Communism’s Negotiated Collapse:  
The Polish Round Table, Ten Years Later

A Conference Held at the University of Michigan  
April 7-10, 1999

The following are excerpts from an English translation of the conference presentations. Not only were the complete presentations vastly more rich and complex than these snippets can possibly convey, but as with all excerpts, these reflect the personal interests of those doing the selecting. Readers are therefore strongly encouraged to refer to the complete transcript of the conference, which is available (both in Polish and English), at our website: <www.umich.edu/~iinet/PolishRoundTable>.¹

PANEL ONE: THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE POLISH ROUND TABLE

Adam Michnik

Lifelong activist for human rights, advisor to the Solidarity movement and negotiator for the opposition in the Round Table negotiations, historian and author Adam Michnik (b. 1946) has been Editor-in-Chief of the daily newspaper Gazeta Wyborcza since its inception in 1989. After being expelled from the University of Warsaw and imprisoned (1968-69) after the March protests of 1968, Michnik completed his degree in history at Adam Mickiewicz University of Poznań in 1975. He was a founding member of the Workers' Defense Committee (KOR) in 1977 and a lecturer in the "Flying University," an organization that brought intellectuals and worker activists together in unofficial seminars. Imprisoned again from 1981 to 1984 and from 1985 to 1986, Michnik continued to advocate democracy and civil society. Following the Round Table

¹ All excerpts quoted below were transcribed and translated from Polish to English by Kasia Kietlinska except for those by László Bruszt, Dai Qing, John R. Davis, and Konstanty Gebert. These latter excerpts were transcribed by Margarita Nafpaktitis.
negotiations, he served as a Deputy in the Sejm from 1989 to 1991 for the Civic Parliamentary Club. Michnik is the author of numerous articles, interviews, and books.

Those who favor the peaceful way of resolving conflicts are always faced with similar questions and charges. How can one think about making a pact with an enemy? How can one seek a compromise with someone who should be punished for their crimes? And usually the answers given are similar. You have got to come to terms and seek compromise with the enemy, precisely because he is an enemy. There is no need to negotiate with friends. What is the real choice here? Either a war, easy to provoke, and which can last permanently, or a difficult path towards peace based on compromise. But a compromise always leaves something to be desired. To be able to live in peace and freedom, it is necessary to replace the language of war by the language of peace, and this was the attempt that Poland undertook ten years ago….

I often hear accusations that by having chosen the logic of compromise, I have betrayed my own biography. That’s why I want to start commenting about my own case….The changes in the Soviet Union produced a new situation in which the Round Table became possible. That compromise was, as usual, the result of relative weakness of both partners. The authorities were too weak to trample us, and we were too weak to topple the authorities. And out of those two weaknesses a new chance arose for a new compromise resolution….

We argued a lot. I remember another of my colleagues who explained to me that it’s not the communist authorities that will legalize Solidarity, but vice versa, Solidarity will lend legitimacy to the communist authorities. I remember a long conversation with a friend of mine, involved in the underground independent cultural activity, and for her the Round Table simply meant a betrayal of ideals, giving in to censorship, and giving up on true independence. I did not share these views but I understood these friends, because this sort of compromise could discredit us. It could! And it really required some sort of violation to one’s self, of one’s emotions and one’s memory. I remember how hard it was for me to overcome my own internal resistance and fears. I remember how much effort it took me to try to understand the reasons of our yesterday’s enemies, who now were to become adversaries and partners…. 

I remember the inauguration of the Round Table very well, when I was forced by Professor Geremek to put on a suit and a necktie, and when, listening to snide comments of Walęsa and others, I went to the Viceroy Palace in Warsaw. To get into the debate room, one had to go upstairs, and at the top there were General Kiszczak and Secretary Stanisław Ciosek welcoming the guests. I managed to hide in the bathroom so as not to be seen by anybody to shake hands with the chief of police. I was simply afraid my wife
will kick me out of the house. So I found a hiding place in the bathroom, waited for several minutes there, but as I emerged, Mr. Kiszczak was still there offering his hand in a handshake. You know, lights, cameras…and this was the way I lost my virginity! We had a sense of strangeness of our situation. Only two-and-a-half years before I had been released from prison, and there were my colleagues, friends from the underground…But at the same time, I was aware that some sort of historic shift was taking place which I was unable to define at that time. I understood one thing: the democratic opposition was finally taking a step over the threshold of legality. From that Viceroy’s Palace our path could only lead either to the Rakowiecka Street prison or to the end of the communist system….

There were no secret agreements. We went ahead to the elections and we won in a manner that simply frightened us by its scale. We didn’t know what to do with our victory, but what matters the most is that in those elections the communist system was rejected by the Polish nation….

The Round Table compromise was possible because on both sides there were people who risked accusations of betrayal by their own communities. And that’s a reformer’s fate, that they go at a snail’s pace and they get banged on the head by their own extremists. But it’s only thanks to such reformers that we can trust that the philosophy of agreement has a future and that one can build that future on the conviction that only a Poland shared by those who fought against the People’s Republic and those who served the People’s Republic can be a truly democratic Poland. If we exclude anybody, we will have to accept discrimination of some sort, which in the final analysis always results in lies and injustice. Thank God Poland has chosen another path.

Mieczysław Rakowski

*Prime Minister in the months leading up to the Round Table negotiations, Mieczysław Rakowski (b. 1926) was an officer of the Polish People’s Army from 1945 to 1949 and received a doctorate in history from Warsaw’s Institute for Social Sciences in 1956. He began his political career in 1946 as a member of the Polish Workers’ Party. From 1948 to 1990 he was a member of the Polish United Workers’ Party (PZPR), serving on its Central Committee from 1975 to 1990. After serving one year as Assistant Editor, Rakowski became Editor-in-Chief of the weekly magazine Polityka in 1958, a position he held until 1982. He was Deputy Prime Minister from 1981 to 1985, Deputy Speaker of the Sejm and leader of its Socio-economic Council from 1985 to 1988, and a member of the PZPR’s Politburo from 1987 to 1990. From September 1988 to August 1989, Rakowski served as the last communist Prime Minister of Poland; from August 1989 to February 1990, he was the last First Secretary of the PZPR. Since 1990, Rakowski has*
been Editor-in-Chief of Dziś: Przegląd Społeczny. He is the author of numerous publications on politics.

...Among those who criticize the Round Table most violently are young right-wing activists who think...that the Round Table was, as Adam Michnik has said, “a transaction between the reds and the pinks.” Well, at that time, when the leadership of the opposition, Lech Wałęsa, Mazowiecki, Geremek, Kuroń, Frasyniuk, Michnik of course, Bujak, and others....When these leaders had mustered their courage to trust us, although they had reasons not to do so, well today’s young critics of the Round Table were in high school, or they were freshmen at universities. They have nothing in their resumes to prove heroic struggle against the communist regime, so they just write new resumes, trying to make up for that gap. Criticizing the Round Table, they present themselves as the ones who, had they been there then, would have really defeated those “commies” and they would have sent them where they belong, to detention camps somewhere, maybe not in Siberia, but they would have found a place. Well, this group, that is simply writing its own resume, thinks that “the reds” and “the pinks” have created a myth about the great importance of the Round Table negotiations, while the meetings at Magdalenka were actually cannibals’ feasts. That’s what I heard on one of the TV shows in Poland. Well, it’s important to note that sometimes it’s frightening to hear such opinions, because they demonstrate a completely ahistorical mode of thinking of some part of the Polish intelligentsia, mostly in the right-wing camp today.

...It is my opinion that during the first period, the communist party authorities, to whom I belonged and that’s why I often say “we” and not “they,” that regime was not politically or psychologically ready to accept the opposition as something that might exist in the socialist system, and even less ready to share power with it. And accepting trade unions independent of the state administration and really the state as such, no, that was not part of the very concept of socialism....after martial law was imposed, we in the party still believed that we faced a crisis, we were fully aware of that, but we thought we could weather the crisis on our own, without the opposition....

We believed, we were convinced that we could cope without the opposition and this conviction, as a matter of fact, lasted until the mid-1980’s, but it was also related to our fear of the Soviet Union. Because the generation of Jaruzelski and, in general, the generation that went through the gulags, Polish communists, or those who later became communists, those who were cutting trees in Siberia, this generation came back to Poland with a sense of helplessness towards power. It wasn’t any kind of servility but it was sheer fear and respect for the power east of the Bug river. That was one of the lessons that Jaruzelski learned, and in my opinion, there’s no doubt that it had an impact on his attitude toward the opposition in the 1980’s....
Now there is an opinion that the collapse of communism began with the fall of the Berlin Wall. I must say that, well, with all my admiration for the Germans, they are cheating us again. They’ve convinced the world. The Berlin Wall and that’s it, the beginning of the fall. No, the Round Table was the beginning and others followed us.

