

Labour Focus on Eastern Europe



The non-communist left in Poland

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Tadeusz Kowalik Loyalty to Oneself: An Appreciation of Włodzimierz Brus
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Filip Stabrowski

Poland's Union of Labour

**The Dilemma of the Non-Communist Left
in Post-Communist Poland**

In the history of anti-communist opposition and dissent in post-war Eastern Europe, the Polish trade union Solidarność - in legal existence in 1980-81 and again from 1989 - occupies a special place, not only as the most dynamic independent social movement under communism, but also the most enigmatic. As an industrial trade union with nearly ten million members nationwide, closely tied to the Polish Catholic Church yet voicing the traditionally socialist demands of worker representation and self-management, Solidarność managed to unite diverse and seemingly contradictory ideological strands in a social movement directed against the communist state.

What is striking in today's Poland, however, is the virtual absence of one particularly important current within the Solidarność tradition - the democratic left opposition to communism - as an independent force on the political scene. Regrettable though it may be for those to whom Solidarność was not just a movement for national liberation, but also - and more importantly - the most spectacular postwar example of an industrial working class become a class "for itself" (to use Marx's dictum), the left tradition arising from the great trade union-cum social movement has all but disappeared. Despite a long and respectable pedigree dating back to Poland's era of partition, the non-communist left has experienced flagging political fortunes in the new pluralist democracy. Insofar as the left remained a formidable presence on the Polish political scene, it was a left deriving from the Polish United Workers

Party (PZPR).

Indeed, by 2001 the most ambitious attempt to consolidate the non-communist left in Poland after 1989, the Union of Labour (Unia Pracy - UP), had been all but reduced to an appendage of the communist successor party - the Democratic Left Alliance (SLD) - serving as, it has been suggested, the "social conscience" for the post-communists. Unia Pracy had risen to become the fourth largest party in the Sejm from 1993-1997, before failing in the 1997 parliamentary elections to meet the five percent threshold necessary to win parliamentary representation. Led by prominent figures from the Solidarność left tradition of 1980-81, this party registered a stunning success in 1993, only to be successively weakened and torn apart from within over the course of its Sejm term.

By December 1998, little over a year since it had lost its seats in the Sejm, UP had also shed all three of its founding members and was well on its way to forming an electoral coalition with its one-time rival on the left, the SLD. In the autumn of 2001 UP would return to parliament - equipped with its own leadership, parliamentary club, and government ministers - but now programmatically tied to its post-communist senior partner.

Why did the Polish non-communist left ultimately fail to establish and maintain its political autonomy in the post-communist period? How was it that the democratic left legacy of the anti-communist opposition - embodied most spectacularly by Solidarność - had proved so ephemeral? After all, the demands of the massive trade union Solidarność for radical social change in 1980-81 resonated with the struggles of social movements outside of the communist system to the extent that they spoke to the interests of the working class as a whole. The calls for a functioning market, the demand for worker self-management, the instruments of political democracy - these were all fundamental to the "Polish revolution". It was precisely this non-communist and democratic left so essential to the strength of Solidarność - both practically and symbolically - in 1980-81, that was so conspicuous in its absence after communism collapsed in 1989. When the need for the political left did return, moreover, as widespread disillusionment and disappointment with the liberal economic reform program had set in, it was not so much the post-Solidarity left that witnessed a renaissance of popular support, but a reinvented and repackaged post-communist left.

This article will offer a detailed analytic analysis of the rise and fall of Unia Pracy as an independent and non-communist party on the left of the

Polish political scene. More specifically, it will attempt to show how the non-communist left in general - and UP in particular - faced an array of difficulties in both its material and organizational party “base” and its political and ideological “superstructure”.

These disadvantages were largely *sui generis*, as the nature of Poland’s political and economic transformation was such that the left tradition within the Solidarność-based anti-communist opposition was doubly disadvantaged: materially and organizationally vis-à-vis the post-communists, whose resource base and personal networks remained unparalleled; and politically and ideologically vis-à-vis the post-Solidarność right, whose discourse of anti-communism was much more effective and easier to comprehend in the given political atmosphere. These dual challenges in the material/organizational “base” and the political/ideological “superstructure” proved insurmountable, as the following history of Unia Pracy from 1992 to 1998 will attempt to demonstrate.

I. The Consolidation of the Non-Communist Left

Solidarność Pracy

As the name suggests, Solidarność Pracy (SP) was an attempt to rescue the tradition of Solidarność 1980-81 for the non-communist left. For SP founding members, the great trade union-cum-social movement crushed by Jaruzelski’s tanks retained its salience in a post-communist Poland beset not just by economic and social trauma, but also by contempt on the part of the political elite for the participatory nature of democracy. In a collection of political essays from 1989-1991, SP founding member Modzelewski inveighed against what he perceived to be the Solidarność leadership’s betrayal of the values and ideals of 1980. He drew parallels between the Balcerowicz Plan and its familiar mantra (adopted from Margaret Thatcher), that “there is no alternative” (TINA), with the way in which the state command economy had been implemented in Poland by the communists after the Second World War.¹ He also stressed the fundamentally social nature of the process by which Poland should strive to build a democratic state and market-based economy, asserting that

reform is not a technical question - like how to fix a pump - but a political one, open to the recognition of certain social needs as more

essential or pressing than others.²

The early parliamentary elections of October 1991, however, caught SP woefully unprepared. Though the group had previously cooperated with trade unions and even other political parties, it was reluctant to enter into electoral coalition with any particular groupings. Despite the fact that attempts were made to draw the "Sieć" - a structure combining Solidarność enterprise commissions with several large enterprises - into a common electoral committee with SP, the idea was eventually abandoned over SP's fears that the economic views of the "Sieć" were simply too radical. Similar reservations prevented electoral alliances with the post-Solidarność peasant groupings, such as PSL Solidarność and NSZZ Rolników Indywidualnych.³ Finally, SP was averse to the idea of cooperating with the post-Solidarity PPS in the 1991 elections, still aware not only of the stigma attached to the word 'socialist', but also of PPS's strong organizational structures, with which it could dominate SP.⁴

When the results of Poland's first fully free parliamentary elections had come in, SP received 230,975 votes, or 2.06 percent of the total. According to the electoral formula, this translated into just four parliamentary mandates. Professor Źukowski has shown that SP's electorate consisted primarily of workers (especially non-skilled), as well as white-collar workers from 40-50 with higher education. The fact that most of these voters supported Wałęsa in the presidential elections of 1990 suggests that, though they accepted the general direction of Polish reform and remained supporters of Solidarność, they were critical of the Balcerowicz Plan. Moreover, though further polls indicated that SP voters were critical of the increasing influence of the Catholic Church in social life, they generally identified SP as neither unambiguously left nor right on the political spectrum.⁵

The SP leadership regarded the elections as an unqualified defeat; the big names and media exposure of the party were clearly unable to compensate for its organizational weakness, and SP remained largely unknown in the smaller towns and villages. Modzelewski interpreted the 1991 elections as the obituary to the left's claim to the Solidarność emblem. He attributed the defeat of the entire post-Solidarność camp to the economic policies carried out under its name over the previous two years - policies which degraded and impoverished the very social base of Solidarność - and pointed to the relative success of the post-communists, along with the failure of SP and Social

Democratic Movement (RDS), as clear indications that “the Solidarność emblem is now accepted only by those fragments of society whose orientation can be called centre-right”.⁶ Here was a clear sign that the post-Solidarność left had begun to perceive the need to move beyond the memory of 1980 in reviving the non-communist left in post-communist Poland.

SP’s attitude towards the 1991-93 parliament revealed a certain internal tension that, as Unia Pracy’s parliamentary record from 1993-1997 would later reflect, would somehow remain with the non-communist left. On the one hand, SP’s assessment of the Bielecki government was unambiguously negative; it accused the government’s stiff and dogmatic policies (largely a continuation of its predecessors) of ruining the state budget, allowing a rise in corruption, and privileging private industry over struggling state enterprises. On the other hand, SP’s attitude toward the succeeding Olszewski government was ambivalent. The new government had clearly changed its tack on economic reform, declaring its commitment to search for a socially acceptable reform program, while moderating its approach to de-communisation. SP welcomed these changes. At the same time, however, the fact that Olszewski’s government was based on a coalition dominated by national-Catholic groupings aroused fears within SP that the very principle of a secular Polish state could be placed in jeopardy.

Still, SP’s attitude towards the Olszewski government revealed the inherent difficulty of a non-communist left situated somewhere between the progressive cultural stance of the post-Solidarność economic liberals, Democratic Union (UD) in particular, and the left socio-economic program of the culturally conservative - and even nationalistic - parties. The theoretical basis for this tension was explored early on by Piotr Marciniak at SP’s programmatic conference in January 1992. According to Marciniak, social-democracy should not simply be imported willy-nilly from Western Europe; a successful social democratic party in post-communist Poland must remain sensitive to the particularities of its communist past.⁷ Moreover, Marciniak warned that:

On the cultural plane...there exists a huge trap to situate oneself to a significant degree within the international current - somewhere at the intersection of the great liberal socialist traditions. Moving consequently in this direction, however, threatens the loss of contact with those groups for whom these traditions - and especially their

language - are foreign, and even inimical.⁸

Marciniak was referring of course to the more impoverished groups in Polish society, elements which a social-democratic party should seek to represent, but which also often display a cultural conservatism and religiosity that would likely disturb social democrats in Western Europe. In searching for a way out of this dilemma, however, Marciniak harkened backward rather than looking forward; in the great Solidarność movement of 1980-81 he discerned a model for an effective - because indigenous and organic - version of social-democracy for post-communist Poland. According to Marciniak, Solidarność:

shows that a dynamic compromise between a tradition reflecting colloquial articulation and mass experience, and a programmatic horizon generalizing the cultural achievements of the West is possible...According to this formula, the religious and national dimension of Polish society should not be treated as decadent and shameful. On the contrary, we should recognize the essential significance of both of these dimensions for the social networks reduced over the past ten years.⁹

Only such a social-democratic programme, by avoiding the twin dangers of the “Europeanisation of Poland” and the “Polonisation of Europe”, could flourish in post-communist Poland.

As the 1991 elections dramatically demonstrated, however, SP’s dilemmas were not just in the political/ideological sphere, but material/organisational in nature as well. At the heart of the internal debate surrounding the party’s organisational renewal was the question over whether SP should open itself up to other political groupings on the left, including former members of the PZPR. The divisions within SP were dramatically exposed at the 7 July 1992 conference “The Political Thought of Solidarność Pracy”, in which representatives from 12 SP clubs expressed their “firm opposition to the method of the emergence of Unia Pracy”, appealing to the leadership not to change the name of the Parliamentary Club Solidarność Pracy.

Ruch Demokratyczno-Społeczny (RDS)

The other major wing of the post-Solidarność left came from the disintegration of the Citizens’ Committees after Wałęsa launched his “war at the top”. On

16 July 1990, after Wałęsa's unsuccessful attempt to dismiss the Citizens' Committees, the activists opposed to his candidacy quit the ranks of the Citizens' Committees and formed ROAD (Citizen's Movement—Democratic Action). At the time of its formation, ROAD defined itself as a centre grouping on the political scene - non-dogmatic, avoiding radicalism and extremism, and upholding the standards of parliamentary democracy and the rule of law. On 20 April 1991, ROAD unanimously decided to disband itself. Led by Zofia Kuratowska, the majority of members decided to enter into the parliamentary club UD with the aim of retaining a degree of autonomy within its ranks. The remaining ROAD members followed Bujak in forming an independent, social-democratic party. This became known as Ruch Demokratyczno-Społeczny, or the Social Democratic Movement (RDS).

The justification for the formation of RDS out of the broader, post-Solidarność UD was presented clearly by Bujak in his 1991 book *Przepraszam za Solidarność* (I Apologize for Solidarity). As the title suggests, this was an insider's indictment of the Solidarność leadership for its inability, and unwillingness, to fulfil the ideals it had set for itself on behalf of Polish society ten years earlier. Bujak attacked the former oppositionists' self-serving approach to politics - the restoration of many of the most venal characteristics of the old communist authorities. He thus denounced the careerism that had replaced the idealism, as well as the privileges that served to further distance the Solidarność elite from its social base.¹⁰

In order to save the Polish economy and its workers, he argued, a fundamental correction of the Balcerowicz Plan was necessary. Essentially, Bujak's "apology" for Solidarność was an attack on the privileged few for their betrayal of the unfortunate many who had been left behind in the reform process. As Bujak emphatically put it:

I am not apologizing for that magnificent 10 million strong movement, which gave us freedom, changed Europe, and breathed new life into our part of the old continent. I apologize for the fact that the ideals of Solidarność were not realized, or were realized perversely. Thus I apologize for ineffective economic reform, for bankrupt enterprises and unemployment, for collapsing crafts and agriculture, for the throttling of Polish capitalism and family production, for the 'war at the top', for the style of operation and the collapse of the parliamentary club Solidarność...This situation is killing the spirit of

Solidarność... That's why I apologise for Solidarność!¹¹

Programmatically, RDS defined itself as a 'centre-left' grouping, free from economic dogmatism, committed to parliamentary democracy, and open to cooperation with SP and the PPS. There existed, however, an important, if at first rather subtle, distinction between RDS and SP. This concerned cultural or "worldview" matters, on which RDS had from the outset established a less ambiguous and compromising stance than SP. While SP had tempered its pro-secular sentiments by acknowledging the "special" role of the Catholic Church in Polish society, RDS had from the outset spoken strongly in favour of a distinct separation of church and state. This was most visible in its opposition to the penalization of abortion, as well as its defence of the ombudsman as an institution.

Much like SP, however, RDS suffered a major defeat in the 1991 parliamentary elections, forcing Bujak's group to confront its organisational weaknesses. Despite the fact that it had been intensely preparing for the elections by negotiating with PPS and SP to form a possible electoral coalition, RDS ended up running independently. The results were dismal. RDS received only 51,656 votes, or 0.46 percent of the total. It managed to field a list in only 20 electoral districts (out of 53), and Bujak in Warsaw was the only RDS candidate to win a seat.¹² What was made patently clear, to RDS as well as to SP, was that neither entity could survive on the political scene independently. The non-communist left simply had to expand its ranks, and consolidating its forces was the obvious solution.

Unia Pracy

On 7 June 1992, behind the initiative of the SP leadership, approximately 300 people came together at the University of Warsaw to take part in UP's founding congress. The Temporary National Council of UP and its Presidium consisted of: Bugaj, Machowski and Marciniak from SP; Bujak, Faszyński and Skorenko from RDS; W. Dobrzański and A. Smóko from PPS; and Wiesława Ziółkowska, Janusz Szymański and T. Naćecz from parties within the PZPR. Most conspicuous in their absence, however, were members of Kuratowska's social-liberal faction of Democratic Union (UD), and the PPS as a whole (including its organizational structures). Within the next three months Unia Pracy's membership ballooned to between two and three thousand people, drawing members from various backgrounds, from the post-Solidarność right,

to the post-communist left, to those who had never been active in politics before. The requirements for membership were not stringent; as one UP activist recalled: “There was no selection; whoever wanted to, entered”.¹³

In a statement issued at its founding congress, UP announced its desire to build a “social market economy” in Poland and pointed to the social democratic parties of Western Europe as both sources of inspiration and models to emulate. The statement stressed the mixed composition of UP and the need to move beyond the historical divisions within Polish politics and society. It explicitly spoke out against “the tradition of pushing former PZPR members with clean hands into a communist ghetto, such as the [ex-Communist] Social Democracy of the Republic of Poland (SdRP)”. More specifically, UP stressed the need to strengthen the role of the state in the economic reform process, and criticised the government’s monetarist approach to formulating the state budget. Privatisation remained the key issue for the new party, which argued that the economically liberal plan for universal privatisation would lead not to the enfranchisement of Polish society but to its expropriation. National property, UP warned, would merely fall into the hands of a narrow group of the wealthiest citizens, or to the interests of foreign capital. A better alternative would be to carry out privatisation of state owned enterprises at a natural market tempo, while paying attention to the creation of new private enterprises, especially in the new and more competitive branches of production. In order to reinvest in and restructure ailing enterprises, moreover, state budget expenditures must not be curtailed.¹⁴

A key moment in the development of UP arose in the autumn of 1992, with the right-wing project on the bill to penalise abortion. UP based its strong opposition to the bill on two main arguments: 1) the necessity to defend the right of women to protect themselves from unwanted pregnancies; and 2) the need to make a clear separation of church and state, and to establish the principle that, in a democratic state, moral norms derived from religious principles should not be enforced “by means of criminal law and administrative order”.¹⁵ Still, UP made it clear that it did not defend abortion on moral grounds, and that it was in no way opposed to the institution of the Church.

At a time when the majority of parliamentarians supported the idea of penalising abortion and the post-communist SdRP preferred not to draw unnecessary fire from the Catholic Church,¹⁶ UP became the only political entity to take up the issue when it proposed a nation-wide referendum on abortion to be held in November 1992. On 13 November 1992 Bujak formed

the Social Committee on the Referendum Issue in order to collect signatures in support of the referendum. Operating largely through the organisational structures of UP itself, this movement drew the active support of certain members from Democratic Union, the Congress of Liberal Democrats (KLD), the PPS and SLD, in addition to women's organisations and a number of ordinary citizens hitherto inactive. Despite the fact that the campaign resulted in the collection of over 1,300,000 signatures nationwide, the Sejm ultimately rejected the legislative proposal for a universal vote on the issue of abortion. Without the support of President Wałęsa, the initiative never made it past the parliament.

For UP, however, the feverish effort to mobilise Polish society on the referendum issue was not in vain. On the contrary, the entire initiative was carried out simultaneously with the development of local party structures. In many ways, the abortion referendum campaign served as a vehicle for UP to reach potential supporters in the localities. As Kędziński later recalled, this was a period of political renaissance for much of Polish society. Politics had been dragged down from the detached heights of the parliament to the crowds in the streets, as mass rallies once again attracted thousands of citizens. In Kędziński's own words, "it was like bringing back the quite interesting atmosphere [of the] end of 1989-90. In 1992-93 this atmosphere returned, with politicians addressing each other on the streets".¹⁷ Indeed, it was this very atmosphere, and the fact that well-known Solidarność activists were building a movement on the left, that prompted many, the young Kędziński included, to join UP.

Significantly, however, the fact that UP's star had risen in such dramatic fashion as a result of its social campaign on the abortion issue immediately raised questions within UP as to exactly what type of social-democratic party it was building. After all, UP's stance on the question of abortion, however important the issue was in defining church-state relations, was not intended to challenge the party's political identity as, primarily, a representative of the interests of the poorest and the working classes. Though there was, of course, some room for overlap, if attracting pro-choice voters entailed making a mortal enemy out of the church, then the abortion referendum campaign could no longer be considered such an unqualified success for UP. As it was, its social constituency happened to be culturally rather conservative, providing yet another dilemma for the non-communist left.

