
Public Works, Private Lives:

Youth Brigades in Nowa Huta

in the 1950s

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I

The new town of Nowa Huta ('New Steelworks') is located in south-eastern Poland, roughly 10 kilometres to the north-east of Kraków's historic centre. Founded in 1949, Nowa Huta was conceived as a city by and for the working class, meant to contrast in every particular with what communist party ideologues deemed the reactionary and bourgeois city of Kraków. The mammoth Lenin steelworks, the key investment of the Soviet-sponsored Six-Year Plan (1950–55), formed Nowa Huta's centrepiece. For the workers who would be employed there, planners envisioned a self-sufficient community outfitted with sanitary, modern homes, well-stocked co-operative shops, and a range of cultural institutions designed to uplift residents in their leisure time. Nowa Huta's inhabitants would be mobilised and transformed by life in the new town; a 'new man' would be born to greet the new age.

The image of Poland's 'first socialist city' was a recurrent trope in Polish propaganda of the 1950s. Building Nowa Huta became a heroic narrative, synonymous with 'building socialism' itself.¹ Among the heroes of this narrative, members of volunteer youth brigades – depicted in contemporary magazines and newsreels as lean, smiling bands of teenagers in green uniforms and red ties – played a highly visible role. The moniker 'city of youth,' embodied by these young brigade members, suggested the dynamism and growth that the new regime wished to

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¹ Anders Åman, *Architecture and Ideology in Eastern Europe during the Stalin Era: An Aspect of Cold War History* (New York: Architectural History Foundation, 1992), 183. There is a growing body of literature on individual 'socialist cities': see, for example, Timothy C. Dowling, 'Stalinstadt/Eisenhüttenstadt: A model for (socialist) life in the German Democratic Republic, 1950–1968', Ph.D. thesis, Tulane University, 1999; Stephen Kotkin, *Magnetic Mountain: Stalinism as a Civilisation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995); Ruth May, *Planstadt Stalinstadt* (Dortmund: Dortmunder Betrieb für Bau- und Planungsliteratur, 1999); and Mark Pittaway, 'Creating and Domesticating Hungary's Socialist Industrial Landscape: From Dunapentele to Sztálinváros', *Historical Archaeology* (forthcoming).

project on to a reborn Poland, rising out of the ashes of the Second World War. The youth brigades of Nowa Huta, however, were more than just a symbol of progress. The building of Nowa Huta provided both the necessity and the opportunity to forge a new proletariat possessing industrial skills and political loyalty in equal measure. The youth brigades, therefore, occupied the vanguard of a new kind of labour mobilisation in 'People's Poland'.

The Party hoped to transform brigade members into productive, skilled labourers and cultured, conscious 'new men'. To a degree, I shall argue, this effort was a success. Under conditions of exceptional hardship, many brigade members (*junacy*) took to production with enthusiasm. One brigade commander's year-end assessment is typical: 'Participants connected political issues with their daily lives and daily work in production.' Valuing 'healthy militancy, . . . they enthusiastically strove for record-breaking achievements, completing their work commitments ahead of schedule'.² Upon completing work in the brigade, many chose to remain in Nowa Huta as civilian workers, some for life.

And yet the same *junacy* more often than not fell far short of the Party's ideal when it came to behaviour off the job. This ranged from displaying a lack of personal 'culture' – a term which in Polish denotes a certain breeding and civilized bearing – to behaviour that constituted an outright challenge to authority. Preferring jazz to mass songs and speak-easies to 'red corners', brigade members gained notoriety as 'hooligans'. They drank, formed gangs, dressed in a slovenly manner, and got into fist fights with the militia. After their release from the brigade, some encountered serious difficulties adapting to 'civilian' life in the new town.

A range of new scholarship has turned to social history for a better understanding of the state socialist regimes that emerged in east central Europe in the decade after the Second World War.³ Whereas Cold-War paradigms assumed a Soviet-style system imposed on an unwilling but inert society through coercion and violence, new research has shown that society itself posed a countervailing force to regimes' efforts to bring their countries smoothly into line with Stalinist models. Ultimately the communists were able to call the shots, but not without reckoning with often troublesome and obstreperous populations who came to the table, as it were, with their own agendas. Such studies have naturally tended to concentrate on workers, the group in whose name the Party claimed to rule and upon whose co-operation the success of postwar industrialisation drives most crucially depended; careful study

² Archiwum Państwowe, Kraków (hereafter APKr), SPKr 109, kk. 101–2.

³ E.g., Andrew Port, 'When workers rumbled: the Wismut upheaval of August 1951 in East Germany', *Social History*, Vol. 22, No. 2 (1997), 145–73; and Mark Pittaway, 'The Social Limits of State Control: Time, the Industrial Wage Relation, and Social Identity in Stalinist Hungary, 1948–1953', *Journal of Historical Sociology*, Vol. 12, No. 3 (1999), 271–301. On workers and the state in Poland, see Jędrzej Chumiński, *Ruch zawodowy w Polsce w warunkach kształtującego się systemu totalitarnego, 1944–1956* (Wrocław: Wydawnictwo Akademii Ekonomicznej im. Oskara Langego, 1999); Łukasz Kamiński, *Strajki robotnicze w Polsce w latach 1945–1948* (Wrocław: GAJT Wydawnictwo, 1999); and Padraic Kenney, *Rebuilding Poland: Workers and Communists, 1945–1950* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997). On relations between the Stalinist regime and the Polish peasantry, see Dariusz Jarosz, *Polityka władz komunistycznych w Polsce w latach 1948–1956 a chłopci* (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo DiG, 1998).

of conflict on the shop-floor and in the community has revealed the ways in which workers, deprived of traditional means for organising their interests, expressed their grievances, and conversely, how communists responded with a variety of ‘carrots’ and ‘sticks’ to subdue and appease them.⁴

Because of Nowa Huta’s immense symbolic and economic importance, inevitably local challenges to control by bosses, Party officials, and their representatives in Poland’s ‘first socialist city’ took on heightened significance. While ‘hooliganism’ defied any easy identification with political opposition or collective action, it nonetheless raised serious questions about the regime’s capacity to socialise and control the nation’s youth. Throughout the first half of the decade, therefore, the unruly behaviour of *junacy* in Nowa Huta was increasingly to occupy not only Party representatives at the local and national levels but ultimately regime critics as well. Indeed, the contradictions between the youthful idealism of brigade members and their rebellious fall from grace became a potent allegory for Poland’s fate after the Second World War. It is perhaps no coincidence that Andrzej Wajda’s film *Man of Marble* is based on the story of Nowa Huta’s *junak* Piotr Ożański, who with his mates laid 27,760 bricks in one famous shift – and who, on his fall from Party favour, became an alcoholic and a drifter.⁵ Ultimately, the regime’s inability to bridge the gulf between itself and Nowa Huta’s youth volunteers reflects Polish Stalinism’s critical failure to secure unambiguous legitimacy among its most eligible social constituency. What it got instead was an uneasy truce – a truce that could fall apart with alarming speed, and with far-reaching consequences for the system’s long-term stability.

II

For the writer Marian Brandys, Nowa Huta’s youth was to be considered ‘the most precious raw material of the Six-Year Plan’, one that the Party would ‘purify on this great building site of all friable alloys and process into refined, stainless human steel’.⁶ The inseparable partnering of ‘youth’ and ‘Nowa Huta’ in the socialist realist idiom can be traced back to Lenin, who argued that young people, by virtue of their age, were natural allies of revolution.⁷ For Polish communists in the wake of the Second World War, youth also held the key to national rebirth. As the text of one educational ‘chat’ for young people on sport and physical education explained,

these have a special meaning for us Poles, enfeebled through the war and the Nazi occupation . . . A large segment of the population’s health was weakened from living in prisons or concentration camps or camped out in the forests. In addition, the Nazis

⁴ Port, ‘The Wismut upheaval’, 168.

