the social after World War II. There are at least two ways to approach this topic: The first one narrates the politicization of consumption through the lenses of the shortage economy and the Cold War,⁷ the second

³ JAMES VERNON, *Hunger. A Modern History*, London 2007; HILTON, *Prosperity For All*, p. 185-213.

⁴ The studies on the GDR, however, offer more insights into the relationship between party-state experts and the politics of consumption. MARK LANDSMAN, *Dictatorship and Demand. The Politics of Consumerism in East Germany*, Cambridge, MA 2005; KARIN ZACHMANN, *A Socialist Consumption Junction. Debating the Mechanization of Housework in East Germany, 1956-1957*, in: *Technology and Culture* 43 (2002), p. 75-101; JONATHAN R. ZATLIN, *The Currency of Socialism. Money and Political Culture in East Germany*, New York 2007; *Socialist Modern. East German Everyday Culture and Politics*, ed. by PAUL BETTS/ KATHERINE PENCE, Ann Arbor 2008.

⁵ A recent review article on Polish history in the twentieth century is PADRAIC KENNEY, *After the Blank Spots Are Filled. Recent Perspectives on Modern Poland*, in: *Journal of Modern History* 79/1 (2007), p. 134-171.

⁶ The newest critical summary of the historical agenda of human rights is: *Human Rights in the Twentieth Century. A Critical History*, ed. by STEFAN-LUDWIG HOFFMANN, Cambridge (forthcoming).

⁷ MAŁGORZATA MAZUREK, *Spółczeństwo kolejki. Więzi społeczne i doświadczenia niedoboru*, Warszawa 2010.

one treats Poland in the context of a common European postwar challenge – as one among the many European regimes influenced by state interventionism and international norms of consumer protection. The question of approach becomes even more interesting if we consider the perspective of the historical actors: While the experts referred openly to the international debates on social policy and consumption, at least after 1956 consumers were concerned with the very fact of shortages, bad quality of production, and eventually with the inefficiency of the one-party state in fulfilling its promises. An independent consumerism in late Communist Poland, which emerged from the revival of the public sphere in 1980–81, tried to reconcile expert knowledge with popular expectations vis-à-vis the politics of consumption. The juxtaposition, harmonization and confrontation of expert conceptions of consumer rights as well as the popular collective imagination constituted a major challenge of the political after 1956 in Poland. With this last point I am referring to a notion of agonistic and collective political expression⁸ which came to full fruition at the turning points of postwar Polish history: 1956, 1980 and 1989.

The political use of consumer rights, as two stories elaborated below will demonstrate, exposed the limits of communication between the experts and society as well as between the experts and the state. *Federacja Konsumentów* (FK), an expert association founded in 1981, incorporated the diction of international consumer rights into its programme in order to discuss the issue of consumer protection within the party-state bodies. The expert consumers of the *Solidarność* movement, in turn, employed the concept of rights to pursue alternative and dissident ideas of self-government and, later on, their notion of a civil society based on market economy. In conclusion, I will attempt to convey how these contradictory approaches to consumer rights contributed to the political transition of 1989 and the transformation of consumerism during the shift from state socialism to capitalism.

1. Polish Expert Consumerism in the Post-Stalinist Period

Polish postwar discourse on consumer rights and the emergence of an expert consumer went hand in hand with the post-Stalinist liberalization of

⁸ I refer to a notion of the political informed by the works of Chantal Mouffe and Carl Schmitt. See CHANTAL MOUFFE, *On the Political*, Abingdon 2005; WILLIBALD STEINMETZ, *Neue Wege einer historischen Semantik des Politischen*, in: 'Politik'. Situationen eines Wortgebrauchs im Europa der Neuzeit, ed. by WILLIBALD STEINMETZ, Frankfurt am Main 2007, p. 9-40.

the socialist political regimes and economies (1956–58). Following the revival of the public sphere and the self-management movement in the factories, experts from the Institute for Domestic Trade (*Instytut Handlu Wewnętrznego*, IHW) introduced the language of rights and individual consumer protection. In 1958, the new pressure group, consisting of experts from government institutions like IHW and academics from economy departments,⁹ launched a pro-consumer campaign in the expert periodical *Handel Wewnętrzny* (Domestic Trade). Its authors believed that economic liberalization would lead to the development of a state-controlled and, at the same time, consumer-friendly market.¹⁰ The answer of *Handel Wewnętrzny* to a question from one consumer, namely whether ‘we, rank-and-file citizens-purchasers, have any rights vis-à-vis state-run trade, and any legal sanctions at our disposal in case a seller breaks the law’, reflected this critical, but optimistic attitude:

‘You bring up a problem that is closely linked with the issue of the “buyers market”. The state of chronic shortages has contributed to the development of a wrong buyer-seller relationship. The buyer makes advances to the seller, who puts on the attitude of a ruler willing to be asked but not ready to accept any demands. It is connected with the quite incorrect, but widespread assumption that if the shop belongs to the state, it is a kind of office. Therefore, the purchaser is a kind of petitioner.’¹¹

The late 1950s in Poland thus constituted a short revival of consumer rights discourse that pointed out the pathologies of the socialist petitioning system. However, the post-Thaw debate on pro-consumer politics had a strictly expert character and did not succeed in attaining significance in the popular media, e.g. radio or newspapers.

In expectation of the democratization and liberalization of the socialist command economy, Polish experts derived most of their ideas and inspirations from contemporary Western literature on consumer protection, which at first glance seemed to be applicable. Indeed, postwar consumer movements in Europe and the U.S.A. opted for state-interventionist and regulatory solutions in the politics of consumption while at the same time criticiz-

⁹ In his book on the politics of consumption and the expert consumers in the GDR mentioned in note 4, Mark Landsman applies the Western term ‘consumer lobby’. I opt for the term ‘consumer pressure group’, which is less normative and less linked to the Western capitalist economies.

¹⁰ Czy sklepy uspołecznione mają jakieś określone obowiązki w stosunku do nabywców? in: *Handel Wewnętrzny* 6 (1958), p. 120-122. On the theoretical model of the buyers’ and sellers’ markets, see JÁNOS KORNAI, *The Socialist System. The Political Economy of Communism*, Cambridge 1992, p. 245-252.

