

There is also something cinematic about the portrait of Escobar's lawyer Guido Parra—pompous, unctuous, and indiscreet—who mishandles the negotiation and winds up dead in the trunk of a car. Parra is the closest thing to a caricature here, yet even he is more than that. Márquez has the great novelist's sympathy for all of his characters, not least for the villain, who overshadows the whole book but does not appear until the epilogue: "Villamizar knew who he was at first sight only because he was different from all the other men he had ever seen in his life." At his surrender, when Escobar orders the police to lower their guns, they automatically obey. Clearly this is a man who might have been great, but for "his total inability to distinguish between good and evil."

For almost a year Escobar lived in the prison specially built for him and his cronies, where he continued to run his narcotics business. But when the authorities finally objected to the luxurious fur-

nishings he had smuggled in, their guest checked out. A year later, he was dead at the hands of the police. By that time he was already a has-been, the center of the country's drug trade having moved from Medellín to Cali.

In the last few years, the national police have captured or killed all of the Cali cartel's leaders, apparently auguring an end to "the biblical holocaust that has been consuming Colombia for more than twenty years." Yet the current president, Ernesto Samper, has been compromised by accusations that the cartel financed his election, and the ensuing scandal has brought on sanctions by the United States. Guerrilla groups that dominate parts of the countryside are increasingly involved in drug dealing, kidnapping, and extortion (from mercenary rather than revolutionary motives). In *News of a Kidnapping*, Márquez prescribes no cure for his country's suffering. The only hope he offers is in the courage of its people. ❁

West rebelled by joining anarchist groups or sampling dope, we rebelled by going on pilgrimages, building street altars for the Corpus Christi procession, or helping to tidy up a chapel."

When Karol Wojtyła, archbishop of Cracow, became Pope John Paul II in 1978, "the church's victory in my soul became irreversible." Sikorski describes how the Pope's visit to Poland in 1979 profoundly altered the psychological balance of forces between "we"—the Polish people—and "them"—their Communist overlords. The huge crowds that spontaneously turned out to greet the Pope suddenly became aware of their own power. "We realized for the first time that 'we' were more numerous than 'them.'... It was partly from that feeling of millions of people coming peacefully together and feeling their strength that Solidarity grew the very next year."

It goes without saying that Sikorski and his parents were enthusiastic Solidarity supporters from the outset. Thus, when word reached them that a Solidarity delegation—led by a radical firebrand named Jan Rulewski—was locked in a tense confrontation with riot police in the center of Bydgoszcz, Sikorski and his father quickly arrived on the scene. They were in time to watch Rulewski being hauled off to an ambulance, his bloodstained, toothless face bearing eloquent witness to the brutality of the authorities.

The "Bydgoszcz provocation," as the incident became known, enraged all of Poland. It was universally assumed that hard-liners in the security forces had ordered Rulewski's beating to scuttle any possibility of compromise between Solidarity and the regime. Solidarity's leader, Lech Walesa, announced that unless the government apologized, he would

You Can Go Home Again

Full Circle:

A Homecoming to Free Poland

Radek Sikorski

Simon and Schuster / 276 pages / \$24

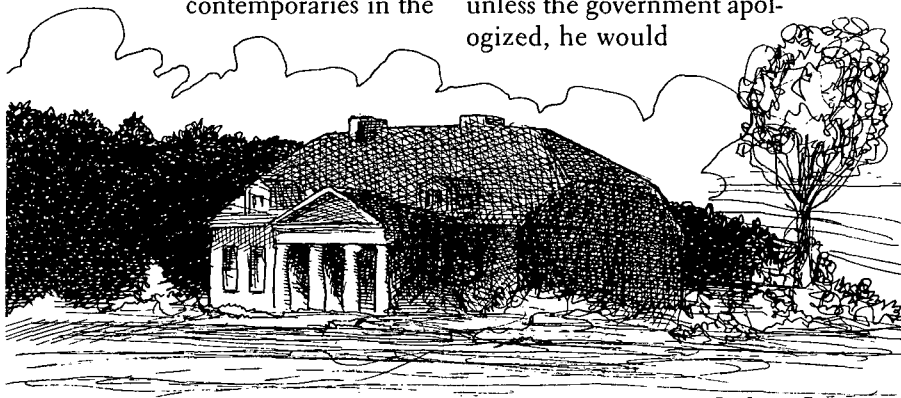
REVIEWED BY

Joseph Shattan

Radek Sikorski is one of those rare individuals with a knack for being wherever the action is. Though just 34 years old, he has been a Polish deputy defense minister, an Afghan guerrilla, a foreign correspondent, and a Solidarity activist. *Full Circle* is an engaging account of his adventures, not the least of which has been his successful effort to refurbish a dilapidated manor house and establish himself as a country squire in a Poland recently liberated from Communist tyranny.