⁵ Andrzej Krzysztof Wróblewski, ‘Bez pomników’, in Stefan Kozicki and Zbigniew Stolarek, eds., *Krajobraz ogni. Antologia reportaży o Nowej Hucie* (Warsaw: Iskry, 1964), 426.

⁶ Anna Bikont and Joanna Szczęsna, ‘O Nowej to Hucie poemat’, *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 26–7 Feb. 2000, 24.

⁷ Richard Cornell, *Youth and Communism* (New York: Walker and Co., 1965), 5–7.

intentionally tried to destroy our youth, encouraging them to use alcohol, smoke cigarettes, etc.⁸

There was, in fact, real cause for concern about the impact of the occupation on young Poles. The war had left an estimated 440,000 orphans and 1.6 million ‘half-orphans’ who had lost one parent.⁹ Many had served or fought in the resistance; most had witnessed acts of terrible brutality. Schools had been closed during the war, but as one commentator wrote, ‘everyday life taught that what before was good was now bad, and vice versa’.¹⁰

One response was the formation shortly after the war of several youth brigades, composed largely of orphans or demobilised young partisans who participated in peacetime reconstruction while receiving education and vocational training. Drawing on this model, in 1948 a proposal was brought before the Polish parliament for the formation of a national youth service corps to be known as ‘Service for Poland’ (Powszechna Organizacja ‘Służba Polsce’, hereafter ‘SP’). Unlike earlier brigades, SP had an explicitly ideological purpose: to ‘bind the broadest mass of youth with the new Polish reality, rooting them in the new relationship with work, [and] strengthening their conscious social discipline’. To this end, SP was placed under the ideological ‘guidance’ of the Party’s youth wing, the Union of Polish Youth (Związek Młodzieży Polskiej, or ZMP). In theory, the establishment of SP created a service obligation for every Pole, male and female, between the ages of sixteen and twenty-one. (In reality, only 30 to 40 per cent of those eligible to serve were ever called up, and mandatory conscription was abolished in 1953.)¹¹ Recruits usually served in two-month seasonal brigades, but young men could also join year-long, volunteer vocational-training brigades, organised in conjunction with ZMP – the type of brigade most closely associated with Nowa Huta. Such volunteers were targeted with slogans like ‘Służba Polsce is the new school for life’, or ‘If you want to acquire professional training, enquire at your SP command post – they’ll help you’.¹²

In the course of SP’s existence, *junacy* were to be found at work on many of the large projects of the Six-Year Plan – building shipyards in Gdańsk and Szczecin, car factories in Warsaw and Lublin, and chemical plants in Silesia. Nowa Huta, however, was designated by the Party as a ‘banner assignment for Polish youth’, a special campaign to be co-ordinated by ZMP, which would organise its own volunteer brigades to work alongside those of SP.¹³ By 1950, seasonal SP brigades in Nowa Huta comprised more than 8,000 *junacy*, while in April of that same year

⁸ Archiwum Akt Nowych, Warsaw (hereafter AAN), KG POSP 953, k. 120.

⁹ William Cary, *Poland Struggles Forward* (New York: Greenberg Publisher, 1949), 102.

¹⁰ Aleksander Bocheński, *Wędrówki po dziejach przemysłu polskiego 1945–1970* (Kraków: PHILED, 1997), 180.

¹¹ Jan Hellwig, *Powszechna Organizacja Służba Polsce* (Warsaw: Iskry, 1977), 31, 44–5.

¹² From 1945 to 1948, for instance, a former partisan organised war orphans from the Kielce area to work in Kielce and Lublin provinces. In 1946 and 1947, youth volunteers helped rebuild Warsaw, working and studying four hours each per day. Hellwig, *Służba Polsce*, 12–13, 17–18, 54.

¹³ Bogdan Hillebrandt, *Związek Młodzieży Polskiej* (Warsaw: Młodzieżowa Agencja Wydawnicza, 1980), 360.

2,169 *junacy* were employed in three year-long ZMP brigades (the Fifty-First, Fifty-Second, and Fifty-Third). Officials listed the social background of recruits as ‘worker’ (55.7 per cent), small or medium peasant (34.4 per cent), wealthy (1.3 per cent), ‘working intelligentsia’ (5.4 per cent) and other (2.5 per cent). The figures, however, are misleading, since ‘worker’ here includes farm-hands and agricultural workers, a ‘large’ but unspecified part of this figure – doubtless the vast majority. Fewer than 2 per cent had completed school beyond the seventh grade; the majority had completed grades five to seven (63 per cent), while 29 per cent had completed only between grades one and four. Roughly 6 per cent were illiterate.¹⁴

During the Second World War and its aftermath, Poland was a country on the move; according to some estimates, one in four Poles changed his or her place of residence between 1930 and 1950.¹⁵ It is against this background of restless movement that the creation of Nowa Huta in 1949 must be understood. The experiences of one young recruit to the Fifty-Third ZMP Brigade were far from unusual in this regard: Edmund Chmieliński, who joined the brigade in 1951 at the age of seventeen, had experienced much of the tumult of the Second World War first-hand. In 1940 his family’s farm in the central Polish village of Przasnysz was seized by occupation forces and the family was forcibly resettled in another village. In 1944 Chmieliński’s father was killed by Germans, and at the age of eleven he himself was deported into slave labour on a German farm. When the front neared, he escaped and made his way back home.¹⁶ Likewise, labour hero Piotr Ożański also lost his father during the war. After the war Ożański served briefly in the army; following his family’s resettlement to the Western Territories, Ożański signed up for work in Nowa Huta.¹⁷

Like Chmieliński and Ożański, the typical newcomers to Nowa Huta between 1949 and 1956 were young, male, rural in origin and unskilled.¹⁸ The greatest number hailed from the province of Kraków and its neighbours (Katowice, Rzeszów and Kielce); a smaller but significant group came from – or through – the Western Territories, particularly Wrocław.¹⁹ Whether they joined SP or simply found regular work on the construction site, with very few exceptions the

¹⁴ AAN ZMP 451/XI-52, kk. 1–2, 5, 107; APKr SPKr 109, k. 113.

¹⁵ Krystyna Kersten, *The Establishment of Communist Rule in Poland, 1943–1948* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 163–5.

¹⁶ Edmund Chmieliński, ‘Tu chciałem żyć i pracować’, in Aurelia Szafran-Bartoszek *et. al.*, eds., *Robotnicze losy. Życiorysy własne robotników*, I (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Naukowe UAM, 1996), 444–5.

¹⁷ APKr Radio Kraków, no title (from series ‘Spotkania po latach’), 1977, nr aud. 969.

¹⁸ In 1954, 88 per cent of employees of the Lenin Steelworks were male, 68 per cent were considered ‘youth,’ and 47 per cent were of peasant origins. Czesław Bąbiński, ‘O budowie Huty im. Lenina’, *Budownictwo Przemysłowe*, Vol. 3, No. 7/8 (1954), 4.

¹⁹ A 1960 study of current residents found that over half were from Kraków province (about 10 per cent from the city of Kraków), 21 per cent from the neighbouring provinces of Katowice, Rzeszów, and Kielce, 10 per cent from Wrocław province, and 13 per cent from the villages that had been subsumed by Nowa Huta. Ewa Pietsch, Antoni Stojak, and Jerzy Sulimski, ‘Budowa i rozwój Huty im. Lenina oraz kształtowanie się społeczeństwa Nowej Huty’, in Antoni Stojak, ed., *Prace socjologiczne. Zeszyt 3. Huta im. Lenina i jej załoga*, Zeszyty Naukowe Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego (Kraków: Uniwersytet Jagielloński, 1976), 15.

newcomers were ‘volunteers’ who willingly sought out a livelihood in Nowa Huta. They might have learned about Nowa Huta from the radio, in school, from posters or from their local youth organisation. Here is how one migrant described his path to Nowa Huta after completing his army service in 1954:

I was a bachelor, so it was a question of honour to be well dressed and have some change in my pocket. Of course, there’s work enough in the village, but the money’s not there . . . Already at that time a lot of friends from my village were working in Nowa Huta and boasted that the wages were good, and that’s what interested me.