Moreover, though the campaign was initiated by UP, it inevitably

attracted many people not only sympathetic to UP, but to other parties as well. As Bujak later noted:

many of the people involved in gathering signatures had their own ambitions...There were desires to build an 'apolitical' movement, which ran counter to what UP was trying to do. This was a time when the idea of a party was associated with the communist party, and groupings tended to be called 'alliances' or 'unions', rather than 'parties'. These people did not want to develop political structures within the framework of UP, but rather outside the party. Thus the leadership of UP lost interest in maintaining contacts with these people.¹⁸

Another, more worrying consequence of the referendum campaign was the significant role it played in attracting former communist party members to the ranks of UP. Again, the effects of this development were mixed. On the one hand, UP's very *raison d'être* was to create a wider, more powerful political entity on the left, completely independent of the post-communist SdRP, yet open to former party members "with clean hands". UP's dramatic success in the referendum campaign was a testament to the need, and feasibility, of this vision.

On the other hand, there remained the lingering fear that the flood of former PZPR members into the ranks of UP reflected nothing more than cynical political opportunism on the part of many such individuals. After all, in 1992 the political reputation of the SLD was still dismal and its future bleak; when added to the virtual absence of any screening process for joining UP, the conditions for such a move were ripe indeed. Moreover, as Kedzierski has pointed out, many of the former communist party members that did join UP in the localities tended to be of second-rate quality at best.¹⁹

Indeed, the fear of this very development provoked a serious discussion within UP, as Bugaj himself proposed a project to create a special ethical commission to assess candidates in cases where their positions in the past might raise some doubts.²⁰ Ultimately, however, no such commission was formed.

The 1993 parliamentary elections

UP entered the 1993 elections behind a number of campaign slogans expressing Polish society's growing disillusion with the Solidarność governments and

their reform programs. The slogan “Let us return hope!” reflected a popular exhaustion with the pace and method of changes, while the description of UP as a “New Left: A program without extremes” suggested that the time was ripe for the revival of the democratic left tradition. Finally, UP’s slogan “The person above all!” was neatly counterposed to the slogan of the liberal, post-Solidarnosc UD - “The economy above all!”²¹

Indeed, the resounding success of the left in the elections demonstrated the rightness of this approach.²² UP captured 7.3 percent of the vote, which translated into 41 electoral mandates and made it the fourth largest party in the Sejm. UP also won two seats in the upper chamber of the parliament, or Senate. At the same time, however, the post-communists gained even more from the “turn to the left” that immediately followed the collapse of the centre-right Suchocka government in 1993. Still, for UP, a party that had been in existence for just over a year and possessed extremely modest organisational and material resources, the 1993 elections were regarded as a moment of triumph.

A closer inquiry into exactly how UP was catapulted into fourth place in the Sejm, however, significantly qualifies the nature of the non-communist left’s victory in 1993. Research on the elections by Tomasz Ćukowski has shown that UP’s major support base consisted of the urban (mainly big city) dwellers and the better educated. UP found most success among the intelligentsia and other white-collar workers (11 percent voted for UP), followed by students (9 percent) and blue-collar workers (7 percent). In fact, no other party received such a high percentage of its vote (43 percent) from the white-collar segment of the Polish population. Moreover, a clear majority of UP supporters (61 percent to 39 percent) was female. Most tellingly, however, of the UP supporters in 1993, the highest percentage (30 percent) voted for either the economically liberal Democratic Union or Congress of Liberal Democrats (KLD) in 1991. Conversely, UP had the greatest problem attracting those who had previously voted for either the SdRP or the Peasant Party (PSL). This failure to make inroads into the traditionally left electorate of the SdRP and PSL not only reflected the high degree of loyalty among the communist successor parties’ electorates, but also suggests that UP’s 1993 success was due primarily to its ability to expand its popularity among the wider post-solidarity camp, in particular its liberal-democratic wing.

Thus though UP had clearly benefited from a widespread dissatisfaction with Solidarność, the particular support it received from among the female

and white collar segments of Polish society suggests that UP may have owed its success more to its stance on cultural/worldview issues, rather than on socio-economic matters. Seen in this light, it was UP's toil over the abortion referendum campaign, in which UP was clearly the boldest and most prominent participant, that bore political fruit in 1993.

Thus its parliamentary victory may have been Pyrrhic in the sense that it was not delivered by a solid, working class social base, the very segment of Polish society that Bugaj's party had sought to represent. Moreover, though the process of consolidating the non-communist left had resulted in the surprising success of UP, equally stunning was the political revival of the larger and better organized post-communist SdRP. This surprising development, and the impact it would have on the fledgling UP, is the subject of the following section.

For now, however, as this section has shown, the 1991-93 period illustrated well the formidable difficulties faced by the non-communist left in both the political/ideological and material/organisational spheres. The painful social effects (especially on the working classes) of the Solidarność-led economic reform program had, by 1991, deprived the non-communist left of much of the political or symbolic capital it might hoped to have retained from the legacy of Solidarność. In the new pluralist democracy, moreover, the traces of a tension within the post-Solidarność left between Solidarność Pracy (SP) and Social Democratic Movement (RDS) over socio-economic and cultural/worldview issues could be discerned.

In the first few years of systemic transformation this political dilemma was largely subordinated to the greater task of unifying the non-communist left; nevertheless, the very process of overcoming the material and organisational weakness of the post-Solidarność left, through the formation of UP, exacerbated the latent political tensions within the non-communist left and opened the party up to programmatic disputes further down the line. Viewed in this light, the abortion referendum campaign appears as the problematic intersection of the material/organisational with the political/ideological, where success in the former sphere augured ill in the latter.

II. Unia Pracy and the Polish Political Scene

Though impressive in its own right, the success registered by UP in resuscitating the post-Solidarność left in 1993 was modest in comparison to the resurrection of the ex-communist Social Democracy of the Republic of Poland (SdRP). Having suffered a devastating defeat in the semi-free elections of June 1989,²³ the newly created SdRP remained politically isolated and popularly derided through the first half of 1990. The post-communists fared so poorly once again in the May 1990 local elections that, as Zubek argues, if fully-free parliamentary elections with some sort of threshold had been set for the spring of 1990 rather than the autumn of 1991, the SdRP would have failed to qualify for parliamentary representation and very well may have dropped entirely out of the Polish political scene.²⁴

Instead, the post-communists regrouped and quickly exhibited signs of life after communism in the 1990 presidential elections, when their candidate, Włodzisław Cimoszewicz, captured 9.3 percent of the vote and fourth place.²⁵ This was but the start of a political revival that would culminate in the spectacular victory of 1993, when the post-communist SLD²⁶ won the largest representation in the Sejm. This turn of political fortune was of no mean significance to the non-communist left, for, as this chapter will show, the rebirth of the post-communists as social democrats would help to perpetuate the severe polarisation of Polish politics along historical lines. For UP, a party whose very composition defied this simple dichotomy, the new political environment was anything but encouraging.

The dissolution of the PZPR and the birth of the SdRP

Following the disastrous semi-free elections of 1989, the SdRP quickly set out to replenish and, to a considerable extent, reinvent itself, both physically and ideologically. It recruited new members from youth organisations previously associated with the communist party, bringing the average age within the SdRP down to around 41 years.²⁷ Programmatically, the SdRP voiced its support for practically the entire litany of social-democratic goals, including the establishment of a market economy regulated through state intervention and mixed forms of ownership and means of production.

The political and ideological reinvention of the PZPR as a social-democratic party of the Western European variety stood in sharp contrast to

the material and organisational continuity that the post-communists managed to preserve. Whereas in Czechoslovakia a high degree of anti-communist sentiment led to a lustration law which deprived both the Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia and the Party of the Democratic Left (in Slovakia) of their physical assets, in Poland the “thick line” policy adopted by the Mazowiecki government allowed the SdRP to retain a good deal of its material resource base.²⁸ It has been suggested that in the confusion of the transition period, a good amount of hard currency stashed away by party members in secret foreign bank accounts was used to launch nomenklatura-based business ventures or to fund the SLD directly. Moreover, the post-communists managed to retain and rebuild a good amount of their influence on the media through the corporation Ad Novum.

In the longer term, however, perhaps more important than these material assets were the organisational structures and personal networks the post-communists managed to retain and, in some sense, reinforce. One of the great advantages enjoyed by as massive a network of organisations as the PZPR were its local organisational structures. A close study of the “successor” parties (the PSL and the SdRP) revealed that, in the case of the SdRP in particular, relative organisational superiority over non-communist parties was preserved. Indeed, *Szczerbiak’s* study of four different provinces (Gdąnsk, Jelenia Góra, Płock and Rzeszów) has shown that, for the period 1993-1997, the SdRP possessed local organizational structures in 65 percent of the gminas of these provinces (from 50 percent in Płock to 80 percent in Rzeszów). This was by far the highest level of party implantation in urban areas, dwarfing the mere eight percent representation of UP.²⁹ Moreover, the SdRP had the advantage of an intermediate level of local party organisation - the regional council (*rada regionalna*). These regional councils operated at what used to be the *powiat* level of state administration,³⁰ thus providing the SdRP with an organisational network at the sub-provincial level. Finally, as regards the “nuts and bolts” of local party infrastructure - offices, telephones and faxes, and staff - the post-communists possessed clear advantages over the newly formed post-Solidarność parties. For UP, whose resources at the local party level were meagre in comparison to the SdRP, the degree of overlap in tasking and funding was much higher.³¹

Finally, the SdRP inherited advantages of a more intangible nature, perhaps the most important of which was the political experience the post-communists carried with them into Poland’s new democracy. This was brought

into stark relief as early as the parliamentary elections of 1991, when the fractious nature of the post-Solidarność camp was set against the political poise of the post-communist led SLD. A clearer and more sophisticated understanding of the legislative process, a less confrontational approach to parliamentary debate, and a keener awareness of effective campaigning all distinguished the post-communists from the former opposition.

Poland's politicised trade unions

Further complicating UP's attempt to establish itself as an independent and non-communist party on the left was the problematic role of trade unions in post-communist Poland. As representatives of and institutional channels to the working class, trade unions have served as natural partners for social democratic parties throughout Western Europe. Indeed, the British Labour Party provides an example of the intimacy of this relationship, where the trade union had transformed itself into a political party. For a party such as UP, in many ways trying to reproduce the experience of Western social democracy, close ties with the working class via trade unions are a necessary, though not sufficient, condition for success.

In Poland, however, the nature of NSZZ Solidarność in post-communist Poland was largely determined by the extraordinary role it had played in the revolutionary events of 1980-81. As the sole expression of social self-organisation outside the all-encompassing communist state³², Solidarność by its very existence was more than a mere trade union. It was a vehicle for an entire social movement, whose industrial working class base lent it enormous institutional, as well as symbolic, power in communist Poland. Of course, the Solidarność of 1980 would be forever changed by the imposition of martial law, and the effective liquidation of its trade union functions. Still, the union leadership would go on to conspire in the underground, preserving the myth of Solidarność within Polish social consciousness, a latent but potent symbolic force. This inevitably meant that the triumphant re-legalisation of Solidarność in 1989 would restore it as something more than a traditional trade union in the liberal, capitalist sense.

Indeed, following the first free elections of 1989 and the formation of the Mazowiecki government, the trade union Solidarność, rather than transform itself into a standard trade union and limit its functions to the protection of workers' interests, opted to remain the driving force behind a broader, anti-communist reform movement. It was in this capacity that the union leadership

erected its “protective umbrella” over the Solidarność government’s economic reform policies, shielding the Mazowiecki team from excessive criticism from the Polish working class.

In the longer term this strategy was bound to fail, however, as the burden of reforming the industrial and state sectors of the Polish economy inevitably fell hardest upon the very workers Solidarność claimed to represent. Faced with the choice between the already compromised post-communist OPZZ and a Solidarność union that defended the austerity measures, it is little wonder that Polish workers began to question whether or not Polish unions represented their interests at all. When asked in 1991 who represented their interests most effectively, 5.2 percent responded OPZZ, 12.5 percent Solidarność, and 68.5 percent no one at all.³³

Polish workers’ declining faith in the major trade unions was accompanied by their even greater estrangement from their political representatives. This popular scepticism towards Polish political elites prevailed among the workers belonging to trade unions as well, the majority of which (65.7 percent) were in favour of the notion that “trade unions should have their own parliamentary representation”.³⁴ Union leaders echoed this sentiment, with 60.1 percent expressing the desire for union representation in parliament. This seems to stem from the fact that trade union leaders felt that unions exerted little influence on the political process, with the great majority believing that unions either have no influence (46.5 percent) or very little influence (35.5 percent) on political parties. In relation to the government, 27.2 percent of union leaders thought that unions had no influence, while 36.4 percent thought that they had very little influence.³⁵

Perhaps more significantly, not only did union leaders support the politicisation of Polish trade unions, but they also called for union pluralism. When asked whether, in order to best represent workers’ interests, one or several competing union headquarters should exist, the overwhelming majority (74.6 percent) chose the latter. The preference for pluralism also existed at the industry level (68 percent in favour), and was stronger among Solidarność union leaders than OPZZ leaders. Behind the desire for union pluralism lay differing political orientations among the two major Polish trade unions. This political division, moreover, was based primarily on the union leaderships’ conflicting attitudes to the past, as surveys from 1992 have indicated. While most Solidarność leaders identified the main reason for the post-1989 economic crisis as 40 years of communism, only 8.6 percent of OPZZ leaders shared

this view.³⁶

The popular support for trade union pluralism based on differing relationships to Poland's communist past meant that the two main trade unions, NSZZ Solidarność and the OPZZ, would function on an explicitly political and partisan basis. Both unions would seek their own representation in parliament, eventually providing the bases for post-solidarity and post-communist electoral coalitions. Essentially, Poland's two major trade unions would become completely politicised, absorbed within either the Solidarność-led Solidarity Electoral Action (AWS) or the SLD. Consequently, this polarised arrangement left little possibility for UP, a party explicitly devoted to representing working class interests, to reach its natural constituency via trade union structures.

The contribution of the OPZZ to the SLD electoral coalition, moreover, was not insignificant. Not only were 61 OPZZ members elected to the parliament from SLD lists in 1993, but the branch unions served as a natural channel to the shopfloor for the SdRP. The benefits that the OPZZ has brought to the SdRP have been particularly evident during election campaigns, when the two organisations work closely together.

The victory of the SLD in the 1993 parliamentary elections, however, presented Solidarność with an opportunity to withdraw from electoral politics altogether and focus instead on exclusively trade union activities. It could have continued to pressure and criticise the SLD-PSL government, but strictly from the perspective of a trade union and not a political party. Instead, the 1995 presidential elections further polarised the Polish political scene between the post-solidarity supporters of Walesa on the one hand, and the post-communist supporters on Kwaśniewski on the other. Naturally, NSZZ Solidarność entered the fray on the side of Wałęsa, citing the "extraordinary" nature of politics during the transition period.

Thus as the 1997 parliamentary elections approached, the Solidarność trade union began to assume an explicitly political role as the foundation for a reconsolidated Polish right. The formation of the AWS, intended to counterbalance the strength of a reunited post-communist bloc, ultimately helped to resurrect the titanic struggle between state (*władza*) and society (*społeczeństwo*) in post-communist Poland. More significant still, for the prospects of an independent and non-communist left, Poland's politicised trade unions inevitably came to constitute the social and organisational bases for two historically-antagonistic political camps - the post-solidarity AWS

and the post-communist SLD.

This left a party such as UP with little opportunity to either forge ties or work cooperatively with Polish workers via the major trade unions. Indeed, UP's very *raison d'être* as expressed by its political leadership - to overcome the divisions based on the past in consolidating the forces of an authentic and non-communist left - was antithetical to the partisan strategies adopted by both *Solidarność* and the OPZZ. UP made repeated overtures to various trade unions, but was either met with suspicion and charges of political opportunism (by the *Solidarność* leadership), was shunned for its fierce anti-communism (by the OPZZ), or was brought to the unpleasant realisation that the smaller and more independent unions (like *Solidarność '80* or *Solidarność Walczaka*) were openly nationalistic and even anti-Semitic.

Referring to UP's difficulties with respect to the trade unions, Bujak pointed to the principal challenge of developing an effective reform strategy alongside an active relationship with trade unions in a period of systemic transformation. According to Bujak:

The social changes were so deep and far reaching, that it was difficult to devise a formula for the future with regard to trade unions. The task was to devise a trade union strategy that wouldn't just criticize all reforms and the reform process as a whole, but would help to educate and retrain, and be concerned with the worker-element in the reform process. This was too hard. UP had a proposition to create vocational schools to retrain workers and upgrade their skills, but the trade unions did not agree to this strategy.³⁷

Instead, the trade unions concentrated on participating directly in politics through their own electoral vehicles, leaving UP to seek union support on an ad hoc basis and with smaller groups such as the pensioners.³⁸ For those UP members who cut their political teeth on the massive trade union-cum social movement of *Solidarność* in 1980, this was a difficult reality to face.

Poland's polarised politics

Polarised as they were between the post-solidarity and post-communist blocs, Poland's trade unions reflected the dichotomous nature of a political scene based above all on historical divisions. The divide between the post-solidarity and post-communist camps can be traced back to the late 1970s, when the oppositional strategy known as the "new evolutionism"³⁹ set Polish society

(spo³eczeñstwo) against the communist authorities (w³adza) in a zero-sum struggle over Poland. Following the changes of 1989 and the introduction of formal democracy, many expected this Manichean division to yield to standard interest-based political divisions. Left-liberal and right-conservative poles were to bound the post-1989 political spectrum in Poland, and political preferences would reflect the socio-economic conditions of the Polish electorate. Under such conditions, it was hoped, a party arising from the democratic left tradition such as UP would be able to establish itself firmly on the left of the political landscape.

Research on Polish political behaviour in the 1990s, however, has belied the notion that interest-based politics would replace the state vs. society/post-communist vs. post-solidarity dichotomy in the new Poland based on the formal mechanisms of parliamentary democracy. Polish political scientist, Tadeusz Szawiel, has convincingly demonstrated that, whereas in the West political identities are primarily defined by socio-demographic and structural (in particular, class) factors, the same cannot be said for post-communist Poland. Rather, left or right political identity in post-communist Poland has reflected attitudes towards Poland's communist past. Intimately tied up with this has been the debate over the role of the Catholic Church in post-communist Poland and the attendant issues of abortion, the concordat with the Vatican,⁴⁰ and religious instruction in schools. Thus the political right has been associated with an unambiguously negative assessment of the communist period, a favourable view of the church in both communist and post-communist Poland, and a belief in the need for "lustration", or the de-communisation of public life.

Those identifying themselves as politically left, on the other had, tend to view the communist past in a more balanced (or even favourable) light, speak out strongly for the separation of church and state (including keeping the church out of such issues as abortion), and are generally against the idea of lustration.⁴¹ These divisions are clearly historical in nature, and are directly linked to personal experiences during the communist period.⁴²

The prevalence of such non-structural factors in determining political identity in Poland was exactly what UP had hoped to combat. UP's answer was to build a social-democratic party open to left-leaning elements from both historically antagonistic camps. Yet even the 'turn to the left' of the 1993 parliamentary elections, an encouraging outcome for Bugaj's fledgling party, is difficult to explain adequately without taking into account divisions

rooted in the past. Anna Banaszkiwicz has cast serious doubt on the notion that UP's success in 1993 represented the victory of a qualitatively new notion of social democracy - that of a left political force organisationally independent of and programmatically different from the post-communists. She argues that UP's primary appeal could not have been the specific socio-economic plan that it offered, because such socio-economic matters played only a secondary role in the leftward shift in political sympathies. Much more significant were issues that revolved around Poland's past: assessments of the achievements of the PZPR, attitudes towards the idea of lustration, relationships to Solidarność and the political leadership arising from its ranks, and feelings regarding the place of the church in public life.⁴³ UP enjoyed political success in 1993 to the extent that it expressed "left" views on these issues, and not, as much of its leadership might have wished, because of its attacks from the far left on the government's economic program.

