PRIVATE SUFFERING, PUBLIC BENEFIT: MARKET RHETORIC IN POLAND, 1989-1993


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1. INTRODUCTION

After the downfall of state socialism at the turn of the 1990s, the former communist countries started to introduce market economy. Was it a return to a “natural” order of things, artificially destroyed by forty to seventy years of attempts to maintain a command economy? Or did the (re)introduction of markets demanded conscious efforts of constructing new institutions from above, and of persuading people that, however different the new order from what they were accustomed to, and however painful the transition in the short term, it is for their own good in the long run? If persuasion was needed, to whom was it to be addressed, and what sort of arguments was to be used? Was it important in terms of facilitating the market transition?

This paper looks at one case of such rhetoric, of the Warsaw daily *Gazeta Wyborcza*. The choice is not accidental. The paper, established in May 1989, became to play the leading role among the Polish paper media for many years to come, first as the only independent daily in the decomposing communist bloc, and then as perhaps the most important daily not only in Poland, but in all East Central Europe, if judged by circulation and by influence. Created by former opposition activists close to the Solidarity Trade Union, it became an unequivocal supporter of the market transition and perhaps the most important pro-market opinion making platform. Thus, it was in a position to shape the discourse on market transition in Poland by influencing the way of thinking of its readership. The period under investigation is 1989-1993. This is a time of rule of the first non-communist cabinet, formed by the Solidarity camp, and also a period of economic recession, accompanying the beginnings of economic reforms.

This small case study is set against a broader theoretical and historical context of a problem of “natural” vs. “constructed” character of the market order. This is analyzed in section 2. Section 3 sketches briefly these aspects of the Polish transformation which are relevant for understanding the *Gazeta* position. Section 4 describes the political context and the place of *Gazeta* within it. Section 5 is devoted to the analysis of the paper pro-market argument and rhetoric.

2. IS MARKET NATURAL?

The question how „natural” is market is a long-standing issue in the social sciences. Adam Smith built much of his argument upon the assumption that humans have a natural “propensity to truck, barter, and exchange one thing for another.” The emergence of some forms of primitive

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1 I would like to express my thanks to Ms. Agata Dembek M.S. who provided an excellent research of *Gazeta Wyborcza* archival issues and made several inspiring comments and observations.

markets even in the most adverse conditions, as for instance in prisons, as well as the emergence of gray markets under command economies seems to give support to this view. Friedrich von Hayek treated the market as set of practices developed in an evolutionary way and enabling the division of labor “on which our civilization is based.” Market for him was thus no so much natural for humans as species, as for the more advanced form of human organization, a civilization. Indeed, historians agree that some forms of market exchange were present in all agrarian civilizations, co-existing with other forms of coordination of the division of labor and of distribution.

But market as a principal form of organization of human activity has often been fiercely contested. Historically, this criticism emerged particularly when labor became commodified and employment for wages became the main source of livelihood. As Gosta Esping-Andersen put it, “[w]hen […] labor power […] became a commodity, peoples’ rights to survive outside the market are at stake.” E. P. Thompson, in his magnificent study of the origins of the English working class, contrasts “the older moral economy” and “a model of ‘natural’ and self-adjusting political economy which, left unrestrained, would operate to the benefit of employers and employed alike.” The first was a legacy of pre-capitalist, paternalistic relations and assumed a right for survival for every member of the community. The second was not so much “natural,” as constructed by the state through the gradual reforms of the Poor Laws, supported by the arguments of classical economists, particularly R. T. Malthus, according to whom nothing could be done to increase the wages above the biological minimum. In the words of Karl Polanyi, “[t]here was nothing natural about the laissez-faire, free markets could have never come into being merely by allowing things to take their course.” His principal argument is of the market system developing in the 19th century in leaps and bounds: “the market expanded continuously but this movement was met by a countermovement checking the expansion in definite directions.” As a total commodification of labor (i.e., human beings) would lead to the destruction of society, the society was reacting by looking for labor protection. Not only Polanyi, but also Schumpeter, ideologically far away from the former, was showing that the extension of market relations have been producing social reactions, leading towards restraining the markets, in particular the labor

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8 Polanyi, op. cit., p. 130.
market. The anti-market attitude found the most radical form in the writings of Karl Marx, who rejected this form of human organization altogether. During the modern era, and particularly in the 19th and 20th century there were waves of pro- and anti-market ideologies, from the contest between the “political” and the “moral” economy which Thompson analyzed on the English example, to the present-day debate over globalization.