Kazimierz Dębowski, who came to Nowa Huta in 1953 (also on release from the army), was likewise driven by empty pockets and the unnerving lack of activity back home on the farm. Another explained, ‘I felt a kind of inborn disgust for work in the fields and never had the intention of staying in the village. I persuaded myself that I had to go out into the world . . . I wanted to go to the city at any price.’²⁰

As these cases demonstrate, the ‘push’ of the village could be as strong or even stronger a motivating force as the ‘pull’ of Nowa Huta; in fact, for most volunteers, the idea of Nowa Huta was almost entirely abstract until their arrival on its terrain. Economic conditions in the Polish countryside were the primary cause of migration to Nowa Huta, but newcomers’ motivations were rarely purely instrumental – rather, they were bound up with a sense of what was ‘wrong’ with village life. Young people, especially, were all too aware of the limited opportunities in the village. Sixteen-year-old Maria N., for instance, ran away from home to join SP in Olsztyn in 1955. Maria’s three brothers had already left the village to find work (one in Nowa Huta), leaving her behind to help her mother on the family’s tiny tobacco plot. After Maria’s mother sought the intervention of Polish Radio’s complaints bureau, Maria’s brigade commander sent her home; on arriving in her village, however, Maria refused to get off the bus, her mother’s slaps and entreaties notwithstanding. As the daughter later explained, ‘There’s nothing to do at home’. On seeing the depth of Maria’s resolve, her mother finally gave up, admitting (according to the SP commander’s report) that her daughter ‘would know a better life in the Brigade’.²¹

Edmund Chmieliński, meanwhile, takes pains to narrate his departure for Nowa Huta against the perceived injustice and abuse he suffered at the hands of village society. As the Stalinist era commenced in 1948, the Polish countryside was in a state of flux. Although the peasantry as a whole had been economically hard-hit by the occupation, the war and its outcome had disrupted prewar social hierarchies and created new ones, as families within a given village had been affected very differently by the occupation and subsequent land reforms. Some with once-large holdings, like the Chmielińskis, had been pauperised over the course of a few years, while other families’ fortunes seemed to have improved considerably.²² For Chmieliński,

²⁰ Renata Siemińska, *Nowe życie w nowym mieście* (Warsaw: Wiedza Powszechna, 1969), 71–3.

²¹ APKr SPKr 53, n.p.

²² Cary, *Poland Struggles Forward*, 115–6. Henryk Slabek, ‘Socio-Political Aspects of the Polish Peasants (1944–1948)’, *Acta Poloniae Historica*, Vol. 57 (1988), 137–42.

this meant a keenly felt place at the bottom of the village pecking order. To support his mother and siblings on their return to the village, Chmieliński worked as a herd- and stable-boy for a farmer in another village. Using the Stalinist term '*kulak*' (rich peasant), Chmieliński describes his unhappy life with the farmer:

There was no time for sleep, so I would fall asleep herding cows or on my two feet at work, which most often ended with a kick in the ribs or a hail of blows – the farmer proved himself no worse at giving a beating than the [German] *Bauer* . . . The farmer's dog was better treated and better fed than I, and sometimes I envied him.

In 1949 Chmieliński returned to his own village, hiring himself out to local farmers as a day-labourer. While this led to an improvement in his living conditions, Chmieliński continued to feel alienated from those around him, from the village priest who demanded deference to the employer for whom 'it was not a matter of concern whether his servants and stable-boys knew how to read and write'. Chmieliński especially wanted to continue his studies, and at the age of sixteen he returned to sixth grade. But even at school he suffered: the children of wealthier families beat him up while the teacher – a sometime employer – turned a blind eye.²³

Salvation came when Chmieliński's uncle, an organiser for the local ZMP chapter, announced that a brigade was being formed that would be sent to a place near Kraków, where a new city – Nowa Huta – was being built. Chmieliński resolved to join, deaf to his mother's pleas and curses:

My decision was unalterable. I wanted to live and work like a human being, be treated the same as others and not like an animal . . . There was no force or might that could keep me in the village that I hated so much, which had looked down on me throughout my childhood.

Chmieliński was one of many to depart for Nowa Huta without his parents' blessing. For such youth, it may have been the first time they had defied parental wishes, and by extension the entire social code of village life; but the desire to escape the confinements of rural existence and to seek a new and better life elsewhere was overwhelming. Like any big city beckoning to the provincial, small-town boy or girl, Nowa Huta held out the prospect of a new beginning: of anonymity, freedom, adventure and limitless possibilities. Few, however, could anticipate what awaited them. 'I didn't consider the fact', writes Chmieliński, 'that I'd be participating in a great endeavour such as history has never known, or what Nowa Huta would become. I didn't know then that work building Nowa Huta would be still harder, more backbreaking and dangerous; and life in the brigade no bed of roses.'²⁴

Of course, as his use of the term '*kulak*' indicates, Chmieliński's memoir and others like it must be read with care, not least because its language and narrative devices reflect the highly charged ideological environment in which it was created. Because this particular text was published after 1989 (though written earlier), we can

²³ Chmieliński, 'Tu chciałem żyć', 445–6.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 446–7.

at least rule out cruder forms of editorial censorship; nonetheless, one must always consider where the limits of ‘acceptable’ speech lay at the time of a given source’s composition and how this might have shaped authorial strategies. Such limits often tended to be broader and more flexible than totalitarian models would lead us to expect: a circumspect reading of Stalin-era Polish sources, for example, reveals a surprising degree of veiled as well as open criticism of the system, notably – as contemporaries remarked – by workers (in contrast to more timid intellectuals).²⁵

Then there are the particularities of Nowa Huta itself: especially after 1956, arguably the limits of what could and could not be said about the new town were remarkably fluid.²⁶ Nowa Huta’s image had become tarnished as a symbol of Stalinist ‘excess’ during the collapse of the Stalinist regime in 1956, and official attitudes towards the new town were now marked by a striving for a sort of balance, which allowed for an unprecedented range of expression (so long as it did not challenge certain ideological ‘basics’). This posture was exemplified by a 1959 special edition of the influential journal *Życie Literackie* devoted to ‘the problems and achievements of the recent period of creating Nowa Huta’,²⁷ by public opinion polls of the town’s residents,²⁸ and by the large body of sociological scholarship on Nowa Huta from the late 1950s onwards, focusing on a host of social ‘pathologies’ believed to have been unleashed by the too-rapid transition from rural to urban life.²⁹

One of the most interesting of these sociological works was Renata Siemieńska’s *New Life in a New Town*, which drew extensively on entries to an essay competition staged in 1958 by *Życie Literackie* and the House of Culture at the Lenin steel-works.³⁰ Given its similarities to several of the unattributed excerpts quoted by Siemieńska, it seems likely that Chmieliński’s memoir was originally drafted as an entry to this contest. It is therefore instructive to compare Chmieliński’s essay with the winning entry, the work of another former youth brigade member writing under the pseudonym ‘Elf’. Chmieliński’s memoir could not differ more sharply in tone from that of ‘Elf’: whereas the latter strikes a nonchalant, almost studiously non-ideological tone, Chmieliński’s unmistakably echoes the social-realist idiom of the political era just past. As Chmieliński’s narrative unfolds, however, it becomes clear that this stance – particularly in an environment in which Stalinism has lost its cachet – is anything but straightforward; just as Chmieliński’s relationship with his

²⁵ Hanna Świda-Ziemia, *Mechanizmy zniewalania społeczeństwa – Refleksje u schyłku formacji* (Warsaw: Uniwersytet Warszawski – Instytut Stosowanych Nauk Społecznych, 1990), 227–8; on ‘criticism and self-criticism’ see Chumiński, *Ruch zawodowy*, 373.