Wieslaw Chrzanowski

A Professor of Law at the Catholic University of Lublin, Wieslaw Chrzanowski (b. 1923) has long been an active opponent of communism. After serving in the anti-Nazi resistance during the Second World War, Chrzanowski studied law at Jagiellonian University, Warsaw University, and the Warsaw School of Economics. He was arrested in 1948 and sentenced to eight years imprisonment for his involvement in the Union of Christian Youth. Although officially rehabilitated in 1956, Chrzanowski was refused permission to practice law (except in the modest position of "legal advisor"). He founded the "Start" Catholic Discussion Club in 1957 and was a member of Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński’s "Information Committee" from 1965. In the 1980’s Chrzanowski served as an advisor to Solidarity and as a member of Cardinal Józef Glemp’s "Social Advisory Board." He was among the founders of the Christian-National Union in 1989 and served as its President until 1994. Chrzanowski was Minister of Justice in 1991, Marshal of the Sejm from 1991 to 1993, and a Senator since 1997.

…I am totally opposed and my view is negative when it comes to any attempts to build up a legend of the Round Table, in connection with its tenth anniversary. History from ten years back is not yet history; it is history in action, and in this regard, the legend has its own role to play.

The Round Table did not cause decomposition in the imperial structure of the Soviet Union; it was rather the consequence of that decomposition. It wasn’t what sealed the collapse of communism as a socio-economic system. The end of the system was already perceived by Prime Minister Rakowski’s government, which undertook steps in a new direction. It did accelerate, however, accelerated by a few months only changing the guard of power in Poland, and it did influence significantly, but not decisively, the manner of transferring the power.

Beyond its legend, the Round Table negotiations have been significant in the Polish political arena. Within this scope, undoubtedly, they have significance. However, those negotiations haven’t had a universal caliber. It would be an illusion to seek analogies with the Spanish, Portuguese, or Chilean decline of the authoritarian system. In our country, it was a system that was imposed from outside, and it could survive only with outside support. In these other countries, the systems were indigenous and so were their
declines. This is the reason why it’s hard to imagine, unfortunately, that our formula could be helpful in solving the tragic events in the former Yugoslavia, that is, the present conflict in Kosovo.

Letter from Pope John Paul II
read to the audience by Michael Kennedy

“His Holiness hopes that this disciplined reflection on the spiritual, cultural and political aspects of Poland’s peaceful transition to democracy will highlight their ultimate foundation in a moral imperative arising from the vision of man’s innate dignity and his transcendent vocation to freedom in the pursuit of truth. He is confident that the Conference’s work will call needed attention to the superiority of patient dialogue over all forms of violence in the resolution of conflicts and the building of a just and humane social order.”

PANEL TWO: THE POLITICAL CONTEST, 1986-89

Zbigniew Bujak

Trained as an electrical technician, Zbigniew Bujak (b. 1954) worked for several years at the Ursus tractor factory near Warsaw. He co-organized a strike there in 1980, and became one of the leading figures in the Solidarity movement. From 1981 to 1989 he was head of Solidarity for the Mazowsze region, and until his arrest in 1986 he was the most prominent opposition figure to avoid detention. In 1986, Bujak was awarded the Robert F. Kennedy Human Rights Award. From 1987 to 1989 he was a member of Solidarity’s National Executive Committee; from 1990 to 1991 he served as President of the Stefan Batory Foundation. A Deputy in the Sejm from 1991 to 1997, he represented the Democratic Social Movement (1991-93) and the Union of Labor (1993-97). Bujak writes frequently on Polish politics and is currently a leading member of the Freedom Union party.

...We had found out before that any time we went into the streets and through demonstrations tried to force the other side to do something, each time we actually lost. No matter how many times we tried to overcome the other side by armed struggle, it would turn out, and I’m referring here to the post-war period, it turned out that the party apparatus could easily present the opposition as some sort of criminals, armed assailants. And we kept losing. Therefore we figured out that the idea of fighting without violence was the best, and that was our belief, the most successful or effective
tool in the fight for democracy. When this is accepted as a principle that here we are headed towards an agreement ultimately, and it revealed itself during the martial law period, then even while we were calling for street demonstrations and aiming for a general strike, in that very document, we would always refer to the need for coming to terms and agreement, believing that this was the only way to solve the conflict.

I must say that if during martial law someone had contacted me, let’s say some general, and said something like, “My division is at your disposal,” most likely we would have seriously reflected over this possibility. But nothing of the sort happened.

I would say that we succeeded in maintaining the unity of the Solidarity movement, and, let’s say, the overall comprehensibility and unity of the idea that was the guiding light for us. That doesn’t mean that there was no diversity in programs. Yes, there were diverse programs, manifold programs. There were new political movements being born and they were formulating their own political programs. And that suited us, because this was what pluralism and democracy in Solidarity were about.

Right now in Poland, there is a debate about the Round Table negotiations, was that necessary, did it make any sense or not? In this conflict, an important argument is the issue of the victims, the issue of whether there is justice, whether justice was served at that time, whether the crimes were punished, whether evil was eliminated. And in a way, those who ask those questions think of the Round Table negotiations as something bad. I’d like to say that this approach, well, shows a lot of deep faith that you can eradicate evil and that justice can prevail one hundred percent. I look at it with detachment, and, well, even with a certain dose of fright, because, well, that’s as if someone was trying to correct what God created, to eliminate all evil and achieve one hundred percent justice. That’s not the way the world works, and human relations aren’t that way, either, and, let me put it this way, within this philosophy, we would like to keep prosecuting and punishing all those who committed various crimes. Within that philosophy, we, the Poles, a religious nation, we go to church and pray for justice. And that’s a big part of the Polish Church, the part which you can hear in the media, the part, well, trying to achieve that one hundred percent absolute justice and truth. How should we do that? In order to do that, one obviously needs to answer the question regarding the significance of the victims’ suffering. Well, to me, then, it’s clear that those people were not fighting for this one hundred-percent justice and eradication of evil. They were fighting for freedom and democracy. And in that sense, when we participated in the Round Table negotiations which led to freedom and democracy in Poland, in a way we are fulfilling the mission, the mission they had been fighting for and gave their lives for. And I have to say that when I listen to the family members of those people, I think they understand, and they say, our father, my husband was killed.
for freedom and democracy. And within that philosophy, we may say, there is another kind of prayer in church. This one is about thankfulness for their sacrifice, and that’s another part of the Polish Church. And in that sense, the difference of opinion regarding the Round Table truly exists and will persist for many more months and perhaps for many long years, and it will define these two trends in Polish socio-economic life, but also the two trends in the Polish Church.

**Ambassador Stanisław Ciosek**

*A member of the Polish United Workers’ Party (PZPR) from 1959 to 1990, Stanisław Ciosek (b. 1939) has held a variety of administrative posts. He was awarded a degree in oceanic studies from the College of Economics at Sopot in 1961 and served for the next fourteen years in the administration of the Union of Polish Students. From 1972 to 1985 Ciosek was a Deputy to the Sejm, and from 1975 to 1980 he was a regional First Secretary in the PZPR. He was on the PZPR’s Central Committee from 1980 to 1981 and 1986 to 1990; from 1980 to 1985 he was a member of the Council of Ministers. In the years leading to the Round Table negotiations (1986-88), he was General Secretary of the PZPR’s Central Committee and General Secretary of the National Council of the Patriotic Movement for National Rebirth. From 1989 to 1996, Ciosek was Poland’s Ambassador to Moscow.*

…This is quite a risky thought, but I am going to say it anyway. I believe that allowing such notions as glasnost’ and perestroika had its source in the situation in Poland, and in the realization that it was impossible to solve conflicts and ensure growth either through force, like in Poland during martial law, or through the existing methods of running the government. Maybe not as clearly as manifested in Poland, those problems occurred in the whole socialist camp. Maybe this is not modest, but I’m fully convinced, after over six years of living in Moscow and after numerous conversations and inquiries, that it was a necessity to face that challenge, the challenge named Poland that engendered the necessity for leaders of Gorbachev’s type.