¹¹ Czy sklepy uspołecznione, p. 120 (author’s translation).

ing the shortcomings of laissez-faire capitalism. Therefore, this kind of critical approach, though conceptualized by Western experts, could have been transferred to Poland without the need for much censorship. Moreover, European consumerist institutions, especially French and Scandinavian ones, demonstrated ready ways of organizing state-sponsored consumerism, which inscribed rights and regulations favourable for consumers in the state legal framework.¹²

Such a model seemed to be particularly interesting and fitting for post-Stalinist Eastern European countries in their transition to planned, industrial, but also consumption-oriented economies. What also attracted the attention of the Polish consumer pressure group was a general and broad definition of consumer protection in the Western countries. As opposed to the socialist system, not only did it embrace the position of the consumer vis-à-vis trade, it also paid attention to broader economic concerns important to the average citizen such as purchasing power or social rights and social protection.¹³

The first programmatic call for a consumer movement in Poland was announced in 1958 in the economic weekly *Życie Gospodarcze* by the then vice director of the Institute for Domestic Trade:¹⁴

‘The emergence of a buyers market entails that the consumer plays a central role. To make it happen, a consumer protection system is needed. The sheer possibility of making a free choice is not enough. For example, in capitalist countries, where a bigger supply does not always mean a better choice, monopolistic tendencies are commonplace. We need some reflection on the protection of consumers in the capitalist countries to comprehend our problems. It seems that such an international comparison will help us consider whether in our regime the problem of consumer protection will change with the emergence of a buyers market. Will our current institutional system be sufficient? [...] However, in my opinion, the best solution would be to entrust consumers both with organization and realization of control over trade. There is no need to additionally engage state administration. Let the active and independent consumers set up their own association.’¹⁵

¹² ALAIN CHATRIOT, Associations and the State. Protection and Defence of the Consumer in France, 1950-2000, in: CHATRIOT, CHESSEL, HILTON, *The Expert Consumer*, p. 123-136; Cold War Kitchen. Americanization, Technology, and European Users, ed. by RUTH OLDENZIEL/ KARIN ZACHMANN, Cambridge, MA 2009.

¹³ EDWARD WISZNIEWSKI, Ochrona konsumenta w krajach kapitalistycznych, in: *Handel Wewnętrzny* 6 (1958), p. 48-57, p. 48.

¹⁴ EDWARD WISZNIEWSKI, Potrzebna ochrona konsumenta, in: *Życie Gospodarcze* 4 (26 January 1958), p. 1.

¹⁵ *Ibid.* (author’s translation).

This appeal remained on paper. In fact, while the consumer pressure group was formulating and specifying its programme, step by step the state was regaining control over the fledgling civil society. At the end of 1958, the Polish United Workers' Party managed to suppress the self-management movement in the factories. The resolution on democratization and liberalization of the trade economy, passed in April 1958,¹⁶ also lost its practical meaning. The formal existence of pro-consumer legislation was not enough to put it into effect because in the reality of the reconsolidation of party-state power, the law was nothing more than an arbitrary fiat. Moreover, the sustainable liberalization of the socialist economic system turned out to be an illusionary hope, as a number of plan directives started to take shape again already at the end of the 1950s.

The rationale of administrative management, creating pressure to apply direct commands and restrictions as well as restoring the superiority of industry over the 'non-productive sectors', made economic reforms in the politics of consumption rather transient and extremely difficult to put into practice. As a result, the early post-Stalinist criticism expressed by the experts from the Institute for Domestic Trade towards the trade and services apparatus remained justified, while the reasons for optimism dwindled.

2. The Origins of the *Federacja Konsumentów*

The very same milieu of experts renewed its attempts to relaunch consumerism in the 1970s, though with no clear and positive outcome. In the 1960s and 70s, the expert economists developed a set of notions diagnosing the consumer situation under the command economy. According to them, the shortage economy resulted from over-bureaucratized central planning. At that time, it became clear that the 'regime of the producer and the seller' would not be replaced by the 'regime of the buyer' until the economy underwent profound pro-market reforms.¹⁷ Indeed, at the eve of the 1980s, twenty years following the Thaw, the consumer pressure group

¹⁶ Uchwała nr 106/58 Rady Ministrów z dnia 14 kwietnia 1958 r. w sprawie rad nadzoru społecznego w państwowych przedsiębiorstwach hurtu resortu handlu wewnętrznego, in: *Monitor Polski* 1958, no. 27, poz. 160, p. 238.

¹⁷ JAN PINDAKIEWICZ, Ochrona interesów konsumenta a działalność handlu (sprawozdanie z konferencji), in: *Handel Wewnętrzny* 1-2 (1974), p. 132-135, p. 132; WŁADYSŁAW BAKA, Problemy kształtowania sprawnego rynku, in: *Problemy ochrony konsumenta*, ed. by REMIGIUSZ KRZYŻEWSKI, Warszawa 1980, p. 38-51.

stemming from the expert circles became one of the most critical opponents of the party-state economic policy.

The political impulse to translate the theoretical framework of expert consumerism into a grass-roots organization came with the emergence of the *Solidarność* mass movement in the summer of 1980. The government and academic experts, who relied on the concepts of Western state consumerism, did not join the new independent trade union. However, they decided to set up their own organization that would focus primarily on addressing consumer issues in the public sphere. In January 1981, more than twenty years after the first programmatic proclamation of Polish consumerism, the experts from Institute for Domestic Trade, together with economic publicists from *Życie Gospodarcze* launched an appeal to join an 'independent and uncompromising' association of consumers.¹⁸ The action, supported by the majority of Polish official media, aimed to unite under one roof everyone who wanted to act in the interest of consumers.¹⁹

However, Andrzej Nałęcz-Jawecki, a charismatic leader of the journalist group and shortly afterwards the first chairman of the *Federacja Konsumentów* (FK), appealed in his initiation article in *Życie Gospodarcze* above all to the economists, lawyers, journalists, commodity specialists and other professionals in the area of consumption and home economics.²⁰ Characteristically, in the central council of the FK, the most numerous group by profession was composed of academics with a Ph.D. in economics.²¹ In consequence, the specialists with professional expertise who joined the FK nationwide set the tone of the whole initiative and gave the movement its internationally comprehensible name.

¹⁸ JANUSZ DĄBROWSKI, Co dalej z ochroną konsumenta? in: *Życie Gospodarcze* 3 (18 January 1981), p. 1-5, p. 5.

¹⁹ ANDRZEJ NAŁĘCZ-JAWECKI, Właśnie teraz! in: *Życie Gospodarcze* 6 (8 February 1981), p. 6; ANDRZEJ NAŁĘCZ-JAWECKI, I Zgromadzenie Ogólne Federacji Konsumentów, in: *Życie Gospodarcze* 46 (15 November 1981), p. 8; ANDRZEJ NAŁĘCZ-JAWECKI, Pierwsze kroki Federacji Konsumentów, in: *Problemy Jakości* 3 (1982), p. 16-20, p. 17.

