

Migrating Tactics: An Interview with Ewa Majewska and Katarzyna Rakowska

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On October 3, 2016, Polish women went on strike to protest a strict ban on abortion then before parliament. In a remarkable and galvanizing demonstration of solidarity, an estimated 100,000 people participated in what became known as the Black Monday protests, which took place in cities and towns throughout Poland. The strike inspired organizers in many other countries and contributed to the collective energy that would lead to the International Women’s Strike on March 8, 2017. It also had an immediate effect within Poland, where lawmakers, who days before had declared their wholehearted support for the ban, rushed to vote against it. Even Prawo i Sprawiedliwość, or Law and Justice, the far right nationalist party led by Jarosław Kaczyński, withdrew its backing.

We conducted the following interview with Ewa Majewska and Katarzyna Rakowska, two young feminist activists living in Poland, in April, when memories of both Black Monday and the March 8 strike were fresh in their minds, and the Polish example felt newly urgent to us. Yet their remarks also attest to the long process of organizing and the ongoing histories of struggle that the October and March strikes continued. These are histories of workers’ struggle as much as of feminist activism, and both Majewska and Rakowska speak to the inseparability of feminist efforts—including work for reproductive justice—from broader anti-capitalist projects in Poland and beyond. Majewska and Rakowska thus repeatedly link the women’s strikes to movements opposing austerity and environmental despoliation, precarization, and nationalism.

These movements converged on Black Monday, and they continue to inform the feminism that Majewska and Rakowska exemplify, through their participation in the Razem, or Together, party (in Majewska’s case) and the radical Inicjatywa Pracownicza, or Workers’ Initiative (in Rakowska’s), as well as through their role in the women’s strikes. This feminism refuses to limit itself to “women’s issues” or “gender issues” narrowly defined, instead insisting on the connectedness of various enduring forms of exploitation and inequality. It stages what Majewska, citing choreographer Sibylle Peters, calls indispensable “rehearsals” for a more egalitarian world, rehearsals that can eventuate in actions like the strikes. In Rakowska’s words, this feminism lays stress on “learning tactics” from other places and times, and from the movements with which it works in solidarity.

Critical Times (CT): Why did you decide to organize a strike in opposition to the push to criminalize abortion? Why a strike instead of another form of advocacy or activism?

Katarzyna Rakowska (KR): As a union, we have supported the idea of some kind of social strike, not only a workers' strike, for many years now. We joined the women's strike almost immediately because as a union we know that capitalism doesn't end at the factory gates. It influences our whole lives: where we live, how we live, what we buy, where we spend our vacations, whether we have any spare time, and how we spend that time. We know that capitalism not only depends on a workforce, on wage labor, but also on the reproductive work of women, the reproductive work of migrants, migrant women, and the whole sector of care, whether it's professional service care or care that is organized at home as unpaid work. So for years we were calling for a social strike, and that's why we joined—to show that the system and the economy really depend on women. When we called for a women's strike, we not only called on women to leave workplaces, to stop working, but also not to do any reproductive work at home, to leave children with other caretakers, not to cook, not to shop, and not to buy anything that day, so that the strike could be both a consumption strike and a care strike.

Ewa Majewska (EM): There is a long history of striking women in Poland. We have to go back to 1905, I think, one of the founding moments of workers' mobilization. The territory of Poland was then occupied by Russia, Prussia, and Austria-Hungary, and the strike that was organized then had a patriotic, anti-occupation aim. But women's rights were also involved, since the biggest protests took place in Łódź. Łódź was the biggest textile industry city in Russia at that time. It was also one of the biggest textile industry cities in Europe, so many workers who went on strike were women. Of course, not only women were striking in Łódź, but that strike was perceived as a women's strike.

And then there is also 1980, the moment when the “Solidarność” movement started. The beginning of the “Solidarność” Independent Workers Union was a strike in solidarity with a particular female crane operator in the Gdańsk shipyard, Anna Walentynowicz. She was older than most of the other workers in her sector of the shipyard. She was fired in July 1980, for saying that because of the rise in food prices, brought about by the Communist Party earlier that year, “life was not worth living.” She was fired, and after some weeks the whole shipyard went on strike, first of all in order to support her and also in order to protest the poverty and lack of democratic control over the country. The strike in the Gdańsk Shipyard began on August 14, 1980, and later other workplaces started to join it, first in Gdańsk, then in the rest of Poland. By the end of August 1980, some seven hundred workplaces were on strike; this meant some 700,000 workers protesting. By March 1981, some ten million Poles registered as “Solidarność” members, which is almost a third of the entire population.