In response to name-calling, when we were being called “red spiders,” …yes, yes, there were times when we were called “red spiders,” I used to say to my partners: “Well, what kind of a spider is it that is no longer able to catch flies?” …

I was being perceived as some kind of a funny monster with two heads, since, well, with my biography I was still the ambassador of the new Poland. And for these people that meant a lot as well, that moving into a new system, they didn’t need to lose their heads, and I mean literally….
We knew that it was necessary to change, that radical changes were needed, but we did not quite know what exactly needed to change and how to introduce those changes. So we were looking towards Solidarity for ideas. And the way we saw it, it was all a maze of criticism, of dissatisfaction, of different ideas, proposals, that were not clearly crystallized political and economic concepts. We could still remember well the famous consultations about cigarette prices during the Solidarity Congress in Gdańsk. This sounds completely irrational today but that was the truth. So in our eyes, that was not the proper idea for the new Poland, either. Yes, we agreed on one thing, that we needed a change. And with this frame of mind, we were sitting down at the Round Table. This was not a duel of two clearly defined concepts, some doctrinaire socialism with planned economy against democracy and market economy. This was a search, at the beginning full of distrust and suspicion, and yet together we were looking for new ways of changing Poland....

At some point, the Russians asked all the ambassadors accredited in Moscow to put something symbolic from each nation under the cornerstone of the currently rebuilt great Temple of Christ the Savior. So I went to Warsaw and I brought a thick book of the Round Table agreements. That was, well, a very dangerous time in Moscow, with the possible confrontation, and I figured that they could use our agreements as a symbol of dialogue. But then I read the book, after several years, carefully, and decided not to put it there at the cornerstone of the temple. As I have mentioned, those were beautiful promises, wishes, expectations. It was not the free market, it was not capitalism. It resembled utopian socialism, social romanticism with the indexing of wages. Well, to give such visions to neighbors, who were and actually still are facing the brutal choice of tough economic measures, well...I did not dare do it. Despite all the symbolic value of our Round Table, I did not decide to undermine the walls of their new temple with ideas, which were created at a specific time and under specific conditions in Poland....

Let me remind you that in the Round Table pact we agreed that the next elections would be completely free. This period of four years of systemic transformation, we called that, well, a coupling mechanism or rather, the clutch mechanism. You press the clutch in order to switch gears, not to stick to the same one. I stubbornly insist that the good part of my camp had a sense of far-reaching changes. Not everybody was aware that major fundamental change would really occur, but there were many that had not as much a premonition as an understanding that it would occur. That’s why...we pressed that clutch pedal...

We pushed for the elections to finally get to know the real truth. We were all afraid that we would destroy the country by the rapid pace of the transformation. That’s the origin of all this resistance, all of those institutions, braking and controlling, including the
contractual elections. This whole construction was about this, and not about our hands..., like it’s often shown, glued to the trough and turned into stone.

Ambassador John R. Davis

As US Ambassador to Poland, John R. Davis (b. 1927) served as a mediator during the Round Table negotiations. His wife, Helen Davis, acted as convener of informal meetings among Round Table participants at the Ambassador’s Residence in Warsaw in the late 1980’s. A Foreign Service Officer since 1955, Ambassador Davis holds degrees from UCLA and Harvard University. His diplomatic career has included tours of duty in Washington, Jakarta, and Rome and service as Consul General in Milan and Sydney. He has had four assignments at the US Embassy in Warsaw: Economics Officer (1960-63); Deputy Chief of Mission (1973-76); Charge d’Affaires (1983-88); and Ambassador (1988-90). From 1981 to 1983, he was Director of the Eastern European and Yugoslav Affairs Office in the Department of State. From 1992 to 1994, he was US Ambassador to Romania.

For us in the Embassy in Warsaw, in the period from 1983 until 1990, when I was head of Mission, Poland was an absolute fairyland of political and economic experimentation, and it was a place that achieved, at the end of the Round Table, something that generations of Americans, pundits and experts, declared to be impossible, and that was the peaceful transfer of power in a communist country into the hands of a democratic society....

In my view Solidarity had all the good arguments and had tremendous popular support, from the Church, from society. It couldn’t lose, once it got down to the table, and that’s exactly the way it worked out. Professor Reykowski will acknowledge, he and Professor Geremek came on television every night, after the sessions of the Round Table, and it was like Thomas Jefferson explaining democracy on television to the American people in 1790. They created the new society, explained that to the people, and by the time they all rose from the table, it was clear that a tremendous moment in Polish history had been achieved, a moment of enormous historical significance....

For the United States, and I think for the whole world, what happened at the Round Table and all of those who participated in it created a situation, which has benefited all mankind. Millions of people may be alive today who would have been dead or suffering if another path had been taken to the end of communism. What was achieved there, although there are those who will now criticize it in retrospect, was at the time unthinkable. In fact, after the Round Table had succeeded, I came back here to talk to analysts in Washington, and half of them didn’t believe that it had happened....
The main element that I tried to use to influence the opposition was to persuade them in the period leading up to the Round Table talks that it was in their interest to talk to the government, because I felt that they could get major concessions, that they would get sufficient political concessions, because the final attempt by Premier Rakowski to institute economic reforms in 1988 had failed because of the strikes, that the government was now in a very weak position, and that Solidarity was in a very strong position, and that they were bound to win any negotiation, so…we urged them….

I didn’t have instructions from Washington as to what to do. As was often the case, I just did what I thought was best in the interest of the Polish nation.

**Bishop Alojzy Orszulik**

Bishop of the Diocese of Łowicz since 1982, Alojzy Orszulik (b. 1928) co-organized and participated in the Round Table negotiations as an observer for the Catholic Church. He received his master’s degree in canon law from the Catholic University of Lublin in 1961 and was a lecturer in this field until 1989. Bishop Orszulik has held several positions in the Polish Episcopate including Director of the Press Department (1968-93) and Deputy to the Secretary (1989-94). He has served as a member and Secretary of the Joint Commission of the Government and Episcopate of Poland since 1980 and has been a consultant to the Papal Council for Social Media since 1974.

…From the very start, ladies and gentlemen, the Secretariat of the Episcopate, as some of you may know, whether it had its office still in a small building right next to the cathedral, or whether it was already in the new site at Cardinal Wyszyński Square, the Secretariat of the Episcopate would always constitute some kind of safety oasis, some kind of a guarantee of safety. Since the very beginning of martial law, we were demanding access to Mr. Lech (Walęsa) and to other places of internment. Lots of priests would go to those places, and I don’t think that they’ve ever committed a crime, and neither have I, when they were smuggling some written messages out. And those situations were sometimes ludicrous, because prisoners would put those encoded messages into the priest’s robe pocket, and the priests’ clothing is sewn in such a way that one can reach both to the pocket and also to the trousers. So sometimes the notes were being placed not really in the pocket but into the other opening, and the message would fall down the trouser leg. The priests were brave, nonetheless, and got those messages out and passed them to the families. Then, the families, in turn, would request help in many different things, were requesting intervention. And we had many interventions of that kind…. 
The Secretariat of the Episcopate, where I used to work, would support Solidarity leaders, because the Church alone worked for the same values for many decades before. And here I would just like to mention that from the very beginning of the Polish People’s Republic, first Cardinal Hlond and then Cardinal Wyszyński would oppose the sovietization of Poland, the construction of a totalitarian system. Actually, at that time he paid for it with three years of imprisonment; at that point, the Church de facto was a political opposition, although it was never its intention, which it expressed many times in public declarations. But the government of the Polish People’s Republic would push the Church into the role of political opposition.

The government of the People’s Republic of Poland always looked to the Church to become a partner, whom they could easily treat instrumentally, some kind of partner who would be able to moderate the opposition and to calm the tensions in society. Well, we didn’t talk only to them; while there was the principle assumed already by Cardinal Wyszyński that we would always talk whenever the authorities wanted to talk, but we also conducted talks with the leadership of the opposition. We would always encourage talks with the society, through elected representatives.

PANEL THREE: EVERYDAY LIFE AND THE POLITICAL CONTEST

Bishop Bronisław Dembowski

Bishop of the Diocese of Wloclawek since 1992 and Professor of Philosophy at the Catholic University of Lublin since 1981, Bronisław Dembowski (b. 1927) participated in the Round Table negotiations as an observer for the Catholic Church. He studied philosophy at the University of Warsaw and the Catholic University of Lublin, where he received a Ph.D. in 1961, and at Warsaw’s Theological Seminary, where he taught from 1970 to 1992. A member of the International Catholic Council for Charismatic Revival and the Polish Episcopate’s Commission for Catholic Education, Missionaries, and Priesthood, Bishop Dembowski has published extensively on religion and philosophy.

…The only thing I can do is give you my own ideas and share my own experience. And I’m going to repeat here again that I’ve never been, I’m not, and I hope I never will be a political activist. First of all, I have been a professor of philosophy and a pastor, and now only the latter, as a bishop, and as such, I have defined my task: to respond in the Christian way to questions posed by life….
Once in one of my sermons, I said, “We are being accused of opposing the government of the Polish People’s Republic. No, I’m not in opposition to the government but the government is in opposition to the society, by using force to introduce atheism.”