²⁰ ANDRZEJ NAŁĘCZ-JAWECKI, Miejsce fachowców, in: *Życie Gospodarcze* 10 (8 March 1981), p. 6; Drugi rok działalności Federacji Konsumentów, in: *Biuletyn Federacji Konsumentów* 1-2 (1983), p. 11-29, p. 11.

²¹ JOLANTA SUPIŃSKA, Ruch konsumencki w Polsce. Zarys problematyki, in: *Zaradność społeczna. Z badań nad społecznymi inicjatywami w dziedzinie rozwiązywania problemów Polski lat osiemdziesiątych*, ed. by JERZY KWAŚNIEWSKI/ ROBERT SOBIECH/ JOANNA ZAMECKA, Wrocław 1990, p. 135-151, p. 140.

3. Expert Consumers Association, *Solidarność* and the International Impact

In the first months of its existence, the FK did not manage to appeal to the mass membership of *Solidarność*. The FK opted for an apolitical identity of consumers and, more generally, for the depoliticization of the consumer rights agenda. This moderate attitude enabled it to introduce important consumer concerns such as the inefficiency of the socialist petitioning system to the mainstream of Polish media and to enter the international stage of consumer organizations. In the long run, however, the FK tended to retreat into its specialized circle of experts. At the central level, the FK chair council controlled the work of local chapters, but rarely engaged in or initiated activities on the ground. The experts preferred cabinet discussions and willingly took part in the top official bodies. Some of the top-rank activists established close ties with the central party-state establishment or even became part of it: The chairwoman of the FK, Małgorzata Niepokulczycka, was a member of the Polish parliament, Anna Kędzierska briefly held the position of minister for the domestic market and consumption, and Ewa Łętowska, an FK expert for consumer jurisdiction, in 1987 became the first ombudswoman (and ombudsman, for that matter) in Poland.²² The FK was represented in such government bodies as the socio-economic council at the Polish parliament, the housing and domestic trade council and the family council at the council of ministers, as well as the central extraordinary board for the fight against speculation, the prices affairs council and many others.²³

At the end of the 1980s, the FK had approximately ten thousand members organized in one hundred local chapters. This, compared to the mass membership of *Solidarność*, is not a very large number. However, it would be overly simplifying to reduce its impact to national and local statistics: Due to its legal status and reliable moderate image, the Polish consumer movement was given credit by an international audience. In 1987, the FK became a member of the International Organization of Consumer Unions (IOCU) as the first consumer organization from a Communist country.²⁴

²² JOANNA ARCIMOWICZ, *Rzecznik praw obywatelskich. Aktor sceny publicznej*, Warszawa 2009.

²³ Sprawozdanie Rady Krajowej Federacji Konsumentów (za okres II kadencji grudzień 1983–styczeń 1987), in: *Biuletyn Federacji Konsumentów* 4-5 (1987), p. 36-39.

²⁴ Od redakcji, in: *Biuletyn Federacji Konsumentów* 4-5 (1987), p. 3. Wystąpienie przedstawiciela IOCU (Międzynarodowego Związku Organizacji Konsumentkich) Leo M. Mudde, 30-31.01.1987, in: *Biuletyn Federacji Konsumentów* 4-5 (1987), p. 21-23. More on the International Organization of Consumer Unions can be found in HILTON, *Prosperity for All*.

From the larger perspective of the Soviet bloc, the FK functioned as a strong, experienced and expansive association that was able to spread consumerist knowhow among the other socialist countries. Eventually, in the wake of perestroika, the Polish consumer organization was designated by the IOCU as an intermediary between Western and Eastern European consumerist institutions. The integration of the Central and Eastern European countries under the umbrella of international consumerism one year before the collapse of the Soviet bloc was one of the numerous ironies of the postwar European consumer movement. However, this story was eclipsed by a much more powerful historical change in that part of Europe: the birth and repression of the consumer movement within *Solidarność*.

4. Experts from the Democratic Opposition

In the late 1970s, a programme of politically engaged consumerism started to emerge also within the dissident milieu.²⁵ In the reports issued by the democratic opposition in *samizdat* publications, the consumer was not just an economic, but also a socio-political category.²⁶ According to economists from dissident circles, postwar Polish society had been excluded from the economic decision-making processes and thus politically disempowered. Consumers suffered from the misappropriation of the economy by the party-state apparatus: from a lack of transparency and reliable information, from informal trade-offs between strong industrial lobbies and party-state bureaucrats, and from falsified statistics concerning issues such as the real cost of living.²⁷ In order to overcome party-state arbitrariness and lawlessness, the dissident economists appealed, consumers had to regain a voice and an impact on social and economic policies. An ultimate goal of consumer empowerment, according to the dissidents, was a democratic planned economy, a system in which consumers would have their say on an equal level with the industrial interest groups, the government administra-

²⁵ On the dissident milieu and dissident language in Poland before 1980: AGNES ARNDT, *Intellektuelle in der Opposition. Diskurse zur Zivilgesellschaft in der Volksrepublik Polen*, Frankfurt am Main 2007; ROBERT ZUZOWSKI, *Political Dissent and Opposition in Poland. The Workers' Defence Committee 'KOR'*, London 1992.

²⁶ Warsaw University Library, Social Life Documents Collection, loose materials, *Konwersatorium 'Doświadczenie i Przyszłość'*. Zespół Usługowy, Wstępny, roboczy zestaw hipotez i propozycji do dyskusji nad tematem 'Społeczeństwo wobec kryzysu', 9 November 1980, p. 14-15; Krajowa Konferencja NSZZ 'Solidarność', *Reforma gospodarcza a warunki realizacji porozumień społecznych*, in: *Zeszyty problemowe NSZZ 'Solidarność' MKZ Ziemi Łódzkiej*, no. 1 (December 1980), p. 5-9.

²⁷ EDWARD LIPiŃSKI et al., *Uwagi o sytuacji gospodarczej kraju*, Warszawa 1978.

tion and, last but not least, with the party-state leaders. At stake was not just the legal protection of buyers, but also a politically more radical idea of ‘consumer defence’. An employee self-administration in the enterprises as well as ‘an independent consumer movement equipped with the right of pro-consumer intervention’²⁸ were thus important facets of the future democratic and consumer-friendly economic order that would replace the discredited command economy as imagined by Polish dissident economic experts in 1978.