The reference to strikes is a very positive reference in Poland, because it's perhaps our only positive heritage of resistance and transformation of the public sphere, politics, counterpublics, and participation. The short period from 1980 to 1981 was a very particular moment when everyone was involved in political change. It really was a public celebration of participatory politics in a very genuine sense—not the kind of participation that we often see today, limited to ballot casting and commenting on politics at home. So people have very warm memories of it—many, perhaps most of the population. I think that these two moments, in 1905 and in 1980, were both there in the women's protests of 2016.

These protests actually began in April. In March the government began to consider changing

the abortion law, around Women's Day, of all days. Then, in early April, some women began a Facebook group called "Dziewuchy dziewczuchom," or "Girls for Girls." Later there were some smaller, local groups, created to conduct local protests. But this first, general one, was created almost overnight, and in its first days 100,000 people signed up. The feminist movement in Poland has never been that big. So clearly there were lots of women disconnected from any activism who just jumped in, because they were furious. This Facebook group still exists, and it was very important for both the women's strike and Black Monday later in 2016. So it's not that Polish women woke up in October 2016 and said, "Let's go on strike!" No. There were several months of preparation and activism that created this atmosphere or readiness to exercise political agency. In April 2016, there were already some fifty demonstrations—in Poland, but also abroad. We organized one in Berlin with Polish women and whoever wanted to join, and protests were also organized in Japan, Great Britain, and other countries. Wherever there was any Polish person, there was a demonstration. Then there were some months of peace.

And then in August 2016, this new law was sent to parliament, a law that not only banned abortion completely, under any circumstances, but that would also punish women if they terminated pregnancies. So then everybody got ready for further protests. A massive campaign initiated by a member of the Razem, or Together, party, Gocha Adamczyk, started in September. It was called #Czarnyprotest, or #Blackprotest, and included several options: to wear black on a particular day (September 23) to support women's rights and protest the anti-abortion law, or to take a selfie with a #Czarnyprotest sign and share as many of these pictures as possible. It was a very clever and very effective use of black and of the selfie, since some 200,000 people put their selfies on a fanpage, and the #Blackprotest eventually became the biggest event on the Polish internet, with some five million hits.

This was already a kind of preparation for the Women's Strike, and as a theorist I like this moment very much, for two reasons. One is that I seriously believe that there are certain aspects of social movements, of social change, that have to be—how do you say it?—not tried out, but rehearsed. Sibylle Peters, a German choreographer and theorist, wrote this short text on "becoming many" for the book *Truth is Concrete*, where she argues that some things require repetition, practice, rehearsal, in order to finally happen. I think she is right, and for me the #Blackprotest, the process of taking and posting selfies and wearing black clothes to support women, was a kind of rehearsal for the Women's Strike. Many women said later that they would never have taken to the streets without this intermediary step, this small, ordinary, and relatively easy activity of posting their support for the strike. So people who had never been actively involved in politics before could use their selfies and wearing black as a kind of training for being political.

CT: Can you tell us a bit about the history of abortion rights in Poland? How have things changed, and what have been the major developments since the fall of Communism in 1989?

EM: Abortion had been legal since the 1950s, during Communist times. Women could terminate pregnancies legally until twelve weeks. This was granted by a law passed in 1956. Then, in 1993, a new law was proposed that banned abortion almost completely, and there was a first wave of a

movement against this new law. Women's organizations collected one million signatures against it. This was quite groundbreaking. Nevertheless, the law was redirected to the Constitutional Tribunal, and then in 1997 it was confirmed and declared constitutional. This law has been called a "compromise on abortion" between the Catholics and progressives, or Catholics and liberals. But this phrase refers to a supposed compromise from which women were excluded in the first place. Nobody consulted any women's rights experts or women's organizations about it.

KR: The compromise is not a social compromise or a civil compromise. It's a compromise between the elites and the Church. And it only allows women to have abortions in three situations: one is if there are health issues or if a woman's life is in danger; the second is if there are health problems with the fetus; and the third is when the pregnancy is a result of crime. All of these cases need to be accepted or acknowledged by a higher body. For health issues, the chief gynecologist has to give approval in the hospital, or some kind of medical board has to sign an agreement granting a legal abortion, and when the pregnancy results from a crime, the agreement has to be signed by a public prosecutor. Since 1993 there was only one time in Poland's history—it was in 1997—when abortion was legal for social reasons, and it was legal for six months. It was the social democratic post-Communist government that introduced that law in late 1996, but then the constitutional law tribunal forbade it, saying that the fetus is a living being, and because the Polish constitution protects every living being, abortion for economic reasons should be forbidden. So for these six months during the '90s, social issues were legal grounds for abortion, and during those six months there were about 2,500 legal abortions for social reasons.