Thus, even if we agree that Smith was right in his assumption about the human propensity to truck, barter, and exchange, the ways this propensity is institutionalized are the most diverse. These differences are of temporal and spatial character, and are expressed in legal regulations, formal and informal institutions, and in various representations and ideas about the markets. The new institutional economics, accepting the differences in institutions, argues for such their shape which would lead to the possibly most efficient use of resources. Its suggestion is that if – people being rational utility maximizers – there is a proper incentive structure, than high efficiency would follow. Much of the post-communist transformation to a market economy has been built upon this assumption.

But there were doubts of the feasibility of realizing this project in a fast way. Not only formal institutions were missing, but societies living for forty to seventy years under state socialism were hardly prepared for the “jump to the market economy.” The perceptions, mental habits, values, attitudes, practices were of a different kind than those formed under several centuries of market and capitalism. Informal institutions and cultural patterns might have prevailed over new regulations, path dependency derailing a society from the route to a market economy.

Thus, those convinced about a natural and positive character of the market order thought at the same time that not all the people shared their views and that these people had to be persuaded if the market reform was to succeed. In an ironic twist of history, they found themselves in a situation similar to that of the Marxists several decades before, who – while convinced that workers of all nations had objectively the same interests – thought it necessary to shout “Workers of the world, unite!”

In the particular case of Poland, the task that the intellectuals committed to market transformation had set to themselves was not an abstract argument in favor of markets in general, but rather an argument in favor of concrete reforms, undertook in specific conditions and leading – in a short run – to the consequences painful for the large segments of the public.

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Thus, the intellectuals had to explain why this suffering was necessary for the public benefit in the future. The jump, however – contrary to simplified opinions – was not from “command to market.” The social experience preceding the jump was much more complex.

3. COLLAPSE AND TRANSFORMATION

If we believe the recalculations of the national income statistics, as collected under state socialism, into GDP, communism collapsed at the moment when the Polish per capita GDP was almost at its peak. But the GDP figures mask gross imbalances the economy was in at the end of the 1980s. On the everyday level they manifested themselves in pervasive shortages, accompanied by inflation and semi-legal dollarization. There was a serious current account deficit, and – last but not least – a mounting foreign debt which the country was unable to service. The macroeconomic situation was untenable and that was the hard fact that Mazowiecki government had to face. In dealing with this challenge, it had to come to accord with the IMF, whose help and understanding was indispensable for the negotiations with the creditors. At that time, the mode of thinking of the economists had very much been in the line of what John Williamson labeled “the Washington Consensus.” The IMF expected stabilization and reforms. Several designs of such plans were developed in and for Poland, most of them stipulating far-reaching changes towards the “market economy.” The term “capitalism” had rarely been used, and Mazowiecki – in his inauguration speech as a Prime Minister – talked about “a social market economy,” clearly hinting the German post-war experience, but also eager to present the future reforms in a soft light.

The actual reform package, on which Leszek Balcerowicz (a Deputy Prime Minister and a Finance Minister) and his team worked for a couple of months to submit 11 laws under parliament voting on December 31, 1989, contained the germs of the classical pro-market reform triad of “stabilization, liberalization, privatization.” The stress was on the first two. Privatization was too complex an issue, legally and politically, to be arranged swiftly and in fact it took several years to accomplish visible results.

The character of Polish reforms is usually associated with the person of Balcerowicz, who is portrayed as a tough neo-liberal and a market fundamentalist. Balcerowicz’s policies were dubbed as “shock therapy,” and their swift character was prized by some and criticized by others.

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preferring a more gradualist approach. The reforms departed from the more social democratic proposals for change expressed in the Round Table agreements several months before. In a recently published book Tadeusz Kowalik gives a throughout account and analysis why this shift occurred.\(^{15}\) In this book, as well as in many earlier publications Kowalik criticizes the Polish reforms from the social democratic perspective. His argues against the thesis that there was no any sound alternative to the radical transformation of a neo-liberal character. Apart of providing important arguments on this issue, Kowalik’s book remains invaluable as it reconstructs the views and actions of the key personal actors of the transformation – Tadeusz Mazowiecki, the Prime Minister, Leszek Balcerowicz, his deputy and the Finance Minister, Jacek Kuroń, the legendary KOR leader, the Minister of Labor in Mazowiecki’s cabinet, and also the key “public face” of this government, and Waldemar Kuczyński, an economist, a close advisor to Mazowiecki and the first Minister of Privatization. Kowalik looks upon the impact of foreign advisors, particularly Jeffrey Sachs, and the Polish/British economists engaged in designing economic policies, Jacek Rostowski and Stanislaw Gomułka.\(^{16}\) Kowalik took also into consideration the role of the IMF in shaping the Polish reforms. According to his interpretation, the pro-market economists managed to persuade people like Mazowiecki, Kuroń, and also Bronislaw Geremek, the chief of Solidarity caucus in the parliament, and Adam Michnik, editor-in-chief of Gazeta Wyborcza and one of the major political figures at the time, that the course of action they proposed is the only possible one.