Unlike the expert milieu at the Institute for Domestic Trade, the democratic opposition did not refer to the international agenda of Western consumerism as promoted by organizations associated with the United Nations such as the IOCU. Rather, they envisioned the defence of consumers along the lines of the European traditions of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century syndicalism and cooperative movements.²⁹ In one of his first articles for the *samizdat* press, Krzysztof Hagemeyer, a major pro-consumer expert from the democratic opposition, wrote:

‘The consumer movement – a defence of consumers’ interests – originates from trade unions and the cooperative movement. It should and can be its inseparable part. [...] The consumer movement, alongside the cooperative, trade union and self-government movements, is a school of democracy, and therefore of democratic planning.’³⁰

According to Hagemeyer, consumer movement activities and institutions were to embrace all realms of social life. In socialist enterprises, consumer councils would decide on the product line as well as on the quality of the manufactured goods. In shops, consumer committees would control commodity deliveries and appropriate provisioning. Even in the local communities, the consumer voice would be institutionalized in the self-governing councils monitoring the erection and distribution of apartments. Therefore, the empowerment (*upodmiotowienie*) of buyers, as outlined in Hagemeyer’s proposals, reached far beyond the actual experience of shopping and consuming. Moreover, it referred to a notion of civil society by stressing the importance of grass-roots actions as opposed to the expert-centred idea of an association ‘speaking in the name of consumers’. Hagemeyer had no

²⁸ Ibid., p. III (author’s translation).

²⁹ The collective politics of consumption peaked in the interwar period before affluent consumer cultures emerged in the West in the 1950s and 1960s. MATTHEW HILTON, *Consumerism in 20th Century Britain. The Search for a Historical Movement*, Cambridge 2003, p. 27-164.

³⁰ KRZYSZTOF HAGEMEYER, *Konsument, plan, demokracja*, in: *Głos. Niezależny miesięcznik społeczno-polityczny* 3 (1977), p. 35-38, p. 37 (author’s translation).

doubts that consumer self-organization in Poland was already a fact, be it in spontaneously created queuing committees or ad hoc consumer boycotts like the one in Silesia in 1979, when mining workers refused to pay in dollars in the foreign currency shop *Pewex*. They protested against dividing society into the dollar haves and have-nots.³¹

It seems that other dissident economists projected the idea of consumer defence along the lines of a democratically planned economy as described by Hagemeyer only as a temporary solution. Solving buyers' concerns by means of self-governed and grass-roots control over enterprises and shops was regarded as a first step towards winning people's confidence in the democratic opposition. As a second step, however, these experts called for the abolition of the fixed-price system and for more liberal workforce management so that a market economy could be introduced. From the consumers' and employees' point of view, this would mean inflation and a consequent worsening of living standards, not to mention the spectre of unemployment. Since the Polish democratic opposition represented a wide range of economic views,³² consumer-oriented projects competed with visions of a free market economy as proposed by Leszek Balcerowicz and Janusz Beksia, the future masterminds of the post-1989 'shock therapy'.³³ Still, the notion of consumer rights remained a common denominator for all experts who joined *Solidarność* in 1980–81.³⁴ During the first Domestic Reunion of *Solidarność* Delegates in September 1981, the concept of the 'institutionalization of consumer rights' was included into the programme of *Solidarność*, which also comprised projects on anti-monopoly law and consumer organizations.³⁵

Notwithstanding divergent programmatic and political affiliations, the experts from *Solidarność* had a lot in common with their colleagues from *Federacja Konsumentów*, and even with the party-state and government economic representatives. Actually, the borders between the three networks were fluid, the biographies connected and the world-views overlapped. At

³¹ KRZYSZTOF HAGEMEYER, *Równi i równiejsi, czyli o krajowcach dewizowych i bezdewizowych*, in: *Robotnik* 32 (30 April 1979), p. 2.

³² DARIUSZ T. GRALA, *Reformy gospodarcze w PRL (1982-1989). Próba uratowania socjalizmu*, Warszawa 2005; WŁADYSŁAW BAKA, *U źródeł wielkiej transformacji*, Warszawa 1999.

³³ Das Balcerowicz-Programm. Konzept, Realisierungsschritte, Zwischenergebnisse, ed. by HENRYK BAK/ PIOTR PYSZ/ ROLAND SCHAFF, Erlangen 1991.

³⁴ 'Karta' Center Archive, Komunikat Zjazdowy, NSZZ 'S' Zarząd Regionalny Ziemi Łódzkiej, Siódmy dzień, druga tura, no. 28 (2 October 1981), unpaginated.

³⁵ Program NSZZ 'Solidarność' uchwalony przez I Krajowy Zjazd Delegatów, NZSS 'Solidarność' Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego, Warszawa 1981, p. 5; Propozycje do programu NSZZ 'Solidarność', in: AS. Biuletyn pism związkowych i zakładowych 38 (1981), p. 16.

the turn of the 1980s, the dissident as well as FK experts were part of the 'revolt of experts' (*bunt ekspertów*), to use the expression of contemporary sociologist Jolanta Supińska.³⁶ For example, Janusz Beksiak, before becoming one of the top economic advisers of *Solidarność* and immediately before joining the independent trade unions movement, had been in charge of the economic committee assigned by the first party secretary, Edward Gierek, in the years 1977-79. Ten years later, at the 1989 Round Table negotiations (*rozmowy Okrągłego Stołu*) which paved the way for political transformation, Beksiak recalled his pre-*Solidarność* career as Gierek's adviser:

'At the end of the 1970s we tried to change the economic thinking of the contemporary party-state officials. However, after one and a half years I found it an idle discussion. Regardless of the intellectual level of the party-state politicians, they pursued completely different goals and adhered to completely different decision-making criteria than the academics. That is why experts and party officials did not communicate well. My sparse contacts with Edward Gierek taught me that despite his sympathetic attitude towards us, he did not draw any conclusions from our expertise.'³⁷

The informal connection between dissident and non-dissident experts is also reflected in the common language and sense of cultural and social background they shared. This was particularly the case in August 1980, when *Solidarność* was born and dissident experts came to the striking workers at the Gdańsk Lenin Shipyard to help Lech Wałęsa and his colleagues negotiate their protest demands vis-à-vis the government. Jadwiga Staniszkis, a renowned sociologist and one of the key dissident advisers of the fledgling social movement, reported on the atmosphere among the experts during the strike at the shipyard:

'During the first meeting of the working group, a peculiar atmosphere and gentle, ironic tones predominated. One of the reasons was that experts on both sides were more or less members of the same Warsaw society: government experts as somewhat critical but still loyal professionals, we as perhaps more openly critical of Gierek's "window dressing" liberalization pattern. We could very easily have changed places (if only our political attitudes were taken into account). This atmosphere made the negotiations easier: elements of truth existed already; leaks from both sides helped us work more smoothly. There was, in addition, a surreal atmosphere of familiarity that facilitated bargaining; it created a peculiar detachment from the context of our talks and overshadowed

³⁶ SUPIŃSKA, Ruch konsumencki, p. 142.