²⁶ The memoirs were all composed between Stalinism’s collapse in November 1956 and the declaration of martial law in December 1981.

²⁷ Siemieńska, *Nowe życie*, 56.

²⁸ Katherine A. Lebow, ‘Revising the Politicized Landscape: Nowa Huta, 1949–1957’, *City & Society*, Vol. 11, No. 1–2 (1999), 165–87.

²⁹ A section of the Kraków branch of the Polish Academy of Sciences was devoted to sociological study of the new town. *Sprawozdania z posiedzeń komisji* (Kraków: Polska Akademia Nauk, Oddział w Krakowie, 1961, 1963, 1964).

³⁰ Siemieńska, *Nowe życie*, 69; *Sprawozdania z posiedzeń komisji* (1963), 468–71.

own past is complex, so too is his engagement with Nowa Huta and its Stalinist legacy. The use of ideologically coded terms and formulations, as Stephen Kotkin has argued in another context,³¹ suggests an element of narrative choice rather than a coerced literary template; far from discrediting the memoir's value as a source, therefore, it invites us to explore Chmieliński's use of this particular idiom to make sense of his own experience, past and present.

III

Whatever they might have heard from recruiters, most of the young people who set out for Nowa Huta could have had only the vaguest idea of what it meant that 'a great steelworks' and 'socialist city' were rising on the outskirts of Kraków. Chmieliński describes the wonder of his first train ride, topped only by a day spent in Warsaw, en route to Kraków:

Only now did I perceive the beauty of our country . . . and my heart beat loudly with joy and happiness. The day ended . . . When I arrived in Warsaw, the city was drowned in lights. I thought I was in the land of fairy tales, but it was reality.

It was, writes Chmieliński, 'the happiest day of my life.'³² By contrast, Nowa Huta at first sight was a disappointment. Chmieliński, expecting a great 'socialist city', found instead the village of Ruszcza, which closely resembled his home town, and an encampment of tents – his future quarters. In conversation with those already at work in the brigade, Chmieliński and the other recruits learned that work was hard and the promised vocational training had failed to materialise. Discoveries like these commonly led to large numbers of arrivals requesting immediate discharge or simply leaving of their own accord (desertion during the first two months reached 19 per cent in some brigades). Some recruits had mistaken impressions about the types of professions for which they might qualify in the brigades – foresters, tailors, radio mechanics or even pastry chefs; others perhaps decided that the proportion of work to 'school' was rather different from what they had expected.³³ If *junacy* stayed, sometimes it was only by default (one *junak* was too embarrassed at his head having been shaved for lice to return home).³⁴ Others felt that life in the brigades would suit them.

For those who, like Chmieliński, remained, the highlight of induction to the brigade was receipt of the khaki uniform with its military-style cap and red tie, which by consensus was 'truly smart.'³⁵ After a haircut, a medical examination, and his first shower, Chmieliński – like many recruits – symbolically burned his old

³¹ Stephen Kotkin, 'Coercion and Identity: Workers' Lives in Stalin's Showcase City', in Lewis H. Siegelbaum and Ronald Grigor Suny, eds., *Making Workers Soviet: Power, Class, and Identity* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994), 302–3.

³² Chmieliński, 'Tu chciałem żyć,' 448.

³³ AAN ZMP 451/XI-30, k. 3; APKr SPKr 109, k. 53.

³⁴ 'Elf', 'Najgorszy był jednak początek', in Stefan Kozicki and Zbigniew Stolarek, eds., *Krajobraz ogni. Antologia reportaży o Nowej Hucie* (Warsaw: Iskry), 1964, 48.

³⁵ 'Elf', 'Początek,' 48.

clothes.³⁶ In the uniform, he felt transformed: ‘Sometimes I furtively looked at myself in the mirror and I couldn’t get over how different I now appeared’ from the tattered herd-boy from Przasnysz. At dinner, Chmieliński noted that portions were weighed out the same for everyone; wearing the same clothes, eating the same food, and sharing the same quarters, ‘all of us [in the brigade] were equal’. For the first time, Chmieliński writes, he fell asleep that night ‘completely happy’.³⁷

But the honeymoon was short-lived. Daily life in the brigade followed a gruelling schedule: after gymnastics, washing, breakfast, assembly and roll-call, and the distribution of work assignments, *junacy* began their march to work at a quarter to six in the morning, sometimes ten to twelve kilometres. Along the way, they sang songs: ‘We ZMP aren’t afraid of reaction or work, no, no!’ or ‘Youth and SP, inseparable sisters two – SP, hey, SP!’ Passing through surrounding villages, they were often observed in hostile silence by inhabitants, although occasionally the local girls blew kisses to the boys in uniform.³⁸ The day was dominated by work, and the work itself was primitive and unmechanised (Krakovians quip that the steelworks was built with much the same technology as Kraków’s thirteenth-century Saint Mary’s church). On being handed his tools on the first day, Chmieliński was ‘very puzzled that we were to build a powerful plant and great modern city with shovel and pickaxe’.³⁹ *Junacy* were assigned to performing excavations, carting earth, digging up greenery, and building temporary roads.⁴⁰ The clayey soil did not yield easily at the best of times, but in autumn it became a deep, viscous mud in which rubber boots and tractors alike became hopelessly mired; in winter, the mud froze solid. During his first day on the job Chmieliński, although he was small for his age, wanted desperately to prove himself, but after only a few hours his hands were covered with sores. After the day’s work his ‘prize’ was the congratulations and handshakes of his colleagues and the platoon leader.⁴¹

When work ended at two in the afternoon, there was a midday meal and a brief rest, followed by further military exercises and a light supper. By that time, all that most *junacy* could think about was sleep. Loudspeakers would announce the results of the day’s work and play music. Sometimes activists circulated through the camp to speak about how Nowa Huta would look in five or ten years and its importance for building socialism.⁴² Yet for the great majority of recruits, contemplation of Nowa Huta’s future was not enough. As ‘Elf’ recalled of his first weeks in the brigade,

There prevailed a great dissatisfaction. Everything was promised us at the time of signing up – that there’d be some kind of schools, that we’d be able to choose our profession, etc. In

³⁶ APKr Radio Kraków, ‘Relacja Anny Siatkowskiej – materiał’ part 3, 1996, nr aud. 2661.

³⁷ ‘Here in the brigade my dream came true: for the first time in my life I became sick from overeating’, Chmieliński adds. ‘Tu chciałem żyć’, 450.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 452.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 452, 456.

⁴⁰ APKr SPKr 102, t. 10.

