

**Brian Porter**

**Abstract**

This paper is based on interviews conducted at a 1999 conference in Ann Arbor, Michigan, which brought together key players from the Polish Round Table of 1989. It addresses the question: how did the victory of a movement rooted in labor activism lead to an anti-labor capitalist regime? Our interlocutors repeated that they were surprised by this development, that few in Solidarity had even thought clearly about what sort of Poland would arise after communism.

Was this an example of liberalism stepping into the void that remained after communism fell? Or was there something about the Solidarity movement that facilitated the triumph of liberalism? The absence of explicit markers of liberal thought can distract us from the presence of underlying rhetorical patterns that set the stage for the triumph of laissez-faire ideology. The interviews reveal a pattern of story-telling that de-legitimized the assertion of individual or collective will, on behalf of the irresistible forces of history. The dominant worldview of 1989 was one which naturalized political and economic developments, insisting that there was only one "normal" way of organizing society, and that history was pushing all of humanity towards this condition.