Today there are generally between three hundred and four hundred legal abortion procedures in Poland each year. So the numbers are very low. In 2014, there were two procedures resulting from rape, and in 2015 only one. But, as you can imagine, the rate of pregnancies as a result of rape is probably much higher. It's just that women don't report it, because you need permission from a public prosecutor. This law has been in effect since 1993, and with the new right-wing government in 2015, the Church started lobbying really hard against any abortion, any reproductive rights, actually. So in March of 2016, the Polish Episcopate, the highest body of Catholic Church, announced that they would force the government to ban any kind of reproductive rights, including the morning-after pill and abortion. They joined forces with a non-governmental organization called *Ordo Iuris*. This is a Catholic, conservative NGO. They introduced the ban with this civic procedure: they gathered 100,000 signatures and brought them to Parliament. And it was in March 2016 when the women's movement of resistance against this restrictive law started. The law was really regressive because it not only forbade but criminalized any kind of abortion. They wanted to put women in jail for having any kind of procedure. And that's what happened last year and how the movement started.

CT: We have wondered about the possibility that workers would be concerned about the financial repercussions of the strike, particularly in an austerity economy.

KR: Because we knew it was going to be a one-day event, the worries were not about money or the economy. They were legal worries, actually—how to organize a strike, and how can I strike if I don't have regular employment? First of all, we have very restrictive strike laws in Poland. So the strike had

to be made with other means than legal strike laws. So we started to take holiday leave and medical leave. There are some special days of leave that you can take if you have children; you can take four days off of work just to care for them. We let women know that they could do that. And of course there are many workers who have no permanent contracts, so they are not recognized as regular workers. So we made a leaflet for female workers explaining how to strike on that day using different kinds of legal means. We encouraged women not to go to work, not to provide services, to work slowly, or to—we call it an Italian strike—make things slow, or work with very great precautions so the service would go slower. And we said that you could also take part in strike in a symbolic way, just by wearing black. We called it Black Monday, and we encouraged women to wear black. And also if some women had to stay at work, if they didn't want to stop care service—because, for example, our members were daycare workers, and they worked in workplaces where only women work—then they wore black to their job and went to demonstrate after work, so they didn't go home to do any reproductive work.

CT: We also have been wondering about the response to Black Monday: what the state's response has been and how Polish people have responded.

EM: The immediate response from the Prawo i Sprawiedliwość (PiS), or Law and Justice, Party was: “No, no, no, this was not our project. This was a project of the Ordo Iuris organization. No, of course not. Why would we?” So it was a change in discourse, like 180 degrees. But later the PiS Party did introduce some changes into healthcare for women that were quite unpleasant and quite dramatic. Also they changed the rules for accessing contraceptives. Now you have to have a prescription from your doctor in order to get a morning-after pill. And this change was introduced on February 14, of all days, so it was on Valentine's Day.

KR: And because of this whole anti-reproductive rights climate in Poland, businesses are starting to cooperate with the government. We now have a list of pharmacies that do not sell the morning-after pill, even in Warsaw, so you can imagine how hard it is to get the morning-after pill in the countryside where there is only one pharmacy, when in the capital we have a whole list of pharmacies that will not sell contraceptives. We also have a whole list of doctors who do not prescribe any kind of hormonal pills. They encourage “natural methods,” by which they mean the calendar and counting your days during the month. And those are private doctors, and those are private business, the pharmacies. So those are the biggest concerns for us now, because they really tamper with women's health. It is not only about control over our bodies, control over when we want to have children. When we can't get medicine from a doctor or the pharmacy, it also becomes about our health and even about our lives.

EM: So on February 14, the government introduced restrictions on the morning-after pill, and also some specific changes to elements of health care for women, such as who decides on the method of birth (before it was the woman, now it is the doctor). But the good change is that the PiS Party (the Kaczyński party) started to say things like: “We have nothing to do with this law. Never did. Never

will.” There is also a sense of agency and solidarity—the Black Protest was the first successful protest against the PiS Party, so obviously it gave a lot of hope to everyone. Even if earlier protests, pro-democratic ones, were sometimes also huge, this was the only one to be successful. So the position of women and the role of women’s movements have changed for the better, and they are taken more seriously. For the self-definition, self-standing, and self-perception of women, it was tremendous.