Sikorski was born in Bydgoszcz, a city in north-central Poland, in 1963. His par-

ents were staunch anti-Communists, and thanks to them and the Catholic Church, so was he. "The Church always had an upper hand in the struggle for my soul," he writes. "Where the schoolteachers who tried to drum Communism into our heads used abstruse jargon—long words which they themselves barely understood—the priests used traditional Polish, with words that grabbed the heart rather than the brain." As a result, the teenaged Sikorski—though not especially pious—became an ardent churchgoer. "While our contemporaries in the



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call a general strike. Such a strike, in turn, would almost certainly precipitate a Soviet invasion.

"Briefly," writes Sikorski, "Bydgoszcz became the political capital of Poland, as Solidarity's top leaders and advisers, including Walesa, descended on the city, trailing the world's media... Through-out, I was in the very eye of the storm, in our local Solidarity headquarters." The 18-year-old Sikorski had a remarkable aptitude for the English language, and while the crisis raged, he served as Walesa's translator.

The danger of a Soviet invasion only receded when Walesa—at the Pope's urging—called off the threatened general strike. According to Sikorski, Walesa's abrupt announcement marked a turning point in Solidarity's fortunes. "People felt disoriented, betrayed and appalled by the arbitrariness with which Walesa made the decision to suspend the strike. Never again was the union to muster similar enthusiasm and a sense of purpose."

What made matters even worse was that there had, in fact, been no conspiracy by the security forces to provoke a violent incident at Bydgoszcz. As Rulewski eventually confessed to Sikorski, the reason the riot policeman slapped him was that Rulewski called him a "f---ing secret policeman." And the reason it appeared that Rulewski's teeth had been knocked out was that he had removed his dentures.

When martial law was imposed on Poland nine months after the Bydgoszcz provocation, Sikorski happened to be in London, where he had gone to perfect his English. Expecting to be arrested if he returned to Poland, Sikorski asked for, and promptly received, political asylum. He graduated from Pembroke College, Oxford, became a freelance journalist, traveled with the Afghan resistance and recorded his experiences in his first book, *Dust of the Saints*. In 1989, after the first semi-free Polish elections since World War II, Sikorski was finally able to return to Poland and realize a long-standing ambition: acquiring, and renovating, a broken-down manor house called Chobielin, located just outside Bydgoszcz. Although restoring Chobielin was a lengthy, cost-

ly undertaking, Sikorski viewed it as his last battle against the Communists:

Just as previously I had fought them with a telephoto lens, a word processor, and one or two bursts from an assault rifle, now I would fight their legacy with bricks, mortar and furniture polish. I wanted to purify a few acres of Poland from the filth, actual and metaphorical, of their rule. Instead of being forced to build their glorious future, I wanted to rescue something of Poland's past. My greatest reward, I told myself, would be if, in a few years' time, my guests would come, look around, and think that Communism had somehow spared this remote spot.

In 1992, however, Sikorski put his plans for Chobielin on hold after agreeing to serve as deputy to Jan Parys, the newly appointed Polish defense minister. Sikorski was in charge of the army's campaign to join NATO, but he soon found that many Polish officers still considered NATO the enemy. Sikorski describes one briefing by the chief of Polish military intelligence, Admiral Wawrzyniak, warning of menacing NATO deployments along Poland's frontiers. Not wishing to embarrass the old man, Parys took Wawrzyniak aside and explained that NATO was now Poland's friend. At the very next briefing, a chastened Wawrzyniak warned of menacing Russian deployments along Poland's frontiers. "I was more depressed than gratified by the military intelligence's sudden change of mind," writes Sikorski. "They had obviously tailored their message to what the politicians wanted to hear. If so, their information was worse than useless."

A problem more serious than the army's uncertain loyalties was President Walesa's determination to acquire nuclear weapons. Former KGB officers had secretly offered Poland five tactical nukes for a million dollars. Walesa's plan was to arrange for the swap on Polish territory, then have Polish troops retrieve the money once the transfer was completed. Admiral Wawrzyniak had assured Walesa that his scheme was "without risk."

Parys and Sikorski were appalled. If the Americans ever learned of the deal, they reasoned, Poland's prospects for joining NATO would be ruined. So Parys, exercising his prerogative as defense min-

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ister, refused to authorize the deal and sacked Wawrzyniak—a brave move that permanently antagonized Walesa and ultimately cost both him and Sikorski their jobs. For Sikorski, a long-time Walesa supporter, the president's behavior forced him to face the fact "that my former hero was half Mahatma Gandhi, half village yokel, and you could never be sure which side of his personality would predominate. He seemed capable of anything."