Thus by the time the post-Solidarność right had regrouped to form the AWS coalition for the 1997 parliamentary elections, the stage had been set for a political showdown between the two historical antagonists. Political divisions would continue to hinge upon issues related to the past, and not differences in socio-economic programs. Thus with respect to the 1997 elections, research conducted by Jasiewicz on electoral opinion regarding ten issues⁴⁴ has shown that the voters of the two largest parties, AWS and the SLD, did not differ in their views on such issues as privatisation of state enterprises, defining the range of social services, tax policies, unemployment, financing agriculture from the state budget, or the flow of foreign capital. When it came to issues such as abortion, the political role of the church and de-communisation, however, their views differed widely.⁴⁵

Thus the re-polarisation of the Polish political landscape after the shocking victory of the post-communists in the 1993 elections, and the subsequent response by the post-Solidarność right to re-group and form AWS, ensured that the left/right division in politics would remain historically and culturally, rather than materially or socio-economically, based. In a situation where the political left was understood as, above all, anti-clerical and sympathetic to the communist past, while the political right stood for a critical assessment of communism combined with a favourable disposition to the role of the Church in public life, the political space for a social-democratic party such as UP - which was secular, non-(or even anti-)communist, and further to the left in socio-economic issues - was limited indeed. Complicating

matters further for Bugaj's party was the fact that the very biographical divisions that UP attempted to eliminate through inclusion of social-democratic elements from both Solidarność and the PZPR served as the basis upon which political identity, and thus political success, rested.

Thus in adapting to Poland's new political environment, the post-communists skilfully managed to avoid both the material/organisational and political/ideological pitfalls that, as the first section argued, plagued the non-communist left from the very start. Materially, the SdRP retained its unparalleled access to finances, its superior party infrastructure, and a good deal of its personal networks, while politically, it rather smoothly re-fashioned itself into the "left leg", to borrow Walesa's term, of the Polish political system. Moreover, this section has also explored the troubled relationship between the non-communist left and Poland's trade unions, politicised and polarised as they were between the opposing electoral camps SLD and AWS. Taken together, these conditions meant that UP, a life-raft of former Solidarność leftists and reformist communists unanchored to a stable social support base, was left adrift in the turbulent waters of a re-polarised Polish political scene.

III. Unia Pracy in Parliament (1993-1997)

Immediately after the 1993 elections, UP faced the important choice of whether or not to join the ruling "left" coalition of the two successor parties, the SLD and the PSL. As an undeniably left-wing party, with the fourth largest representation in the Sejm, UP was a natural potential partner in a government of the left. At the same time, strong anti-communist sentiment within the UP leadership (especially that of the leader Bugaj) cautioned against crossing over to the other, that is, non-Solidarność, side of the political divide. These conflicting impulses led to a sort of paralysis, as divisions within UP on whether to join the ruling coalition manifested themselves in the party's visibly hesitant behaviour. UP's own uncertainty as to where it actually stood on the left of the Polish political scene was thus evident from the very beginning.

Unia Pracy and the SLD-PSL government

In declining the offer to participate in the governing coalition, the UP leadership expressed concerns both personal and programmatic in nature. With respect to the personal makeup of the future government, UP opposed the agreed-

upon power sharing arrangement, whereby the SLD would yield the post of Prime Minister to the PSL in return for the positions of Marshal of the Sejm and the most important economic ministries. Moreover, UP objected chiefly to a member of the SLD holding the post of Marshal of the Sejm, as this position served as the main interlocutor between parliament and the president. UP was particularly opposed to the inclusion of SdRP General Secretary, Leszek Miller, in the new government as Minister of Labour, as Miller had been under investigation for the alleged transfer of communist party funds to Moscow in 1989.⁴⁶

A more fundamental point of dispute keeping Bugaj's party out of the governing coalition was UP's sharp criticism of the SLD's Universal Privatisation Program, which it felt to be a mere continuation of the previous government's policy. Bugaj was particularly adamant in his opposition to the privatisation scheme, and expressed fears over the market imbalance that would result from the administrative decision to release a huge supply of enterprise vouchers. According to Bugaj, the great majority of citizens who would obtain these vouchers would want to get rid of them, given the fact that most Poles' incomes were extremely low and that the inclination to save is directly proportional to income level. The mass sale of vouchers would dramatically depress the value of the vouchers and, in turn, affect the enterprise share values on the stock market. The lower stock market share prices would create the possibility for investors, foreign as well as domestic, to purchase shares of Polish enterprises for a "symbolic zloty". More worryingly, if people felt cheated through the privatisation process, social unrest could ensue.

Despite these clear reservations, however, UP's ultimate decision not to enter into the governing coalition was marked by reversals and ambiguity. This external display of uncertainty reflected very real divisions within the party, the ramifications of which would only become clearer and more serious as the Sejm term wore on. In 1993, however, UP's internal discord resulted merely in the party granting provisional support for the SLD-PSL government from the side, neither in alliance with nor in opposition to the ruling coalition. Still, the uncertainty itself spoke volumes.

Further ambiguity regarding the UP's relationship with the new government was cast by UP member Marek Pol's decision to accept the post of minister of industry. His position as both a member of UP and a minister for the SLD-PSL government finally became untenable after UP entered into official opposition to the governing coalition at the end of June 1994. Now

faced with a clear dilemma, whether to remain the minister of industry or continue membership in a party in opposition to the government, Pol chose the former. Though Bugaj maintained that Pol was a non-partisan professional, representing only himself in government, still his very participation in government was inconsistent with UP's official policy, and Pol was thus temporarily removed.⁴⁷

What UP's indecisiveness in 1993-94 also hinted at, however, was a split within the party along the very same lines that divided Polish politics generally, that is, history and biography. Those UP members who were most willing to work closely with the post-communists in order to participate in government also happened to be former members of the PZPR. Thus Zio³kowska, Lamentowicz and Pol had all begun their political careers with the communist party. Moreover, in January 1995 three UP members with PZPR backgrounds, Zbigniew Zysk, Eugeniusz Janula and S³awomir Nowakowski, decided to leave the party altogether and form their own parliamentary circle, the Kolo Nowa Demokracja, in protest of UP's decision to join the opposition. Despite pressure from the UP leadership, they decided to support the SLD in overturning President Wa³êsa's veto on the law on wages from the state budget, citing Wa³êsa as a destabilising presence on the political scene. Despite initial pledges to remain independent, however, Nowa Demokracja soon folded into the SLD, to the surprise of very few.⁴⁸

Bugaj himself would later comment on the inclination of UP's local activists, the majority of which had jumped the communist ship to join UP in 1992, towards developing a closer relationship with the SLD. In a 1998 interview following UP's defeat in the parliamentary elections, Bugaj acknowledged the divergent tendencies within his party, stating:

For a long time in the so-called base of UP there existed a tendency to attach [oneself] to the stronger [party]. Many people came to us who did not go to the SLD because they figured that the SLD would lose.⁴⁹

Criticisms of UP's decision not to take part in the governing coalition and the undemocratic means by which this decision was reached could be heard fairly frequently among local activists. According to one respondent from the Ćerubin gmina,

There is no modern idea of internal party democracy, because with us the decision of Mr. Bugaj is the most important—the base has nothing

to discuss, it has to listen.⁵⁰

The 1994 local government elections

The ambiguous relationship between UP and the ruling coalition yielded disastrous results for the party in the local government elections of June 1994. According to former UP member, Piotr Kêdzierski, UP had terrible difficulties in increasing its involvement at the local level from the very beginning of its Sejm term. In his words, the party of Bugaj was “top-heavy”, possessing a strong and prominent national representation, but a weak local support base. What is more, the demands made upon the fledgling party by everyday parliamentary work ultimately taxed the energy and resources of the leadership. Bugaj and other UP parliamentarians had little time to build the party from below, and in fact paid little attention to the localities. The leadership of UP thus found itself practically oblivious to the extent of the party’s influence in the rest of the country. As Katarzyna Batko has shown, even though UP had invited local residents to meet openly with leaders from the national level, those leaders who attracted the most interest at the local level were often too busy to visit, to the great disappointment of local activists. The lack of enthusiasm for UP involvement at the local level was shared by many local activists.⁵¹

Moreover, in an atmosphere of heightened political antagonism between the post-communist and post-solidarity camps, UP once again found itself on shrinking middle ground. The results of the local elections indicated that, however much local UP activists may have hoped to build coalitions, party-political rather than specifically local issues dominated the voting. In the municipalities, three major political blocs began to emerge: the post-communist left, the Freedom Union (UW) and the right-wing coalitions. The PSL managed to consolidate its influence in the small towns and rural areas, where the elections were held according to majority vote, while the SLD established itself more firmly among the small-town and industrial proletariat.⁵²

The 1995 presidential elections

If the 1994 local elections exposed the weakness of UP in the localities, the presidential elections of 1995 generated the most glaring rift within the party, once again along historical lines. Presidential elections have always tended to polarise politics within multi-party systems. At a time when President Wa³êsa

had begun to raise more than a few eyebrows with his authoritarian behaviour, the challenge from the post-communist left rekindled the post-solidarity/post-communist rivalry in a heated way. UP had anticipated this, and was disturbed by the prospect of Wałęsa winning another term, and with it five more years with which to (possibly) abuse Poland's newly democratic system. Zbigniew Bujak expressed concern over the prospect of Wałęsa winning another term, as it could very well constitute a blow to democracy and the rule of law in Poland.

Bugaj, in the meantime, argued that a victory for the SLD's presidential candidate would not only threaten the young Polish democracy by placing both the legislative and executive branches into the hands of the post-communists, but would undoubtedly perpetuate the historical division that had hitherto dominated politics.⁵³ The UP leadership (and Bugaj in particular) felt that the only candidate who could offer a realistic alternative to Wałęsa and Kwaśniewski was Kuroń. As the sole above-party candidate in the elections, supported by both UP and UW, Kuroń would represent Poland's lone hope of overcoming the post-Solidarność/post-communist divide. The only way to weaken the two polar extremes of the political scene, Bugaj argued, was to strengthen the centre. Thus Kuroń was presented by the UP leadership as "one of us"⁵⁴, as neither from the left nor the right. In an interview with *Nowa Lewica*, he offered his own definition of left and right.

For those UP members with backgrounds in Solidarność (most of the top leadership), supporting Kuroń for president was unproblematic, even natural. UP supporters of Kuroń, however, met with unexpected resistance from within the party. The leadership's surprise was largely due to its failure to examine the preferences of the regional structures prior to the UP Election Congress, followed by its inability to discern the delegates' views during the Congress. Thus it came as an unpleasant shock to learn that most of the local UP activists did not support Kuroń's candidacy for president, unwilling to forgive him for his participation in the Mazowiecki and Suchocka governments and his involvement with the party of Balcerowicz.⁵⁵ Kuroń himself did little to allay such fears, professing his loyalty to UW and making few gestures of non-partisanship.⁵⁶

Thus in the first round of voting for UP's presidential endorsement, Tadeusz Zieliński stunned the leadership by receiving 132 (out of 271) votes, just four shy of an absolute majority. He and Kuroń (94 first round votes) squared off in the second round, where Zieliński easily emerged victorious

by a count of 160 votes to 81.⁵⁷ In this context, the fact that Zieliński's candidacy was forced through by one of the members of the Presidium with a PZPR background (Lamentowicz) contributed to speculation that a division between the post-Solidarność and post-PZPR wings of UP was emerging.⁵⁸ Moreover, Zieliński's victory meant that UP, a party that for both political and financial reasons did not want to present its own presidential candidate, now found itself doing just that. UP was faced with the burden of financing the campaign of a candidate who was not a member of the party, had never worked with the party, and offered a political program that was extremely foggy.

A large part of the UP leadership refused to support Zieliński's nomination. Immediately following the May Congress, UP Honorary Chairman, Modzelewski, submitted his resignation, stating that he could not in good faith continue to support Kuroń while remaining part of UP. The atmosphere within the congress hall turned especially bitter as some UP delegates responded to Modzelewski's departure with remarks such as: "it's all for the better" and "let him go play in the sandbox". Bugaj, however, was visibly disconcerted by Modzelewski's decision, as it implied the loss of a respected friend and colleague in the project to build a non-communist left.⁵⁹

If the original intention had been to present a serious centre-left alternative to Kwacieniewski and Wałęsa, the final outcome could not have been further off the mark. Instead of one above-party candidate representing the centre-left, two contenders battling for the same electorate were selected, each with his own party nomination but neither with a strong social constituency. Worse, with time UP became increasingly aware of how little it actually knew about its candidate's political views. In trying to appeal simultaneously to the left and the right, the church and anti-clerics, and pensioners and entrepreneurs, he obscured important and fundamental political divisions. The following excerpt from a pre-election interview with Zieliński is telling:

I have something nice for everyone. For ZChN [Christian Democrats]- the social teaching of the Church is close to me; for KPN [Polish National Congress]- my activity for the sake of Poland; UPR [Union of the Right of the Republic of Poland] - my actions against fiscalism. PSL also does not turn me off. Furthermore, 60 percent of the SLD electorate could be mine. Why? Because I never abused them for

communism, I respected them...Like them I think that the inheritance of the PRL [People's Republic of Poland] is not just the illegality of the communist system, but also the work of several generations...And do you have something nice for UW [Freedom Union]? I am one of them. It was UW who pushed through my candidacy for the position of ombudsman. And now they're charging me with a lack of trustworthiness!⁶⁰

UP's 1995 presidential election fiasco gave rise to serious internal debate regarding the future strategy and direction of the party. The election had shown that the political polarization based on historical divisions had not only persisted, but had grown more acute. Given UP's obvious inability to field a centrist, above-party candidate to uproot one of the poles bounding the political spectrum, a fundamental reassessment of the party's position with respect to its rivals was undertaken in the immediate post-election period. For the first time, the course established by UP's mostly post-Solidarność leadership, and Bugaj in particular, was openly called into question.

One of the most trenchant critiques of UP's political strategy could be found on the pages of the left-wing journal *Przełłd Społeczny* immediately after the elections. UP member Tomidajewicz speculated on the future trajectory of the Polish political scene and the options open to the party within each possible scenario. Tomidajewicz offered alternative courses of action for UP in the event that a) the post-communist/post-solidarity division lasts and becomes the operative principle in Polish politics, and b) this historical division does not turn out to be a lasting one. In the first case, UP would face the choice of either remaining in between the two camps or choosing to side with one or the other. If it opted for the former, UP would only seem more indecisive to Polish society at large, while opening itself up to attacks from both political camps; inevitably, the party would become increasingly marginalised.

In short, Tomidajewicz's prognosis for a strong and independent UP - continuing along the path that Bugaj had set for the party - was not a favourable one. He did propose, however, a course of action if the party hoped to remain a relevant part of the political landscape. He began with what he believed to be the lessons, however painful, to be drawn from Kwańiewski's success in 1995. According to Tomidajewicz, Kwańiewski's victory rested to a considerable degree on the support of not only those who favoured a secular

state and the social-democratic path to transformation, but also, and more importantly, of those who rejected the perpetuation of the division between the post-Solidarność and post-communist camps. Moreover, the election results represented a further step on the path to the legitimization of the SLD as a “normal” party on the left. As the post-communist stigma faded, so too would the significance of the main characteristic distinguishing UP from the SLD in the eyes of the voters, namely, its non-post-communist composition.⁶¹ In this situation, he argued, UP should definitively and unambiguously stand for the elimination of historical divisions, and thus place itself on the side of those who voted for Kwaśniewski in the second round of the elections. He thus suggested that UP attempt to create a “presidential camp”: a “historical and democratic” constellation of forces that recognised such principles as: the validity of democratic elections, the limited role of the president, civilian control over the army and secret services, and the non-partisan position of the National Security Council. Involvement in such a pro-presidential and democratic camp would “allow UP to shed its reputation as a party incapable of constructive action and afraid to take responsibility for governing Poland” and “would also allow UP to display its previous programmatic face in both social-economic questions and constitutional and worldview matters”.⁶²

Unia Pracy in run-up to 1997 parliamentary elections

Tomidajewicz’s essay reflected a more general sentiment, prevalent among the UP “base” and those members with backgrounds in the PZPR, calling for a qualitatively new relationship with the post-communists. Recognising the SLD as a viable and respectable political force on the left, such voices began pressing to establish a new *modus vivendi* with Kwasniewski’s party. UP’s unabated criticism of the SLD and its continued distance from the governing coalition, it was argued, had earned the party two electoral defeats (in 1994 and 1995). Tomidajewicz’s essay should thus be seen as the opening salvo in an internal battle over the direction of UP, a struggle that would become more acute as the major political parties began mobilising for the 1997 parliamentary elections.

At the February National Council meeting, however, it was decided that UP would stay the course set by Bugaj, neither approaching the SLD nor taking part in the construction of a post-Solidarność bloc. Though he recognized the risks of such a decision, given the severely polarised political atmosphere, Bugaj insisted that this was the only way for the party to preserve

its independent identity.⁶³ At the core of Bugaj's criticism of the SLD was a deep suspicion of the post-communists, both with regard to their political principles and their methods of conducting politics. As long as UP remained "Bugaj's party", it would refuse to recognise the SLD as a legitimate part of the left.

Two political issues invited particular criticism of the SLD from UP: the constitutional project and the commercialisation and privatisation of state enterprises. With respect to the former, Bugaj stated flatly that the SLD's plans for the new Polish constitution were "against the aspirations of the majority of society". He reminded both governing coalition partners that they had previously been in favour of eliminating the institution of the senate, a proposal that had disappeared from the drafts of the constitution. Other serious deficiencies, according to Bugaj, were the lack of guarantees social rights, the right to free schooling, and the establishment of church-state relations based on the principle of the neutral world-view of the state.⁶⁴

With respect to the privatisation and commercialisation of state enterprises, it will be recalled that UP's opposition to the SLD on this issue was the most important reason for UP not joining the governing coalition. It remained a serious obstacle to cooperation between the two parties, and was regarded by much of UP as proof of just how liberal the SLD's economic policies were. UP charged the SLD with dramatically accelerating the privatisation process with the aim of enfranchising the nomenklatura. According to UP, the quick sale of a large number of state enterprises had deflated their worth. The most egregious example of such asset stripping was the Bank Œel'ski affair, which cost the Polish state treasury several tens of billions of z³oty.⁶⁵

Perhaps more damaging to the level of trust between UP and the SLD was the sorry record of their attempts to work together constructively. One striking example was the quid pro quo over the 1995 tax agreement, in which UP agreed to support the SLD in overriding President Wa³e³sa's veto, in return for the SLD's acceptance of proposals to alter the tax codes in 1996. Specifically, UP had called for the introduction of an additional lower tax rate for the lowest income earners, tax relief for families with children, and an increase in the quota of those free from taxes.⁶⁶ The agreement seemed to work initially, as with UP's help the SLD-PSL coalition was able to override Wa³e³sa's veto. After the vote, however, President Wa³e³sa sent the bill to the Constitutional Tribunal, raising doubts as to the manner in which the current

taxes were introduced.⁶⁷ The Constitutional Tribunal supported the president, and UP declared itself for accepting the verdict, even though it meant a reduction of the tax rates. The SLD charged UP with breaking the agreement, arguing that Bugaj's party had committed itself to supporting the coalition over this issue. The SLD thus considered itself freed of any obligations regarding UP's proposals for the following year's taxes.⁶⁸ The SLD charged UP with excessive formalism, and UP was left with the suspicion that the post-communists had merely found a pretext upon which to justify their continued liberal economic course.