³⁷ Okrągły Stół. Kto jest kim. 'Solidarność'. Opozycja, biogramy, wypowiedzi (książka wydana z inicjatywy Komitetu Organizacyjnego przy Lechu Wałęsie), ed. by WOJCIECH ADAMIECKI, Warszawa 1989, p. 239 (author's translation).

such facts as the crude blackmail of the telephone blockade, in which our interlocutors were involved [...]. On the other hand, this atmosphere dangerously increased internal loyalty within the bargaining group: it was one of the main reasons why, for the sake of the talks, the workers were not informed about the crucial details and changes made in the working group. We ended the first meeting in an optimistic mood.³⁸

5. Institutions and Ideas of the *Solidarność* Consumer Movement

The close and connecting interactions between the experts from the democratic opposition and the government professionals, described by Jadwiga Staniszkis in her analysis of *Solidarność*, contributed to the success of the Gdańsk agreements from 31 August 1980. Apart from Staniszkis, however, nobody at the time was eager to mention the sense of familiarity between the two negotiating sides. In the popular narrative, experts did not play a prominent role in the success of the shipyard strike and hence in the emergence of *Solidarność*: First and foremost, the new independent trade unions succeeded thanks to the determination of the protesting workers and the ties of solidarity which had brought together so many people from all over the country in a wave of mass strikes.³⁹ It was a mode of resistance and mass movement dynamics that became a symbol of *Solidarność* rather than a mode of negotiations and compromise as embodied by the expert advisers.

Still, from the point of view of the experts who were actively involved in *Solidarność*, a readiness to cooperate with workers in developing their programmes and institutions distinguished them from their more party-state-conform colleagues. After all, the opposition experts were thrilled by the emergence of a mass social movement, which brought the realm of the political back into social life. At stake was a clear distinction between the official and the *Solidarność* style of the expert consultancy.

While organizing academic seminars or creating a myriad of advisory bodies within the *Solidarność* structures, they were searching for their own political language. A tradition to which they referred quite instinctively was an intelligentsia ethos of civic duty and responsibility for the fate of soci-

³⁸ JADWIGA STANISZKIS, *Poland's Self-Limiting Revolution*, ed. by JAN T. GROSS, Princeton 1984, p. 55-56.

³⁹ HARTMUT KÜHN, *Das Jahrzehnt der Solidarnosc. Die politische Geschichte Polens 1980-1990*, Berlin 1999; JAN KUBIK, *The Power of Symbols against the Symbols of Power. The Rise of Solidarity and the Fall of State Socialism in Poland*, University Park 1994.

ety.⁴⁰ And the cultural code of intelligentsia civility moreover served as a way to establish a dialogue with the workers, whom, in fact, the experts did not know well.

The dissident experts hoped that the times when their reports were simply stored in the desks of the party-state officials were over. Since the birth of *Solidarność*, they envisioned that a new style of expertise would emerge, namely one free of the ‘deformations that “official social sciences” had often produced’.⁴¹ For example, the task of the Centre for Social Research (*Ośrodek Badań Społecznych* – OBS), established in 1980 within the regional *Solidarność* chapter in Lublin, ‘was to fulfil service functions vis-à-vis the syndicalists and to address their real needs’. It also expressed the following hope:

‘Close relations between the OBS and the [*Solidarność*] Union and the presentation of alternative strategies in specific areas of workers’ interests may guarantee that we will not share the destiny of all that expertise kept in the ministries and party committees, which, as a matter of fact, remains “socially dead”’.⁴²

Social utility, communicative language and authenticity, as opposed to bureaucratized and politically isolated knowledge, was thus a major motto of the *Solidarność* generation of experts.

As already mentioned, since the late 1970s dissident experts dealt with employee and consumer issues in their diagnoses and memoranda. Not surprisingly, the famous Gdańsk agreements from August 1980 already contained some of their ideas. Not only did they create favourable conditions both for better protection and recognition of consumer rights, they also ensured formal collaboration between experts and the new independent trade unions. The August 1980 agreements included precise notations about the trade unions’ impact on consumer issues and the state-run distribution system.⁴³ It has often been forgotten that strike demands, apart from the widely known claims for political freedom,⁴⁴ contained a number of issues which we could today define as consumer rights claims. For example, a

⁴⁰ MACIEJ JANOWSKI/ JERZY JEDLIŃSKI/ MAGDALENA MICIŃSKA, *Dzieje inteligencji polskiej do roku 1918*, Warszawa 2008.

⁴¹ LESŁAW PAGA/ JAN POMORSKI, OBS o sobie, in: *Zeszyty problemowe Ośrodka Badań Społecznych Lublin. NSZZ ‘Solidarność’. Region Środkowo-Wschodni 1* (1981), p. 1-6, p. 1-2.

⁴² *Ibid.* (author’s translation).

⁴³ *Protokół porozumienia zawartego przez Komisję Rządową i Międzyzakładowy Komitet Strajkowy w dniu 31 sierpnia 1980 r. w Stoczni Gdańskiej*, in: *Porozumienia społeczne 1980–1981*, ed. by JANUSZ GMITRUK/ JAN SĄŁKOWSKI, Warszawa 2005, p. 15-29.

⁴⁴ *Solidarność w ruchu 1980–1981*, ed. by MARCIN KULA, Warszawa 2000, p. 39-55; IRENEUSZ KRZEMIŃSKI, *Solidarność. Projekt polskiej demokracji*, Warszawa 1997.

demand for a more transparent information policy on the socio-economic situation in the country may be interpreted as a consumer's right to information; the claim for the defence of workers' purchasing power was visible in point no. 9 about the indexation of wages and salaries proportionally to the rate of inflation. Other demands referring to the distribution of necessities, like the demand for meat rationing (point no. 13), or, more generally, the call for 'a real improvement in provisioning policy' (point no. 6), represented a typical consumer-oriented agenda. Having emerged from the workers' protest, however, *Solidarność* tackled a number of consumer issues that turned out to be crucial in the following months of deepening economic crisis. Thus it was consumption, not production, which became the main issue of popular concern: The economic experts were to assist and advise their fellow trade unionists as they evolved from protesting workers to even more frustrated consumers.