For the question how was it possible for the Solidarity Trade Union to accept the package which run against the immediate interests of the workers, Kowalik answers that it was because during the 1980s the Union, and particularly its leadership, transformed from labor organization into political movement whose main preoccupation was to contest the communist system. This view is similar to that of David Ost, who interprets the Polish developments in class-like terms and argues that the Union leadership already in the late eighties was keen to demobilize labor, interested in its support only insofar as it allowed them to press the communists politically. Thus the labor issues sensu stricto became secondary for the leadership. After the breakthrough, the Union leadership strengthened its demobilizing policies, this time in order to provide “an umbrella” for the Balcerowicz Plan.\(^{17}\)

A few caveats are necessary for the “shock therapy” label. In fact, the process of transformation towards the market had indeed started earlier; in some way even so far back as the mid-fifties, if the subsequent efforts to introduce elements of market into the socialist economy

\(^{15}\) Kowalik, op. cit.


are included.\textsuperscript{18} Already during the Solidarity revolution (1980-81) the state owned enterprises (SOE) were given considerable autonomy, the 1982 reform relaxed the administrative price setting system, and the last communist government allowed for private firms establishment, leading the way to what Jadwiga Staniszkiś called “political capitalism.”\textsuperscript{19} It also freed the food prices. Balcerowicz pushed these liberalization and deregulation measures much further, added the external liberalization (abolishing the state monopoly in foreign trade) and initiated the privatization process. Of enormous importance had been also the rhetorical and symbolical shift – no more talking about reforming the state socialism, instead the building “the market economy” was set as a task. But the 1989 reforms were only the beginning of the beginning of the institutional change. There were to be followed not only by privatization, but also by reintroduction of the commercial code, by the banking reform, by the establishment of stock exchange, by the tax reforms, and so on and so on. These processes were to take several years, and since the mid-nineties they were more and more shaped by the expectations of the accession to the European Union.

One part of the Balcerowicz package, however, had immediate consequences. These were the stabilization measures. It does not seem that the government could act in a more gradual way in this respect, taking into consideration as much the external debt as the internal imbalances. Freeing food prices in 1989, without putting the brakes on wages and cutting subsidies for SOE triggered the inflation spiral. Under the Balcerowicz Plan, almost all remaining prices were made free, but the subsidies were reduced drastically. In addition, a special tax was put on the excessive wage rises in SOE, to stop the inflationary spiral. The fixed exchange rate for the Polish Zloty had been introduced, to achieve yet another anti-inflationary anchor.

The consequences were immediate, and in the short term mostly unpleasant for the wider public. Prices jumped sevenfold over 1990 in the wave of correctional inflation, only than inflation started to decrease, to reach one digit levels in the mid-1990. The SOE started to shed off the non-necessary activities, such as in-house food provision, summer resorts, or housing programs for the employees. On the macro-economic level, the output plummeted down. This had been forecasted, but not to the degree that it actually happened. Growth returned in 1992, and only in 1996 the per capita GDP reached its 1988 level. Last but not least, the SOE, finding


themselves under a hard budget constraint, started to downsize and the unemployment, hitherto unknown, appeared on a vast scale. This was the most dramatic change, as it signified a return to a commodification of labor, a situation unknown under the job security regime of state socialism. With the lack of security of employment, the economic system became a real market economy in the sense Polanyi or Esping-Andersen were writing about.

Thus, from the point of view of the “man from the street,” with Balcerowicz stabilization plan his/her real incomes decreased, while the feeling of insecurity increased. On the positive side, shortages disappeared and shops and stalls became full of goods. But this was not enough to offset the rising discontent of the public, which manifested itself politically in the 1990 presidential elections, in which previously unknown expatriate populist Stan Tymiński got over 21% of popular vote in the first round of elections, more than the first post-communist prime minister Mazowiecki. Two years later, in 1993, the Solidarity camp, blamed for the pains of reforms, lost the parliamentary elections to the former communists, now Social Democrats.

It is in this context of “anger,” to use an expression of Ost, that the “marketing the market” unfolded. The daily Gazeta Wyborcza played in this debate a specific role.