And it was also very much about intergenerational connection. Usually young women go to protests; older women don’t. There is a lot of separation between women. The protests in September really gave us a sense of connection. Many women would say, “It’s not about me anymore. It’s about my daughter and her colleagues, all the young women.” I went to one demonstration in September 2016 with my mother. She usually supports my political work but never actually goes to protests. This time, she not only went with me, but we also addressed the protest and gave speeches. It was very touching, but also what happened in her speech was fascinating: she said that at first she thought she just came there for me, but then she realized that she was there for all young women threatened by the anti-abortion law. This change from an individualist, family-focused perspective to a sense of solidarity with all women was really beautiful.

In Walter Benjamin’s “On the Concept of History,” there is a pact between generations. It’s called “weak messianism,” of all things. Polish culture is very preoccupied with messianism, a particularly heroic one. What happened in fall 2016, during the Black Protests, was very much about transforming this heroic, Polish macho messianism into a sort of weak messianism, trying to work with ordinary people and the everyday, dealing with non-heroic, ordinary matters. It’s about our bodies and reproduction; this is the most mundane, the least exceptional thing. So the change in political agency from the familiar heroic messianism centered on brave subjectivity, the autonomous subject detached from everything, into a multitude in revolt—this is what the women’s protests accomplished.

Since I’ve been theorizing about weak resistance, this was for me a dream come true. Women were doing something that I was actually trying to conceptualize. It was amazing. What happened was a change from an image of political agency as being always and only heroic and masculine into a multitude of humans and perhaps also nonhumans, interconnected and working in very ordinary ways, starting from a position of weakness rather than one of domination, and doing transformative politics at the same time.

CT: When you say also nonhumans, what do you mean by that?

EM: There is a whole interpretation of the social in terms of collectives coming from—in Poland, most people say it comes from Bruno Latour, but of course it’s Donna Haraway: a sense of circuits and interconnections that demand that we see ourselves as just as important or unimportant as the other parts of these circuits, collectives, or whatever we decide to call them. I am also very fond of the notion of the common as theorized by Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt, in *Commonwealth* and other texts. I think the “common” embraces much more than the human; it is also our environment, cultural production, all kinds of things often called “natural resources,” nonhuman species, and companions. As cyberfeminist authors remind us, historically women were in so many ways accused

of not being human. We were deprived of humanity all the time. For Haraway, Sadie Plant, and the authors of “Xenofeminist Manifesto”—the Laboria Cubonix—the deprivation and the alienation resulting from the supposed “non-humanity” of women can become a weapon for emancipation. Now refugees are harshly dehumanized by our government as well. So already within humanity, you have all kinds of groups systematically deprived of humanity. Following Negri and Hardt, I would *claim* this inhumanity. When I speak as a feminist, I am very often saying, “Yes, if you want to call me a monster, this is what I am precisely.” My experience, my bodily experience, my political experience, my social experience all contradict humanity and this kind of autonomous subject that was developed in the European tradition, detached from any relations and contexts, dematerialized.

CT: How do you see the connection between reproductive rights, on the one hand, and labor rights, or economic struggles more generally, on the other? How do you put those in relation, and why do you put them in relation?

KR: First of all, for us access to modern medical procedures is a class issue, because whether it’s in Poland or in the United States, if you have resources you can go across the border and have a safe, medical, modern procedure to terminate pregnancy or to get the morning-after pill or to get any other kind of medicine. So women with resources and time and the ability to move around the country, it is very easy for them to get an abortion outside of Poland. There are clinics with Polish staff just across the border, both the German border and the Czech border. But we know that for women who have no time—who are forced to work all the time, who have no holiday leave, who have no place to leave other children with, who have no money, and who have no access to that information—it’s really a class issue that they don’t have access to something that is very simple for women with money. So this is the first issue.