The institutional background of the trade union expertise was meticulously defined in the founding document of August 1980.⁴⁵ This document contained many references to expert knowledge, e.g. the 'necessity to conduct regular research on the employees' needs' or 'a right to real and public evaluation of key government decisions determining the living standard of working people'. Most importantly, the negotiators had agreed upon the creation of an independent trade unionist research centre dedicated to the issues labour and quality of life. The *Solidarność* experts also achieved that academic and trade union institutions would conduct regular research on living conditions based on the notion of a 'minimum standard of living' – a concept previously censured by the Communist officials. At last in 1980–81, poverty and the low quality of life could be openly discussed. Undoubtedly, the experts contributed to the redefinition of social policy in Communist Poland, this time in accordance with international norms regarding living standards.⁴⁶

The new syndicalist consumerism took roots on every level of the trade union structures. It is difficult to list all of *Solidarność*'s consumer-oriented institutions in which experts had their say or to analyse the courses of the various negotiations on provision, the rationing system and the economic crisis in which academic advisers represented the trade union side vis-à-vis

⁴⁵ To the group of experts negotiating the agreements on behalf of the shipyard workers belonged Tadeusz Mazowiecki, Bronisław Geremek, Bogdan Cywiński, Tadeusz Kowalik, Jadwiga Staniszkis, Waldemar Kuczyński and Andrzej Wielowiejski. Józef Pajestka, Antoni Rajkiewicz and Czesław Jachowiak negotiated for the government side. See: Porozumienia społeczne 1980–1981, p. 9–14.

⁴⁶ LUCYNA DENISZCZUK, Kilka uwag o historii i funkcjach minimum socjalnego, in: Polityka Społeczna 11-12 (2001), p. 5–6, p. 5; ANDRZEJ TYMOWSKI, Początki minimum socjalnego, in: Polityka Społeczna 11-12 (2001), p. 1–2, p. 1.

the government.⁴⁷ In 1981, when the shortage of basic consumer goods became a crucial social concern, a chain of Intervention Bureaus emerged as the most impressive institutional network of *Solidarność* consumerism. One of their tasks was to collect data about the waste or hidden storage of foodstuffs ('the conscious creation of shortages'), which would otherwise immediately be sold on the market.⁴⁸ Intervention Bureaus were also able to set up an alternative network of informants who would monitor country-wide deliveries and the unofficial export of basic consumer goods⁴⁹: a network of dockers, railwaymen and customs officers who communicated through the Intervention Bureaus.⁵⁰

Trade union consumerism had only one, but a very powerful weapon: the right to strike. This entitlement determined, in fact, whether the opposing side would take consumer rights, such as the right to information or the right to basic necessities, seriously. Moreover, members of *Solidarność* – nearly ten million people producing food in the agriculture sector, manufacturing goods in the state-run enterprises, transporting them to the retail units and finally selling them in the shops – could follow and observe the entire food chain from production site to shop counter.⁵¹ And finally, as trade unionists, the members of *Solidarność* were entitled by civil law to inspect retail units independently from the regular state inspection. All in all, the number of consumer concerns and interventions addressed by the social movement turned out to be so vast that in May 1981 the *Solidarność* press agency created a separate column in its daily magazine under the title 'defence of consumers'.

While the *Federacja Konsumentów* looked to the International Organization of Consumer Unions and the UN agencies, the new trade union con-

⁴⁷ 'Karta' Center Archive, A/8B.7, Oświadczenia, uchwały, komunikaty i korespondencja Krajowej Komisji Porozumiewawczej NSZZ 'Solidarność', Posiedzenie KKP 28.10.1981 w Gdańsku. Uchwała 24/1981 w sprawie rządowego projektu reglamentacji żywności, p. 3.

⁴⁸ Uchwała V Krajowego Zjazdu Biur Interwencyjnych ws. żywności, in: AS, no. 19 (6-8 June 1981), p. 306.

⁴⁹ Walka ze spekulacją, in: AS, no. 28 (5-9 August 1981), p. 207; Spotkanie kolejarzy stacji granicznych, in: AS, no. 29 (10-12 August 1981), p. 207; O kontrolę nad handlem zagranicznym, in: AS, no. 37 (4-6 September 1981), p. 206.

⁵⁰ O kontrolę nad handlem zagranicznym, in: AS, no. 37 (4-6 September 1981), p. 206; Rozmowy Komisji ds. żywności przy KKP oraz Komisji Koordynacyjnej Pracowników Branży Portów Morskich z przedstawicielami Central Handlu Zagranicznego nt. eksportu żywności, in: AS, no. 35 (31 August–3 September 1981). For more on the *Solidarność* boycott of food exportation, see Żywność dla kraju, in: Serwis Komisji ds. Żywności przy KKP NSZZ 'Solidarność', no. 1 (September 1981), p. 2.

⁵¹ For more on *Solidarność* control activities, see MAŁGORZATA MAZUREK, Społeczeństwo kolejki.

sumer movement developed predominantly in domestic milieus and became an equal and politically dangerous opponent for the party-state apparatus. However, the *Solidarność* experts were right to note that none of the food control actions undertaken by the syndicalists could improved the crisis mode of the Polish economy. Consumer rights thus constituted a temporary form of collective empowerment which in the short term served as an efficient remedy against the widespread sense of humiliation. The social appropriation of consumer rights, especially the right to control a distribution and retail system independently from state inspection (or concurrently with the party-state-conform trade unions), restored people's sense of dignity, subjectivity and participation in political life.⁵² For all these reasons, the dissident experts supported the consumerist form of the political, despite their reservations towards the populist drive to tighten food controls and despite their belief that the main national task for the following months was the project of economic reform rather than the pro-consumerist assistance.⁵³

6. *Solidarność* Experts and the Challenge of the Political in the 1980s

To navigate between the trade union structures and the dynamics of the social movement, to moderate the seething social rage and anger – these were the main challenges the *Solidarność* advisers were confronted with. Facing the slump, the experts referred to their knowledge about economic mechanisms, be it shortage economy theories developed in Eastern Europe in the 1970s⁵⁴ or current empirical data about the state of the Polish economy. On the one hand, they supported the consumer movement with their expertise and sympathized with the popular sense of exhaustion and humiliation that resulted from the ubiquitous shortages and never-ending queues. On the other, by virtue of their expert knowledge they struggled against rumours and conspiracy theories such as the alleged export of Polish ham to the Soviet Union.

⁵² ZBIGNIEW M. KOWALEWSKI, 'Solidarność' i walka o samorząd załogi, Łódź 1981, p. 48–49.

⁵³ 'Karta' Center Archive, A/8B.19, Apel do członków związku i całego społeczeństwa dotyczący podjęcia inicjatyw zmierzających do naprawy stanu gospodarki (12 August 1981), unpaginated.