4. POLITICAL CHANGE AND GAZETA WYBORCZA

The political discourse of those contesting the system in the 1980s had been often employing the opposition of “the Society” against “the Authorities.” Solidarity was supposed to represent the society, against those in power, organized in the form of the communist party. Although simplified and ideological, this scheme to a degree explains the political dynamics of the period of Round Table, June 1989 elections and the early stages of Mazowiecki government. With the demise of communism, however, the picture became much more complex. The communist party dissolved in January 1990, but its former activists regrouped and redefined themselves as Social Democrats, to gain more and more support with the economic transformation unfolding. The Solidarity camp fragmented and new parties were emerging and changing throughout the year 1990 in almost a kaleidoscopic fashion. When the situation more or less crystallized at the beginning of the next year, the Democratic Union and the Liberal-Democratic Congress gathered those of more liberal democratic views, while the Christian-Nationalist Union and the Confederation of Independent Poland gathered those for whom the religious and national values were the most important. Gazeta Wyborcza clearly defined itself closer to the former. In this way, it took position in a split within the former Solidarity camp, a split which was to define much of ideological debate and political life in the next twenty years. For many of those who increasingly were self-styling themselves as “the Right” Gazeta became a symbol of betrayal, and became to be
accused of collaboration with the (ex) communists, a neglect of patriotic values and ideals, and — last but not least — of a support of the neoliberal economic solutions.

“Gazeta Wyborcza” means literally “Electoral Gazette.” It was founded as an outcome of the Round Table negotiations (February-April 1989) and begun publication in May 1989. It quickly established itself as an important — perhaps the most important — daily, both in terms of circulation and the opinion making power. Adam Michnik, one of the leading figures of the pre-1989 opposition, became Gazeta editor-in-chief (and remains so to this day). The core members of the editorial staff were people close to one of the camps of this opposition. The origins of this camp go back to 1956 and to the so-called “revisionist” tendencies within the communist party. In the sixties, its representatives were active in the intellectual and student opposition to the regime, in the seventies they co-founded the Committee for the Defense of Workers (KOR), gradually shedding the leftist ideology and moving closer to the human and civil rights ideas. In the eighties they continued doing so under the martial law and authoritarian conditions. Some of them were active in clandestine writing and journalism, so in a way the now legal Gazeta was just a coming out.

If Gazeta is to be classified in a simplified way, it would probably fit best into a “liberal left” pigeon hole. “Left” in a sense of an allergy towards ethnic, conservative, or religious nationalism. “Liberal” in the sense of the rule of law and human rights, but also its stance on the economic issues. But at the same time it had the Solidarity emblem printed on its front page and was somehow expected to represent the Solidarity Trade Union. Solidarity – which was much more a political movement then just a trade union – was unified only as long as the communist regime existed. Later, it fragmented into many currents, representing various interests and ideas of different social groups. Then, in September 1990, Wałęsa, as the Union leader, revoked the paper’s right to use the Solidarity logo.

Still, in some way it was understood that Solidarity represented the workers, who were the ultimate force which led to the demise of communism in Poland. Arguing for reforms which in the short run went against the interests of these workers put Gazeta in a difficult position and gave arguments those who were critical about the intellectual elite gaining politically due to the support of the workers during the communist period and then abandoning them when communism ended.

The taking by the Gazeta editors a radical, pro-market position did not come out of the blue. It was a continuation of the several years’ long process of shifting attitudes of the wider, although difficult to delineate circles of the Polish intelligentsia. This includes the eclipse of its

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20 For more on Gazeta editor-in-chief, see C. Bouyeure, L’invention du politique: une biographie d’Adam Michnik, Lausanne: Noir sur Blanc, 2007.
fascination with the working class, so vivid in 1980/81, and a departure from social-democratic ideals towards free market ideology. Thus, many members of this group could be characterized as in some sense “neoliberal” much before communism collapsed. Already in the 1970s the samizdat editions of Hayek’s *Road to Serfdom* and the Friedmans’ *Free to Choose* were being widely read. Among the professional economists, many became disillusioned with attempts to reform the socialist system and were more and more openly advocating a market economy. Balcerowicz, who chaired a seminar on comparative economic system at the Central School of Planning and Statistics (today, Warsaw School of Economics), was one of them. Two important circles of self-styled economic liberals formed, one in Kraków and another in Gdańsk. None of these people was ever close to Marxism or socialism.