In the meantime, with the approach of the 1997 parliamentary elections, the post-communists looked to consolidate the left side of the political spectrum. As early as August 1996, Oleksy, the leader of the SdRP, suggested that his party would be open to the idea of forming an electoral coalition with UP. The main obstacle to such an arrangement, he added, was the leadership of Bugaj, whose anti-communism remained virulent. It had been suggested that this overture was an effort by the post-communists to demonstrate their openness to all elements on the left, even those arising from the Solidarność tradition.⁶⁹ Among the UP leadership, however, Oleksy's conditional proposal was received as an insidious attempt to stir dissent within the ranks of UP.

Confronted with such professedly innocuous proposals for reconciliation from a political party it was deeply suspicious of, the leadership of UP, and Bugaj in particular, responded by increasing its political distance from the post-communists. The Solidarność-based leadership thus chose to stress the two parties' fundamental differences over socio-economic matters, while reassessing its stance on matters in which it previously felt to be close to the SLD. Specifically, the latter consisted of issues of culture or worldview, such as abortion and the role of the church in public life more generally. In concentrating on the poorest and least privileged segments of Polish society, that "socio-economic" electorate, UP perceived the need to re-examine its strained relationship with the Polish Catholic Church. By 1997 Bugaj had come to the realisation that if he wanted to keep his party away from the outstretched arms of the SLD by seeking to represent the poorest and most downtrodden, a rapprochement with the church was necessary. As Bugaj remarked to *Rzeczpospolita* in March 1997,

Public opinion polls show that to a large degree our voters are practicing people, although certainly not as religious as AWS or ROP voters. In

this way our electorate differs fundamentally from the electorate of the SLD, which is the only grouping that attracts distinctly anti-clerical people.⁷⁰

Research by Tadeusz Szawiel indicating that the poorer and less educated groups in Polish society tend to be more religious and favourably inclined to the presence of the church in public life, has validated Bugaj's strategy.⁷¹

In practice, this volte-face with respect to the institution of the church led UP to reconsider its position on ratifying the concordat. In early 1997, after three years of working (along with the SLD) to postpone ratification of the concordat until after the Polish constitution has been ratified, UP began calling for reaching a compromise on the concordat prior to the parliamentary elections. As the 1997 parliamentary elections drew closer, Bugaj tried desperately to disassociate his party from the anti-clerics in the post-communist camp, arguing that

deep respect for the Christian tradition and certain symbolic institutions should incline us to find a chance for ratifying the concordat. But for [UP] the essential condition is a guarantee of the secular state.⁷²

UP's reversal on the Concordat issue, along with its decision to stop pushing for a referendum on abortion, reflected the party leadership's intense desire to distance itself from its post-communist competitors on the left. By 1997 Bugaj had opted to risk abandoning a certain type of left electorate - which was "left" or "progressive" in the cultural/worldview sense - for another - the "socio-economic" left. The former, Bugaj left to the SLD or UW, while the latter he hoped would comprise the non-communist left's main support base. To this end, Bugaj refused to compromise on UP's socio-economic program, whilst re-establishing a dialogue with the church.

Thus the sharp post-communist/post-Solidarność divide in Polish politics posed an acute dilemma for UP, a party which in its very composition defied this simple dichotomy. In its time in parliament, UP was repeatedly split on the most important strategic decisions: whether to enter into the governing coalition, how to approach the local elections, whom to support in the presidential elections, and where to look for political allies in the run-up to the 1997 parliamentary elections.

What is more, political divisions based on personal histories and

attitudes towards the past, so powerful in determining political preferences in post-communist Poland, ultimately reproduced themselves within UP. This lent further ambiguity to the already elusive political identity of the non-communist left. Pressure on the part of the SLD to co-opt the non-communist left prior to the non-communist left further forced the hand of the fiercely independent UP Chairman, Bugaj, who pulled his party away from the post-communists at the cost of re-formulating, some have suggested betraying, the non-communist left's relationship with the Catholic Church.

More than anything, however, UP's pre-election re-positioning on the Polish political scene only generated confusion. Piotr Kêdziński, campaign manager for UP in the 1997 parliamentary elections, summed up his party's dilemma:

It's very difficult to build a party that wants to appeal to two completely different social groups, and at the end of the day UP fell in the "empty space between the two groups. UP was no longer credible with the youth and the women after its capitulation with the Vatican. This electorate was lost to the SLD...But among the church it was still stigmatised as being against the church, as being for abortion, gay rights. When the Catholic Church spoke of the enemies of the church, the name of UP always came up.⁷³

This confusion and ambiguity surrounding the non-communist left paid meagre electoral dividends, as UP failed even to cross the five percent threshold in the 1997 elections. The non-communist left had dropped entirely out of the Polish parliament.

Quo Vadis? The wandering non-communist left

Like all political parties that have just suffered a major electoral defeat, UP undertook an intensive self-examination following the 1997 parliamentary elections. The attempt to build a non-communist left political force as a real alternative to the post-communists had, at least for the time being, failed; the SLD remained, with the second largest representation in parliament, the only party donning the mantle of social democracy. In light of this, it is entirely understandable that the UP leadership would begin to reassess the party's political strategy and the overall direction in which the party should head.

Bugaj's resignation as leader of UP heralded a new era for the non-communist left and promised at least some changes in its overall strategy.

The changing of the guard was a significant moment in the history of the non-communist left in post-communist Poland, as Bugaj had really been the only leader this political movement had known. More than this, in the popular consciousness UP had been associated almost exclusively with the name of its leader, such that his resignation announced clearly that a change in the party's political line was in the works. Bugaj, the intellectual driving force behind the attempt to construct a left wholly independent of, and even in opposition to, the post-communist SLD, would no longer lead this change, but would continue to try and influence it the best he could.

But exactly how would UP adjust its political strategy? The search for an answer to this vexed question following the 1997 elections exposed in spectacular fashion the contradictions and conflicting tendencies within UP. What is instructive about the divisions within UP, however, is the wide range of notions regarding the future of the non-communist left that they reflected. If the party had been torn over political strategy throughout its four years in parliament, it would find it even more difficult to agree upon an adequate response to the political crisis it now faced.

As the various proposals regarding the future of the non-communist left emerged from within UP, what became increasingly evident was just how precariously the party had been held together. Lacking a sturdy social base to provide direction now that it found itself out of parliament, the UP leadership would desperately try to identify that future social base and reorient itself accordingly. As the rest of this section will show, however, this search pulled the leaders of the party in quite conflicting directions.

Kêdzierski's "New Left"

The first initiative geared towards the political renewal of UP emerged from a rather unexpected quarter of the party - the UP Youth Federation (UPFM). Its leader, Piotr Kêdzierski, laid out his strategy for the renewal of the non-communist left in Poland in an essay entitled "16 Points for a New Left". At the core of his proposal was a call for building a fundamentally "new" left, incorporating new ideas, adopting a new form, and employing a new language. In a country where the discourse of politics has been reduced to "cynical realism", Kêdzierski argued, a qualitatively new politics must be informed by new ideas.⁷⁴

The regenerative force on the left, Kêdzierski asserted, can only be the youth. To this group has been assigned the historic task of reinventing the

Polish left, for only the youth is by definition rebellious, idealistic and hungry for social change. Moreover, only the younger generations are untainted by the historical divisions that have so dominated politics in Poland and obscured the really important issues. In order to reach this segment of society, however, the left must engage it in its own language. It must do away with the tired old refrains of the traditional politicians on the left, and learn to be hip, *avant garde*; only in this way can the non-communist left infuse itself with the young blood needed to meet the challenges of the day.

The new left, Kêdzierski continued, cannot be built on the ruins of the communist party. On this point Kêdzierski was in full agreement with UP's former leader Bugaj. The post-communists not only compromised themselves long ago by subscribing to the precepts of economic liberalism, but also, and more significantly, have heaped long-lasting shame and disgrace upon the very notion of the left in Poland. The Polish right wing has extracted considerable political mileage out of the legacy of communism, arguing that all left politics finds its logical conclusion in the PRL criminal state. The new left must reject this, and state clearly and with confidence that communism did not realise the values of the left, and that it should be grouped rather with fascism; both are hybrids appealing to either left or right values, but in fact closer to each other than to either side of the spectrum.⁷⁵

Thus Kêdzierski implored his fellow UP party members to renounce their sense of pride in the Polish non-communist left as a "force of compromise, peace and diplomacy". Now was the time for the left to don its other historical costume, that of "rebellion and scandal".⁷⁶ Here was a call to radicalism, a plea for a politics informed once again by idealism and activism. "It's not about defending the poor", Kêdzierski maintained, "but about eliminating poverty".⁷⁷

If Kêdzierski was radical in his rhetoric, however, then the actual socio-economic program he proposed for the new left recalled more tried and tested solutions. On the one hand, he suggested that Poland look to Scandinavia as a model of economic development. The basis should be Keynesian, with the role of the state not just limited to redistributing income, but extended to actively promoting the strategic, future-oriented branches of production and services, while minimising unemployment. Education plays an absolutely key role in this strategy. Implicit in Kêdzierski's strategy is a focus on the socio-economic roots of the ills of Polish society, and thus economic development as a programmatic priority.

To supplement the Scandinavian model of social democracy in the economic base, however, Kêdzierski called for a conceptual rethinking in the cultural superstructure. Here he drew upon the achievements of the Blair/Clinton “third way”, which had restored the left to power by promising the hope for something qualitatively new. Though he did not go into any detail, Kêdzierski seemed to be calling for a new social understanding of the concepts of wealth and poverty along “third way” lines. The former no longer implies the latter; development and prosperity are not a zero-sum game. Whereas “the old left generation rejected wealth outright”, Kêdzierski argued, “the new generation must not - it must accept the disparities in society, but only demand that the wealthier do not pull the ladder up behind them”.⁷⁸ Moreover, though a war against the Catholic Church must not be proclaimed, the Polish left cannot remain silent about the role of the church in public life. The specific position of the church in Poland necessitates a response from the left, as core ethical values, in addition to the separation of church and state, are at stake.

Kêdzierski’s vision of the new left, first expounded at the UPFM Congress, was ultimately rejected by the rest of UP at the party congress in February 1998, when Kêdzierski himself was roundly defeated in his bid to become the leader of the party. His proposals met with the entrenched opposition of the congress delegates, the majority of which were former PZPR members. The prevailing mood at the UP Party Congress pushed for a consolidation of left forces as the only sensible means of returning to politics. Kêdzierski’s challenge, a longer-term strategy oriented towards forming a new social support base rather than readjusting to the old, elicited a negative, in fact outright hostile response from the delegates.⁷⁹

His call for the formation of a “non-authoritarian left”, based on members of the new left generation and incorporating the democratic left opposition under communism, went unheeded. In particular, the one prominent UP leader who Kêdzierski felt could lead such an initiative, Zbigniew Bujak, expressed no interest. Indeed, Bujak had made political plans of his own.

Bujak’s departure

Zbigniew Bujak’s response to UP’s 1997 electoral defeat, though coming as a surprise to many of his fellow party members, reflected a second current within the hopelessly divided UP. Accepting the verdict of the recent parliamentary elections as the final word on the attempt to build an independent and non-communist left, Bujak wasted no time in searching elsewhere for a

political home. As soon as he detected the drift within UP towards the post-communist SdRP, he abandoned altogether the project to forge a left in cooperation with even reformist elements from the PZPR. He and about twenty other UP members did not even attend the UP Party Congress, opting instead to make an appearance at the party congress of UP's liberal rival, the Freedom Union (UW).

Bujak justified his move to the party of Balcerowicz as a natural, and indeed the most practical, response to the political situation following the recent parliamentary elections. For Bujak and his followers, only three viable forces now remained on the Polish political scene, the SLD, AWS and UW, and the practical options available to the non-communist left amounted to a simple choice between these groupings. Continuing to preserve the absolute independence of UP outside of parliament would consign the party to political oblivion. Thus Bujak, a self-proclaimed man of "action", reasoned that joining UW was a simple matter of political expediency for someone on the democratic and non-communist left who wanted to remain politically active.

For Bujak and his followers, however, the move to UW was entirely natural. In justifying his decision to his many critics, Bujak announced that ROAD, from which much of UW had come, had always been the political grouping he with which he most closely identified. When he left ROAD to form UP in 1992, he did so to escape from the monolithic post-solidarity liberal Democratic Union (UD) camp that had formed around Mazowiecki's bid for president. Now that the economic conservatives of UD have left to form KLD, UW has become more of a centrist party as a result, and UP has proven to be a political failure, returning to his old colleagues in UW made strategic sense.

For the worker-activist turned politician Bujak, moreover, the move to UW was more than just a personal homecoming; it was a political coming-of-age of sorts. Izabela Jaruga-Nowacka, a former colleague of Bujak's in both ROAD and UP, has suggested that Bujak's political views were still in the process of formation while he was part of UW. By the autumn of 1997, when the UP experiment had fallen flat, Bujak had "rediscovered" Balcerowicz and, with him, the painful necessity of economic liberalism for the consolidation of democracy and capitalism in Poland.⁸⁰ This was a reality, Bujak argued, that the Polish intelligentsia had already come to terms with, while the non-communist left (UP) could not.

Thus in Balcerowicz Bujak saw more than the economist, he also saw

the skilful politician.⁸¹ More than this, he saw a politician with the support of such heroic political figures as Kuroń and Mazowiecki. Far from a betrayal of the left, Bujak regarded the offer from UW as a chance to bolster its reform policies with concepts from the left. Specifically how the former UP members might be able to contribute constructively to UW he did not say; most important for Bujak seemed to be that members of the non-communist left could remain politically active on the national level in the company of men of conviction and integrity. To his critics, however, Bujak's decision seemed only to confirm suspicions that he had always placed far more importance on the non-communist aspect of the non-communist left.

Bugaj's "Social Left"

In contrast to his sharpest critics, Bugaj [who had originally come to UP from *Solidarność Pracy*] reacted to UP's electoral defeat by calmly enumerating what he perceived to be its underlying, objective causes. In the first place, he argued, UP suffered from the simple misfortune of being a left party, which placed particular emphasis on the social aspects of economic policy, at a time when economic growth had served to alleviate the social situation for many Poles. Despite rising inequality and stern warnings emanating from UP over future threats to the national economy, the overall message of the non-communist left found little resonance with Polish society writ large. Bugaj added that the historical divisions between the post-communist and post-*Solidarność* political camps also remained too powerful to overcome, though the desire of UP to do so still retains its salience.⁸² These were the objective realities, which played no small part in UP's failure in 1997.

If Bugaj had attributed UP's defeat to a very different set of factors, the lessons he drew for the future direction of the party also conflicted with those of his critics. Bugaj's immediate recommendation was for UP to focus its attention on the 52 percent of eligible voters that did not vote in the recent parliamentary elections. This segment of Polish society he dubbed the "social electorate", the poorer, less educated and, it followed, natural support-base for the left. Bugaj suggested that UP involve itself with this "base", by "organising support for specific legislative projects, collecting citizens' signatures, and presenting these projects to the Sejm".⁸³

At the same time, Bugaj established his firm opposition to any moves that might jeopardize the political autonomy of UP. In particular, he was adamant that UP maintain its distance from the SLD, which, he argued, was

bent on fully absorbing all competition on the left side of the political scene. In an open letter addressed to Malachowski, he and seven other UP members made clear their objections to an alliance with the post-communists, highlighting the important programmatic differences that separated the two parties. Former UP Honorary Chairman, Karol Modzelewski, echoed Bugaj's fears that a rapprochement with the post-communists would likely lead to the party's vassalisation under the SLD, and urged against tendencies leading in such a direction. He predicted that the credibility of the AWS-UW right governing coalition would soon wear out, at which time UP should be ready to absorb the dissatisfied elements. As this electorate is unlikely to be lacking in anti-communist sentiment, however, UP must keep its distance from the SLD. Only such a strategy, he argued, offered UP the chance to return to the Polish political scene as an autonomous social-democratic party.⁸⁴

The personal factor was not entirely absent from Bugaj's criticism of the SLD, however, as he pointed out that, as the most recent SdRP Congress had illustrated, the SLD remained under the control of the old communist party apparatus. For Bugaj, accepting the communist legacy was far too high a price to pay for the consolidation of the left and, with it, the return to political power. Bugaj maintained, "I do not see any reason for taking upon myself the lifetime career achievements of Jaskiernia, Oleksy, Szmajdziński, Janik and Miller".⁸⁵

As an alternative political strategy, Bugaj pressed his party for closer cooperation with what he called the "social left", that part of the Polish electorate that was left in the socio-economic, rather than cultural, sense. The unemployed and low-wage earners from small towns and villages were the target group Bugaj had in mind, and in looking forward to the upcoming local elections he pointed to an electoral coalition with the PSL as a way to reach this element. At a conference organized by the Association of Social Studies and Initiatives, sociologists, PSL members and UP members (including Bugaj) discussed the prospects of the two parties forming a new and lasting political bloc.

According to Bugaj, the Polish political scene, which was comprised of three stable political blocs (AWS, SLD, and UW), was in desperate need of a fourth, which would represent the interests of the "social left". This fourth bloc, known as the Social Association (Przymierze Społeczne), would unite behind the conviction that the state must be an instrument for equalising incomes and life opportunities. However, warned Bugaj,

in the Polish conditions this solidarity also has its national dimension. The social left must appeal to the proletarian groups. This determines the inability, and in my opinion the groundlessness, of accenting left liberalism in a sharp manner in the cultural or worldview sphere”.⁸⁶

The social left should also stand for caution and scepticism with regard to European integration, as the process itself will impact hardest on the least-advantaged. On this point, Bugaj’s conception of the social left and the position of the PSL were in close agreement.

Bugaj’s conception of the social left can perhaps be better understood as a reaction to Western European notions of the “third way” and their implications. In a critique of British sociologist Anthony Giddens’s book, *The Third Way*,⁸⁷ Bugaj locates the concept of the new left, expounded by Blair and his intellectual guru Giddens, squarely within the Atlanticist tradition of his conservative predecessors, Major and Thatcher. The “third way”, he argues, borrows heavily from the American model of capitalism, one which accepts great inequality, little security, unemployment, high crime rates, low savings and chronic trade deficits as by-products of supposed efficiency and competitiveness in the global economy.