The second issue is that because of the neoliberal reforms in Poland in the last 25 years, we are facing cuts to all kinds of public services. So there are fewer and fewer kindergartens. There is almost no daycare for children, for really small toddlers. There are very long queues for the public healthcare system. Public transportation is getting more and more expensive, and there are some cities in Poland where they have no public transportation to any bigger city, where, for example, the hospital is. So for women with no money, having children also means that they’re forced to raise them with only their own resources. Having access to contraception, to abortion, is also having the right to decide whether you want to have children in this kind of society that doesn’t support you in any way. And if you have resources, all those services are of course available, because they’ve been privatized. So this reproductive health issue is a class issue because it excludes women without resources from deciding whether they want to have children, how they want to raise children, and what they would like to offer their children.

The third issue relates to our perspective on labor and our place in capitalism, which is really based on our workforce and on our reproductive work. If we don’t have control over our bodies, we also don’t have control over our workforce. We can’t decide whether we want to work or not work, how to work, whether we can withdraw from work, and whether we can strike if we have no control over our bodies. So this is the highest—I would call it the top level—of our concerns: our biggest bargaining power in the system is to withdraw from work, to strike in any kind of way. To do that,

we have to have control over our bodies, just to stop working. In doing that, in stopping work, we are exercising control over our bodies.

EM: For me abortion is much more of a class/gender issue than an issue of choice. This is a big part of my problem with liberal feminism, which reduces complicated social phenomena to matters of “choice.” The ban on abortion is actually a systematic and strategic tool to keep certain parts of the population in poverty or even to enlarge the poor strata and push women—not only women, but whole families—into poverty. This has always been Razem’s view. Basically, in my view, the abortion ban works as a tool used to dominate women’s bodies and choices and agency, and to preserve the domination of men over women. It is not only about what I can choose. It is always about who can choose, who gets to deliberate, and so on.

As a leftist I have a huge problem with the concept of choice, but also as a cultural studies scholar. I think that calling abortion “a choice” makes no sense whatsoever. We are socialized and educated in certain ways. We get a certain worldview. There is a whole machinery of elements that makes us make certain choices. The fact that I choose something on this particular day means that I follow my earlier choices, earlier decisions, in ways shaped by my class, gender, atheism, all kinds of aspects of my life. Reducing abortion to a single choice has this negative effect of reducing a complicated biographical scheme of a woman into one moment. I don’t choose abortion. You know, if I could choose, I would choose not to be pregnant at all, actually. This would be my choice. And also the privileging of choice neglects all these material aspects of life that we spoke about before. It’s very often a question of how much money I have in my purse or whether I have friends who can lend me money or whether I have access to doctors who will volunteer to give abortions regardless of the ban. I had one abortion, and at that time I was mostly thinking of all these women who didn’t have enough support and financial resources. I knew that my choice was just a small element of an entire constellation of my life at the time. Choice is not enough also because it reduces us to our decision making, which I think is a small part of—a very important, but a small part of—our entire social functioning. And also, this translation of women’s life into choices, you know—for most women in Poland this is not available, this kind of mental structure of thinking of oneself in terms of choices. Most women in Poland are unfortunately not given a chance to make any choices at all. This narrative of choice is therefore not about our lives. Social exclusion is an important topic, and perhaps if we begin from social exclusion, if we begin by asking how people are kept in poverty, how families—entire families—are deprived of certain opportunities, maybe this is better.

CT: We’re wondering, Kasia, if you could give us a bit of background about the Inicjatywa Pracownicza (Workers’ Initiative) and speak just a bit about how it was formed and what its advocacy has looked like until now.

KR: The Workers’ Initiative was founded as an informal group by some people—actually, anarchists in Poznan—in 2001, and it was a group that supported workers’ struggles in Poznan, especially in the Cegelski factory. It’s a big factory in Poznan and very important, historically, for workers’ struggles. So there was a group of anarchists supporting that struggle. And in 2004, when there was a major conflict in that factory, a group of workers from that factory decided that they wanted to

formalize a union, a new union, a grassroots one, a militant one, and they would call it the Workers' Initiative since the groups were already cooperating so well. Since 2004 it's been a formal legal union in Poland. We now have more than 2,000 members and over forty locals in various branches from services, daycares, and the culture sector to factories, logistics facilities like Amazon, and so on.

What is specific about the Workers' Initiative is that we are militant. This means that we do not use the tripartite system of negotiations. According to Polish law, we are not allowed to on the country level, but we also do not support the idea on the lowest level. We are grassroots: that means that we do not have the system of a bureaucratic union; almost all of our members are regular activists. We were the first union to organize precarious workers, even if Polish law does not recognize precarious workers as workers. We have a rule: no one left behind, or one for all and all for one. This means we do not negotiate with employers agreeing to sacrifice one group of workers in order to make better conditions for other workers. And also we organize all kinds of people who are important for the system, not only regular workers and not only precarious workers, but also the unemployed, students, university students, and people who are already retired. So we don't divide people who support the economy of the capitalist system; we do not divide them into workers and non-workers.