This pro-market shift in attitudes was by no means a monopoly of the opposition intelligentsia. The same trajectory can be traced insofar as many members of the communist nomenklatura are concerned. Managers of SOE, specialists working for the state foreign trade companies, technocrats in various ministries, and also economic experts in the party apparatus were increasingly disillusioned not only with the command economy as such, but also with limited results of market oriented reforms. They might have stand in the politically opposing camp to the liberal intelligentsia, but were not far in economic views. Not surprisingly, in the period of Gorbachev’s thaw they were supportive for the last communist government pro-capitalist moves.

Reading the *Gazeta* articles of the early 1990s, one has to remember that the focus of the argument was not so much market in general, as the reforms. In fact, among the general public the acceptance of the market economy might have been higher at the beginning of 1990 than a few months – or years – later. The most recent experience people had was with the state socialism in decomposition, with shortages, hardships, and uncertainty. There was no love lost, at least for a moment. Many people also had quite a lot of experience with markets. Polish agriculture remained private during the whole communist period, there always existed small private sector outside the agriculture, many travelled abroad for economic reasons, and – last but not least – there always existed a gray zone of hidden economy of a purely market character. In fact, quite a lot of “creeping capitalism,” to borrow the expression from Stephen Kotkin, already replaced dead wood of command economy, and not much persuasion was needed for its

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21 Both Kowalik and Ost provide ample empirical evidence for this.
The real socially and politically contentious issue was the macroeconomic stabilization.

5. GAZETA ARGUMENTS

Gazeta Wyborcza supported the reforms from the very beginning with the pens of its own staff writers, by words of the economists engaged in the reform process, among them Leszek Balcerowicz himself, and also by articles of invited authors. In its op-ed pages, it often published quite lengthy texts of a full page or so, thus giving its authors a considerable space to develop their ideas. Characterized in a telegraphic fashion, the paper arguments look as follows: The market economy is a well-tested system and Leszek Balcerowicz designed a good plan to achieve it. There is no sound alternative for either the market economy in general, or the Balcerowicz Plan in particular. Reforms, however, are difficult to accomplish because of the backlog of communist past, including the attitudes of population, and thus their success is by no means guaranteed. Social costs are inevitable. Claiming otherwise and trying a different strategy would be counterproductive and would turn against those in whose name it may be proposed. The critics of the Balcerowicz Plan and of his policies are either naïve, or acting out of bad faith and self interests.

Gazeta seemed to reason in the Enlightenment spirit that no amount of effort should be spared for explaining the logic of reform, as much of the resistance is a result of ignorance. The rhetorical tools were a frequent reference to rationality and logic suggesting that no alternative existed, an often ironic and patronizing tone when talking about the criticism, and the warnings about the danger of derailing the reform process if their course wouldn’t be strictly adhered to. Of those writing for Gazeta, their own staff writers and – not surprisingly – the co-architects of reform tended to take a more radical position than invited commentators, some of whom were quite critical to the reform strategy.

The paper identified the obstacles to reforms as political and psychological. „Changing a system is a titanic job. To transform a socialist man into a capitalist one not only in desires, but in actions is even more difficult” – wrote Danuta Zagrodzka one of the Gazeta staff writers most engaged in the defense of reforms. In another article she noticed in the society the lack of thriftiness, diligence, self-reliance, patience in climbing the career ladder, and business honesty – the attitudes indispensable for the market economy. Instead, she was finding learned helplessness, waiting for outside aid, grievances, and bad working habits. Thus, a determination

in reforms was indispensable. „There is only one course to be taken – commented the Sejm decision to vote the Balcerowicz package Wojciech Maziarski, another staff writer. – A slightly different route could have been chosen, but you go for a treatment to a doctor whom you trust.” A system which was being replaced he characterized as printing of false money on a national scale.27

Ernest Skalski, also a staff writer, was straightforward in describing the desired model: “From the beginning we took the assumption that we will not promote the imaginary solutions anymore, but we shall rely on the proven designs of the capitalist economy.”28 In another article he wrote: “The fundamental principles of market economy have long been invented and tested, and any attempt to depart from them anytime, anywhere ends badly.”29 Zagrodzka, while agreeing that “no system satisfies people who came to live under it,” added that “[f]ortunately, no one tells us to love capitalism. It is a relation of convenience – nothing so far has proven to be more promising in real life (not in a utopia) than democratic capitalism.”30