Moreover, in his reformulation of the left for the globalised world, Giddens offers precious little advice or hope for those, largely working class, elements that will suffer the greatest from the disruptions created by the process of globalisation. Instead, Bugaj surmises, Giddens affirms the process of globalisation out of “conviction of the inevitability of the process and the hope for a world government”, buttressed by international bodies such as the WTO, the IMF, the World Bank and the UN. Implicit in this view is the belief that “national links and national states will not be an obstacle in the building of a global democracy”. “This assertion”, according to Bugaj,

is contradicted by reality. All democracies are strongly rooted in the history, tradition and culture of the particular countries. There is no visible solid foundation for a ‘synthetic global democracy’.⁸⁸

Since for Bugaj there can be no substantive democracy outside the nation-state, it follows that the democratic left must accept the nation-state as its point of departure, as the only institution through which the great goals of the left, equality, solidarity, community, can be realised democratically. But these traditionally leftist goals are precisely what the “third way”, by its

wholesale acceptance of many of the social and economic principles of neo-liberalism, precludes. "About these goals", says Bugaj, "the Pope speaks more decidedly today than the new social democrats".⁸⁹

Unia Pracy drifts towards the SLD

Immediately after the 1997 parliamentary debacle, Tomasz Nałecz argued that now was the time for Polish society to "see clearly that on the left there are people who differ here and there, sometimes going in different directions, but able to act in solidarity in the name of an objective goal".⁹⁰ Indeed, the thrust of the statement, that the left must be able to act together as a political force, was a lesson that some UP leaders were quick to draw following the elections. Nałecz, in remarking that "in the current situation UP should not, and will not, look for opponents on the left", was not even the first to call for such a rapprochement with the post-communists. Aleksander Małachowski, Honorary Chairman of UP, suggested in a post-election UP press conference that the party consider following the example of the Italian left, which returned to power by consolidating a wide range of groupings on the left in a coalition known as the Olive Tree.

The implication was that UP should now concentrate its efforts on consolidating the forces on the left with the aim of winning back power; further, it was the very aversion of UP to the post-communists that had cost the party its parliamentary representation, and the left control over the government. Małachowski levied this charge with particular emphasis at UP's VI Congress, stating, "It's not a coincidence that the Secretary General of the Socialist International is not at our congress. He explained to me that we will not be able to be on the left side of the political scene so long as we attack the SLD on a daily basis". Whence the overblown self-confidence, even conceit, of such a small party as UP, he wondered aloud after the elections, and the hubris to attempt to build a 'clean' left party to which people from the SLD would not have access?⁹¹ This had proven unrealistic, and UP would do best not to repeat the mistake.

A further argument was the inevitability of the process of reconciliation on the left. While the UP leadership continued its bickering over the degree of "left-ness" of the post-communists, the left electorate, insisted Małachowski, "resistant to our criticisms, recognized the SLD also as a real left and demanded that we respect its opinion".⁹² It was high time for UP to respond to the voters, echoed Ziolkowska, and initiate a dialogue with the SLD as soon as possible.⁹³

The party faced a simple choice: it could either be reduced to a discussion club for intellectuals or could become a party with real strength on the left, serious about taking power.⁹⁴

Marek Pol, the new chairman of UP, differed fundamentally with Bugaj on the direction in which the party should head, and saw no future in the *Przymierze Społeczne* electoral alliance that UP had conducted with PSL in the 1998 local elections. UP must be more than just a party for the poor, worrying exclusively about pensioners and the unemployed. Rather, he felt that UP should seek the support of a broader segment of Polish society, including the nascent small capitalist classes.

The only chance for UP to remain effective as a party on the left would be to help the SLD win an absolute majority in the next parliament and thus exert whatever influence it could within the government, from the left side of the coalition. In this way the left in Poland could hope to reproduce the recent success of the social-democratic parties in Western Europe.

To all but one (Małachowski) of the former *Solidarność* activists in UP, however, institutional cooperation with the post-communists was unacceptable. On 13 December 1998, after UP voted against the Institute of Historical Memory and refused to recognise the People's Republic of Poland as a criminal state, nine UP members, including Bugaj, drafted a letter of protest and resignation to the UP leadership. The dissenting members charged the party leadership with betraying the founding mission of UP - to build an independent and non-communist left - and expressed fears that the party had chosen the road of political marginalisation, much like the PPS five years earlier.⁹⁵

To be sure, with the departure of Bugaj and his supporters, there was very little to keep UP from moving ever closer to the post-communists. By October 2000, the UP leadership had decided in favour of entering into an electoral alliance with the SLD, in which UP would retain its autonomous party structure, but would be programmatically bound to the post-communists. The move would bring considerable electoral rewards to Pol's party in the 2001 parliamentary elections⁹⁶, but at the cost of abandoning any pretensions to political independence. As Eliza Olczyk, long-time follower of the Polish left and UP in particular, would comment, "Today [UP] is so close to [the SLD], that it is difficult to say where the SLD ends, and UP begins".⁹⁷

IV. Conclusion: The Dilemma of the Non-Communist Left in Post-Communist Poland

Clearly one of the most disappointing developments for those on the left inspired by the worker-led “Polish revolution” of 1980-81 has been the chronic difficulty, and ultimate failure, of the non-communist left to remain an independent force in post-communist Polish politics. The left tradition arising from Solidarność was severely weakened, first as its trade union structures were dismantled through the imposition of martial law, and later in the political and economic turbulence of the first years of post-communist transformation. Significantly, in the post-1989 period, the non-communist left came under attack in both the political/ideological sense - as economic liberalism captured the imagination of the anti-communist opposition - and in the material/organisational sense, as the only institutions that could have adequately articulated the interests of the poor and working classes (NSZZ Solidarność and the Citizens’ Committees) were consciously subordinated to the greater goal of constructing a functioning market economy.

The non-communist left was never able to recover from this twin blow to its material/organisational “base” and political/ideological “superstructure”. Its weakness in both spheres was exposed by the disappointing performance of both Solidarność Pracy and the Social Democratic Movement (RDS), neither of which managed to revive the spirit of Solidarność 1980-81 in any meaningful sense. The ambiguous success of UP in 1992-93, moreover, hinted at the fundamental dilemma facing the non-communist left in post-communist Poland. For in addressing many of its organisational weaknesses (and becoming the fourth largest party in parliament in 1993), UP was inevitably forced to open itself up to elements (including many former communist party members) whose loyalty to an independent and non-communist left party were suspect at best. Hence the Pyrrhic nature of UP’s abortion referendum campaign and its electoral success in 1993.

UP’s initial difficulties stood in sharp contrast to the post-communist SdRP, which managed skilfully to combine a continuity in the material/organizational sphere with a reinvention of its political/ideological identity. UP thus found itself competing with a post-communist social-democratic party with an established party structure, far greater financial resources, and resilient

personal (i.e. nomenklatura) networks. As the stunning revival of the post-communists helped to re-polarise politics according to historical criteria, manifested by, among other things, the politicised nature of Poland's trade unions, the tension between the material/organisational and political/ideological became well-nigh impossible to reconcile for the non-communist left.

Indeed, in attempting to solve its material/organisational problems (by opening up to former communist reformers), UP risked diluting the content of its political program, which was explicitly anti-communist in that it denied the left-ness of both the PZPR and its post-communist successor party - the SLD. At the same time, however, preserving its independent and non-communist political line left UP with little chance of attracting wider social support, as the political scene had clearly become polarized between a post-communist "left" and a post-Solidarność, virulently anti-communist "right". UP, which was neither, was left exposed to attacks from both political camps. The SLD charged UP with an irrational anti-communism and reactionary sentiments unbecoming of a modern and tolerant left, while AWS (and other nationalist and Catholic groupings on the right) condemned UP for its anticlericalism and blatant left-wing sympathies.

In the end, UP exhibited ambiguous, even contradictory, tendencies: remaining outside the governing coalition, but with one of its members occupying a ministerial post; entering into official opposition to the SLD-PSL government, but explicitly from the left; presenting its own presidential candidate, but one with an indeterminate political platform; and re-formulating its previously unambiguous relationship to the Catholic Church. The result was confusion, for both UP members and, more significantly, for Polish voters. Time and again disputes arose within UP, increasingly played out along personal and historical lines, as post-Solidarność and post-communist members expressed differing conceptions of where best to situate the non-communist left on the Polish political spectrum. By the 1997 parliamentary elections, in the face of increasing pressure from the post-communists to consolidate the entire political left, Bugaj undertook clear efforts to distance his party from the SLD. This move met with considerable surprise, even objection, from elements within UP (with concerns emanating from the party "base" in particular), as would be emphatically demonstrated in the aftermath of the party's 1997 electoral defeat.

Indeed, the post-election period would reflect the true extent of the

political disorientation confronting the non-communist left in post-communist Poland. The disintegration of UP was noteworthy in that four distinct future paths were outlined for the party, each reflecting a different understanding of the non-communist left's place in Polish politics. The sheer range of proposals was telling, as it suggested the extent to which UP had been divorced of any stable electorate that might keep it politically "honest", so to speak. Thus there emerged: Kêdzierski's "new left"; Bujak's "democratic left" within UW; Bugaj's "social left"; and Pol's consolidated left with the post-communists. The non-communist left had clearly been unable to overcome its political/ideological crisis of identity, as UP remained a party in search of a social base.

In the end, of course, Pol's proposal for UP carried the day, as the non-communist left gave up its independent political program for the sake of returning to parliament, this time as part of the governing coalition. The decision marked the end of a bold political experiment, one whose goal was nothing less than the displacement of the post-communists as the major force on the left of the Polish political spectrum. More than this, the UP-SLD electoral coalition put paid to a political tradition that found its most powerful expression in the mass trade union-cum-social movement *Solidarnoœæ* in 1980-81 - the democratic left opposition to communism. This once-powerful current within Polish society was simply unable to gain wider currency in the post-communist reality, as its political expression, *Unia Pracy*, eventually succumbed to the material/organisational and political/ideological challenges of the times. The left legacy of *Solidarnoœæ* has all but expired in its political form; what remains of it is confined, for now, to the realm of symbols and memories.

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Endnotes

- 1 Modzelewski, 17.
- 2 Ibid.
- 3 Chwedoruk, 104.
- 4 Kędziński, interview.
- 5 Ńukowski (1992), 66.
- 6 *Tygodnik Solidarności*, 8 November 1991.
- 7 Marciniak (1992A), 31.
- 8 Ibid., 33-34.
- 9 Ibid., 34.
- 10 Rolicki, 152-53.
- 11 Ibid., 159.
- 12 Ńukowski (1994), 67.
- 13 Chwedoruk, 120.
- 14 Pierwszy Kongres Unii Pracy, 39.
- 15 Chwedoruk, 122.
- 16 According to Piotr Kędziński, prior to the 1993 parliamentary elections the SdRP had been loathe to provide further ammunition for attacks from post-solidarity right (and other elements close to the Church), and thus adopted

a rather muted response to the 1992 anti-abortion campaign. Kêdziński, interview.

17 Kêdziński, interview.

18 Bujak, Zbigniew, interview with the author.

19 Kêdziński, interview.

20 Chwedoruk, 123.

21 Ibid., 128.

22 The three “left” parties - the SLD, PSL and UP - won 43.1 percent of the vote between them. The SLD won 20.4 percent, the PSL 15.4 percent, and UP 7.3 percent. 7 ukowski (1994), 10-11.

23 In the parliamentary elections of 1989, the communists won only one contested seat in the Sejm and none in the Senate.

24 Zubek, 282.

25 Lewis, 20.

26 The SLD was originally formed in the autumn of 1990 to promote the candidacy of Cimoszewicz. It grouped together over 30 post-communist organs, including the OPZZ trade union, but its driving force was remained the SdRP. Lewis, 20.

27 Rogowska, 84.

28 Waller, 481.

29 Szczerbiak, 528.

30 The powiat, eliminated in the 1997 administrative reform, consisted of several gmina grouped around a medium-sized town.

31 Szczerbiak, 531.

32 With the possible exception of the Church, which had reached a stable, if limited, *modus vivendi* with communist authorities in 1956.

33 Gilejko, 98-99.

34 Ibid., 105.

35 Ibid.

36 Ibid., 106.

37 Bujak, Zbigniew, interview.

38 In 1998, UP participated in the local elections in an alliance with the PSL and KPİER (Pensioners' Union).

39 This concept, developed by KOR and Solidarnosc activist Adam Michnik in 1976, denied the reformability of the communist system and entreated the opposition to concentrate on changing Polish society rather than the state. See Michnik (1987).

- 40 Concluded by the Polish Foreign Minister and the Papal Nuncio on 28 July 1993.
- 41 Szawiel (2001), 251.
- 42 Szawiel (1999), 120-21.
- 43 Banaszekiewicz, 86.
- 44 The issues were: the problem of crime, privatisation of state enterprises, the role of the Church and religion in the state, the question of how to deal with the former communist nomenklatura, the problem of unemployment, the level of taxes, the question of Polish integration into NATO and the EU, the financing of agriculture from the state budget, the range of social services to be covered by the state, the influence of foreign capital, and the question over abortion.
- 45 Jasiewicz, 156-57.
- 46 Sabbat-Ćwidlecka, 27.
- 47 *Rzeczpospolita*, 28 June 1994.
- 48 *Rzeczpospolita*, 3 January 1995.
- 49 *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 23 February 1998.
- 50 Kuszlik, 58.
- 51 Batko, 185.
- 52 Sabbat-Ćwidlecka, 8.
- 53 "Wybory prezydenckie: co dalej?", 9.
- 54 The interview with Kuroň in UP's periodical *Nowa Lewica* was entitled "One of Us".
- 55 Former Finance Minister Leszek Balcerowicz was also one of the leaders of Democratic Union (UD) and, later, Freedom Union (UW).
- 56 Gortat (1996), 13.
- 57 Dziemidok, 20.
- 58 Gortat (1996), 14.
- 59 *Rzeczpospolita*, 10 May 1995.
- 60 *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 27-28 May 1995.
- 61 Tomidajewicz, 29.
- 62 *Ibid.*, 38.
- 63 *Rzeczpospolita*, 26 February 1996.
- 64 *Rzeczpospolita*, 7 January 1996.
- 65 *Rzeczpospolita*, 12 September 1996.
- 66 *Rzeczpospolita*, 1 December 1994.
- 67 The tax rise was supposed to apply to the year 1994 only, hence the need to

- extend the current rates for another year. *Rzeczpospolita*, 13 June 1995.
- 68 Ibid.
- 69 *Rzeczpospolita*, 3 September 1996.
- 70 *Rzeczpospolita*, 26 March 1997.
- 71 Szawiel (2001), 296.
- 72 “³oty Ćrodek: rozmowa z poslem Ryszardem Bugajem,” 19-20.
- 73 Kêdzierski, op. cit.
- 74 Kêdzierski, 26-27.
- 75 Ibid., 22.
- 76 Kêdzierski, 26-27.
- 77 Kêdzierski, 12
- 78 Ibid., 13
- 79 During Kêdzierski’s congress speech on the „new left”, a number of UP delegates stood up and left the auditorium in protest, some even denouncing Kêdzierski as a KGB agent. Kêdzierski, interview with author.
- 80 Jaruga-Nowacka, Izabela, interview with the author.
- 81 *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 26 February 1998.
- 82 *Rzeczpospolita*, 27 September 1997.
- 83 *Rzeczpospolita*, 2 October 1997.
- 84 *Rzeczpospolita*, 3 February 1998.
- 85 *Rzeczpospolita*, 14 January 1998.
- 86 Bugaj, 12.
- 87 This book by the renowned British sociologist is widely considered to provide the theoretical underpinning for Prime Minister Tony Blair’s New Labour program.
- 88 *Rzeczpospolita*, 7 August 2000.
- 89 Ibid.
- 90 Nalecz, 16.
- 91 *Trybuna*, 19 December 1997.
- 92 *Przegl’d Tygodniowy*, 1 April 1998.
- 93 *Trybuna*, 13 January 1998.
- 94 *Rzeczpospolita*, 14 January 1998.
- 95 “Oswiadczenie,” 13 December 1997.
- 96 Including: 16 parliamentarians, 7 senators, a vice-marshal of the Sejm, a vice-premier and minister of infrastructure, 2 secretaries of state, and 5 under-secretaries of state. Janicki, Mariusz, “Mniejszy brat”, *Polityka*, Nr. 6, 2002.
- 97 *Rzeczpospolita*, 10 September 2000.

Urszula Lugowska

Samoobrona versus the Establishment

[In Labour Focus no. 69, Urszula Lugowska and Karol Modzelewski reported on the unexpected success, in the Polish elections of September 2001, of the “demagogic, direct-action oriented Self-Defence of the Polish Republic (Samoobrona) which has sent a shock wave through the salons of the Polish political elite”. Modzelewski described Lepper, the leader of Samoobrona, as “a political phenomenon of our time”. In the following article, Urszula Lugowska documents the political development of Samoobrona in the period since the election. Documentary sources are given at the end of the article. Translation is by David Holland]

A year ago, following the electoral success of Samoobrona [Self-Defence] (it achieved 10.2 per cent of the poll in the September 2001 elections), the direction of its future evolution posed a puzzle to commentators. Many took the view that not finding a place for itself in the governing left wing coalition, it would develop in the direction of an alliance with the nationalist-clerical right, represented in parliament by the League of Polish Families. Others predicted that after its electoral success, Samoobrona would shed its radical slogans and integrate with the rest of the political system. Certainly many political figures in the SLD [Democratic Left Alliance] thought this, which is why they supported entrusting Andrzej Lepper with the post of Vice Marshall of the Sejm.

A year later it must be recognised that these prognoses were erroneous. The radical social slogans have remained in Samoobrona's activities and the growth in its popularity to 15 per cent (which puts it in second place) shortly before new elections, this time for local government, demand a closer examination of the only significant anti-establishment political force in Poland.

Soon after the announcement of the results of the parliamentary elections, Samoobrona offered its co-operation in governing the country to the victorious SLD. Samoobrona's social demands however meant that the

SLD leader, Leszek Miller, turned down the offer and instead formed a coalition with Samoobrona's rival, the 'euro-optimistic' peasants' party, the PSL (which had taken part in the preceding SLD coalition cabinet) together with Unia Pracy [Union of Labour].

Samoobrona's leaders declared that they would give the left wing government the benefit of the doubt, but would monitor strictly the fulfilment of the promises made by the SLD during its campaign. With the support of SLD deputies, Andrzej Lepper succeeded in being elected to the post of Sejm Vice Marshall. It was anticipated that this honour would temper Samoobrona's radicalism and moderate the language of Lepper himself. However the opposite took place.

Samoobrona in parliament

The hope that Lepper could be bought off by entrusting him with the office of Sejm Vice Marshall was very short-lived. When in November 2001, the foreign minister, Włodzimierz Cimoszewicz, presented, without parliamentary approval, a position in Brussels on the sale of land to foreigners, Lepper attacked him vehemently. He called him a scoundrel and accused him of indifference to the interests of the Polish countryside. On 29 November 2001, Lepper was stripped of his position as Vice Marshall of the Sejm, with the votes of the SLD and the liberal PO (Citizens' Platform), on the pretext that he had violated parliamentary principles.

