

## Excerpts from Debate Between Lech Wałęsa and Alfred Miodowicz, 30 November 1988

**Alfred Miodowicz:** Years have gone by, Mr. Wałęsa, since I last saw you in Nowa Huta . . . it's a different situation, but our cares have remained the same. There are everyday problems—lack of medicines, lines at stores, lines for buses and trams; it is impossible to balance one's checkbook with the old pension levels; it is a situation, in which we can not move ahead with production, because our machines are getting old; there is the matter of our debt; there is the lack of prospects for our youth. What is important is what we are going to do to change things. If the only way is supposed to be dividing up our workforce (through the introduction of trade union pluralism), then I am strongly against that. . . .

Will trade union pluralism solve all of our problems? I am convinced it will not. You say, Mr. Wałęsa, that we can not make any moves without the financial support of the West. And that we will not get this support without the legalization of Solidarity. Perhaps, but what will the situation be then? We will certainly only receive support when we are at each other's throats, when we repeat the example of Lebanon, when we become not only the poorest but also the most dangerous state in Europe. That support will only allow us to crawl on all fours, not stand any higher. That is why we count above all on our own strength. We are union members, but above we are all Poles. . . .

In many of your speeches you present a vision of a reconstructed Polish economy—that it is necessary to make equal all sectors (state, cooperative, and private), that there must be a free market, that it is necessary to break the chains of a bloated bureaucracy. Yes, that is true, but please read the proposals of the OPZZ [All-Poland Alliance of Trade Unions]—we put forward the same concept, which we called the economic alternative. Has it already been put into practice? No, but the announcements of the current government team cause us to look to the future with optimism. As far as the free market is concerned, it seems to me that in our sad situation, those who profit will be, above all, hundreds of thousands of hucksters, who speculate, who play middleman, but don't produce anything. . . .

**Lech Wałęsa:** Good evening, ladies and gentlemen. . . .

We could take stock here of various faults, problems, difficulties; we could make mutual charges, but there is, I think, no time for such calculations. I will just say that in 1980 and 1981 the external conditions did not exist for the introduction of the reforms that Solidarity proposed. Brezhnev lived two years too long. Today, however, it seems to me that there are possibilities, but we are not taking advantage of them. One continues to get the impression that remnants of the Stalinist model are being preserved. Let us take our meeting today—you could organize it instantly, while it was denied to me for seven years. Nonetheless, you are right, that we should now try to come together, not quarrel. Solidarity is prepared to make great compromises, but only alongside examination of the fundamental issues. It is no accident, after all, that all the countries of the Eastern Bloc are undergoing similar vicissitudes. Political monopoly, trade union monopoly, economic monopoly—these must finally be crushed. You say that it is not the right time to introduce pluralism, because there are fundamental issues to deal with, but I say, we will not

solve fundamental issues without the prior introduction of pluralism! Pluralism has proved its value around the world. It is precisely hostility to pluralism that continues to prevent entry to the Round Table, so let us not discuss whether Solidarity is necessary, only how to get it moving again. . . .

**Miodowicz:** Is trade union pluralism the only solution to all Polish problems? It is also necessary to see opportunities in the party, where significant transformations are happening and will be happening. But the greatest opportunity, as you have mentioned, is obviously the gray matter of our intelligentsia, which is not being fully used.

**Wałęsa:** When I speak of pluralism, I have in mind three spheres: the economy, trade unions, and politics. We have to understand that, because those ideals will triumph sooner or later. One organization will never have a copyright on all knowledge. That is why we fight for pluralism—whether you like it or not. . . .

**Miodowicz:** But you understand that, given the very impulsive nature of Poles, diversity must be found in unity. Otherwise, we will tear each other apart.

**Wałęsa:** We will not make people happy by force. Give them freedom, and we will stop stumbling in place. Just look at Hungary, at how far forward they have gone.

**Miodowicz:** Do you not see here essential structural changes moving in the direction of democracy?

**Wałęsa:** What I see is that we are going by foot, while others go by car.

*Source:* Lech Wałęsa, *Droga do wolności* (Warsaw: Editions Spotkania, 1991), trans. James Bjork.