CT: You had this campaign “My, Precariat” (We the Precariat). Could you say a bit more about what that was? In the US, we've been talking a lot more about precarious workers and the precariat recently, but it seems like it's something that's come into public consciousness—even on the left—quite recently.

KR: What we did was analyze how the system exploits precarious workers, how it uses them to divide the working class, how subcontracting is developing in Poland, and also how to educate people—our members and other workers—on their rights, on why regular contracts are better than civil contracts, for example, on what their rights are as civil contract workers, and also about tactics, because actually Polish law doesn't provide many legal tools for people who are working on civil contracts. But learning from abroad and learning from our experiences, we developed different kinds of tactics for different situations and workplaces. So the campaign lasted for about a year, and it ended with a big demonstration in Warsaw. And now the concept of precarious workers is something that is functioning in public discourse and in the media, and I think that we had a really great influence, a great impact, on that. Precarious workers are present in our everyday struggles and in our analysis.

CT: For many people in the United States, their first association with labor unions in Poland is Solidarność, the union that was active in resistance to the Communist government in the '80s. And so I wonder if you could tell us a bit about what kind of a role these traditional unions have played more recently: have they taken stances on issues like reproductive rights? Have they responded to the growth of the precarious workforce? And what are your relationships to more traditional unions?

KR: Solidarność is a very conservative and regressive union now. It started cooperating with the

government, with the right-wing government in the '90s, and now it's really close to the government. It doesn't organize or support workers' struggles, as it should. *Solidarność* now—and it's really shameful—is a racist union and a sexist union. And they made a public statement that they are not supporting, that they are in fact condemning, the women's protest and the women's strike. About the other unions: there's this post-Communist one that is a big bureaucratic union, the *Ogólnopolskie Porozumienie Związków Zawodowych (OPZZ)*, or All-Poland Alliance of Trade Unions. At first they were distant. They didn't make any statement about women's rights but then they saw that more and more women were joining demonstrations and struggles and that women were striking on October 3. It's a federation, so when first the teachers' branch made a formal statement that they supported joining the demonstrations, then I think the whole federation made some sort of statement that they supported the women's strike.

CT: Ewa, can you describe *Razem* for us, briefly? How did the party come to be, how is it structured, and what was its role in planning Black Monday? How and why has *Razem* sought to distinguish itself from other, more traditional political parties?

EM: *Razem* is a combination of people and groups previously functioning as small separate organizations or members of small political parties, such as the Greens. It was formed in the spring of 2015, and we got 3.6 percent of the vote in the elections in October 2015. We did not make it into Parliament, since Poland has a five percent threshold, yet we do obtain state funding, since the threshold for state subsidy for political parties in Poland is three percent.

Razem is a social-democratic party in a traditional, early twentieth-century sense, so today we would associate it more with Syriza and Podemos than with European Social Democrats. *Razem* consciously detaches itself from other Polish political parties, including the post-communist left, which has now become a neoliberal party, responsible for the labor code changes, precarization, and Polish participation in the war in Iraq. The *Razem* party has provided all kinds of support for women in our fight against anti-abortion campaigns, especially since April 2016, when the first proposals for changing the abortion laws were announced. We co-organized demonstrations against the ban, our politicians criticized the anti-abortion laws in the media, and we issued statements and leaflets against it. The campaigns and protests in the fall of 2016 were in large part co-orchestrated and supported by *Razem*, which provided infrastructure, sound systems, speakers, advertising, political speeches, and campaigns. One of our members, Gocha Adamczyk, began the Black Protest and our party was the first to take it on. The Women's Strike openly demanded a no-party line, so our members were there, but not as official co-organizers. I think it was not the happiest decision, because *Razem* has great campaign makers and we would probably have made the March 8 strike in 2017 a much better event, but we still were there and we used all the means we had to support the protests.

CT: How does your work with *Razem* inform or otherwise relate to your academic work? What do you see as the place of the university in public life?