Gazeta supported Balcerowicz, urging its readers to trust the competences of the Finance Minister. Quite often it used a patronizing tone. “Many people […] obviously KNOW BETTER than the deputy Prime Minister WHAT, HOW, AND WHEN should be done to stop the recession and revive the economy [capitalized in the original].”31 It defended him fiercely when he felt under attacks and after he left office in December 1991. Zagrodzka, in an article written already after Balcerowicz departure, said that “[p]erhaps Leszek Balcerowicz had nothing new to propose, as some claim, though personally I do not believe it. But certainly a personality of such dimension, with ideas, courage and the readiness to take responsibility is necessary during such profound changes. Our economy [now] lacks a brain and a helmsman.”32 Also for the Gazeta editor-in-chief there was no alternative for Balcerowicz’s policies, although he was acknowledging the costs and pain they caused: “probably in those conditions of a Great Improvisation there was no other way. Unemployment and decline of the standard of living were inevitable.” After stating this, Michnik agreed that such policies gave a mortal blow to what he called “the Solidarity utopia.” “This utopia, born during the strikes of August 1980, harmoniously combined together the bread, the idea of freedom, and the emancipation of the working class.”33

Thus, the paper agreed that social costs were inevitable. As one of the authors put it, “it is not possible to get in a painless way through a breakthrough which faces us, if only because it

27 W. Maziarski, Co zamiast cięć w budżecie, GW September 2, 1991.
29 Skalski, Sprawdzian z konkretnów, GW July 1, 1993.
31 S. Remuszko, Cierpliwości…, GW June 6, 1990.
32 Zagrodzka, Na drugim brzegu, op. cit.
goes against the interests and habits formed over the years.”\textsuperscript{34} Another writer, Wojciech Maziarski (author of many articles on reform) stated: “If Poland wants to become an affluent country with an effectively functioning economy, there is no choice – the teeth must be clenched and the costs borne.” Maziarski agreed that these costs were not equally distributed. However, a reconstructed, more efficient economy was the only way for the weak and the poor to improve their lot. Only the affluent would be able pay taxes, and thus to finance the benefits for those less lucky.\textsuperscript{35} Thus, in line with the trickle-down economics, he was suggesting that higher inequalities were not only inevitable, but also necessary for growth. Even the recession was not without benefits. Skalski, in a Schumpeterian mood, was saying that the recession offers a chance of triggering the economic reconstruction process through the elimination of those firms which should disappear.\textsuperscript{36}

With time, as the social costs of reforms became to be felt, criticism and protests mounted and were taken up by political parties opposing the Democratic Union, Balcerowicz, and his economic policies. \textit{Gazeta} became afraid that the reforms could be derailed, and its tone became more aggressive. “Our fate is still in our own hands – wrote Zagrodzka in March “91 – but the success is far from obvious.”\textsuperscript{37} Maziarski, writing in November ’91 and visibly irritated by the expressions of dissatisfaction in the media, commented ironically: “The society, harassed by Balcerowicz, moans and begs for mercy.”\textsuperscript{38} Sociologists, invited by the paper were more nuanced and understood that opposition to reforms was inevitable. Edmund Wnuk-Lipiński wrote two years after transformation started that “the initial, unconditional support of the prevailing majority for the Solidarity forces evaporated quickly […] This process […] begun when liberal economic reforms affected the basic interests of the employees of the large socialist enterprises and of the peasantry […] an attempt to regain social support leads to reform slow-down or even stopping, while their continuation – to the alienation of the elites.”\textsuperscript{39} Lack of adequate political support worried the paper, which noticed that this deficit made them different from Thatcher’s policies in the UK, as the Iron Lady could count on the solid backing of the business class.\textsuperscript{40}

Journalists seemed to believe in the force of persuasion. Teresa Bogucka, an important commentator, criticized the government for its deficient communication with the society and the lack of adequate explanation of the necessity of reforms. Afraid of a delegitimization of the

\textsuperscript{34} Remuszko, Cierpliwości, op. cit.
\textsuperscript{35} Maziarski, Po ostrzegawczym dzwonku, \textit{GW} November 8, 1991.
\textsuperscript{36} Skalski, Ucieczka od gospodarki idiota, \textit{GW} March 3-4, 1991.
\textsuperscript{37} Zagrodzka, Do socjalizmu…, op. cit.
\textsuperscript{38} Maziarski, Po ostrzegawczym dzwonku, op. cit.
\textsuperscript{39} E. Wnuk-Lipiński, Więźniowie mitu, \textit{GW} February 8, 1992.
\textsuperscript{40} A. Białkowska, Między Solidarnością a prawicowością, \textit{GW} June 16, 1992. The article summarizes a seminar, attended by Thatcher’s collaborators and representatives of Polish right-of-the-center parties.
market idea, she was pleading for telling all the truths about the unavoidable hardships, but also for showing each case of success, to build up hope. In a similar vein Zagrodzka, blaming the government, the media, and the Solidarity Trade Union for inadequate explanations, argued that “the Union, authorizing the changes, should have explained to its members and sympathizers why it accepts capitalism, what it is all about, what hardships and sacrifices await us, what has to change in order for the things to turn better.”