Zbigniew Janas

Zbigniew Janas (b. 1953) was trained as a transport technician at the Technical School of the Railroad Industry in Warsaw. During the 1970’s, he worked for Polish National Railways and the Ursus tractor factory near Warsaw. Active in the Workers' Defense Committee (KOR) from 1978 to 1980, Janas co-organized a strike at the Ursus factory in 1980 and headed the factory’s Solidarity local in 1980-81 and 1989. An underground Solidarity activist between 1981 and 1984, he was unemployed for political reasons from 1984 to 1986. From 1985 to 1989, Janas helped organize illegal meetings on the Polish-Czechoslovak border between members of Solidarity and Czech and Slovak civil rights activists. A Deputy in the Sejm since 1989, he has represented the Civic Parliamentary Club, Democratic Union, and Freedom Union.

As research has documented, an average Pole at the end of the 80’s focused primarily on organizing his own private life and on material issues. Socio-political problems, such as, for instance, doubts concerning the mismanagement of the country or the economic crisis were, for a majority of Poles, only a marginal issue, remaining in the background of everyday life. Because at that time, when asked the question, “What is crucial right now for your family, what issues would you like to take care of first of all and what are your main goals?,” those surveyed would indicate such things as an apartment, over fifty-one percent, family and private life, financial situation, with almost thirty percent of respondents. And it was only the fourth position where the situation in the country was mentioned by merely thirteen percent of respondents....

In the political struggle of the 80’s, I can say that, to my knowledge, political demands were to a considerable degree a result of everyday, economic frustrations. The propaganda of success generated by the political authorities gradually contributed to higher and higher material aspirations and expectations in the Polish society. At the same time, the deepening crisis caused the ability of the government to meet those expectations to gradually diminish. And thus, the lack of balance between the material needs and expectations of the society and the life conditions that the system could provide turned out to be one of the main causes of the protests in the 80’s. And what pushed people towards struggle were not so much objective material problems as the gap between expectations, aroused by propaganda, and the actual availability of goods.
Gabriel Janowski

Farmer, Solidarity activist responsible for unifying the independent trade union movement in the countryside, and Round Table participant for the opposition, Gabriel Janowski (b. 1947) holds a doctorate in agriculture from the College of Agriculture in Warsaw, where he worked from 1974 to 1988. After his detention from 1981 to 1982, Janowski played a leading role in the Catholic Church’s lay ministry among farmers. He was a member of the Citizens’ Committee, Vice-Chair (1989-90) and Chair (1990-92) of the National Council of Solidarity of Individual Farmers, and Senator for the Civic Parliamentary Club (1989-91). From 1991 to 1993, Janowski represented the Peasant Alliance as a Deputy to the Sejm and served as Minister of Agriculture. In 1992 he became leader of the Polish Peasant Party-Peasant Alliance. He is currently a Deputy to the Sejm associated with Solidarity Electoral Action.

In 1981, in November, farmers…organized a big protest demonstration at Siedlice, and one of the demands was to allow them to buy rubber shoes, more than two pairs, and lard. Hardly anyone knows about that, but when food was rationed, farmers were not given coupons, in fact. Those things are practically, well, we can’t really understand those things today how that group, that class, was being discriminated against throughout all that time….

In the Polish rural areas there was practically…unilateral support for the new order. And great expectations indeed connected with it. I could ask you, ladies and gentlemen, directly, what forced the government side to enter those Round Table negotiations. Just as it happened during previous crises….Of course, I don’t want to oversimplify, but I want to show this as a real problem. It was the issue of providing food for the Poles, since every Polish crisis was in fact accompanied by empty store shelves.…

During the Round Table negotiations, to us, well, in what is now the Presidential Palace, there were farmers in front of the palace demonstrating, farmers demonstrating, demanding good pay. Ten years later, in February of this year, as you know, Poland was shaken by peasant protests, well, on a scale unheard of for the past seventy years. There is something symbolic about this, since then, there, at the Round Table, we tried, well, unsuccessfully, as it has turned out, but we tried to solve the economic problems, especially those of the farmers. And now, ten years later, the same problem is coming back magnified, and it still remains unsolved. And that’s a great challenge that’s ahead of us, all those Poles who look seriously at their duties toward the Polish nation. This means that we will have to tackle the problem of the Polish farmers and we’ll have to solve it for the good of the farmers, but also for the good of the whole Polish society….
Among parts of the opposition, there was a fear of taking over. Among the rural types like myself...we were used to working on our own, to normal entrepreneurship and so forth. We never lost completely this kind of responsibility, which...not to put down the working class, but they functioned differently. They were supposed to obey orders, you know. They would think less; I'm sorry, you know, I don't mean to put anybody down. In order to survive as individual farmers, we had to think, figure out some tricks, to say informally. Therefore, we were not afraid of running things....

As a man, well, let's call it a hundred percent Solidarity man, I am experiencing personally, and very acutely, the huge problem of the departure from Solidarity of the community I'm representing, and that is the rural community....

It's something incredible that the most powerful, peaceful movement in that part of Europe that has changed the face of contemporary world is unable to find its place in this contemporary world! But I believe, and I am an optimist, that we will find it and we will enter the twenty-first century with a new force, the force that would stem, above all, from Solidarity and from the social teachings of the Church. And these are the two major tasks that we have to carry.

**Janina Jankowska**

Broadcast journalist Janina Jankowska chaired the Solidarity delegation on the sub-table for public radio and television during the Round Table negotiations. After graduating from the University of Warsaw in Polish philology, Jankowska worked until 1982 for the Radio and Television Commission. In August 1980, Jankowska covered events at the Gdańsk shipyards, becoming a member of the Editorial Board for Solidarity Broadcasting Programs. Interned under martial law in early 1982, she went on to produce radio documentaries for clandestine distribution on audiocassettes, which led to her imprisonment in 1984. Jankowska was responsible for the opposition's radio and television campaigns in the 1989 elections. She has worked as a broadcast journalist in Poland since 1990 and has chaired the Program Council of Polish Radio since 1993.

...Any interviews that had been recorded during the Round Table negotiations, the interviews recorded by regime journalists, as we called them then, were attended by our own journalists who would record everything and then we would check which sections of the interview had been cut out, so, with this breathing on their necks, they had to produce decent, substantive, well done reports. Besides, we also wanted the viewers to know when Zakrzewski, the regime journalist, spoke to a member of the OPZZ (government unions) or a person from Solidarity. And here I have to say immodestly
that this was my idea. We had three folders with the Solidarity logo, so everybody from our side who was being interviewed on television would hold that folder like this. And it became clear, since otherwise nobody would be able to identify that person as a member of Solidarity or the opposition and not a person from OPZZ. That’s what this moment was like....

At the Round Table negotiations we didn’t even dream that what has happened would happen, that so soon we would have free mass media. One of those colleagues of mine who participated at the press “small table” said, and I won’t quote it here exactly, that he hoped that perhaps in two years underground publications would probably become legal. We were simply counting on the end of repression against underground publications. And, of course, the way Polish society behaved during the elections surprised all of us, I mean the election results. And we, journalists, I think owe particularly much to all this because what happened was exactly what we had been fighting for. Thanks to that we have completely free mass media right now and we may write according to our conscience. However, completely new and also quite restrictive conditions arose, but those phenomena are close to the world in which we are here right now. It’s a certain commercialism, a certain dependence on centers, perhaps no longer political,...but perhaps to some extent political, but primarily on money....

…One of my male friends from the opposition said to me in a conversation at one point that we should erect a monument dedicated to the women of martial law, because that entire network of conspiracy, all of this rested on the shoulders of the women....

The Solidarity that we were directly involved in and felt so emotional about was a creation of a certain era, a certain time, and perhaps it cannot easily be transferred to today, as reality has demonstrated....

The period of the Round Table was very interesting, very important, also because it allowed us to look at the opponents, at the partners, and get to know them. And this is when the links were created, and they were quite necessary in order to perceive those people differently and try to understand their motivation, their way of thinking. And on the other hand, those Round Table negotiations marked the beginning of a process which brought to an end this period of direct democracy when people still had direct impact on their trade union authorities and on the opposition authorities. And a new period started which, I am afraid, today has resulted in a certain deafness to social protests.
ALEKSANDER HALL

Former teacher and founder of the Young Poland Movement (1979), Aleksander Hall (b. 1953) participated in the Round Table negotiations as a representative of the opposition. In 1977, he received a degree in history from the University of Gdańsk and became a coordinator of the Movement for the Defense of Human and Civil Rights. A member of the Regional Coordinating Commission for Solidarity from 1980 to 1981, he spent the following three years in hiding. He resumed involvement in the Solidarity movement in 1988 and became a member of the Citizens' Committee. Hall was a government minister responsible for cooperation with political organizations and associations from 1989 to 1990. Co-founder of the Democratic Union, he served as its Co-chairman from 1991 to 1992 and as one of its Deputies in the Sejm from 1991 to 1993. Hall was leader of the Conservative Party from 1992 to 1997, when he co-founded the Peasant-Conservative Party. He is currently a Deputy to the Sejm associated with Solidarity Electoral Action.