EM: I think the public university—and I need to stress that in Poland “public” means funded by the state and free of tuition—is a particularly important institution not only for educating students and providing research, but also as one of those institutions that can perhaps one day become an “institution of the common.” Contrary to the line currently taken by our conservative government, which wants the universities to become profit-generating companies, many people, regardless of their political views, still perceive the universities as “republics of scholars,” which could be—under a different government, obviously—transformed into highly democratic, collectively managed cooperatives or something of the kind. This is a utopian vision, a part of my larger heterotopic vision of how certain state-funded institutions could shift towards a communal model like the one introduced by Gerald Raunig in the context of art institutions. Our main galleries, museums, and theaters are state-funded, and there were some experiments in Europe leading to the occupation and collectivization of theaters and museums. I believe this could be done with universities as well.

CT: A huge number of Polish workers are now migrants: for instance, in Britain a very significant proportion of care work and domestic work is done by Polish migrants, mostly women. Can you tell us how the situation of these women, who tend to work in precarious sectors, has affected your organizing?

EM: We have several branches of Razem abroad, and some of us made it very explicit in our electoral campaigns that we want to fight for better lives for immigrants and refugees, of Polish and other origins, here and abroad. For me, the experiences of precarity and migration became important elements in the electoral campaign and party politics. Razem intervenes in cases of the (usually verbal and political) abuse of refugees by Poland’s more conservative politicians. We issue statements about refugees, and we have organized several demonstrations (in London, Berlin, and other cities) against our government’s labor and refugees policies. I think, however, that more could be done. I think we don’t have enough international involvement; our main statement has not even been published in English. There is a lot to be done here.

CT: Can you tell us a bit about the role that nationalism plays in Polish politics right now and how it has affected your organizing?

EM: When in Poland, I live in Warsaw. Seventy-five percent of the city was burned and destroyed by fascists during World War II. What can I say? Yes, deep anti-nationalism and anti-fascism inform every aspect of my life, from intimate relations through friendships and collaborations up to organizing and party work and other political and scholarly involvements. One paradox of today’s Polish nationalists is that they take the Warsaw Uprising of 1944 as their symbol. The truth is that this was an anti-fascist uprising (against the Nazi occupiers of Poland), and the leaflets from 1944 clearly show that the uprising’s organizers wanted an egalitarian Poland for all nationalities. (These leaflets are clearly socialist—not communist—though.) So it is hard to believe contemporary Neo-Nazis have taken up the Uprising’s legacy so easily.

KR: In the Workers' Initiative, we do not organize any kind of workers who want to organize against other workers. We say: all or none. So, for example, if you think that migrants are going to steal your job, you still have to organize migrants within the local. This is our firm belief, and we make it explicit to new locals. The other thing that we do is some education work with our members. For example, we published a brochure about how capitalism uses divisions of laborers and how capitalism uses migrants to, for example, cut wages and to cut the bargaining power of different kinds of workers. We also organized some actions on individual workers' rights with Ukrainian workers. In Poland, there are almost one million Ukrainian workers now. And as with Polish workers abroad, Ukrainian workers in Poland are not fond of organizing within a union now. But there are some individual cases, and they usually involve not paying a wage, or paying a lower wage than was agreed on. So what we do is we try to pressure the employer: we have picket lines and demonstrations, we do public shaming, we inform the press, and so forth. We can't take any legal action because usually those workers are either without papers or they have expired work permits; they would face being deported. So with migrant workers it's actually what we do best. It's direct action.

CT: What about the European Union? We know this is a complicated question, but do you see the EU as a friend or an enemy of Polish working women?

KR: Well, I must admit that the European Union was the body that forced the Polish government, two or three years ago, to introduce, for example, the morning-after pill without a doctor's prescription. So it was something that was forced on Poland by European regulations. Nowadays the Polish government is just ignoring those regulations. So despite being an anarchist at heart, I would really look forward to any kind of European Union action, but I don't know whether European bodies will take any action against Poland. But it would really be helpful. On the other hand, with issues other than women's issues, we know that European Union is not a friend of the workforce, with those international treaty agreements, like CETA and TTIP. Also, the European Union tries every year to introduce laws that would allow paying migrant workers the minimum wage of their country of origin, not their country of destination. They haven't passed yet, but for years we've been fighting against them. So we don't consider these bureaucratic bodies to be workers' friends.

EM: The EU has the potential to become a guarantor of socialist, egalitarian policy, but it does not fulfill these promises now. Razem is very pro-European, and we are super clear on this, but we are also critical of the EU's neoliberal policies, especially in the contexts of labor, corporations, and refugees. For Razem, changing the direction of the EU when it comes to socialism, decolonization, and equality is the responsibility of conscious Europeans today, and we try to fulfill this responsibility.