Gazeta staff writers had little patience and few good words for those whom they perceived as opposing reforms. Zagrodzka, writing about employees of large state owned enterprises, expressed an understanding for their complaints and attitudes, but had done so in a patronizing tone. “Only a handful of workers fully support the changes, agreeing for the risk of the loss of employment and a necessity of retraining.” Those few she praised as “open” and “enterprising.” When the opposition criticizing the government budget proposals, Gazeta labeled its argument as “fireworks of oratory and promises.” Economists not agreeing with radical reforms were not spared. “The Polish economic science, as the Polish society, is radically divided. On the one side there are the so-called liberals, usually young, sympathizing with the Balcerowicz way; on the other side the whole palette – the old economics, experienced in correcting the uncorrectable mechanism of the socialist economy, a ‘social’ economics looking at everything through a prism of the misfortunes of state owned enterprises, the consistent supporters of the market, but without Balcerowicz […] and his tough policy.” There is no alternative for continuing the reforms. Opposition she ridiculed a few months later for having an idea of economic policy reduced to subventions for everyone – for the public administration, for the private business, and for the state owned enterprises. When Jan Olszewski cabinet took power (in December 1991), Maziarski was asking rhetorically whether a less costly economic policy was possible. The new Prime Minister he suspected of believing so, but being unable to say anything else than “empty clichés” about a necessity of fighting recession and controlling inflation.

The reforms were also defended in Gazeta by their authors. “Wouldn’t Poland adopt the Balcerowicz Plan, we would have the recession anyway, and on top of that inflation, queues and empty shelves” – wrote Waldermar Kuczyński, Mazowiecki’s close advisor who recommended Balcerowicz to him in 1989. Countries which introduced good reforms survive a recession in an

42 Zagrodzka, Gniew…, op. cit.
43 Zagrodzka, Gniew…, op. cit.
44 Maziarski, Co zamiast cięć…, op. cit.
orderly way, with shops full and inflation decreasing.\textsuperscript{48} Marek Dąbrowski, Balcerowicz deputy in the Ministry of Finance, in an article written at the beginning of 1993 argued for a very strong position of the Finance Minister in the cabinet, even giving him a veto power against the cabinet decisions. According to Dąbrowski, Balcerowicz managed to achieve such a strong position, but his departure triggered attempts to change it by “the enemies of a stable macroeconomic policy and by the supporters of various forms of interventionism.”\textsuperscript{49} Janusz Lewandowski, who was a minister of privatization in Bielecki and Suchocka cabinets, was warning about the false “myths” of privatization, such as a belief that national wealth was being sold out for nothing, that the foreign capital was buying all, that foreign experts were agents of foreign intelligence services, that the best companies were being sold out, and that a creation of the institution of National Treasury would provide a panacea for all the problems with privatization. Lewandowski argued that this mythology was a product of election campaign and media activity, detrimental to a sound privatization process.\textsuperscript{50}

Balcerowicz himself also wrote for \textit{Gazeta} a few times. At the end of 1992, already a year after his departure, he expressed concern with strikes that were organized in various state owned enterprises. He saw them as a part of a “vicious circle” of pressure leading to economic disaster and blocking the “circle of success” of the Polish economy. He talked about “large interest groups” aiming at the demolition of the Polish economy through demanding more money for themselves, assessed these strikes as “anti-solidarity” and, ultimately, targeted against the weakest.\textsuperscript{51} In another article, written almost a year later Balcerowicz indicated, that the economic situation of Poland was the best among all the post-socialist countries and accused the critics of painting – out of ignorance or political calculation – a false picture of Polish economy. “[I]f the opponents of reforms succeed in using the popular dissatisfaction for gaining their political influence and for changing the course of economic policy, it would be those dissatisfied who would lose the most, as it is their future chances which are the most linked to the creation of healthy and robust economy in Poland.”\textsuperscript{52} Andrzej Rychard, a sociologist, responding to the first of these articles noticed that it was due to Balcerowicz policies, liberalizing the economy, that the group interests were formed. And, while some of them might oppose the reforms, others are supportive.\textsuperscript{53}