⁴¹ Chmieliński, ‘Tu chciałem żyć’, 454.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 467, 455.

reality it turned out these were fairy-tales . . . Outside work and the movies once a week, there was nothing. Boredom and utter pointlessness.⁴³

This leitmotif of demands for vocational training drowns out all other causes for dissatisfaction in brigade commanders' reports, such as complaints of inadequate footwear and winter clothing. As one wrote, *junacy* 'demanded [vocational training] at every step'. And in fact, the introduction of vocational training when it finally occurred seems almost always to have correlated with a general improvement in morale, even when it affected only a section of the brigade.⁴⁴ As 'Elf' recalled, when the long-promised courses finally began, 'in spite of everything, some other spirit entered into the "masses"'.⁴⁵

In the narratives of memoirists, this 'other spirit' is also closely connected with the introduction of Stakhanovite labour competition, or *współzawodnictwo* – competition within and among brigades for highest productivity at work. The latter was worked out as a percentage of a 'norm', the nominal basis of pay under the Soviet-style wage system. In practice, brigades billed the state firms with which *junacy* were employed according to this pay system, and brigades designated a certain amount of this sum to *junacy*. In the brigade to which 'Elf' belonged, for example, those *junacy* whose work surpassed 100 per cent of the norm would receive the balance in a savings book. Others appear to have received cash in hand.⁴⁶

As Padraic Kenney has noted, 'labour competition was nothing less than a wager on the enthusiasm of new workers because it offered them a chance to earn more money, gain advance in the factory, and see their names in the newspaper'.⁴⁷ The 'wager' of labour competition was, by many accounts, a success among Nowa Huta's youth. 'The brotherhood was simply hot to work', writes 'Elf', describing how *junacy* would hurry to see their production results put up on the brigade scoreboard at the end of the day.⁴⁸ Brigade commanders were also pleased with the results of labour competition. 'Significant accomplishments should be noted in mobilising youth to dedicated productive work', wrote one in assessing the Fifty-First, Fifty-Second and Fifty-Third brigades. Some individuals distinguished themselves as 'model workers' (*przodownicy pracy*) like the *junak* Ożański, habitually performing at 200 per cent of the norm. Others committed themselves to working extra hours without pay: for example, by working one Sunday in June, the entire Fifty-First Brigade 'earned' money designated to buy a tractor for the State Centre of Agricultural Machines, while other sums were designated for civilians in Korea. *Junacy* also took part in savings campaigns: under the slogan 'faster and cheaper', *junak* Kołodziej gathered a group of twenty colleagues and pledged to use all the broken bricks scattered about a particular building site.⁴⁹

⁴³ 'Elf', 'Początek', 48.

⁴⁴ APKr SPKr 109, kk. 2, 54, 20.

⁴⁵ 'Elf', 'Początek', 51.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 51.

⁴⁷ Kenney, *Rebuilding Poland*, 238.

⁴⁸ 'Elf', 'Początek', 51.

⁴⁹ AAN ZMP 451/XI–30, k. 10.

Although considerable exaggeration – and at times falsification – must be factored into accounts of the *results* of *współzawodnictwo*, the spirit of enthusiasm, by contrast, seems to have been genuine. This, at least, is the consensus among eye-witnesses, regardless of political profile:⁵⁰ as one put it, ‘*przodownicy* were people with fire in the belly. They were engaged, didn’t ask about money, were given to sacrifices. There was such an enthusiasm after the war – a conviction that one must do something’.⁵¹ If such sentiments are to be even partially credited, the experience of Nowa Huta’s builders contradicts Kenney’s finding that genuine enthusiasm for labour competition faded after 1949, as the state insisted more and more on an ‘new idea of work’ that was ‘not for oneself and one’s family, or for Poland, but for the party’.⁵² Two possible explanations for this disjuncture present themselves. First, while the workers Kenney studies had learned certain lessons in their dealings with the Party between 1945 and 1949, those arriving in Nowa Huta fresh from the village had little access to this collective wisdom; unlike new generations of workers in traditional industries, they were largely isolated from more experienced workers who might have passed on these lessons. Thus one finds *junacy* conforming to Kenney’s pre-1949 patterns – engaging in *współzawodnictwo* both in enjoyment of the act of competition itself and in anticipation of potential material reward.

Second, the very terms in which Nowa Huta tended to be portrayed in official media served, in a sense, to subvert a strict party-ideological framing of *współzawodnictwo*. In newspapers, newsreels, prose and poetry, Nowa Huta’s builders – explicitly identified as the town’s future steelworkers and/or inhabitants – appeared as the primary beneficiaries of their own work in the near future. Secondary benefits – in the form of increased industrial capacity – would, it was made clear, accrue to all of Poland. Indeed, the fact that building Nowa Huta was often used as a metaphor for ‘building socialism’ had the rather contradictory effect of eliding ‘socialism’ with economic development broadly defined rather than any partisan political programme. Thus, while one was said to be building Nowa Huta at the call of the Party, one did so precisely for the good of ‘oneself’, ‘one’s family’ and above all ‘Poland’. Chmieliński, who dreamed of being a *przodownik* and having his picture in the newspaper,

⁵⁰ Interviews with Augustyn and Krystyna Gil, Leszek Kalkowski, and Franciszek Kielbik, Kraków, Poland, 1997–8. Based on her own interviews with residents, Dorota Gut writes that their ‘awareness of all the negative social and political transformations [of the Stalinist era] . . . does not rule out a positive evaluation of the period as a whole. Reminiscences of the 1950s are coloured with considerable nostalgia; for many, it was above all a time of disinterested efforts, authentic engagement and enthusiasm’. Dorota Gut, ‘Nowa Huta w świetle publikacji z lat 50-tych i w świadomości jej mieszkańców’, master’s thesis, Jagiellonian University, 1991, 74.

⁵¹ Similarly: ‘People lived by those norms. They went to volunteer activities after work; there was an enormous enthusiasm. *Przodownicy* were idealistic people who believed in what they were doing. Those young people who came to build [Nowa Huta] didn’t ask how much they’d be paid, but what was to be done, and whether they’d succeed. Spontaneity and enthusiasm were everywhere.’ Gut, ‘Nowa Huta’, 74.

⁵² Kenney, *Rebuilding Poland*, 286, 275.

firmly believed that with a common effort we would build in a few years a splendid city in which I would live and work . . . I didn't count the hours of work. I built as though I was building my own house. I believed that I was working for myself and my children.⁵³

And even where labour mobilisation was cast in overtly ideological terms (e.g., pledges to finish a children's clinic ahead of schedule to celebrate the anniversary of the October Revolution), in the local newspaper *We Are Building Socialism* model workers were consistently allowed to emphasise the satisfaction they gained from their contribution to Nowa Huta's future residents (in this case, its children), with little talk of the Party or the October Revolution.⁵⁴

The drive to transform *junacy* into efficient, skilled, and productive workers who identified their own individual work as an essential component of a larger, desirable goal – whether building Nowa Huta or 'building socialism' – can, therefore, be judged a considerable success. Yet this achievement was, I would argue, a double-edged sword. This becomes most apparent in brigade commanders' and technicians' reports detailing problems at the 'work front'. For workers, production at a high percentage of the norm depended on the firm's adequate preparation and provision of this 'front'. Certain types of work conditions were naturally more conducive to high productivity than others, depending on such factors as weather, tools or work organisation (too many workers on one job, for example, would lower individual output). In theory, such irregularities were meant to be addressed through the mechanism of the day rate: certain types of work were recognised as unsuited to labour competition and were therefore paid automatically at 100 per cent of the norm. For *junacy*, however, being paid by the day was tantamount to not being paid at all, since they only received pay in hand for work *above* 100 per cent, the remainder going directly to the state treasury. The practice of labour competition, therefore, created pressure from below not only for piece rates instead of day rates, but for work conditions that would guarantee the highest possible output.⁵⁵ Meanwhile, firms not unjustifiedly assumed that *junacy* would be less productive than more experienced 'civilian' workers, often treating brigades as surplus labour.⁵⁶ The result was a frequent clash of interests, as firms distributed the 'work front' – essentially a scarce commodity – more readily to more favoured categories of workers.

Thus, for example, in July 1951, the leadership of the Thirty-Ninth Brigade reported that *junacy* were continually being moved from one place of work to the other by the firms with which they were contracted, which meant in many cases that youth who had undertaken work pledges for that month were unable to

⁵³ Chmieliński, 'Tu chciałem żyć,' 454, 456.

⁵⁴ *Budujemy Socjalizm*, Vol. 1, No. 12 (1950), 1.