This punishment by the social democrats and liberals did not encourage Lepper to abandon his role as 'people's tribune' in the Sejm. In December 2001, Lepper made serious accusations in a speech to the Sejm against some of the highest placed people in the state. He named several politicians he accused of taking bribes. Lepper deposited with the Warsaw Procurator evidence connected with his statements in the Sejm. When he was asked if he did not fear arrest, he responded that he was 'at the disposition' of the Procuracy and ready to give an account to it of his every step.' The documents accused Donald Tusk and Andrzej Olechowski (PO) as well as Włodzimierz Cimoszewicz.

Soon after these events, a motion appeared on the order of the day in the Sejm moving the lifting of Andrzej Lepper's parliamentary immunity. The debate and voting on this resolution became the occasion of a further scandal. On 24 January 2002, when a break in the debate took place, the Marshall cut off the Sejm microphone being used by one of the Samoobrona

deputies. Lepper then brought into the chamber his own equipment, a microphone and loudspeaker (!) and commenced to speak, accusing the left of plundering national property.

In response to the questions of journalists as to whether he would abide by the rules of the Sejm, the leader replied: “I will abide by the rules completely, the rules for me are the voters to whom I promised that I would defend their interests – and I will defend them, regardless of the consequences.”

To the question whether he did not agree that if Samoobrona entered the Sejm, it should abide by its rules, Lepper replied:

These rules are that out of 3 million unemployed people, 80 per cent are denied their benefits. These are the rules which the SLD has brought in, that they give benefits of 20-50 zloty a month – these are their rules.

The Sejm resolved to lift the immunity of deputy Andrzej Lepper: 281 deputies voted for and 87 against, with 7 abstentions. The Sejm also agreed to criminal charges being brought against the president of Samoobrona. Lepper himself voted for the lifting of his own parliamentary immunity, the only Samoobrona deputy to do so.

The immunity was lifted with the votes of the SLD and the PO. Against were all the Samoobrona deputies, apart from Lepper himself, and the LPR [League of Polish Families] deputies. In the following months, however, the relationship between Samoobrona and the LPR did not become any closer. For the majority of the LPR, Samoobrona is too left wing with regard to its methods and in its criticism of the church hierarchy.

Opposition to neoliberal reform

The fullest critique yet made of the anti-worker positions of the new government can be found in the resolutions of the Third Congress of Samoobrona, which took place in April 2002. Samoobrona criticises the growth of unemployment and the deterioration in the position of people progressively excluded from the right to benefits, the collapse of the public health service, privatisation, and the way the Polish banking system is out of touch with Polish economic reality.

This is how Samoobrona evaluated the general situation in the country;

“A lack of proper theoretical foundations and a lack of the political will to carry out an honest systemic transformation in Poland, profiteering from the influx of foreign speculative capital, the development of domestic and foreign organised crime, the collapse and destruction of Polish productive enterprises and services, an extremely negative balance of trade, a plundering privatisation of state assets and an uncontrolled growth in unemployment.

Open unemployment currently exceeds 3.3m. people and together with hidden unemployment exceeds 5.1m. people, of whom those entitled to unemployment benefits number scarcely 0.6m. people. The remaining people and their families have no stable source of income. The state of the economy, resulting from the privatisation programme and the absence of any concrete and courageous decisions by the present government, mean that unemployment will continue to rise. The Third Congress of Samoobrona calls upon the Sejm and the Senate to adopt legislation guaranteeing delivery of a social minimum for everyone deprived of work through no fault of their own, in line with the bill prepared and submitted by the Samoobrona parliamentary group.

The Third Congress of Samoobrona instructs the Samoobrona parliamentary group to undertake appropriate actions as provided for by law to bring before the State Trybunal all those in the Ministries of Labour and Social Policy in Poland, who in the course of discharging their office allowed Polish citizens unemployed through no fault of their own to be left without social security.”

Radical criticism was made by Samoobrona of the market reforms carried out to date in the health service:

“The efforts of the political elite from the beginning of the 90’s were directed towards reformist ideas in the health service, towards appropriation of parts of the assets and financial resources of the health service and not towards improvement in its operation to the benefit of patients.

The result of these measures was the complete wrecking of one of the most modern systems of public health protection in Europe and the world, the pauperisation of the medical professions, in particular doctors and nurses and the driving of hospitals and medical clinics

into extreme poverty. (...)

As a result of 'reform' many clinics, hospital departments and even whole hospitals and sanatoriums stand empty, although the state of the health of citizens in Poland has not improved and there has been no diminution in the number of people requiring medical care.

The building of hospitals and National Health facilities in Poland has been halted, which is incompatible with the interests of people needing medical care and with the constitution of the Polish Republic.

The collapse of medicine and medical care in Poland is associated with the sell off of the pharmaceutical industry and of medical services. It is now not just big pharmaceutical conglomerates, but small Balkan concerns, which are buying up Polish medicine factories and the Polish pharmaceutical market for a song. These are the real outcomes of the political elite's reforms in the Polish health service.

The Third Congress of Samoobrona demands that the Government of Poland complies with the constitution and enacts indispensable reform in accord with its provisions. The Third Congress of Samoobrona expects that a thorough inquiry into its financial management will identify those responsible for the crisis in the Polish health service and the pharmaceutical industry and bring them to book."

There is also a very negative view of Polish finance policy:

"Almost 80 per cent of the Polish banking system has been sold to foreign capital, together with the buildings, fixed assets, clients and their deposits and with them that part of the sovereignty of the Republic which rests upon the banking system.

The President of the National Bank of Poland and the Monetary Policy Council act in a manner divorced from the realities of socio-economic life in Poland and execute the instructions of the IMF and not those of the government or the Sejm.

The senior management of the IMF mission in Poland criticises and humiliates the constitutional organs of government in the Republic of Poland.

The Third Congress of Samoobrona accepts the contents of the declaration of the Samoobrona parliamentary group put forward on 15 March 2002 in the Sejm, calling upon the Government of Poland

to declare the senior management of the IMF mission in Poland “persona non grata” and demands that, the foreign minister, Włodzimierz Cimoszewicz, provides IMF headquarters with urgent notification of this matter.

The Third Congress of Samoobrona asserts that as long as Leszek Balcerowicz remains in the position of President of the national bank of Poland, and President of the Monetary Policy Council losses of over 10m. zloty a day accrue to the national economy and that the Government, the Sejm and the President are responsible for this in equal measure.”

Samoobrona accuses the ‘left-wing’ governing coalition of sharing responsibility for the whole dramatic situation in the country. An assessment of the responsibility of the governing elite is virtually a call for social revolution.

“We observe the dramatic situation in Poland with the greatest perturbation and concern. The governing coalition in the country has up until now not carried out even its own electoral promises. It is behaving in a completely opposite manner. The state budget for 2002 has been passed at the cost of poor people, from the pockets of teachers, students and mothers bringing up small children. The pockets of the rich however have been immune. The president and his court protect them, the political elite defends them, mired as it is in fraud and the sell off of national assets, with the economic elite.

In this country, poverty and destitution are growing. The Polish farmer is already a third class citizen. His income is simply outrageous. It is strikingly lower than urban incomes, where people can’t make ends meet either.

Samoobrona cannot any longer stand by watching the mediocre performance of the Government, while the three executive arms of government lord it over us – ie:

The President’s court, which is already a super-government defending only the rich and their jiggery-pokery;

The Monetary Policy Council – being the latest conduit for the bankrupt AWS [Solidarity Electoral Action] policies, which have been damaging to Poland and Poles from the beginning;

The SLD-UP-PSL Government, which dodges its electoral promises and does not carry them out, reversing its decisions and cowering before the super-government of President Kwasniewski; In this state of affairs, the Third Congress of Samoobrona proclaims national readiness for protests by the poor, the unemployed and the wronged. We cannot wait any longer. The time has come for active and uncompromising struggle. Congress appeals to the poor, the wronged, the unemployed, the cheated, to those threatened with bankruptcy, to those ready to struggle for their right to live, for a dignified life. We will drive this elite from power. It has substituted for a mandate of service to the nation private mandates of greed and arrogance (...) in our country the people must rule and their representatives who can demonstrate that they serve their nation and not only the rich.”

Social Revolt

Soon after he levelled accusations of bribe-taking against leading politicians, Lepper warned of further protests and ‘passive revolt’ by Samoobrona, in the Sejm and in the streets.

“I will urge people to revolt (...) against this government, which has acted against Poland and against the Polish nation and I am not afraid to stand at the head of this revolt, but a passive revolt. No violence, because this is not necessary,”

Questioned as to what methods this ‘passive revolt’ would employ, he said:

“a passive posture of resistance to government.” “This even means refusing to pay rent, that we will stand passively, we will go onto the streets, apologising to those whose movements are hindered by what is happening (...) Not a single stone will be thrown, not a single window broken”.

He also added that in the Sejm:

“there will be some big surprises. This Sejm will not be a tranquil idyll (...) until people are no longer unable to live with dignity. (...) You can expect everything. There may be passive revolt in the streets,

maybe in the Sejm”.

In January, during a meeting with Kraków shop-keepers and businessmen, Andrzej Lepper said that he was ready to stand at the head of the eventual social revolt, if it falls to him. He had gone to Kraków on the invitation of an association of small shop-keepers, who looked to the support of the president of Samoobrona to act to restrict the number of hypermarkets. “In the market I was surrounded by crowds of people screaming to be led to revolution,” Lepper said at a press conference.

“I hear similar opinions in other towns I visit. People feel cheated by the SLD and they have had enough of what is happening in Poland. They want to go onto the streets. If it comes to a social revolt, I will stand at its head, but I would not want it to lead to bloodshed.”

The leader of Samoobrona assured the shop-keepers that he was against hypermarkets and will support actions aimed at restricting the number of big capacity shops. He stressed that in many towns, the establishment of such trading entities gave rise to violations of the law and to official corruption, to obtain permission for building.

In August 2002 he called in at the clothing factory ‘Odra’ in Szczecin. The boss had not paid any wages to his workers for months. The Szczecin ship-yard workers came to the assistance of the striking textile workers and beat him up. The Minister of Internal Affairs, Krzysztof Janik, publicly condemned the police for carrying out their instructions and not intervening against the ship-yard workers. The Chief Police Commander sacked the policemen for not defending the owner of the factory from the angry ship-yard workers.

Lepper involved himself in this matter by putting forward a resolution offering guarantees to the Szczecin shipyard workers.

“They are struggling for survival, for bread for themselves and their children,” wrote Lepper “and their actions were a result of the terrible situation of the workers at the ‘Odra’ factory, caused by the actions of Henryk Walus, the president of the clothing factory, which not only broke the law but violated all moral principles.

Mr Henryk Walus, through his long-standing behaviour and contempt for his workers, pushed them into destitution through making it

impossible for them to satisfy their basic needs, not paying them the wages due to them and exploiting the workers like a free resource, driving them to extreme desperation.

The guarantee which I put forward is an expression of the solidarity of Samoobrona, of which I am president, with the ship-yard workers, who are denied work and any hope.”

The parliamentary group of Samoobrona and the Convention of the Samoobrona Party adopted a resolution in which it was stated that

“economic hyenas exploit defenceless people with impunity, not paying them for their work for months on end and neither the procurator, nor the police, nor Minister Janik, concern themselves about it.

The Samoobrona deputies consider that during the events in Szczecin, the police behaved responsibly, with a sense of justice and social sensitivity. A responsible police force does not use fire arms against people crying for bread, like they were against the desperate farmers in Nowy Dwor Gdansk.

A social explosion threatens Poland, with the growth in the ranks of the unemployed, without benefits, without a chance of a normal life – in the families of soldiers and policemen too. The police in Szczecin did not succumb to emotion, they did not join in, they remained at their posts, obedient to the discipline of the service and their instructions.

Society expects condemnation and punishment of the perpetrators of social destitution, condemnation of those responsible for the situation in Szczecin. Instead of this, representatives of the government in the style of years gone by, threatened to punish the victims of the system and not those responsible.

The situation in Szczecin is terrible. Eleven desperate ship-yard workers have hanged themselves. Minister Krzysztof Janik (...) will not give them their lives back.

The police are being treated like the Gdansk ship-yard workers were treated in the old days. They were called trouble-makers by the government of the day. Enough of this! Enough abuse of the uniformed public services to defend the private people’s interests, to defend the groups and people connected to the state authorities.”

Samoobrona and the European Union

Samoobrona has already developed a coherent position on the question of Polish foreign policy. The position of Samoobrona on Poland's integration into the European Union diverges markedly from the euro-enthusiasm of the social democrats, who are criticised by them for their servility toward the West and for uncritical acceptance of the conditions imposed by Brussels upon Poland. Samoobrona says: "We are already in Europe. We have been at its geographical centre since the dawn of history. We can be in the European Union, but not at any price."

Samoobrona objects chiefly to the policy the EU is conducting and intends to conduct with regard to Polish agriculture. In the opinion of Samoobrona, entry to the EU on the basis proposed by Brussels will lead to the complete destruction of Polish agriculture:

"Poland joining the EU will not create problems for EU agriculture, however it will lay a huge burden on Polish agriculture. Experience so far of the integration process indicates that Poland cannot count on significant help from the EU, on the contrary, it will have to oppose the expansion of overproduction in the EU.

Agreement with such a policy in the not-too-distant future will lead to the complete collapse of the whole of agriculture, in a similar way to what happened to the former state farms.

In direct subsidies Poland will supposedly receive only 25 per cent of what the Western farmers get. But no-one will speak honestly about how much the prices of agricultural inputs will rise and this will work out at around 40 per cent. Taking into account the agricultural price rises and the 25 per cent of direct subsidies, the income of a Polish farmer per hectare will be as low after joining the EU as before. Direct subsidies of at least 66 per cent of what EU farmers get will be needed to offset the price shock.

Only 100 per cent subsidies to Polish agriculture will create paying conditions after joining the EU and even then the incomes of Polish farmers will still be 30 per cent lower than those of their EU colleagues. Samoobrona is completely against a situation in which the Polish government and the EU envisage acting to ensure good conditions for foreign capital in Polish agriculture and its hinterland by increasing

outlays on infrastructure, from domestic and foreign aid sources, at the cost of direct payments to Polish farmers. Treating the countries of central and eastern Europe as a sphere of economic expansion and in the case of agriculture exclusively as market outlets for foodstuffs from the EU, as some EU politicians advocate, is a mistake and displays a complete lack of understanding of the idea of European integration. The practical proposals put forward by the EU are not acceptable to Poland, in the opinion of the political leaders of Samoobrona. The EU plans to allocate 20 bn. euro for aid to Poland in the first three years following our country's adherence. This means that in the years 2004-2006 Poland may get about 7 bn euro net.

The Union wants to limit Polish agricultural production, taking into account, as Günter Verheugen explains, that in the EU itself significant limitations are being introduced in the agricultural sector and for particular member states quotas or limits on production will be established.

With the aim of pursuing such a policy, the Commission proposes a ten year period for the integration of the Polish countryside into the Union's foodstuffs market. This is to work out at only 25 per cent of what Western farmers get in 2004, 30 per cent in 2005 and 35 per cent in 2006. For the average farm, with 8 hectares of wheat sown, the proposal of the European Commission means that around 120 zloty (30 euro) will be paid monthly in 2004.

In exchange for direct subsidies, the Commission wants to impose production limits on Polish farmers. The proposed limits are lower than those advocated by the Polish government. The largest difference is in relation to milk (the EC proposes 8,875m. tons annually, the government wants 11,845m. tons in 2004 and 13,740m. tons in 2008) and to corn (Brussels considers that average crops to count for aid should be fixed at 296 tons a hectare, while Poland wanted 361 tons a hectare).

The level of direct payments proposed by the Commission cannot be accepted by Samoobrona. The extension of such an offer by the EU negates its own central principles, such as the principle of solidarity, equal treatment of all agents or equal competition. Samoobrona also expresses its strong opposition to the decision of the Government of the Republic of Poland allowing the possibility of the sale of land to

foreigners.”

Samoobrona, NATO and the Pax Americana

In questions relating to military conflicts in the world, the position of Samoobrona also contrasts markedly with the policy of the governing coalition. In April Lepper was the only parliamentary politician present at a several hundred strong demonstration of Palestinians living in Poland against the aggressive Israeli war activities. On the anniversary of the events of 11 September, Samoobrona prepared its own declaration, which although it condemned the attack on the World Trade Centre, at the same time included a strong anti-war and anti-imperialist accent.

“The huge technological scientific and especially military preponderance of the United States of North America must arouse our concern about its further application in practice. Fully understanding the need for preventive actions, we cannot however agree to ever more frequent actions of an aggressive character.

Our full support is extended only on the question of tracking down those responsible for the massacre in the United States. We consider however that haste in the direction of curbing evil leads to ever greater blindness, causing people to be condemned on the basis of suspicion before a court has passed judgement, before proof of any kind of guilt. This can lead to the entanglement not only of Poland, but also of the whole of Europe, in a war without end.

We emphatically underline that the obligations of an ally, arising from Poland’s membership of NATO, do not oblige our fatherland to involve itself in a far away war not its own. We do not consider that a military attack was the best solution amongst those available. This may threaten a balkanised war, which will spread into ever more territory, spilling the innocent blood not only of many Iraqis, but perhaps and even for some time, of us Poles. We know such a scenario well already from history.

A considered international policy, the possibility of imposing an embargo, even economic isolation, and first and foremost diplomatic discussions and negotiations are more likely to work than rockets and bombs. Samoobrona does not want Poland to be exposed again by irresponsible acts either from the Polish side or from foreign decision making centres to the kind of thing that has happened in the past. We

warn against such a scenario, at the same time drawing the attention of the government to the problems of the country, such as unemployment, poverty and social injustice.”

The local government campaign

Today, after little over a year of the Miller government, Samoobrona has opened its local government election campaign with the slogan: “They got in, they cheated us, they have to go.”

“The disastrous condition of state finances has been made clear” say the activists of Samoobrona, “The hole in the budget threatens the stability and functioning of state institutions, which may lead to unimaginable consequences.

In spite of such a difficult situation, in which successive finance ministers have introduced, or tried to introduce, new kinds of taxes (eg taxation of incomes from bank accounts or obligatory tolls on journeys on normal roads) Prime Minister Miller has done nothing to bring before Court or Tribunal the guilty perpetrators. Some of these prominent people who are responsible for the catastrophic financial situation, after switching parties, are again aiming at government. It is high time to make clear to them that they were already in government and what their achievements were. This is the more the case when there are parties such as Samoobrona whose members have not been compromised by taking part in earlier cabinets.

Why is Prime Minister Miller reluctant to bring those guilty of financial incompetence before a court. Is it a matter of “do not judge unless you be judged”? Whether the government is right or left, better or worse, they always come through it. And the man in the street has to pay for everything.”

At the same time, Samoobrona does not intend to abandon its earlier forms of activity: organised citizen protests. In response to charges of disturbing social order, Samoobrona recalled the words of, Cyrankiewicz, the premier of People’s Poland in 1956: “Every provocateur or nutcase who dares to raise his hand against the people’s power should be clear that the government will chop it off.”