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\textsuperscript{48} W. Kuczyński, Pośmiertny krach komunizmu, \textit{GW} February 19, 1992.
\textsuperscript{49} M. Dąbrowski, Ministrowi finansów ku rozwadze, \textit{GW} September 2, 1992.
\textsuperscript{50} J. Lewandowski, Pięć mitów prywatyzacji, \textit{GW} April 30, 1992.
\textsuperscript{51} L. Balcerowicz, Między błędным kołem a kołem sukcesu, \textit{GW} December 28, 1992.
\textsuperscript{52} Balcerowicz, Nie dajmy się omamić, \textit{GW} September 9, 1993.
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While Gazeta was backing the reforms, it had not denied the voice for the friendly critics. Thus, the historian and essayist Jerzy Jedlicki noticed that “many publicists – particularly those of Gazeta Wyborcza – treat the Balcerowicz Plan as the national anthem and whoever wants to change even one verse, does not understand its logic, or – even worse – had been duped by communism for life.” Ryszard Bugaj, an economist advocating a social-democratic and gradual approach to transformation, labeled Marek Dąbrowski “a guardian of a sacred fire of the monetarist orthodoxy.” Tadeusz Kowalik, of views similar to Bugaj, was expressing his disagreement with portraying the shock therapy as having no alternative and criticizes what he calls “a desperate privatization.” Kowalik was writing from a social-democratic perspective, but he referred to von Hayek, “a father of contemporary neo-liberalism,” who argued against “constructivism” in creating socio-economic order. Krzysztof Wolicki characterized the early 1992 parliamentary debate on the budget as a “dummy,” with the MPs seeing no other way as to agree for the proposals which were a legacy of Balcerowicz Plan. Tomasz Gruszecki argued against idealizing the free market. “For us, the frame of reference is not an ideal market, as described by Balcerowicz, but the really existing market economies, with a degree of ‘spoiling’ and ‘intervention.’”

6. CONCLUDING REMARKS

Gazeta Wyborcza was adamant in supporting not only the market transition in general, but also the particular form it took under the Balcerowicz Plan. In the process of convincing its readership, it argued, in a manner similar to the early 19th century classical economists, that it was the only way to achieve an efficient economy and that the social costs and suffering – however lamentable – were impossible to avoid. In the longer run, the paper argued, the reform would benefit the poor as well. The critical voices it treated as either naïve and ignorant, or representing vested interests of those opposing reforms. In its rhetoric, it stressed the logic and rationality as characteristics of the reform projects, while often using the irony when describing differing views.

How important Gazeta argumentation was in persuading the broader public, it is obviously difficult to assess with any precision. In some ways, it was preaching to the converted. The unemployed blue collar workers were not the likely members of its readership. At the same time, it seemed to be successful in strengthening the view that there was no sound alternative to a certain vision of capitalism underlying the Polish reforms. In vein of the book of Michel Albert

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published in 1991, this vision can be called the Anglo-Saxon model. Albert’s book was one of the stimuli for the “varieties of capitalism” debate which unfolded in the 1990s. In Poland this debate arose only marginal interest, the neo-liberal or Anglo-Saxon model remaining as the centerpiece at least until the time when the new wave of institutional rebuilding started with the view of the accession to the European Union. No doubt, Gazeta played some role in keeping the debate on the right track, at least through defining what kind of views were politically (or rather, economically) correct. While it allowed exchange of opinions on its pages and invited authors who were not a hundred per cent supportive for the Balcerowicz Plan, it contributed to keeping the adherents of a gradual transition, “third way,” or “Scandinavian model” marginalized.

Of course, the domination of a neo-liberal discourse does not equal with a neo-liberal practice. This was much more complex, and while the subsequent Polish governments were usually keen to pursue macroeconomic policies more or less in tune with the monetarist prescription, they have neither reduced the welfare state to a minimalist social safety net, nor have they completed the privatization of state owned enterprises, not to mention the public services. But the reasons for the divergence from the neoliberal creed were rather political or pragmatic than ideological.

There remains a question why Gazeta was so decided to keep this radical pro-market course. The simplest answer is that the members of its editorial staff sincerely believed in what they were preaching, as they were motivated by their own vision of the desired future, which was liberal-democratic capitalism. They wanted reforms fast and swift, as they were afraid that pain and suffering would mobilize resistance. They believed that the sooner economic rebuilding produces success, the more the support for the reforms would build up. In the Enlightenment vein, they also believed that rational arguments had the force of convincing even those whose immediate interests were threatened by the short-term effects of systemic change. The danger they were the most afraid of was the right-wing, nationalist populism. Ironically, the type of policies they advocated actually led to the marginalization and social exclusion, with few provisions how to institutionalize the re-inclusion. Thus, as we see from looking around the East Central Europe politics, in the longer term they were leading exactly to what Gazeta was the most afraid of.