⁵⁵ For a case where *junacy* demand that their pay be calculated according to piece- rather than day-rates, see AAN ZMP 451/XI–52, k. 15.

⁵⁶ APKr ORZZWK, p. 591, t. 6392, n.p. On the 'hoarding' of labour see Katherine Verdery, *What Was Socialism, and What Comes Next?* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), 22, and Stanisław Wellisz, *The Economics of the Soviet Bloc: A Study of Decision Making and Resource Allocation* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1966), 61.

complete them. Poor organisation of the ‘work front,’ moreover, meant that certain platoons were ‘condemned’ to low output, with nothing to do for several hours each day. One group had worked at 180 per cent of norm at their previous work site, and now was achieving 15 to 30 per cent. As a result, the desire of these *junacy* to participate in work competition had declined. At a meeting called to evaluate productivity on 13 May 1951, members of the Thirty-Seventh Brigade directed a variety of complaints toward management, from an inadequate supply of tools to tardy, incompetent or absent foremen. Worse still, *junacy* said that they were often forced to wander about the site, sometimes for several hours, actually looking for work – which naturally lowered their output for the day. Sometimes firms provided no work at all. Such ‘mistakes’, wrote one trade union officer, ‘have a demobilising effect on exemplary volunteer brigades.’⁵⁷

In the end, according to one assessment, a full 40 per cent of work by *junacy* was performed at less than 100 per cent of the norm; and about half of all brigade members never took part in work competition.⁵⁸ Moreover, few *junacy* received adequate practical training in their professions, because firms failed to provide appropriate work.⁵⁹ A joint letter from the leadership of the Fifty-Second Brigade to the Kraków province command of SP, requesting intervention with the management of the state construction firm to resolve the firm’s failure to employ *junacy* as contracted, including the provision of practical training in several areas, concludes:

The question arises why on the one hand we have a recruitment campaign, when on the other participants of brigades have no employment. Moreover, participants of the brigade see the futility of their presence in the brigade. . . [raising] concerns that there will be desertions in the near future.⁶⁰

IV

In a December 1950 circular to brigade commanders in Nowa Huta, the provincial command of SP in Kraków called the success of youth in forwarding the goals of the Six-Year Plan ‘salt in the eyes’ of the class enemy. Nonetheless, it stated, the enemy’s work could be seen all the more often in poor discipline among *junacy*. *Junacy* went about with their belts undone, unshaven and dirty. They could be found drinking in restaurants and creating a ruckus on the streets of Kraków. Defying strict orders, they were frequently discovered in women workers’ quarters in Nowa Huta, ‘behaving immorally’, or getting into fights, often in a drunken state.⁶¹

By the early 1950s, the ‘class enemy’ could well rejoice at the widespread reputation *junacy* had gained among respectable citizens as ‘hooligans’. An ingredient

⁵⁷ APKr SPKr 102, t. 10, k. 42; APKr SPKr 101, n.p.; APKr SPKr 100, k. 65; APKr ORZZWK, p. 591, t. 6392, n.p.

⁵⁸ APKr SPKr 109, k. 174.

⁵⁹ *Budujemy Socjalizm*, Vol. 2, No. 4 (1951), 4.

⁶⁰ APKr SPKr 100, k. 65.

⁶¹ APKr SPKr 100, n.p.

in a certain ‘black legend’ of Nowa Huta, the image of *junak* as hooligan was, like that of *junak* as *przodownik*, no doubt much exaggerated by contemporaries.⁶² Nonetheless, it bespoke the underlying failure of the Party and its intermediate organs to channel the social energies of *junacy* with the same effectiveness it had exercised in the productive arena. The Leninist ideal of the disciplined, self-controlled proletarian was juxtaposed with the reality of a postwar generation groping for its place in the new order.

‘It is not enough today to fight for good work. It is necessary simultaneously to struggle for good people, for their high ideological, moral and cultural level’, declared ZMP activist Józef Tejchma in 1955.⁶³ In a society where the intelligentsia had long felt the burden of leading the ‘nation’, but where the divide between urban, educated society and the ‘backward’, rural masses was profound, this meant more than ideological indoctrination. It was in effect a civilising mission, which might begin with a task as basic as teaching those who had never seen internal plumbing the difference between a washbasin and a flush toilet.⁶⁴

Cultural and educational activities were focused within each brigade in a so-called ‘red corner’, or common room – ideally a ‘clean, pleasant corner with coffee, music, newspapers, dance’ – supervised by a cultural instructor.⁶⁵ The most typical red corner activities were straightforwardly recreational. During April 1950 the Sixty-Fourth Brigade learned several new songs (marches as well as some current hits) and engaged in contests for singing and for the best contribution to the brigade’s wall newspaper; there were field trips to an educational exhibit on venereal disease, to the medieval tumulus Wanda’s Mound, and outside town for soccer and volleyball. *Junacy* reportedly read 170 books, the most popular being war stories. In the same month, the Sixtieth Brigade’s artistic troupe gave performances for workers in Nowa Huta and around the region, while several comradesly soccer matches with youth in the villages of Mogiła, Czyżyny and Wieliczka were reportedly a great success.⁶⁶

In education, the ‘battle with illiteracy’ campaign of the early 1950s played a prominent role in Nowa Huta. During 1950–1, 206 *junacy* reportedly attended literacy classes in the three year-long brigades. In the same period the Fifty-Second Brigade alone read 2,770 books and saw on average seven to eight films a month.⁶⁷ Political education occupied about two hours per week, consisting of conversational lectures on themes like ‘the splendid achievements of People’s Poland’, ‘production co-operatives in the village’, or ‘Soviet youth – the leading [*przodująca*] youth of the world’. Reports include ‘success stories’ like that of ‘Kazimierz S[. . .], who at the

⁶² See Gut, *Nowa Huta*, 68–71.

⁶³ Józef Tejchma, *Z notatnika aktywisty ZMP* (Warsaw: Iskry, 1955), 44. Tejchma later became Minister of Culture and was instrumental in getting Andrzej Wajda’s *Man of Marble* approved by censors.

⁶⁴ Interview with Leszek Kalkowski, Kraków, Poland, 3 Mar. 1998.

⁶⁵ Józef Tejchma, *Pożegnanie z władzą* (Warsaw: Projekt, 1996), 45.

⁶⁶ APKr SPKr 158, kk. 34, 85.

⁶⁷ AAN ZMP 451/XI–30, kk. 12–13.

beginning was ashamed of his red tie and presently is an active member of ZMP and wears his ZMP tie with pride (there was an occasion when he washed his tie specially on leaving for vacation, and said that he would put it on at home out of spite for the *kulaks*).⁶⁸

In hindsight, we know that Nowa Huta's population participated in the broad secular trends of rising literacy and educational levels among formerly disadvantaged groups in postwar Poland;⁶⁹ however, whether *junacy* participated in this trend at a higher rate than 'civilian' workers in Nowa Huta (or youth more generally) is hard to say. Some *junacy* were able to take advantage of opportunities for significant educational advancement. 'Elf', for example, forged a document certifying he had completed sixth grade in order to gain admission to a training course that led, ultimately, to night school at a technical university.⁷⁰ Edmund Chmieliński had less luck: although granted a scholarship to vocational secondary school, he was forced to drop out when he could not afford incidental fees not covered by his scholarship.⁷¹

In the cultural arena, contemporaries complained about the 'narrow and primitive' cultural predilections of Nowa Huta's youth. According to one ZMP report, getting youth to theatre or museums was a Sisyphean labour; 'it suffices however to have a jazz orchestra for a moment, for a tremendous gathering of youth to form instantly'.⁷² Tejchma confirms that many young Nowa Hutans resisted, for example, being brought to 'good shows' at Kraków's Old Theatre, but in retrospect can afford to be more sanguine about the results: 'If even a few became enthusiasts of the theatre, that was progress and success', he writes.⁷³ Among these few would certainly be counted Chmieliński, who by his own account 'adored books and movies so much' that he would sometimes walk the seven or ten kilometres to Kraków after a hard day's work so as not to miss a show. As a crane operator in the steelworks, Chmieliński later served as cultural organiser for his union branch.⁷⁴

Chmieliński would also qualify as one of SP's ideological success stories:

In the brigade I often heard the words: proletariat, communism, socialism, Marxism, Leninism. For me these words were strange and incomprehensible. I wanted to get to know them better, find out what they meant and why they were so often used, so in my free moments after work I read all the political brochures, magazines, and books I could find. I also read a few works on the life and activities of Lenin . . . After a certain time I joined ZMP. It was a great celebration for me when I got my [ZMP] i.d. and stamp and the leader shook my hand.⁷⁵

In 1950, more than two-thirds of the yearly brigade participants were ZMP members (over 60 per cent in the seasonal brigades). And yet, *junacy* appeared to be

⁶⁸ APKr SPKr 158, k. 88; AAN ZMP 451/XI-30, k. 12.