⁵⁴ JANUSZ BEKSIĄK, Społeczeństwo gospodarujące, Warszawa 1976; JAN LIPIŃSKI, Poglądy szkoły wakarowskiej a faktyczne funkcjonowanie 'realnego socjalizmu', in: Materiały na konferencję Szkoła wakarowska w polskiej ekonomii, ed. by Szkoła Główna Handlowa, Warszawa 1996.

Still, the experts had to keep a critical distance towards the statements and data provided by the party and government institutions. As a result, they entered into the equation as intermediaries who translated the concerns and failures of the government into the language of popular imagination. During the bilateral negotiations, in turn, they alerted party-state officials to the importance of emotions, such as a collective sense of humiliation, for the relations between state and society.

Hagemejer, for example, while describing the dramatic provisioning situation in his article 'Queueing Society', did not confirm popular beliefs about intentional party-state politics of humiliation towards the rebellious society. Rather, he looked for the sources of the crisis in 'the scandalous helplessness of the administration' and its 'striking incompetence in economic planning'.⁵⁵ His anti-populist attitude was courageous because most *Solidarność* members believed in the bad will of the party-state functionaries. In the popular imagination, queues symbolized a perverse form of intentional pacification or even a kind of punishment executed by the Communist regime over society.

The language of Catholic masses, celebrated on behalf of 'the starving Polish nation', may exemplify how distant expert intellectualism was from the rhetoric of popular unrest. In summer 1981, when numerous industrial enterprises went on strike against the government's provisioning and rationing policies, textile plants in Łódź were covered with posters entitled 'Our Pope, please do not let us die of hunger'.⁵⁶ The search for a common denominator between the expert discourse and the symbolic expression of the national-religious community constituted a real challenge for the dissident advisers. Although the expert language was critical towards the official Communist discourse and at the same time open to popular claim making, which Jadwiga Staniszkis has called 'political moralism' (as opposed to the political pragmatism dominating the adviser circles),⁵⁷ *Solidarność* activists perceived the experts as not sufficiently radical, politicized and moralistic.

All these tensions often focused on the *Solidarność* experts who negotiated consumer issues with the government and had to communicate the even more radical demands of the striking workers.⁵⁸ Shortly before the

⁵⁵ HAGEMEJER, *Spółeczeństwo w kolejce*, p. 146-147.

⁵⁶ W sprawie zaopatrzenia Łodzi, in: AS, no. 25 (14-20 July 1981), p. 207.

⁵⁷ STANISZKIS, Poland's Self-Limiting Revolution, p. 140-144.

⁵⁸ Obrady Krajowej Komisji Porozumiewawczej 10.-12.08.1981, in: AS, no. 29 (10-12 August 1981), p. 104.

introduction of Martial Law,⁵⁹ during the last months of legal *Solidarność* activity (September–December 1981), a discord between the moderate attitudes of the experts and the popular movement, which did not want to follow the rationale of the self-limiting revolution anymore, increasingly became apparent. The diverging visions of the political, as well as growing conflicts within *Solidarność*, demonstrated the limits of the experts' attachment to popular political action. From the perspective of the following decade, this was an important experience for the dissident advisers.

In the second half of the 1980s, such promoters of syndicalist consumerism as Lesław Paga, who had introduced consumer issues into *Solidarność*'s political programme, abandoned the project of a mass social movement and turned instead to the ideas of individual entrepreneurship and social resourcefulness.⁶⁰ There were good reasons for such a change. While the independent trade unions had to operate in conspiracy as a result of the Martial Law restrictions⁶¹ and the party-state officials made fruitless efforts to revive the crippling economy, individual wit and creativity became a landmark of that transitory decade – the 1980s.⁶² Self-help and grass-roots distribution of the Western packages sent to Poland by organizations and individuals from the other side of the Iron Curtain determined, to a great extent, the daily lives of Polish consumers. Lesław Paga saw in these activities another form of fledgling civil society, existing in complete separation from the party-state structures. Employing the American term of 'grass-roots reform', he believed that the rise of mutual aid associations and the development of small-scale private business would lead to a general change in politics and society. According to Paga, consumer self-help would not only constitute an adaptation to the economic crisis, it would also define the very origins of the new socio-economic system.

At the end of the 1980s, the view became more common – but was still quite disputed – among the dissident and non-dissident experts that civil society and democracy fit well with a liberal market economy. Or rather, this was still a very vague concept propagated by a few leading economists.

⁵⁹ Martial law was introduced in Poland on 13 December 1981. From *Solidarity to Martial Law. The Polish Crisis of 1980-1981*, ed. by ANDRZEJ PACZKOWSKI/ MALCOLM BYRNE, Budapest 2007.

⁶⁰ LESŁAW A. PAGA, *Consumer Mutual Aid. Adaptation or Challenge?* in: *Urbanization and Values*, ed. by JOHN KROMKOWSKI/ GEORGE F. MCLEAN, Washington, D. C. 1991.

⁶¹ *Solidarność* regained its legal status only in 1989. See: *Polska 1986-1989. Koniec systemu. Referaty*, ed. by PAWEŁ MACHCEWICZ, vol. 1, Warszawa 2002; ANDRZEJ PACZKOWSKI, *The Spring Will Be Ours. Poland and the Poles from Occupation to Freedom*, University Park 2003.

⁶² JANINE R. WEDEL, *Private Poland*, New York 1986; *The Unplanned Society. Poland During and After Communism*, ed. by JANINE R. WEDEL, New York 1992.

And yet, it was precisely at this time that the experts came to the forefront and organized an influential milieu under the auspices of Lech Wałęsa. More concretely, while *Solidarność* was kept illegal by the Jaruzelski regime, the future economic and political reforms were heatedly discussed in the isolated circles of the intellectual elite such as the Lech Wałęsa Citizens Committee, in which several dozens of dissident academics were organized.⁶³ Paradoxically, in the conspiracy period of *Solidarność*, the more its advisers stressed the issue of civil society and the concerns of everyday consumers, the less, in fact, they were able to communicate with the rank-and-file members of the trade union. Between 1986 and 1988, as the dissident expert groups rebuilt a well-functioning nationwide network, its social basis narrowed to the members of intelligentsia.

As some of the advisers noticed self-critically at the end of the 1980s, their debates on politics, economy and society represented voices of expert consumers, but hardly referred to 'what society actually thought'.⁶⁴ They stressed Poland's position 'between East and West' as well as the 'energy, creativity and resourcefulness of the Poles' that should 'translate into a new understanding of state and economic organization'⁶⁵ that would replace the fading political system. However, during this crucial moment, everyday consumer concerns did not matter as much as in 1980-81 because the experts already shifted their attention to more general divagations on the future economic regime.