“Do you remember the time (in People’s Poland) when the government

sent armed units against citizens ?” asks the president of the Samoobrona youth organisation, Mama Jankowska.

“Do you recall why people went into the streets and what the commentaries were like in the party media ? Finally, which side was right ? How did it end for a government using police interventions against citizens ?

The blockades organised by Samoobrona are not small demonstrations involving a dozen or so political zealots – they are mass protests, in which thousands of people take part. Isolated by their own problems, denied any kind of assistance, living on the edge of destitution, they don’t see any way of bringing their cause to social awareness. Only through mass protest can they manifest the magnitude of their degradation.

Samoobrona does not lift a finger against the democratic order or the legal system. It wishes only to put an end to a policy which has led to appalling poverty, lack of horizons, unemployment, corruption and selling off of national assets.

For Poland is not just towns with exclusive shops and glass skyscrapers – Warsaw, Poznan, Lodz, Krakow. Poland is above all a multitude of villages and small towns, which are not providing their inhabitants with any chance of a dignified life. The people blocking the streets and public buildings are ordinary people, whose terrible personal situation impels them to civil disobedience. It is necessary to understand these people, to put yourself in their position and try to help, rather than sending police units with instructions for pacification.

We young people give warning: every government which dares to raise its hand against people, against citizens protesting in a just cause, can be sure that the democratic mechanisms will put a stop to it earlier than they think.”

Conclusion

Samoobrona is a populist party. It does not fit into traditional right-left schemas. This political character is expressed in its vision of seeking a Third Way, expressed in many programmatic documents, representing both a rejection of the experience of real socialism and the destitution and social marginalisation that market reforms have brought in Poland since 1989. A year ago Samoobrona was a party with an electorate and apparatus chiefly from the

countryside and small towns.

The success of the party and the fact that it is the only force opposing market economics has caused its ranks to grow in big urban centres. New Samoobrona activists have very different political pasts. In its apparatus we can find both dissidents from the social democratic LD and members of small extreme right groups. On the one hand we have Janusz Rolicki, the former chief editor of the social democratic daily Trybuna, occupying openly left social democrat positions. On the other, unfortunately, we have the anti-semitic paranoiac, Leszek Bubel. There are however no explicit or formalised factions, either of the right or the left in the party, which is run in an authoritarian manner by Lepper, maintaining both his base and his control of the party and ensuring that it does not depart from the Third Way position in the direction of right wing extremism. With regret it should be observed that the perspective sketched a year ago, in last year's parliamentary elections, of a drawing together with the faction of PPS [Polish Socialist Party] activists led by Piotr Ikonowicz has not produced any compact organised group of left activists, which is a result of the degeneration of the PPS itself into factional struggles, verging on self-destruction.

The press tried to stigmatise Samoobrona on the basis of the presence on its lists in the local government elections of a few SLD activists, who in the past co-operated with the political police of People's Poland and of a few representatives of extreme right wing groups, such as the neo-pagan nationalist association 'Niklot.' Steam being let off by liberal (*Gazeta Wyborcza*) or right wing (*Zycie*) dailies on the disgraceful past of some Samoobrona activists, or their present involvement with right wing nationalist groups, have as their only aim discrediting Lepper as a radical political foe of the establishment. It does not lend the least significance to these elements in Lepper's party, which is marginal.

Andrzej Lepper leads an unusual party. The group of his closest collaborators built a radical peasants trade union with him in the first half of the nineties. His charismatic style of leadership is the subject of many columns of attacks in the press. *Gazeta Wyborcza* (2 October 2002) writes of him:

"The chief of Samoobrona has every feature of the autocrat. Focused on himself, ambitious and ruthless (...) he talks a lot about democracy, like most of those who threaten it. His street and parliamentary theatre of the grotesque, he calls civil disobedience.

Andrzej Lepper himself has replied that:

“They can raise a hue and cry about Lepper, hurling mud and insults at him. Lepper is a scoundrel and features of all the degenerates of the world can be attributed to him: Hitler, Mussolini, Goebbels, Miloszewicz. The political elite and their media are after Lepper like a pack of rabid dogs. The elite hates the cause of the ordinary man, his life, his dignity, they despise his hopeless life. But Lepper is not alone. There are already thousands, millions of such Leppers.”

“We acknowledge it is a menacing vision” comments *Gazeta Wyborcza*. And this is the only commentary on how to place him – because it is in no position to question the catastrophic social reality against which Samoobrona is protesting.

The quotes included in this text come from the following documents:

Declaration of the Samoobrona on the Anniversary of September 11
 The Youth of the Samoobrona on the Blockades of Roads and Public Offices
 Declaration no 6 of III Congress of Samoobrona on Polish Agriculture
 Declaration no 5 of III Congress of Samoobrona on the Health Service
 Resolution no 8 of III Congress of Samoobrona on the Current Socio-political Situation in Poland
 Resolution no 7 of III Congress of Samoobrona on Privatisation and Re-privatisation
 Resolution no 4 of III Congress of Samoobrona on the Urgent Need for Change in the National Bank of Poland
 Declaration: Why the Third Road ?
 Declaration: Attitude to Entrance in the EU
 Resolution no 3 of III Congress of Samoobrona on Unemployment and Minimum Wage
 Statement of the President of the Samoobrona Parliamentary Club on Unjust Decisions of the Minister of Internal Affairs and Public Administration, Krzysztof Janik, in Regard to Policemen
 Application to the Regional Public Prosecutor Office in Szczecin (9.08.2002) for consent to guarantee of employees arrested 8.08.2002 by the Public Prosecutor in Szczecin

Introduction

to Tadeusz Kowalik's

Appreciation of Włodzimierz Brus

Włodzimierz Brus is one of the most remarkable of the generation of critical intellectuals who came to prominence in Central and Eastern Europe in the late 1950s and early 1960s, in the wake of the death of Stalin and the upheavals in Poland and Hungary during 1956. Brus is especially noteworthy in this context as someone whose interests were focused on political economy rather than philosophy or sociology; a set of concerns which led him to a deep engagement with Marxist thought. Educated in Poland and the Soviet Union, in the post-war period he played an important role in Poland both in the academic sphere and in the world of economic planning. During the period of reform following 1956 Brus acted as Director of the Research Bureau of the Polish State Planning Commission and until 1968 he was Professor of Political Economy at the University of Warsaw. He was removed from his academic and political positions after the Polish student unrest of March 1968 and after a period of work in the Institute of Housing Research came to Britain in 1972, first to Glasgow and then to a post at Oxford University, where he taught until retirement in 1988.

Brus' first book to be published in English was *The Market in a Socialist Economy* which appeared in 1972. However, this was a translation of the Polish text *Ogólne problemy funkcjonowania gospodarki socjalistycznej* (General Problems of the Functioning of a Socialist Economy), which was published in Poland in 1961 and translated into Czech and Italian in 1964, Hungarian in 1966 and French in 1967. This publishing history indicates the influence of Brus' work on the emerging movement towards economic reform in Eastern Europe through the 1960s. Brus' book can be compared with János Kornai's 1959 work *Over-Centralisation in Economic*

Administration as an inspiration for this movement. However, Brus' analysis of the relationship between his ideas and Marxist concepts is considerably deeper than that of Kornai.

This early work was followed by a collection of essays, *The Economics and Politics of Socialism*, in 1973. In addition to material from Polish sources this also included texts published in the Italian communist journal *Rinascita*, underlining Brus' impact on the emerging 'eurocommunist' current in Western Europe. It was his next book, though, which marked a significant development in his analysis of the political economy of state planning. *Socialist Ownership and Political Systems*, published in 1975, and recipient of the Isaac Deutscher Memorial Prize for that year, extended Brus' earlier work in two ways. Firstly, it looked much more deeply at the connections between economic reform and political democratisation. Secondly, it moved from the analysis of particular models of a socialist economy towards an account of the development of such economies over time.

Over the next decade Brus' work focused on the detailed historical analysis of post-war Eastern Europe. His main publication, in 1986, was his contribution to the three volume collection *The Economic History of Eastern Europe 1919-75* edited by Michael Kaser and E A Radice. Brus wrote the bulk of the third volume of this work and, together with a lengthy essay in the second volume on post-war reconstruction, his analysis constitutes a full-scale economic history of the region from 1945 to 1975. Under the stimulus of the changes taking place in the USSR and Eastern Europe in the late 1980s however, his next work marked a significant change in direction. *From Marx to the Market: Socialism in Search of an Economic System*, co-authored with Kazimierz Laski and published in 1989 (reviewed in *Labour Focus on Eastern Europe* no.1/1990) was a theoretical summing-up of the experience of and prospects for market-based economic reform within the context of a planned economy. By this point Brus and Laski were notably pessimistic about these prospects, arguing that reformers should contemplate the need for market mechanisms in investment planning and the extension of private ownership.

Brus reviewed the work *Towards an East European Marxism* by the Hungarian writers G Bence and J Kis (writing under the

pseudonym Marc Rakovski) for *Labour Focus on Eastern Europe* in 1979 (Volume 3 No.1). His work has been of importance for this journal over a long period, both because of the influence of his ideas in the region and because of the depth and seriousness of the confrontation he has attempted to bring about between Marxist analysis and historical reality. We are pleased to be able to publish the following assessment of Brus by his friend and colleague, Tadeusz Kowalik, who is an active participant in contemporary discussions within Poland around left wing alternatives to the current path of transition. It was first published in *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 25/26 August 2001. It has been translated by **Filip Stabrowski**.

Andrew Kilmister

Tadeusz Kowalik

Faithful to His Ideals An Appreciation of Włodzimierz Brus

Neither in Poland nor in any other country or language have I come across such a brutal settling of accounts by an economist with himself as that undertaken by Włodzimierz Brus* In a book begun when he was in Poland, but published abroad, he wrote that

This case [price increases in Poland in 1953] is particularly well known to the author who, in accordance with the basic task of the ‘court economics’ of the time, was also employed in pseudo-scientific justification of successive moves in economic policy, most frequently with inadequate acquaintance with the real basis and practical consequences, which were kept

* Brus was born on 23 September 1921 in Plock, Poland.

secret by the authorities” *Socialist Ownership and Political Systems*, London 1975, p. 172.

In a later autobiographical sketch he wrote that:

The relatively short period of a year or two after the death of Stalin became a sharp line of division in my academic life. As these remembrances clearly reveal, later I also made many errors of judgment and compromises, but from the middle of the 1950s they burdened my account in its entirety. This was not because I was convinced of possessing a higher a priori knowledge based on an ideological syndrome, nor did they result from a feeling of loyalty towards any political organisation. When I look back, from exactly that moment can I consider myself an economist.” (The sketch appeared originally as “The Bane of Reforming the Socialist Economic System”, in the quarterly review *Banca Nazionale del Lavoro*, no. 187, 1993, later in a collection entitled *Recollections of Eminent Economists*, 1996.)

These were not the words of a person in any way called to self-criticism. On the contrary, he was asked to write an autobiography in a publication devoted to the most distinguished living economists (these biographies were published in two volumes). Laurels rather than hair shirts were expected. Thus rather than settling accounts with himself, he could have concentrated on his own output and achievements, which are considerable. His books (the earlier ones as well), either written or published abroad, were and are translated into many languages. Not counting political economists, in the West he is probably still the best-known living Polish economist.

Looking back at his own life’s journey, Brus allowed himself the following piece of sarcasm: “Reading Polish obituaries and memoirs, one has the impression that there were more members of the [Communist] Party who had left or were expelled than there were still in the Party.” During the last decade, Brus, a professor at Oxford University, has invariably rejected suggestions that he involve himself more directly in Poland’s systemic transformation (“I already over-advised enough”), just as he had rejected similar Chinese proposals. In this there is a feeling of guilt for the past. There is also an

understanding of the great complexity of the planned social changes, of the large part played by unforeseen and undesirable effects in major socio-technological transformation.

Above all, however, one senses here a feeling that the choices made by the elites of Central and Eastern Europe, in which Poland played a pioneering role, creating a model of transformation for the other countries, did not correspond to his own system of values or to his conception of what the reform and transformation process should be.

The last attempt to take part directly in matters concerning the direction of changes in Poland was his trip to Poland in the late summer of 1989. Let us recall the atmosphere of that summer.

By the end of the 1980s Poland, like a number of other communist countries, found herself at a turning point. Following the phenomenon of *Solidarność* in 1980-81, there occurred a new miracle which no one had expected. The single party shared power with the opposition in a peaceful manner and also reached an initial agreement about the nature of the “new economic order”. This was to be an accelerated march along the road to a market economy. However, already by the summer of that same year, the economist Jeffrey Sachs had won support among a considerable part of the elite. Sachs proposed a shock operation which, in a few years, he was to rationalize as a completed “jump” to a new system. Stanisław Gomułka also supported the “jump” from planning to the market as a “Thatcherite surgical operation.” Even the seemingly divided Sejm proved to be of one mind in this matter. From these foundations arose the so-called Balcerowicz Plan, which won practically the unanimous acceptance of parliament.

After more than a decade of enforced absence, Brus travelled to Poland with a programmatic text. Its contents were a condensation of a book he had just published (about which, later). It is worth pausing before the main assumptions of this text. Having finally rejected, as negatively verified in practice, any Marxist conception of socialism as a distinct socio-economic formation, he saw the course of development of countries emerging from communism in the following way:

Reforms leaning towards the marketisation of the economy are the main way forward in seeking alternatives to 'real socialism'. But certain things follow from this. It means rejecting every one of the features considered up to now to be essential elements of socialism. The socio-economic model aimed at by those reformers who underline their attachment to socialist values is most often the "Swedish model". In other words, they no longer want to overthrow the institutions of the capitalist system... and are ready to limit themselves to fulfilling these (aspirations) by means of policies aiding structural changes by only small deviations from full employment, alleviation of income inequality, guarantees of a minimum of social security, concern for free access to education and culture... This attribute - let us call it social-democratic in the widest sense of the word - maintains from the socialist idea the conviction that societal interest exists as a whole and not just as the sum of individual self-interests.¹

The text was a summary of the main thoughts of the book *From Marx to the Market*, written together with Kazimierz Laski and published in 1989. It appeared as if "on order", at a moment of great decisive choices. Despite attempts to have it published in Poland, its Polish edition appeared only after three years and, as far as I know, was reviewed only once. This is a pity. I do not know of a better, more comprehensive or deeper theoretical analysis of the Soviet economic system, of its internal mainsprings and brakes, its evolution toward collapse.

Real socialism turned out to be unreformable, and even market socialism would certainly have more faults than merits in comparison with a private market economy. In the course of the anti-communist revolutions in Eastern Europe social consciousness turned against the great reforms of socialism, including market socialism. However the immediate passage from a command economy to a market economy is not possible, most of all with respect to property relations. For a certain amount of time the enterprises, which in one form or another remain state property, will retain a significant role in the economy, and especially in industry. This coexistence may be

treated as market socialism, imposed on society through the conditions into which the private market economy is headed.²

(T)he subject of our discussion here is not the choice between abstract alternatives in an empty space, but the direction of evolution of ‘real socialism’. The process unfold from a position in which state enterprise dominates, and this fact of life cannot be changed overnight. Thus a mixed economy where various forms of state enterprise would gradually be made to compete on an equal footing with private firms and cooperatives seems the only realistic prospect for MS in the foreseeable future. This means that the question of whether state enterprise can be fitted into a genuine market framework, including the capital market, and if so how to do it with minimal losses, remains highly relevantThe economic system becomes open-ended³.

Its predictions passed the ‘test of history’ well, and its authors have no reason to consider their conclusions invalidated because they failed to foresee that the actual process of transformation would be based on values foreign to them. After twelve years of strife, the victorious program of “jumping” from the plan to the free market has led to mass and permanent unemployment, a large layer of poor and impoverished, glaring inequalities, enormous rural poverty, a housing catastrophe and a universal lack of social security. It has also led to the electoral marginalisation of the political formation mainly responsible for the adopted course.

Brus and Laski placed great stress on the inevitable and long-term co-existence of the state and the private sectors. It is not just a question of the fact that the proponents of the big bang “wanted it faster, but were not successful.” Brus and Laski favoured the gradual retreat, not the accelerated liquidation, of the state sector. This retreat would be a result of the competition between state firms and private firms “on an equal playing field” and not the result of systematic discrimination and, most importantly, it would be in the context of policies aimed at full employment.

The issue is significantly more than a reason for bitter satisfaction. The direction of contemporary world development arouses deep pessimism in Brus. He sees the problems of the post-communist countries as a part of worldwide problems: “the growing feeling of uncertainty” of work and social security, increasing inequality in property and incomes, as well as ecological threats. He wants to defend “compromise solutions, connecting the demands of economic rationality with the realization of the social goals of management.” He adds, however, that neither public opinion nor economic science is prepared to meet this challenge.⁴

The Soviet state devoured the revolution

The present essay is a biographical sketch written by a grateful student and friend, and also a co-author of a few publications. In an effort to counteract too much personal bias, I will often make use of his own autobiography and other texts. In Brus’s autobiography we find clear accounts of his motives for embracing socialism, his shock at coming into contact with the political, social and economic reality of the Soviet Union during the war period, and finally his acceptance and active participation in both what was initially called the “Polish road to socialism” and in the Sovietisation of this road at the end of the 1940s and beginning of the 1950s.

Brus matured in the 1930s and thus belongs to the generation strongly marked by the Great Crisis and the Great Crash. “The juxtaposition of closed factories and squandered products with armies of people desperately looking for work and fighting for their survival” determined his choice for economics, as his main subject of interest, and for socialism. The feeling of Polish hopelessness deepened with the spectre of fascism in the 1930s. “For no essential reason, exclusively as a result of growing anti-Semitism,” the socially aroused youth was barred from the (Warsaw) Main School of Commerce. In 1938 he began studies at the Free Polish University, but completing a school of such a low professional status meant that the prospects for a paying job were poor. Today this is difficult to imagine, but pre-war Poland, with its far lower level of people with university education, suffered from an excess, not only of peasants and workers, but also of the intelligentsia as a whole. And for the Jewish leftist intelligentsia?

To Palestine, or at least to Madagascar!

With such a baggage of experience and, undoubtedly, with the ideas of Lenin and Zeromski, the 18 year old student found himself in the orbit of a “new civilisation.” He first studied for two years in Lvov, then spent three years in Saratov, in a job and at the same time studying with great success. In the final phase of his studies he was a graduate student at Leningrad University, at its temporary site in Saratov. He was even a lecturer at two schools. He thus had favourable conditions not only to confront his old ideas with the reality of the “first proletarian state”, to confront the book knowledge obtained in Warsaw and Lvov with the functioning of the “socialist factory.”

The outbreak of the Soviet-German war caused tragic separation from his wife for the rest of the war period. Brus was mobilized to serve on a semi-military battalion. Tortured by reproaches that he left his wife alone, he wrote long letters to her, with detailed observations of his surrounding world interspersed with the torment of separation and reproaches. The letters, of course, were never sent. From the moment of his flight from Lvov, for the entire period of the war, their attempts to locate each other all failed.