⁶⁹ Franciszek Adamski, 'Nowa Huta na tle procesów urbanizacyjnych Polski powojennej', *Roczniki nauk społecznych*, III (1975), 236.

⁷⁰ 'Elf', 'Początek', 67-8.

⁷¹ Chmieliński, 'Tu chciałem żyć', 471-2.

⁷² AAN ZMP 451/VI-40, k. 244-5.

⁷³ Tejchma, *Pożegnanie*, 45.

⁷⁴ Chmieliński, 'Tu chciałem żyć', 491-2.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 453.

especially vulnerable to ‘enemy activity’. Sometimes this ‘enemy’ was organised and could be exposed, like a purported Underground Youth (or Scout) Organisation charged with passing out literature encouraging *junacy* to desert, or a Catholic Youth Association allegedly supported by the priests in the village church.⁷⁶ A ‘light cavalry’ of the most reliable ZMP members within each brigade was formed to unmask enemy activity, including sabotage and the illegal sale of alcohol. It was not always easy to identify the source of negative influences, however. Once, the ‘class enemy’ allegedly took advantage of a rumour that ‘murdered seasonal brigade members’ were buried in a certain rye field. This caused a panic to spread through the Ninety-Ninth Brigade, and *junacy* were afraid to sleep at night in tents close to the field.⁷⁷

But negative influences on *junacy* were also thought to be the result of contamination by, among others, SP cadres and ‘civilian’ workers. The former were blamed for vulgarity among *junacy*; the latter, with their ‘weak political consciousness’, were said to lower morale by complaining, spreading rumors (e.g., that Nowa Huta would be fenced in and no one would be allowed to leave), and inviting *junacy* to drink alcohol.⁷⁸ Incidents such as that in the Fifty-First ZMP Brigade, when the visiting sister of a *junak* was ‘provoked [by commanders] to stay in the Brigade and to drink wine’, were not atypical. (During an inspection, the girl was found partly naked in the company storeroom.) A year-end report noted, moreover, that ‘some educators . . . in the yearly ZMP brigades don’t possess the elementary basics of pedagogy’, citing a cadre of the Fifty-First Brigade who humiliated a *junak* who had never seen a tie and didn’t know how to put it on: ‘The Company Chief ordered him to tie it on his —, and then ordered him to go in front of the company and shout where he was supposed to put his tie.’⁷⁹

Junak discipline was reported as low within the brigade,⁸⁰ but more especially outside it. The movement of *junacy* through the (quite literally) contested territory surrounding SP camps and work sites – inhabited by peasants assumed with good reason to be hostile to Nowa Huta – was policed by the so-called Citizen Militia (Milicja Obywatelska, or MO). Public transport between Kraków and Nowa Huta, as well as the road itself, came under sharp surveillance on Sundays and holidays when *junacy* were off work. In June 1950 the MO reported misbehaviour by inebriated *junacy* at the bus stations in Mogiła and Kraków on Sundays, including cases of *junacy* insulting ‘civilians’ and pushing them off crowded buses. Some *junacy* travelling the road to Kraków on foot harassed other pedestrians, asking them for money. In response to such incidents, the provincial SP command instructed Nowa Huta brigades to institute patrols by reliable *junak* activists to monitor these hot spots. Patrols were charged with taking in any *junak* who disturbed the peace or was

⁷⁶ AAN ZMP 451/XI–52, k. 5; AAN ZMP 451/XI–30, kk. 10–1; AAN ZMP 451/XI–32, k. 159.

⁷⁷ AAN ZMP 451/XI–30, kk. 10–11; APKr SPKr 109, kk. 196–7.

⁷⁸ APKr SPKr 109, kk. 54, 102; AAN ZMP 451/XI–52, k. 67.

⁷⁹ APKr SPKr 109, k. 3; AAN ZMP 451/XI–52, kk. 22–3.

⁸⁰ APKr SPKr 158, kk. 193–4.

inappropriately dressed, drunk, or absent without leave, turning offenders over to their home brigades for disciplinary action; more serious cases were to be delivered to the MO.⁸¹

The earliest report of a scuffle between *junacy* and MO functionaries dates from April 1950, when two *junacy* from the Sixtieth Brigade were arrested for attempting to intervene in the MO's arrest of peasants charged with illegally selling meat to workers. The account is unusual in ascribing political motivations to the arrested *junacy*; more typically, reports fail to specify any immediate cause for 'incidents' between *junacy* and the MO.⁸² The term 'hooliganism', invariably used to describe such 'incidents' (which resulted in seventeen arrests among yearly brigade members in 1951–2), captured the ambiguities of the situation.⁸³ Scuffles with the MO were clearly nothing less than attacks on the representatives of state authority, and were therefore not to be taken lightly; yet their inarticulate rebelliousness and very lack of conspiratorial guile failed to conform to any pattern recognisable as 'enemy activity'.⁸⁴ Some ZMP officials complained that the courts were too lenient toward *junacy* charged in such encounters.⁸⁵ In fact, no one was quite sure how to assess or address the matter of hooliganism.

While not all *junacy* were hooligans, this nuance was often lost on observers who came to associate the highly visible green uniforms with trouble. 'Elf', who trained and worked as an electrician in Nowa Huta after his release from the brigade, describes *junacy* in terms reminiscent of a Western-style gang, as being both capricious and territorial: they 'went about in crowds, unchecked by anyone, sowing terror. Even the militia didn't get involved in their exploits – they simply avoided encountering them'. Once while living in a dormitory for worker scholars, he awoke in the middle of the night to find a crowd of *junacy* in the act of storming the building. They got as far as the second floor before residents managed to push them back, but in the process one hapless defender was dragged out of the building by *junacy* and beaten mercilessly.⁸⁶ What sense of identity underlay such gang-like activity? *Junak*-hooligans marked their otherness from 'civilians', Krakovians, and the police. Tension with civilian workers, as we have seen, derived from relations at the workplace; and workers from Nowa Huta, not only *junacy*, frequently remarked on their otherness from Krakovians, who they (not altogether incorrectly) believed disliked and looked down on them. *Junacy*'s behaviour towards these groups seems

⁸¹ APKr SPKr 158, kk. 178–9.

⁸² APKr SPKr 158, k. 85; APKr SPKr 100, k. 28, e.g.

⁸³ The words 'hooligan' and 'hooliganism' entered the Russian language in the late-Imperial period, when the terms were used in debates over urban criminality; thereafter they became part of the Stalinist idiom. Joan Neuberger, *Hooliganism: Crime, Culture, and Power in St. Petersburg, 1900–1914* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993).