Solidarity was certainly a polyphonic major national anticommunist movement that was also a labor movement in favor of civil society. In time, differences surfaced, sometimes quite substantial, among separate strands of that movement, but it was undoubtedly a major national movement that had its own ethos, the movement that has transformed Poland. Its mode of operation was indeed the rejection of violence, and in this rejection of violence, both ideological and pragmatic considerations played a role....

Was it possible to engage in dialogue with the other side? I think that there certainly existed political communities in Poland which believed that it was not, for ideological reasons, simply because one just doesn’t talk to the communist authorities. Let’s be honest, however, those were marginal communities. Other groups claimed that it wasn’t the right moment, or would claim that the side represented by Solidarity and Wałęsa was not fully representative for society and opposition at the time. But I think that a distinct majority of those who were active and involved in the opposition, groups and individuals, believed that it was worthwhile to opt for those talks, not because they trusted in the good intentions of the other side, but for other reasons....

It was also clear that the system was stepping back, not because those in the leadership of the communist party were liberals or reformers, but it was in retreat because of its own weaknesses, because of the various forms of social resistance, and also, I would just say, under the influence of the reality....
Since the Church and the underground Solidarity really demanded, insisted on
resuming dialogue, so when the other side finally, under the influence of many factors,
had matured to engage in this dialogue, or at least there was a chance that it had
matured, it was necessary to take advantage of this opportunity. Taking advantage, of
course, meant not having any illusions, or in other words, trying to preserve our own
independence, our own identity, and under no circumstances legitimizing the status quo
that would signal that a reformed People’s Poland was the achievement of what we had
been struggling for. Signing an accord that would legitimize the withdrawal of a
prospect of democracy and independence for Poland was out of the question. But on this
path towards democracy and independence, it was possible to make partial
compromises that would bring us closer to that goal. And that appeared to be a decent
compromise. . . .

We have to look at the Round Table by, on the one hand, rejecting the sort of black
legend that depicts the Round Table as a betrayal. Because that would be a very strange
betrayal that pushes Poland’s affairs strongly ahead. But we also have to reject the other
legend which produces the myth where both sides, Solidarity and the government, are
being presented as equally worried, equally concerned with the need for transforming
Poland. And under that myth both sides are given equal credit for having brought about
democracy in Poland. I have no doubt that such was the intention of Solidarity, but that
was not the intention of the communist authorities of the People’s Poland. . . .

I had a very distinct feeling that it was very important for the society to emphasize very
clearly that two opposite visions of Poland meet, that they also represent different moral
stands, and that our delegation approaches this table to reach a certain goal, a goal that
would place Poland closer to independence and democracy, and that, to the enemies,
because there was absolutely no doubt that these were our enemies, that we need to
show them, well, some attitude I would say, an attitude of human respect. Yet, at the
same time, we cannot create an impression that these fundamental differences have been
blurred and that martial law, with its victims, and the whole balance sheet of the Polish
People’s Republic have been forgotten. . . .

Of course, the Round Table did not represent the entire opposition, realistic opposition I
mean, since there were also groups which generally opposed any direction towards
negotiations. Why did that happen? It was not...because of the decision of the
government, but it was the decision of Mr. Lech Wałęsa and his advisors, since they
were the ones who created the group that participated in the Round Table negotiations.
And I think it was not good that important circles and important people were not
participating in those negotiations.
Adam Michnik

…During the Round Table negotiations and, actually, at one of the sub-committees, where the most controversial issues were being discussed, a very significant dialogue took place between a representative of the government and a representative of the Church. Namely, the representative of the government, Mr. Stanislaw Ciosek, in an attempt to explain to us how important it was, said: “Well, I have a dog and his name is Pikuś. And Pikuś is sick, and my sick Pikuś needs medication, and this Pikuś is Poland, and I know that this medication for Pikuś is democracy, but if we inject too much of this medication into my dog Pikuś, then instead of getting better, he will just kick the bucket.” So then the Church representative, Father Orszulik, says: “Well, Mr. Secretary, but your Pikuś gets into convulsions just by looking at the syringe.” So in that little anecdote, we can see both the heat and the essence of the discussion but we can also see something that… I would call… perhaps not an ethos, but a certain climate of the Round Table that made it possible for the two worlds, which spoke two different languages, to communicate….

Communists, and those who accepted the communist government for their own benefit, are a component of the Polish nation, which cannot be excluded from Poland, unless one wants to destroy the Polish national community. And this is what I learned at the Round Table.…

I have a feeling that at the Round Table, we, as a nation and a society, have managed to leave communism behind in two ways. First, the whole model of a single party dictatorship, supported by censorship, police violence, subordination to Moscow, and ideology, has been broken down and sort of thrown away into the dumping ground of history. But second of all, we have rejected bolshevism also by accepting the fact that our society is pluralistic, with many different interests, different ideas, different forces, and different value systems. And only in those areas where we are able to reach agreement are we capable of defending the interests of our state….

This was an essential conflict, and in this conflict, both sides had good arguments and I don’t deny moral points to my adversaries, because in their conviction, they were defending the most important thing for Poland. All I am expecting is reciprocity. I want it to be admitted that defending Solidarity’s position so strongly, I was, in my conviction, defending the most important thing for Poland.
Professor of Psychology at the University of Warsaw since 1972, Janusz Reykowski (b. 1929) participated in the Round Table talks as a negotiator for the government. He was a member of the Polish United Workers’ Party from 1949 to 1990 and served on its Central Committee and Politburo from 1988 to 1990. Reykowski earned his master’s (1954) and doctoral (1959) degrees from the University of Warsaw. Since 1980, he has directed various psychological institutions, including the Psychology Institute of the Polish Academy of Sciences. Reykowski has been Editor-in-Chief of the journal Studia Psychologiczne since 1972 and is a member of several Polish and international psychological associations. He is the author of numerous publications on psychological stress and personality.

I must say that when Professor Michael Kennedy approached me, asking me to participate in this panel, concerning the ethical problems, I felt uneasy. I felt uneasy because I thought that that would lead to an ethical argument with people who, defending their own values and convictions, suffered a huge sacrifice, personal sacrifice. And their ethical attitude, their sacrifice, makes them look like saints. And you can hardly argue with a saint. So, I hesitated, whether or not to take up this discussion. But, eventually, I thought that my respect of the moral attitude of those people and their struggle for a democratic Poland, which they may rightly consider won, should not prevent me from participation but it actually obliges me to present the moral arguments shared by those who saw the situation from a different perspective….

On one hand, there is a set of values Solidarity is struggling for, values such as civil society, national sovereignty, civil rights guarantees. On the other hand, though, there are values represented by the government. Well, it was, above all else, defending that minimal, limited sovereignty which they were able to keep and enlarge. For the West and also for many members of the Polish community abroad who were looking at the socialist camp from a distance, everything looked all the same, but to many Poles living in Poland, the difference between our situation and the situation in the Soviet Union, East Germany, Czechoslovakia, or Romania, was tremendous. Defending, protecting this, we believed, was a very important value for the society. Another issue that we also considered a value was our fear that...or the defense of the basic order within the country, without which no kind of life of the society is possible. Many of us thought that at that time, under those conditions, when the opposition was not ready to take power, there was no possibility for Solidarity to take over safely, that there is a potential danger of a huge de-stabilization. At that time that was mostly theoretical thinking, but the experience many countries went through after 1989 showed what it means when there is a collapse of a system where no other institutions exist....
One aspect of the Solidarity movement was mobilization of the society around the idea of peaceful transformation toward democracy. Another aspect was an explosion of aggressive populism, escalating demands, and traditional Polish nationalism and intolerance. Both elements might be discerned within the Solidarity movement. All that caused us to think that the moral situation was not as obvious as presented by activists on both sides….

We were…convinced that the natural logic of a destructive conflict causes severing of any ties between the struggling sides, causes a growing tendency to demonize the enemy, and invariably results in physical confrontation. This is that tragic logic that moves the sides involved in the Balkan conflict and all others involved in conflicts where blood is shed. And we wanted to counter that kind of logic, so we wanted, at all costs, to try to avoid leading those two separate camps to a precipice. That kind of thinking is often criticized as trying to enter into agreements with the devil. This accusation is put forward not only against those who were collaborating with the regime this way or another, or those, like myself, who agreed to represent one them, but also against the Solidarity participants of the Round Table negotiations. The latter ones, while defending themselves, say that it’s worth negotiating with the devil if it ultimately spreads the good and the peaceful transformation that has led to freedom and democracy….