But Sikorski's disillusionment was not confined to Walesa: Polish society in general hasn't lived up to his expectations. In today's Poland, he writes, the old Communist elite, having successfully transformed its political power into economic clout, "is the new upper class, whereas those who made it possible for them—the workers who brought down Communism—remain the proletariat." Even more galling, there has been no moral reckoning with Poland's Communist past. Those who collaborated with the regime have not been made to answer for their deeds.

What about all the men and women who sacrificed their careers because they would not collaborate—the millions of ordinary people like my parents who were never seduced by ideology and never joined the Party for the sake of a career? From today's perspective, they were just dumb. They should have been swine, compromised their consciences and gotten ahead, for today they would be building on their privileges with a condescending smile at the simpletons.

Sikorski concludes his memoir on a note of philosophical resignation. Having been "inoculated" by his government service against the temptations of politics, he would have us believe that he is gladly retiring to Chobielin—"a patch where I want to see the trees that I have planted rise tall, where I want my children to roam, where I can take pleasure in growing old." In fact, he is currently running for parliament. Sikorski may well be in love with the *idea* of life in a manor house, but the daily routines of the Polish countryside are far too placid for a man of his activist temperament. He is the sort of person who is drawn to political conflict the way moths are attracted to a flame—and, as *Full Circle* makes abundantly clear, the conflict over Poland's future is far from over. ❧

We Can't Work It Out

The Excuse Factory: How Employment Law Is Paralyzing the American Workplace

Walter K. Olson

Free Press / 378 pages / \$25

REVIEWED BY

Matthew Scully

The latest landmark in employment law, coinciding with the arrival of Walter Olson's *The Excuse Factory*, was the "Seinfeld case": A jury in Milwaukee awarded \$26.6 million to one Jerold Mackenzie, fired from his job for recounting a "Seinfeld" episode to a female co-worker. A gag in the show had a sexual twist the woman found offensive. Fearing harassment charges, Miller Brewing Company in 1993 jettisoned the malefactor, who responded with a wrongful discharge suit. *Time* quotes the plaintiff's lawyer, of the San Francisco-based firm Littler, Mendelson specializing in employment litigation, saying the verdict might be evidence of "the pendulum swinging" against workplace harassment suits.

How such petty workplace quarrels ever became federal cases is Olson's subject in this devastating brief against America's employment lawyers. The office scold makes a big to-do over a meaningless incident, and four years later we find ourselves listening to Roger Cosack and Greta Van Susteren discussing *Mackenzie v. Miller Brewing* on CNN. A brewery, whose sole function in the world is to make beer, dismisses an otherwise fine employee and is then immersed in years of litigation, with more to come in appeals. Millions of dollars that should have gone to payroll, new distilling equipment, new hires, goes instead to a team of defense attorneys. Another jury, unable to follow simple instructions, decides to "send a message" with heavy punitive damages. Littler, Mendelson heads back to 'Frisco with a third or more of the \$26.6 million.

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Employment, Olson reminds us, used to be understood in fairly simple terms: I agree to lend my labor to you, you agree to pay me a specified amount of money. Either party is free, barring terms otherwise specified in written contract, to end the arrangement. I do not own the job. You do not own my labor.

Both the ill-treated employee and dissatisfied employer had the same recourse, Olson writes. Either one "could end the relation on short notice or none, much as we are free to stop dealing with a local tradesman if we grow dissatisfied with his service." Only where some specific contractual breach was at issue would the courts intervene, and then only to enforce the contract. Even unions did not shake the basic principle of "at will" employment. The workers, exercising their independence, simply agree to band together and deal with employers as one. And for a time at least, unions were run by men with some actual connection to the workplace and a stake in its well being.

By contrast, the employment lawyer of today is there to extract the highest possible damages for one client, never mind the interests of the company or its less contentious employees. Arbitration or other traditional in-house means of addressing worker complaints are, if anything, an obstacle to be averted on the way to court. Attempts to work things out short of litigation (talking it over with the aggrieved employee, reassigning the offender, changing office policy) are often grounds for still more legal action.

Where once litigation was seen as a final recourse, writes Olson, "By the late 1960's our legal establishment had begun to see things in an entirely new light. Lawyers and courts suddenly seemed like a potential vanguard of social progress. Litigation wasn't a miserable and costly last resort at all, but really a positive thing for society; nothing seemed more natural than to apply its many benefits to the workplace."

Here's an incomplete list of workplace grievances Olson examines in the book, all of recent mintage in the law schools, and