⁸⁴ Compare efforts by East German authorities to interpret rebellious behaviour by the so-called *Halbstarcken* in the same period. Uta G. Poiger, 'Rebels With A Cause? American Popular Culture, the 1956 Youth Riots, and New Conceptions of Masculinity in East and West Germany', in Rainer Pommerin, ed., *The American Impact on Postwar Germany* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995).

⁸⁵ One group of *junacy* charged with attacking MO functionaries during a raid on a women's hostel received between six and eight months in prison (one was acquitted). AAN ZMP 451/XI–32, k. 160.

⁸⁶ 'Elf', 'Początek', 62.

to indicate a sense of both marginalisation and entitlement, however; if *junacy* pushed civilians off the bus, presumably they felt they had more of a right to a seat. But *junak* provocations of the militia are harder to interpret. ‘Elf’ describes how *junacy*, roaming in gangs, goaded passers-by:

When they didn’t like the look of someone, the question usually came: ‘What don’t you like, the system or SP?’ It was dangerous to answer ‘the system [*ustrój*]’, but worse still ‘SP’. Then you’d have to reckon with returning home via a detour through the hospital with a dozen broken ribs.⁸⁷

The framing of the remarkable question posed here by *junacy* leaves their relationship with ‘the system’ highly ambiguous. It indicates an identification with that system – but one that is secondary to their identification with SP, thus inverting the system’s own pyramidal hierarchy. Moreover, the very audacity of posing such a question in a Stalinist context indicates something more, or less, than regime loyalty. If these are rebels without a cause, theirs is a very complex nihilism indeed.

The concept of *Eigensinn* – ‘the creative reappropriation of the conditions of daily life [implying] a striving for time and space of one’s own’ – is, I believe, a useful way to understand forms of behaviour in Nowa Huta that defy conventional understandings of everyday life under Stalinism, including the territorial behaviour of *junacy*, who carved a ‘time and space of their own’ out of a landscape saturated with ideological meaning. This is particularly so because it enables us to conceptualize the relationship between these ‘everyday’ forms of working-class culture and organised or ‘high’ politics in a nuanced way, one that avoids simplistically reducing them to expressions of ‘resistance’. The political valences of *Eigensinn* are complex and ambiguous; they establish ‘capacities for individual or collective action’, but this potential need not always be mobilised against the prevailing order.⁸⁸ Indeed, as Alf Lüdtke has shown in the case of Nazi Germany, workers’ *Eigensinn* can also be called upon to support and defend those in power.⁸⁹ *Eigensinn* generally takes on political meaning when galvanised by particular events. It was not until 1956 that developments in Poland at large overtook Nowa Huta, recasting its residents’ unruly behaviour in an altogether new light.

V

The ‘black legend’ of Nowa Huta, though it has taken many forms over the years, was most influentially articulated by the poet Adam Ważyk in 1955 with publication of his ‘Poem for Adults’ – all the more shocking because of Ważyk’s reputation as a die-hard Stalinist. Announcing that ‘there were people from Nowa Huta/ who have never been in a theatre’, Ważyk suggested a Hieronymous Bosch-like scene of

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 62.

⁸⁸ Alf Lüdtke, ‘Organisational Order or *Eigensinn*? Workers’ Privacy and Workers’ Politics in Imperial Germany’, in Sean Wilentz, ed., *Rites of Power: Symbolism, Ritual, and Politics since the Middle Ages* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 1985), 305, 314, 312.

⁸⁹ Alf Lüdtke, ‘The Appeal of Exterminating “Others”: German Workers and the Limits of Resistance’, *Journal of Modern History*, Vol. 64, suppl. (1992), S46–S67.

'half-demented' crowds of rural migrants to Nowa Huta 'living wild' in a purgatory devoid of meaning or morals. The 'first socialist city' had become a human wasteland: '. . . In coal smoke, in slow torment,/ from this the working class is smelted./A great deal of refuse. And to date only *kasza*'.⁹⁰ For Ważyk and other critics, the Party had concerned itself too much with the imperatives of production and not enough with Poles' spiritual needs. Nowa Huta symbolised this failure: *junacy* and other young workers had been spurred to great achievements in production, but at what moral cost? Ważyk's poem, which sponsored a highly critical internal Party review of conditions in Nowa Huta, thus marked an important step in the 'thaw' ultimately leading to the overthrow of the Stalinist regime in 1956.⁹¹

One victim of the thaw was the universal service requirement for Polish youth, which was eliminated in 1953. In 1955, 'Służba Polsce' was itself dissolved. The significance of SP for Nowa Huta in particular, and for postwar Poland in general, must be seen in the context of Stalinist labour mobilisation and the 'social advancement' of a new generation of young workers. The logic of Stalinist labour mobilisation posited a connection between a worker's individual effort and the achievement of a collective goal. As we have seen, the Party was successful in mobilising *junacy* to great exertions in the field of production – but beyond the opportunity to acquire skills and qualifications, what did young people in Nowa Huta want, and did they get it? Those in positions of authority increasingly came to mistrust and fear this inarticulate mass, which refused either to endorse or oppose the regime for which it laboured.

For some *junacy*, having been encouraged to view themselves as beneficiaries of a new social order, an enormous sense of betrayal resulted when promised goods failed to materialise. After his expulsion from school, Chmieliński suffered a nervous breakdown, unable to comprehend an injustice that seemed so starkly to contradict the principles he felt he had toiled for in the brigades. In 1952 he became a homeless alcoholic eating out of garbage cans on Nowa Huta's streets and sleeping in the cellars of its unfinished buildings.⁹² In some respects Chmieliński shared a similar fate to Stakhanovite hero Piotr Ożański, who following a brief but stellar rise to national celebrity, was fired from his job and expelled from the Party for alcoholism in 1952 – apparently another of Ważyk's lost souls.⁹³

Personal catastrophes like these help us understand, in part, the transformation of *Eigensinn* into politics. Chmieliński never wavered in his vow, formed in his early days in SP uniform, to live and work in Nowa Huta forever. After a period of training and rehabilitation in Silesia, he was finally able to secure a steady job at the

⁹⁰ *Nowa Kultura*, 21 Aug. 1955. See Dariusz Jarosz, 'Jak słowo stawało się ciałem,' *Mowią wieki*, Vol. 38, No. 10 (1996), 19–23, and Marci Shore, 'Some Words for Grown-Up Marxists: "A Poem for Adults" and the Revolt from Within', *The Polish Review*, Vol. XLII, No. 2 (1997), 131–54.

⁹¹ Dariusz Jarosz, "'Notatka o sytuacji w Nowej Hucie" z października 1955 roku', *Polska 1944/45–1989. Studia i materiały*, Vol. 2 (1996), 309–30.

⁹² Chmieliński, 'Tu chciałem żyć', 471–87.

⁹³ APKr KP PZPR 60/IV/5, k. 370.

Lenin steelworks in 1955. But, alienated by what he saw as an alliance between fat-cat management and self-serving union and Party bosses, he shed no tears at the demise of the Stalinist regime during the ‘Polish October’ of 1956 (marked at the Lenin steelworks by the plant’s administration being unceremoniously dumped outside the factory gates in a wheelbarrow). Chmieliński – once the proud bearer of the *junak*’s red tie, whose breast had swelled singing mass songs on May Day – should have been one of the system’s staunchest supporters, but ultimately he experienced a sense of alienation not unlike what he had once felt in the village.⁹⁴ In the final analysis, the regime’s failure to secure legitimacy among its natural constituency during the Stalinist years turned out to be critical to its survival, contributing to its recurring crises and ultimate collapse. At moments of crisis, it was all too easy for Poles of the generation that ‘built socialism’ to feel that, while socialism’s failures were the fault of those in power, its accomplishments had been theirs alone.

⁹⁴ Chmieliński, ‘Tu chciałem żyć’, 487.