I do not think that people who at that time were in charge of Poland deserved being called devils. First of all, they also acted on behalf of certain values, which are important to the Poles, even though one must admit that those values were defective and limited. …They do not deserve to be called that because they undertook some efforts to limit or to eradicate certain evils which the regime generated. These efforts were limited by the limited vision of those who were in charge at that time, but they were a permanent element of governing the country. Finally, they don’t deserve to be called that because they voluntarily undertook actions geared towards fundamental transformation of the system when they fully realized that it’s economically unviable and politically unfit for the needs and the aspirations of Polish society….

On the one hand, there was a real conflict, discussion, struggle, argument. There were dangerous and dramatic moments. But above all that, there was a conviction that we share a common goal. And that common goal was starting such reforms, which will enable Poland to pass safely and peacefully to another way of functioning….

On the day the Polish communist party was being dissolved, a young man approached me, reached out his hand and, with a grimace of rage on his face, said, “Well, thank you very much for destroying the party….”
I always had a feeling that…my main concern is the state, the country and not any specific political formation. Political formations come and go, while the concerns of the Polish state and society are above it all. And from that perspective…I’ve never had any doubts about that….

I look with sadness upon those people who, while they contributed a lot to those negotiations, find themselves attacked unjustly, I think, and that I haven’t done anything to maybe even partially protect those people from those attacks. One could say, well, this is the justice of history: when they were in power, they hurt their enemies more than the enemies are hurting them now. But I think that the reason we were trying to change this world, this political world, was to prevent it from becoming a sequence of mutually performed harms, even when some are smaller than others.

Bishop Bronislaw Dembowski

In the long run, a correct moral choice always proves to be correct tactically.

PANEL FIVE: CAPACITIES TO NEGOTIATE

Bishop Alojzy Orszulik

I expected what Solidarity was expecting, what the leadership of Solidarity was expecting. And at this early stage, the leaders were expecting the government to...,like I used to say, “stutter” the three words, “Solidarity,” “re-legalization,” and “trade union pluralism….”

In our conversations, I mean between the government and the Episcopate, we tried to encourage, we tried to convince the other side to start looking for paths to establish contacts. We were also trying to help the government side get rid of that fear of Solidarity and of what could possibly happen….

At the Round Table we were not concerned with the Church itself. Our concern was focused on the nation, the country, changes in the country, improvement of the situation in Poland, the life of the people. That was our concern and not dividing people into those we liked and those we didn’t like.
Janusz Reykowski

...Within the political elites and the government circles there was a deep dissatisfaction with the system, disappointment with its ideological value and practical capabilities....

In the 70’s and the 80’s, there were a lot of people in the government who were educated at the best Polish universities, traveled abroad and compared the situation here and there in the world. And these people were ready for changes. On the one government side, they were the political, or rather the social base for change. The existence of this category of people interested in change was a very important factor....

During the course of the negotiations, it was important that certain principles would be followed. I’d like to mention several of them which were important. One of them was the principle of equality. It was very scrupulously followed in a variety of aspects, beginning with the idea that the number of people on both delegations had to be the same, equal....Another such condition that was also very important was the principle of not discussing symbolic problems. We were to solve the future, and avoid arguing about the past. We believed, and I think most of us agreed here, that if we started getting into discussions about the past wrongs, we wouldn’t accomplish anything. We had to accept the fact that we looked at different things from the past in different ways, and that we had different visions of various symbolic problems....

If Solidarity were blamed for breaking up the talks, it would think that it was a trap all along, that all those talks were meant to compromise...At first I was thinking to myself, there’s no other way, but tomorrow, the first thing in the morning, I’m turning in my resignation officially and that’s the end of it. And then I had some apocalyptic thoughts run through my head, about what would happen next, with the society’s expectations. I’m imagining the Solidarity people’s emotions and how they go right into the streets...that’s what I was thinking....

And at one point, Ireneusz Sekula...said this: “I’ll tell you an anecdote.” I thought he’d gone crazy, an anecdote in this situation! But he went on: “One day, Goethe went along a narrow path in the mountains and he met his fiercest enemy, and his enemy said, ‘I never give the right of way to fools.’ And Goethe responded, ‘And I always do.’ And he turned around and left....”

The negotiations met the needs of a society that wanted change but did not want confrontation. It met the needs of the opposition that was pressing for peaceful changes in the country but began to understand that if the situation continued it would not become a player in this arena because new forces were emerging, more radical and of a
different orientation. It also met the needs of the authorities that were becoming aware that it was impossible to continue running the country this way, that it was impossible to implement any reforms, and the alternative of the talks was an escalated policy of repression….

There had been many historical circumstances that had been wasted, but that one did not get wasted. That’s…I believe that it’s worthwhile to support the myth of the Round Table, because this is a myth of Poles who were capable of taking advantage of the opportunity. And I think that, even if we don’t know what will happen in ten years, that myth, that legend, can support us in difficult moments.

Grażyna Staniszewska

A Solidarity activist in Bielsko-Biała during the 1980’s, Grażyna Staniszewska (b. 1949) participated in the Round Table negotiations for the opposition. She received a master’s degree in Polish philology from Jagiellonian University in 1972. Over the next decade, she worked in a local high school, cultural center, and research center library in Bielsko-Biała. Staniszewska joined Solidarity in 1980; she was detained from 1981 to 1982 and imprisoned in 1983. From 1983 to 1988, she edited the regional newspaper Solidarność Podbeskidzia and was a member of the Helsinki Committee in Poland. In 1988, she was chosen as a regional representative to Solidarity’s National Executive Committee. From 1988 to 1990, she was a member of the Citizens’ Committee. A Deputy to the Sejm since 1989, Staniszewska has represented the Civic Parliamentary Club (1989-91), Democratic Union (1991-94), and Freedom Union (1994-present).

All the way till the very end, it seemed to me that we were being involved in an end game that was not ours. And I was afraid all the time, from the very beginning, that, well you know, great, we chatted, we visited the salons, we saw how people behave in salons, we ate some fancy food, but that finally we would start acting in somebody else’s play….

I think that if anybody had thought that the system was being dismantled, the Round Table would not have happened at all….

Only after the first actual meeting of the Round Table, suddenly, like mushrooms after rain, would the local Solidarity committees spring into existence. People started meeting, working on things. When negotiations faltered, when news wasn’t good, people would stop coming to meetings, work would freeze. That was clear proof for me
that if we did not continue those talks, those activities would just cease to exist, and people would completely drop out from this activity….

It never occurred to me that it would be the end of communism. I thought that there would be some other kind of thaw period that would last a year or two, maybe three, maybe a little bit longer, and then the situation would get back to the same old, same old. Yet it seemed worthwhile to live and see this breath of freedom; it seemed worthwhile to create some sort of network for this….

I thought that there were some real gangsters sitting on the other side of the table, that they certainly wanted to trap us, but we had to balance on this rope and play this game, like we had been with the secret police, when we knew that our conversations were tapped and we were being followed while we had some illegal publications on us….

We knew that we had to go for it and just try to outsmart them. Did my perception of the other side change during negotiations? No…not much! Not during negotiations….

We all had a sense that we were really transforming Poland. Well, maybe this is a huge word, but this…patriotic atmosphere, this selfless atmosphere that dominated the tenth Sejm is unfortunately gone today. I’m sorry but it’s gone….

**PANEL SIX: CONSTITUENCIES OF NEGOTIATION**

**Mieczysław Rakowski**

…So what is weighing so heavily on my heart? Well, it’s the fact that I have a swallowing problem. I cannot keep on swallowing those opinions that are being uttered here today and that were uttered here yesterday. And those opinions that state that our intentions—when I say “our” I’m going to be referring to the government camp at that time—from all those opinions, it’s clear that our intentions were evil, and they were all evil. And we are being denied any kind of goodwill and reason….

I’ve also heard that we are generously granted the right to live, because I quote, “independently of their biographies,” at the Round Table, “they still did something for Poland.” So we are still allowed to breathe and to take an exam on our attachment to democracy….
Nobody will be surprised when I say that not once and not twice within the past ten years I’ve gone through a critical reckoning of my life, analyzed my attitudes, my life, my judgments and opinions, and so on. I’ve done it of my own will, and also based on some accusations that were being brought up against the People’s Republic of Poland and the people who played key roles in that system. I admit it’s not easy to talk about myself but there are some circumstances that allow us to work through our natural reservations. You know, I don’t think that somebody who’s not biased, somebody who is not dressing up in the armor of a saint fighting a dragon would count me among the hard-liners, the “party concrete.” I’m classifying myself into the reformist wing of PZPR and I’m not sure how development of Poland would have gone without the wing that I represent. The reformist wing, I believe, deserves to be analyzed in a factual and friendly way, and not to be treated like a dog’s fifth leg….