The Round Table talks in early 1989, led by *Solidarność* and party-state experts and politicians⁶⁶ – a political symbol of the peaceful demise of the Communism – decided on the fundamental economic issues, including the protection of consumers against inflation and unemployment.⁶⁷ However, the language of consumerism propagated by the FK and some of the dissident economists in the 1980s no longer shaped the main economic ideas of the Round Table. It was not a debate about economic rights, but rather an expert discussion about the ways in which a 'social market economy' was

⁶³ ANDRZEJ FRISZKE, Komitet Obywatelski. Geneza i historia, in: Komitet Obywatelski przy Przewodniczącym NSZZ 'Solidarność' Lechu Wałęsie. Stenogramy z posiedzeń 7 listopada 1987, 18 grudnia 1988 i 23 kwietnia 1989, prep. by MAŁGORZATA STRASZ, Warszawa 2006, p. 5-69.

⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 42.

⁶⁵ Ibid., p. 14.

⁶⁶ The experts of *Federacja Konsumentów* sat on the party-state side.

⁶⁷ ANDRZEJ FRISZKE, Okrągły stół. Geneza i przebieg, in: Polska 1986-1989, p. 74-117; ANDRZEJ GARLICKI, Karuzela. Rzecz o Okrągłym Stole, Warszawa 2003; WŁADYSŁAW BAKA, U źródeł wielkiej transformacji, Warszawa 1999. WŁADYSŁAW BAKA, W tyglu transformacji ustrojowej. Szkice i komentarze, Warszawa 2004, p. 13-16.

to be introduced. Therefore, the last Communist⁶⁸ as well as the first non-Communist government⁶⁹ was to a great extent composed of publicly unknown experts who focused on the very notion of pro-market reforms. While human rights talk became a political language of the 1989 transition in Eastern Europe,⁷⁰ Polish experts abandoned the rhetoric of consumer entitlement in favour of the much more radical idea of ‘shock therapy’, which revoked both the original *Solidarność* pro-consumer agenda and the resolutions of the Round Table that were officially announced only a few months earlier. The pro-human rights and pro-market discourses appeared to the majority of economic experts as two coherent and intertwined intellectual projects. At the beginning of the 1990s, the concepts of economic liberalization (or deregulation, to use the modern term) and consumer rights went hand in hand. Actually, very few of the former leaders of the democratic opposition or FK activists perceived this shift as a ‘crisis of *Solidarność* identity’ or as a symptom of the ‘chasm between the trade union’s elite and its rank-and-file members’, as the eminent oppositionist Karol Modzelewski indicated bitterly in his writings in the early 1990s.⁷¹

7. Conclusion

In sum, in 1989 and shortly afterwards, for the experts of both the democratic opposition and party-state circles, including *Federacja Konsumentów*, the connection between pro-market reforms and the creation of civil society (the latter would then automatically represent the consumers’ point of view) eventually turned into a public confession of faith.⁷² The fact that the working class, as a consequence of the post-1989 transformation, got

⁶⁸ The last Communist government (from September 1988 to August 1989) was headed by Mieczysław Rakowski, the liberal and pragmatist within the party elite. MIECZYSLAW F. RAKOWSKI, *Es begann in Polen. Der Anfang vom Ende des Ostblocks*, Hamburg 1995; MIECZYSLAW F. RAKOWSKI, *Jak to się stało*, Warszawa 1991.

⁶⁹ The first non-Communist government, with Tadeusz Mazowiecki serving as prime minister, was nominated in August 1989. CLAUDIA KUNDUGRABER, *Polens Weg in die Demokratie. Der Runde Tisch und der unerwartete Machtwechsel*, Göttingen 1997.

⁷⁰ DANIEL C. THOMAS, *The Helsinki Effect. International Norms, Human Rights, and the Demise of Communism*, Princeton 2001; Ku zwycięstwu ‘Solidarności’. Korespondencja Ambasady USA w Warszawie z Departamentem Stanu, styczeń-wrzesień 1989, ed. by GREGORY F. DOMBER et al., Warszawa 2006.

⁷¹ KAROL MODZELEWSKI, *Dokąd od komunizmu?*, Warszawa 1993.

⁷² *Spór o Polskę. Wybór tekstów prasowych*, ed. by PAWEŁ ŚPIEWAK, Warszawa 2000; JERZY SZACKI, *Liberalizm po komunizmie*, Kraków 2004, ANDRZEJ KOŹMIŃSKI/ PIOTR SZTOMPKA, *Rozmowy o wielkiej przemianie*, Warszawa 2004.

excluded from the fruits of affluence was perceived and represented as ‘the necessary cost of the systems transition’.⁷³ This may explain why the early 1980s consumer movement, based on the trade unionist structures and referring to the spirit of collective, syndicalist action, was not revived at the end of the decade.

Why did consumer rights get depoliticized so fast in the beginning of the 1990s? My thesis is that the *Solidarność* advisers who turned into government officials or became captains of economic liberalism, like Lesław Paga, the president of the first stock exchange in Eastern Europe after the fall of Communism, had always treated consumer protection as a temporary issue. And they imagined that once the planned economy came to an end, all consumer nightmares would simply disappear of their own accord.

In the 1990s, formerly dissident experts did not stress consumer rights as part of the politically and symbolically powerful set of human rights. They preferred to equate consumer issues with the questions of choice, full shop shelves and material abundance, but not necessarily with the questions of living standards, purchasing power, poverty and access to material and cultural goods. However, one cannot regard the shift of the consumerism agenda towards the satisfaction of the individual consumer as an Eastern European particularity. All around the globe, as Matthew Hilton has observed, consumer movements felt the pressure of global neo-liberalism, which came to fruition through the proliferation of multi-national companies and the crisis of the United Nations idea of development.⁷⁴ In Poland as well as in other European economies after 1989, the challenge of the political in the sphere of consumption focused on the issues of deregulation, privatization of the economy and the legal protection of individual consumers (the latter strongly supported by the European Union): Regulatory, collective and state-interventionist institutions were labelled as ideologically bankrupt. For the FK, this meant the triumph of the consumerist agenda as a consensual, non-political activity within the domestic NGO sector and the responsible UN or EU agencies. The formerly dissident experts pursued a similar path: They removed collective action from the political repertoire of post-1989 consumerism.

⁷³ LESZEK BALCEROWICZ, *Socialism, Capitalism, Transformation*, Budapest 1995; DAVID OST, *The Defeat of Solidarity. Anger and Politics in Postcommunist Europe*, Ithaca 2005.

⁷⁴ HILTON, *Prosperity for All*, p. 223-227.