CT: Black Monday inspired actions in many other countries. We're wondering how you think your tactics might show a way forward for women in these other countries. And also whether you could address the nature and extent of your collaborations with women, or organizers or workers, in these other countries.

KR: For me, internationalism is actually about learning tactics, because capital and companies and governments use similar tools in different countries, and sometimes they experiment in one country, for example, in the occupied territories (of Gaza and the West Bank), with ID issues, with movement control issues, and then they sell those tools in other countries. So with the women's protests, we are just trying to exchange knowledge about tactics—what worked, what didn't work—to get inspired, actually, on how to organize communities. For us, as a union, the big inspirations were the American and French campaigns organizing precarious cleaning workers: the big campaign of Justice for Janitors in the US, and the campaign with the ACCOR subcontractor several years ago. I think it was in 2007. And we are trying, you know, to keep in touch and to learn about different tactics and try them in Poland. Also, as we saw with the protests, women got inspired to organize mass protests on the streets, not, for example, protests within workplaces or some other kind of protests. So I think it's beautiful, actually, that with internationalism those struggles and tactics migrate, and ideas migrate. And I was really surprised by that, really moved that the protests were held in other countries. But it also shows how capitalism is a global system and how it affects women in all other countries. Because if it was only about violence in South America, or if it was only about reproductive rights in Poland, then the support and protests wouldn't be so global, I think. We got support from over sixty towns in different countries on Black Monday. So I think that those women knew that it's not only about several million Polish women. It's about women's rights and place in capitalism generally.

EM: My own contacts were with comrades in Italy and Germany, but Razem members collaborated with women in lots of other countries, and we try to share and collaborate as much and as well as we can. The key is, I think, to produce solidarity rather than support—to share and learn from each other rather than providing support in only one direction.

CT: Are you continuing conversations with women in these other countries right now, and what's developed in the international dimension of your organizing since Black Monday?

KR: In the Workers' Initiative, we exchange information about sectors or branches where women work, about tactics, about how to organize these branches, and about how to organize common struggles. So, for example, we are now cooperating with Amazon workers in three different countries, I think. We try to support those struggles, because actually in Europe when there is a strike or some kind of concerted action in Germany, the products are moved to Poland within hours, so we try to coordinate those struggles. We also, as I said, are just trying to learn about tactics and support other struggles that are held abroad, for example by picketing local headquarters of the same company. So when women in duty-free shops were protesting in Warsaw, our friends from France picketed in headquarters in Paris. And when there was a struggle in the Basque country, we had pickets in Warsaw. So we are coordinating those struggles and supporting them here.

CT: How, if at all, does critical theory, broadly defined, inform your organizing? Are there theoretical texts or concepts that have become especially important in Poland in recent years, or that have

emerged from ongoing activist struggles and that you'd like our readers to know about?

KR: With women's issues, cooperating with the anarchist movement, we did some translations and were inspired by texts by Silvia Federici and Maria Dalla Costa, about the theory of reproductive rights and about women's reproductive work under capitalism, and also about the divisions of labor and the similarities between migrant workers and women in the capitalist system—how we don't have the same rights as male workers and how we usually do care work or work in service, are paid lower wages, and so on. We did some translations, and we published texts by Federici and Dalla Costa. We also had many discussions about Harry Cleaver. In our analysis, we use the theory of bargaining power by Beverly Silver. We also did readings of her book about the transfer of capital and about bargaining power. And—because I'm also on the training team, so I train new locals—we use the theory of different kinds of bargaining power derived from Silver. And also there are the autonomist Marxists, who recognize different kinds of workers within the system: students, the unemployed, and so on, and their place within the system, and also the critique of bureaucratic unions that I think is connected with autonomist Marxist theory.

EM: Critical theory is highly important for many of Razem's members: Theodor Adorno's and Max Horkheimer's critique of Enlightenment, Benjamin's "weak messianism," the counterpublics of Kluge and Negt, and Nancy Fraser's subaltern counterpublics all inspire us. All of these theories are present in my own theoretical and political work as well as in Razem's discussions. There was one meeting on Judith Butler's recent book about assemblies, organized by Razem Poznan, and we apply critical feminist and queer theories in as many of our policies as we can. In most of our documents we understand families as all kinds of kinship, and in our daily work we consider gender and queer practice as key to equality.

About the Authors

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