It’s not the most important issue that reformers constituted a minority. The most important thing is that we could not afford to say no openly and to organize ourselves within the party. Why? Well, why couldn’t we afford that? Because for many years we had been prisoners of a few dogmas defining our behaviors and attitudes. There was a dogma about the detriment of fragmentation, and from that dogma another one stemmed, the one about party’s unity as an absolutely crucial thing. And I have to admit that such unity did not exist. The Polish communist party gathered all kinds of attitudes from the national democrats to some really hard-headed fundamentalists. We were also prisoners of the leading role of the party dogma, the unquestioned role of the leader dogma, and finally the dogma of an absolute superiority of the socialist economy over the capitalist one. And finally, we, the members of the party who were keen on reforms, were also prisoners of that dogma that preached the absolute detriment of any criticism of the Soviet Union….

Once I spoke to one of the leaders in the opposition, a man whom I respect a lot, who had been imprisoned for nine years, and I asked him, “Listen, who was right? You or I?” And he said, “We were both needed….”

“…I do not consider myself a loser; I’m a guy who was representing a party that in the first round of the ’89 elections received four million four hundred fifty thousand votes, and that is twenty-eight percent, and Solidarity received thirty-eight percent. For the sake of comparison, in the last election AWS (Solidarity Electoral Action) received four million four hundred twenty-seven and a half thousand votes. Well, I don’t believe, I’m not expecting a fair judgment, yet I believe that it would be good to perceive Polish reality of that time as a multi-colored, multi-faceted, complicated reality, and that we were not mere puppets moved by strings pulled by somebody who was standing on the outside….”
I’d like to say that I treated the Round Table as a beginning of an evolutionary change of the system. I believed that economic reforms, regardless of their range, would bring about stratification within the material sphere, and that stratification would cause emergence of political parties with diverse interests.

I simply did not accept at the time, and I still don’t accept today the conclusion that we should have just chopped out everything down to the roots, the entire People’s Poland system, and then we would just have a wonderful, democratic country. It seems to me that anybody who gives up on revolution and bloodshed must be in favor of more evolutionary changes.

Jan Lityński

A participant in the Round Table negotiations for the opposition and a mathematician, Jan Lityński (b. 1946) has served as a Deputy in the Sejm since 1989. Lityński was expelled from the University of Warsaw and imprisoned in 1968 for his participation in student demonstrations. Nine years later he became a founding member of the Workers’ Defense Committee (KOR) and edited Biuletyn Informacyjny and Robotnik. As a result of his membership in Solidarity, he was imprisoned from 1981 to 1983 and forced into hiding from 1983 to 1986. Since 1989, Lityński has represented the Civic Parliamentary Club, Democratic Union, and Freedom Union in the Sejm; since 1994, he has been a member of the National Council for Freedom.

As for the question of representativeness, at the Round Table, the representation was relatively limited. It was limited to that trend, which was not in itself uniform, the trend putting a high stake on that solution, on the negotiation solution.

I was to some extent a beneficiary of communism, because thanks to communism I’ve had a very interesting life, I’ve had a number of close friendships, I’ve had a sense of some common bond. Without communism, I probably wouldn’t have had it. And also what I do now I owe to the fact that communism was around once upon a time. So I wouldn’t overdo the victim part. When it comes to joining the Round Table, I would say that some dual responsibility was our driving force. Above all, it was responsibility for those who had been actually persecuted, who actually lost something after martial law because of their Solidarity activities. It was quite different from us. In 1989, we were pretty well fixed, we knew how to live in this system, but there were others who didn’t. They really were persecuted; they lost their jobs and had no chance in life. This was one thing and the other was that thanks to communism I may have been set up pretty well, but Poland wasn’t. And it was necessary to look for ways out of communism. So the
Round Table seemed at that time to be the only way. And what’s more, and I’ve mentioned this before, nobody had formulated another way.

**Ambassador Stanislaw Ciosek**

Well, I’d like to report to you that Pikuś has died, and not because of seeing the syringe, and not because of an overdose of the drug, but simply because of old age. The system that we’ve been talking about here has died for that reason. Pikuś lived too long; he was very old indeed. And I’d like to tell you that we have a new dog. It’s a multi-racial dog, incredibly pluralistic, and he’s doing well….

We were not afraid so much of Solidarity itself as that Solidarity would not be able to put the genie back in the bottle….

The Polish Church was very important in reaching the compromise. It’s a great, honorable page in its history, and I’m sure future generations will acknowledge it when the distance is further from that time and evaluations may be more rational. A centrally run structure, which was the party, better understood and trusted another strong structure than an unbridled Solidarity which was only in the state of emerging….The Church achieved a very important, formal position in the country, one that’s binding till today. Because Solidarity also turned to the Church for protection and help, it naturally became the mediator between the government and the opposition. I believe it was more than just passive mediation. The Church has actively shaped the Polish compromise….

I must say definitely that the fundamental thing was the will to change and reach compromise. General Wojciech Jaruzelski had that will. He had the real power and things in Poland did not have to go the way they went. Well, it was possible to maneuver, delay, ignore the election plebiscite of the June ‘89 elections. We heard such advice. Jaruzelski, however, accepted the challenge and, I think, with full awareness of its potential consequences. Also Lech Wałęsa and his colleagues from the Solidarity leadership had enough imagination and courage. In retrospect, we can clearly say that both sides acted in good will, and the negotiations were conducted by the book….

The logic of events shows that things were intermingled, borders were liquid, and there was no black-or-white picture… The way of framing the issue, I believe, in terms of opposing camps, is methodologically problematic, I’m sorry to say.
Lech Kaczyński

A Round Table participant for the opposition, Lech Kaczyński (b. 1949) graduated from the University of Warsaw’s Faculty of Law in 1971 and later completed doctoral studies in law at the University of Gdańsk. In the early 1980’s Kaczyński directed the Bureau for Intervention of the Workers’ Defense Committee (KOR) and advised striking workers in the Lenin Shipyards in Gdańsk in 1980. From 1982 to 1989, he was a member of the Helsinki Committee in Poland. He was Secretary of Solidarity's Provisional Coordinating Commission (1986-87) and National Executive Committee (1987-89), and a member of the Citizens' Committee (1988-91). Kaczyński became a Senator representing the Civic Parliamentary Club (1989-91) and First Vice-President of the National Commission for Solidarity (1990-91). In 1991, he was elected to the Sejm for the Center Alliance and served as a presidential advisor on issues of national security. Kaczyński was President of the Chief Inspectorate from 1992 to 1995. A docent of law, he is currently Professor of Law at the Catholic Theological Academy in Warsaw.

What was the important source of that power struggle, about at least a partial control over the union? Well, in my opinion, the crux of the matter here was a sizable difference in political concepts. In short, it’s possible to simplify it as a debate whether Solidarity as a social movement is to have one political heir in the form of some Solidarity political party, Solidarity movement, whatever the name, and by the way, I believe the concept was constantly evolving, or whether Solidarity should have many political heirs....

I was deeply, deeply convinced that the new balance created by the Round Table, that new balance that was all about removing the party’s leadership in the society but at the same time maintaining some kind of political power, that is control over the country, by the party would have to be temporary and would not be able to survive four years, as it was practically decided at the Round Table. Yet, in May before the election, I wasn’t sure that it would only last a few months, but we simply believed that these contacts were worth having, because in the overall context of changes they could turn out very useful....

Within the nation at that time, the feeling was that economically we were poorly off, and that the cause of this economic misery was the communist system. And there was the great hope, incredibly dangerous, by the way, that the very change of this situation would cause improvement in people’s economic situation. In general, during the entire election campaign that was the very first question: when will things get better?
PANEL SEVEN: GLOBAL CHANGE AND THE ROUND TABLE

László Bruszt

Co-founder and National Secretary of the Democratic League of Independent Trade Unions from 1988 to 1992, László Bruszt (b. 1953) represented the unions in the Hungarian Opposition Round Table (EKA) and at the negotiations between the EKA and the communist government. Bruszt holds a master’s degree in sociology from Budapest University and a doctorate in sociology from the Hungarian Academy of Sciences. Associate Professor in the Department of Political Science at Central European University (CEU) in Budapest since 1993, he has been CEU’s Vice-Rector of Academic Affairs since 1995 and served as its Acting Rector and President in 1996-97. During 1998-99, he was a Research Fellow at the Center for Advanced Study in the Behavioral Sciences in Stanford, CA. Bruszt has published several books and articles on the political transformation of East Central Europe.

In the second half of the 80’s, Eastern Europe was seen, briefly, as one of the most hopeless regions of the world. According to the official US analyses done in the mid-80’s, Eastern Europe was seen as the second biggest potential crisis region of the world, just nearly, or a little after, the Middle East....

The Poles played an extremely important role, basically until the end of August ‘89. They signaled, or they created events which signaled for the citizens and rulers of the region, what is possible, how far they can go, what is tolerated and what are the strategies of creating such events....

To enter into compromise negotiations, and as such a type of democratization, presupposed to speak in the name of society. That slowly emerged in Poland, by the end of ‘88, and it didn’t come about, the Hungarian opposition was never able, never felt that it can speak in the name of society, even when the negotiations started, they very clearly contrasted their position to the Polish Solidarity. They could afford to enter into compromise; we cannot do that, because we cannot speak, we don’t have that type of mandate....

The Polish peaceful negotiations had an impact not only on the Hungarian or the other negotiations, but this compromise had an impact also on regime changes like the Czech or the German, where the mobilization of masses was so high that political leaders of the opposition could have easily led the masses against the party headquarters and started violent regime change. And the reason they didn’t do that, the most important reason they didn’t do that was that they were led by the same ethos, which led the Polish negotiators and the Polish democratic opposition, that you cannot get, establish rule of
law…in an unruly way—that human rights should be respected and the peaceful and non-violent nature of the negotiations is extremely important and a value in itself.

Dai Qing

Trained as a missile engineer, Dai Qing (b. 1941) is a prominent Chinese journalist and writer. Dai’s investigative reports about dissident figures persecuted by the Chinese Communist Party in the 1940’s and 1950’s were published during the 1980’s. She co-organized China’s first environmental lobby in 1989 in opposition to construction of the Three Gorges Dam Project on the Yangtze River. Although banned after several printings in China, her 1989 collection of essays by prominent Chinese intellectuals critical of the hydroelectric project, Yangtze!, was largely responsible for the government’s decision to temporarily postpone construction of the dam. After publicly denouncing the June 4, 1989 Tiananmen Square massacre and quitting the Chinese Communist Party on June 5, Dai was jailed for ten months and is no longer able to publish in China. Currently a Scholar in Residence at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, she has been honored with several international fellowships and awards.

Compared with the Round Table negotiations in Poland, what happened in Beijing ten years ago was not a great democratic movement, as it was widely perceived to have been, but a serious setback for democracy, a tragedy….

There are lots of experiences that Poland can pass on to China, but the first one is that democracy can only come through the reconciliation and agreement between the state and the society. Achieving it can only be gained through an untiring effort, through threats and counter-threats, through competition, dialogue and negotiation.

María de los Ángeles Torres

María de los Ángeles Torres, Associate Professor of Political Science at DePaul University in Chicago, holds a doctorate in political science from the University of Michigan. Active in community service in Chicago for several years, Torres was Executive Director of the Mayor’s Advisory Commission on Latino Affairs from 1983 to 1987. She has served on the Board of Directors of the Cuban American Committee Research and Education Fund (1979-94) and on the Board of Advisors of Catedra de Cultura Cubana of the Pablo Milanés Foundation in Havana (1993-95). A member of the American Political Science Association’s President’s Task Force on the Status of Latinos from 1991 to 1994, she has been Coordinator of the Latin American Studies Association’s Research Working Group on the Cuban American Community since 1990 and its
Michael wanted me to talk about the applicability of the experience of the Polish Round Table to Cuba. And in a certain sense, that would be a very quick talk up here, because I really think it’s not applicable. What I’d like to talk about, though, is why I think it’s not applicable, looking at maybe some of the political and institutional actors that in the Polish case, from what I have come to understand, were so critical to the Round Table, and why they are different in Cuba….The Cuban government, regardless of what it has become, was a government that emerged out of a popular, radical, nationalist revolution. And as such, still lays certain claims of legitimacy to that particular project. Secondly, the United States, unlike the help that it has given democracy in Poland, has not necessarily been a friend of democracies in Latin America, specifically not Cuba….The Church itself is a very different, very, very different situation in Cuba. They say that Cubans are Catholic on Sundays and that’s it, and I would say probably less than that….There’s a long history of the Church really being part of the colonial power, and as such was not there when the Cuban nation was formed.

Konstanty Gebert

Author, Editor-in-Chief of Midrasz, and Moderator for panel on “Global Change and the Round Table.”

Regardless of what we thought about “them” in Poland, and what “they” thought about us, there was no denying that we were all Poles. Now, we certainly thought that “they” were bad Poles, and they certainly thought that we were bad Poles, but Poles all the same. Phrases were bandied about, “jak Polak z Polakiem,” “Pole to Pole,” the way of negotiating, of doing business. This was not only rhetoric, what it meant was, that there was a conceivable community to which we all belonged, and a conceivable common project to which we all wanted to contribute.…

I just regret that this room isn’t packed full with Polish opponents of the Round Table. Those who say it was a crime, or treason, or at least a mistake, so that they could hear María, Dai Qing, telling us how they would love such a crime, treason, mistake to happen in their countries, and many more such mistakes.
PANEL EIGHT: THE POLISH ROUND TABLE REVISITED
THE ART OF NEGOTIATION

Adam Michnik

The Round Table initiated a new phase of dismantling dictatorships through negotiations. This was perhaps the most important invention of the twentieth century, the century of totalitarian dictatorships, the century of Auschwitz and the Holocaust, the century of Stalinism, Katyń, and the gulag….

An amnesty, yes, amnesia, no. We should know how to reconcile and live together, but we must not forget what had been. We have to keep penetrating it, be inquisitive about it, at least for one reason, that it never happens again….

I remember times when even before one entered a courtroom, one was already tried and punished. And I was one of them. I was sentenced to years of imprisonment according to those procedures, in an atmosphere of hysteria where judges were too scared to pronounce a just sentence. So I promised to myself that never ever in my life in free Poland would I imitate those people who at a certain square in Jerusalem would scream, “Put him on the cross, put him on the cross.”

Lech Kaczyński

To make one thing clear, however, these changes, although at this point the new structures could not simply have been created completely from scratch, since that was really unrealistic, were still too shallow, I believe. In other words, the old state, involved in a lot of different interests, still remained the basic tool of carrying out social and national tasks. What was the impact of this factor on social restructuring? I deeply believe that the impact was this: struggling for a new place in our society after 1989, people involved in the old system got a head start in the race….

And if the independence of Poland and its democracy is good, then the Round Table was a crucial step towards that goal. That goes without saying. And there are no doubts that this is Solidarity’s contribution, but also a contribution of these representatives of the other side of the table, whose active participation in negotiations I witnessed myself. But the Round Table became something that could be defined as a certain prefiguration of phenomena that later ended up bringing negative results. So, as everything in this
world, the Round Table has some unanimously positive sides but it has negative consequences, as well.

Grażyna Staniszewska

The Round Table, for us, Solidarity activists of that time, was an enormous risk. While sitting down at the Round Table, we were aware that if the thing failed, we might have lost the only good that we had, our own good name, that is, and that was the only capital that we had at the time, the only asset. And we sat down without any awareness that we were about to dismantle the system. We treated those sessions, those deliberations, as just another stage in our struggle for a little bit of freedom. That’s what we thought at that time…. 

I will be honest here and say that I sincerely regret that this atmosphere, when we felt that we were creating a new Poland, where every person had a right to a fresh start, lasted such a short time…. 

Aleksander Kwaśniewski

President of Poland since 1995, Aleksander Kwaśniewski (b. 1954) helped to initiate the Round Table negotiations. Along with Tadeusz Mazowiecki, he co-chaired the union pluralism sub-table. Kwaśniewski studied international business at the University of Gdańsk. A member of the Polish United Workers' Party from 1977 to 1990, he was active in youth movements, serving as a leader of the Union of Polish Socialist Students and editor of the student weekly Itd and daily Sztandar Młodych. He was Minister for Youth Affairs from 1985 to 1987 and Chair of the Committee for Youth and Physical Fitness from 1987 to 1990. Kwaśniewski was a Deputy to the Sejm for the Democratic Left Alliance and leader of Social Democracy of the Polish Republic until his election as President in 1995.

The Round Table was indeed a paradoxical event in a certain sense. On the one hand, it was caused by weakness. The party was weak, the government was weak, and Solidarity was weak. And the Soviet Union was weak, too. Everybody was weak. On the other hand, it resulted from the strength of the people who thought that a breakthrough was possible and that it could be done. Adam Michnik mentioned Mr. Wałęsa and Wojciech Jaruzelski. And I think that we owe our respect to these two people, since at that particular moment, when there were so many unknown factors and unclear spots, they undertook the effort whose results neither they themselves nor any of us who participated in the Round Table could foresee....