In these letters Brus describes a far from an ideal world:

“This entire factory [in which he worked—TK] presents a veritable picture of destitution and despair. A complete mess, a lack of any kind of organisation and planning, simply throwing money out of the window. This could serve as a classic example for the enemy of the nationalization of industry.” “The god of the average Soviet person is free trade. After the opening of the Orthodox Church, everyone expects the opening of American and private shops.” “The (pompous) Soviet bonzes have departed quite a way from communism. They do not understand anything, they use the entire litany of platitudes, and there is not a bit of truth in them.” “In the USSR the feeling of caste has rooted itself so strongly that it takes on unkind forms.”⁵

Observing the injustices, the monstrous pressure on and exploitation of agriculture especially, he is surprised at the “absence of any symptoms of revolt.” But he finds an explanation in the “strong

terror”:

The NKVD comes at night and simply takes people. And the next day no one knows what has become of them. Massive arrests took place in 1937. Then, as my informer - a young boy - confirmed, they were taken away by the thousands.⁶

In the twentieth century thousands of people could go missing. To be sure, already in Warsaw the first doubts had already begun to emerge as a result of the trials of the leading Bolsheviks in the mid-1930s. That was why he didn't join the Communist youth organization in the secondary schools. And, undoubtedly, his stay in Lvov increased these doubts. Still, what he observed and discovered in Saratov must have been a shock for such a discerning observer. What conclusions did he draw?

Seeing these atrocities, why didn't he withdraw from economics to a more neutral field? Moreover, how is one to understand his later support for the “leading system” and especially his strong involvement in the creation of the system, and this not only in the phase when the “road” was called “Polish”?

Brus continued to believe in both the revolution and in socialism so strongly that he was able to separate his belief from what surrounded him and the things he observed. The reality he experienced was an expression of the degeneration of the revolution, a departure from the principles of socialism. Such a dualism is clearly evident in the way in which Brus reacted to the dissolution of the Communist International:

For me this is a culmination of these deep changes in the ideological structure of the USSR, beginning in the years directly after the death of Lenin and continuing as a red thread through the bloodbath of 1936-38 and finally reaching the present...the Soviet state devoured the revolutionary state. ‘Someone’ once spoke about the Thermidor. Would that it were not true.⁷

Let us note that the author of these notes is extremely rash, committing so many disloyal thoughts to paper, but not so unsafe as to refer to this “someone” by first and last name (he was, of course, Leon Trotsky in his *The Revolution Betrayed*).

Certain doubts, however, go to the very foundations of a revolution whose chief slogan was internationalism. The observation that such an important decision “did not arouse practically any feelings” is modified with a comment:

Maybe that is how it should be. Maybe it is only among us- the red Jewish intellectuals - that “proletarian” internationalism is strongly rooted. Among the people it was artificial and was in any case rejected by the top.⁸

Immediately, however, he dispels these doubts. Reminding himself of the PPS youth (of the Polish Socialist Party) and the circle around the leftist writer, Andrzej Strug, he hopes once more that “this terrible collapse which has taken place in the USSR is only a result of this policy of Chinese wall [isolationism]” and that in the future “the proletariats of all countries will once again aspire to a single goal.”

On the basis of such realisations, doubts, and hopes, Brus’s design grew - to work out for himself his own socialist alternative.

I often simply study and attempt to draw my conclusions, to build a positive plan of socialist construction among us in Poland. As it should be, to build socialism without repeating the Soviet mistakes...⁹

Finally, after many, many failed attempts (a Jewish background), and even a pleading letter sent to Stalin, he finds himself at the very end of the war in the Polish army, expressing the hope that this will guarantee Polish uniqueness.

It is interesting how the relationships in the new Poland are being arranged...whether we will have the possibility of free economic and cultural development. In any case, if everything goes well, our first army will enter Polish territory, and this should have a decisive impact on the further fate of the country.¹⁰

Reformist intermezzo

Brus spent the first post-war years in purely ideological activities. As an officer of the Polish Army the core of which was founded in the USSR, he wrote propagandistic political brochures about “New Roads.” He was more ideologue than economist, particularly when he worked in the administration of the Polish Socialist Party-dominated Central Planning Board, or when he published - together with Maximilian Pohorille - the textbook *An Outline of the Political Economy of Socialism*. At the same time at SGH he wrote and defended, under the direction of Professor Edward Lipinski, his doctoral dissertation about the law of value in socialism. It is the culmination of his interests and studies from his time in Russia, but also an announcement of his first, still very timid, attempt at justification for a reform aimed at expanding the role of the market under socialism.

In 1952 the “theoretical” testament of Joseph Stalin appeared: *The Economic Problems of Socialism in the USSR*. Once again the younger reader of this essay will have trouble understanding how such an exceptional person as Edward Lipinski, or such an erudite man of the world as Oscar Lange (based at leading American universities for many years), could write “scientific” articles, interpreting and praising such banal “wisdom.” Lipinski “explained” this most understandably. Asked why he was doing this, he answered (in my conversation): “Hmm, if a monkey suddenly began to speak in a human language” (“how would you react?”) Lange answered (in my conversation) this same question indirectly: “When Polish professors passed on a greeting to my old Norwegian friend, Ragnar Frisch, he reacted with the spontaneous question: “is he really still alive” and - let us add - this certainly had nothing to do with the age of a man not yet fifty. But in this case it was not only the fear of breaking with the collective tribute. Lange also perceived in this statement by Stalin certain elements deserving a wider interpretation.

Brus’s reaction was even more positive. Long taken by the idea of limiting the omnipotent state by expanding the market, he treated Stalin’s work with the greatest seriousness - as the gesture of an autocrat drifting towards self-limitation. Stalin’s emphasis on the objective character of economic laws in socialism in general, and

especially his acceptance of the law of value, created for Brus the possibility of an increasingly louder, increasingly clearer assertion of the limitation of the role of the state in the economy, of the objective criteria for establishing prices, of the need for a material incentive for workers. It provided the basis for a criticism of the voluntarism of the authorities. It is a well-known paradox that this publication of Stalin - in 1953 in both Poland and Hungary - gave rise to revisionism and to the first practical reformist proposals.

The years 1956-58, preceded by the revolt of the Poznan workers, the "Polish October", were the most active years for Brus who, like many economists, was involved in what these events appeared to herald. From the June revolt arose the movement for workers' councils, which to many of us appeared to be a very important systemic change. A new social force emerged onto the economic scene, this time not in the form of a strike or a blind revolt, but as an organized movement based on the slogans of co-management and co-responsibility in the workplace.

Today it is difficult to determine what was the intention in setting up the Commission for Assistance in the Proper Development of the Initiatives of Workers in the Field of Managing Enterprises in early September 1956, led by deputy prime minister Jaroszewicz. This extremely long name for a party-state organ probably concealed both a desire to assist and a desire to canalise, if not limit, the activity of the worker councils.

The atmosphere of social agitation actually spread to this Commission, which worked extremely effectively. Within a short period of time it initiated three important projects: 1) laws on worker councils, entrusting them with "managing, on behalf of the workers, enterprises owned by the nation"; 2) laws on enterprise funds, allowing for part of the profits of the firm to be used to increase the wage fund (the popular thirteenth month's wage); and 3) government resolutions radically reducing the number of state orders for enterprises and thus increasing the powers of management (that is why it is often called the 'manager's card'). These projects were the work of three people: Michal Kalecki, as the vice-chairman of the Commission, and two other members, enthusiasts of worker self-management - Szymon Jakubowicz and, in particular, Włodzimierz Brus, then director of

the Institute for Economic Research at the Planning Commission. This institute turned out to be a significant support for the Commission.

All of the above three acts were ratified by the Sejm and the Council of Ministers in November 1956. It soon turned out, however, that they constituted the *only* important changes in the functioning of the economy achieved by the post-October authorities. To be sure, Wladyslaw Gomulka patronized these changes, but this was more as a result of social pressure. Gomulka himself treated worker self-management suspiciously. Public opinion, however, wanted to see in him a reformer, believing that these acts constituted the beginning of reform. Gomulka however, soon limited the powers of worker councils and enterprises in general.

The Economic Council, an advisory body to the government, proposed half a year earlier by the tempestuous Congress of Economists, was created at the end of 1956. One of its most active vice-chairmen was Wlodzimierz Brus. The over thirty-person Council consisted mainly of representatives from the realm of economics but also had quite a few government ministers and party functionaries. This condemned it to the paralysis of political compromise, which filled the first and most important document of the Council: Theses on Some Directions of Change in the Economic Model.¹¹ Although these Theses (called Model Theses) were, according to the words of the official vice-chairman of the Council, Czeslaw Bobrowski, “poor and modest enough”, they provoked resistance from the apparatus. As a consequence, they was ignored (in the words of prime minister, Cyrankiewicz, “neither accepted nor rejected”).

It is thus not surprising that the Council soon ceased to be active. Many other phenomena and processes bore witness to the rapid retreat from October. In this situation, Brus resigned from directing the Institute in 1958, signalling his withdrawal from activity concerned directly with economic policy. Instead, he devoted a few years to theoretical elaboration of the reform process to date. The product of this was the book *The Main Problems of the Functioning of the Socialist Economy* (1961), which achieved magnificent success and was translated into eleven languages. It was indisputably the most important work of the reformist-revisionist current. And Brus was soon regarded as the foremost theorist of reform. His work, together

with that of Michal Kalecki, Oskar Lange, Edward Lipinski and others, led to Warsaw being described as the “Polish Cambridge”.

The first translation of Brus’s 1961 book appeared in Czechoslovakia and clearly influenced the economic thought of the “Prague Spring”. More recently, there is the Chinese translation of 1985, but it is clear that there the contents of the book were known earlier. On many occasions, I met with Chinese economists who stressed their closeness to Brus’s views expressed in this book. The book generated the greatest resonance in Hungary. The leading reformers in that country have repeatedly emphasized the fact that the intellectual source of their New Economic Mechanism - introduced in 1968 - was this work.

The two models of socialist economics formulated and developed in Brus’s book became part of the history of economic thought: the centralized model, which was the theoretical generalization of Soviet-type socialism, and the “de-centralized” model, of a normative character. It was more fully described as “the model of a planned economy with the application of market mechanisms”. The first model represented the negative background to the second. The decentralised model, with its dynamism and the manner in which it took account of the needs of society, represented a significant, incomparably more mature step forward in relation to the “model theses” of the Economic Council, but the author himself would later stress its limitations. Here the market was treated not as the dominant regulator, but as a tool in the hands of a central planner. That is why the author himself underlined the fact that the decentralised model of this publication was not yet the model of market socialism.

Conflict with the authorities

In Czechoslovakia and Hungary, Brus’s normative model remained a hope for many years, and in the latter country it even became the foundation for the only partly successful and complex reform in the Soviet bloc. To be sure, the success of the Hungarian reform was partial. But this only partly resulted from the limitations inherent in the concept of reform. The other reasons had to do with the limits imposed by the international environment. The Warsaw Pact intervention in Czechoslovakia as well as the growing conservatism

in the USSR and Poland did not favour the widening of reform. Thus one cannot consider the Hungarian experiment as a genuine test of Brus's conceptual model. He exaggerated when he wrote facetiously:

for a certain period of time after 1968, when I presented myself to the Hungarians, I was treated with great respect as one of the inspirers of the 'New Economic Mechanism', which had brought significant improvements to the economic conditions of the country, while later, when conditions changed for the worse, avoiding insult became my main preoccupation.

In Poland, however, Brus's book marked an end to the period of modest reforms. For the authorities, who retreated from reforms they had announced, the work of Brus became a reproach, a negative mirror. This fact had already placed the author in opposition to the authorities. On account of both this book and numerous other articles and statements, Brus had become an authority, a crystallizing centre of the reformist current, especially in 1965, when Lange died and Kalecki resigned from his position as advisor to the government and ceased commenting on current topics and, after March 1968, no longer published in Poland.

Also in this year (1965), Brus became one of the few witnesses at Jacek Kuron and Karol Modzelewski's trial (they were sentenced for three and the half years) and earlier he stood before the University Disciplinary Commission in defence of their now classic *Open Letter to the Party*. In 1966 Brus's speech at the University Party Organization meeting resounded with a wide echo. Immediately after the removal of L. Kolakowski and K. Pomian from the party, Brus submitted a defence of their positions. It is also more than certain that the political authorities knew full well about the informal seminars devoted to economic, political and ideological questions pertaining to both Poland and the contemporary world. These seminars, in which Brus played a central role, brought together the cream of the malcontents inside and outside of the Party.

The growing conservatism of the structures of power brought into relief the most important shortcoming of Brus's *Main Problems of the Functioning of the Socialist Economy*. The underlying assumption of the book, that if the authorities understood the

theoretical justification for the necessary and much-desired reforms, then they would introduce them, overlooked almost completely the problem of the reciprocal conditions of politics and economics. During the course of the next ten years, following the publication of *Main Problems*, Brus was preoccupied with these issues. The published articles analysing questions of power and property had already put him in open conflict with the authorities. That it is why, several weeks before March 1968, Brus left the Polish United Workers Party (PZPR).

As justification, he pointed to the rapid retreat from the October programme and to the autocratic methods of the government, the dangerous effects of which were reflected clearly in economic results and in the welfare level of the population. Linked to these were the increasingly brutal forms of repression, the stifling of freedom of expression with increasing censorship, the use of the monopolistic position of the state in striking at the right to work and reactivating the notorious Small Criminal Code.

A little over a year before, Leszek Kolakowski and an entire group of Polish writers were expelled from the PZPR. The main reason given for the expulsion of Kolakowski was the fact that his critical speech was delivered at an extra-party forum. Brus's reaction was:

In these conditions I came to the conclusion that remaining in the PZPR would be an expression of approbation for those actions which I consider to be contradictory with Marxism and the interests of socialism.

It may be difficult for young people today to understand how big a step this was. It might be possible to be a non-party lecturer in economics, but for someone who demonstrably left the party and, what is more, did this in the name of a socialism, this would be impossible. This meant for me, a young student and assistant, a loss of contact with a fantastic lecturer. That is why, deprived of contact with students myself, I was initially against this decision.

The point of departure for Brus's new view of socialism was his conviction that, in conditions of state property and mono-centric authority, property, widely understood as a bundle of laws, and not only as legal title, concentrates within itself the most important political aspects of administration. It permeates the entire decision-making

system from top to bottom. The fruit of these systematic studies on the problematic of property and the economic policies of real socialism was a book entitled *Socialist Ownership and Political Systems*. The first version was the topic of discussion at the aforementioned seminars. It was not published, however, until 1975 in Upsala (and in English in 1975).

The central idea of the book is built on the conviction that the single-party political system had become a brake on economic development. There thus existed an objective need for its democratisation, and most of all for the de-etatisation of the means of production, not, however, in the form of privatisation, but in the form of socialisation through a system of enterprise participation and the participation of representative institutions of society in macro-economic decision-making.

Brus's tendency to avoid concrete reformist propositions and to concentrate on introducing difficult questions was clear in this book. Brus appeared to be taking seriously Keynes's strong conviction that the future is not known to us. On the question of whether, from the objective necessity of adapting the institutional system to the demands of the productive forces, "it is possible to build a prognosis of the process of socializing property (or at least)...to accept the democratic perspective of the evolution of the political system as unambiguously determined", he answered: "We will state this clearly and bluntly: no - our knowledge does not yet create the necessary foundations for this type of prognosis".

Emigration

Socialist Ownership and Political Systems, which analysed property as the basis and "essence" of the political system, in conditions of the omnipotence of a single party, was not only an important stage in Brus's intellectual evolution, but also an analytic description of the increasingly distinct regression, both economically and socio-politically, in the communist world. Poland was the leader in this regression. I will cite here the testimony of a person known rather for his optimism. Advising me to stay in the West as long as possible, Oscar Lange wrote, beyond the reach of censors (from Cortina d'Ampezzo to Geneva):

Poland is a complete province, becoming the Portugal of the socialist camp (this was still the fascist Portugal ruled by Salazar - TK). The sociological conditions are creating long-lasting stagnation, an “explosive” solution has no prospects and is hardly desirable. A change, if it comes, may be touched off by external developments, namely when Poland falls too far back behind both the capitalist world and the socialist world”¹²

The stagnation, or a certain “salazarisation” (from the then Portugese dictator) of Poland, led to an “undesirable” explosive solution. March 1968 was the culmination of anti-Semitic and anti-revisionist campaign what Michal Kalecki called the “poor copy of the Reichstag”. As a result, many Polish intellectuals, especially those who were Jewish (such as Baczko, Bauman, L. Hirszowicz, and Laski, but also Kolakowski and Maria Hirszowicz), found themselves outside the country. After his departure from prison in 1969, Stanislaw Gomulka joined them.

After his dismissal from the University, Brus was “exiled” to the Institute of Housing, where he worked for almost four years. With dignity he bore a complete ban on publication (even of work completed at this Institute), as well as the concentrated campaign of the party and police apparatus and the entire galaxy of “March-ers” (the anti-semitic campaigners of March '68, such as Szeffler, Krawczewski, Lysko, Sokolow). Denied a passport, he was unable to take advantage of a number of invitations from Berkeley, Cambridge, Paris and Chile. Only later on exception was allowed: following an intervention by the Italians, inter alia also by Communists Party, he was allowed to visit the University of Rome.

Brus long resisted any thought of leaving the country. Health and family considerations, however, dramatically decided the issue, and in the autumn of 1972 he and his family found themselves in Great Britain, first in Glasgow and, a year later, in Oxford, where he has stayed, although his close friends joke that he was always “sitting on his suitcases”.

Among “post-March” émigrés, *Socialist Ownership and Political Systems* sparked lively discussion. This was the only serious debate on the topic of the future of socialism, seen from the perspective

of its democratisation. The introduction to the discussion, organised by the editors of the quarterly *Aneks*, became the paper of the one-time student of O. Lange, Stanislaw Gomulka.¹³ His guiding thought was the following: capitalism is becoming increasingly socialised, while socialism is becoming increasingly democratic. Thus a rapprochement is taking place from both sides, a convergence of systems. Believing that the economy of the USSR was able in the course of 35-40 years to catch up with the highly developed economies of the West, he tied his hopes for democratisation to this very process.

Gomulka addressed many critical remarks to Brus's book. He accounted for the prospect of democracy in socialism differently (the growth of prosperity and the growing aspirations of society). However, the later advisor to almost all successive ministers of finance during the period of transformation demonstrated significantly more optimism about the future democratisation of socialism, especially in relation to the USSR, than did Brus.

On the other hand, the troika of "non-economists" were more critical. Maria Hirszowicz regarded Brus's concept of the socialization of property and W. Bienkowski's related concept of "dynamic petrification" as ideological constructs, aiming "to reconcile the unions with the communist movement, and simultaneously to question the principles on which this authority is actually based". She emphasized the fundamental contradiction of communism as well as socialism and social democracy.¹⁴ Leszek Kolakowski argued that "the obstacles on the road to a democratic socialism are significantly greater in countries of despotic socialism, than in conditions of political democracy, where expropriation has not taken place".¹⁵ Aleksander Matejko went further, defending the view that the future does not belong to any form of socialism, neither etatist, self-management, nor democratic.¹⁶

Conservative modernisation

The 1980s brought a series of reformist misfortunes in Yugoslavia and Hungary, as well as the beginning, in the Soviet Union and in Poland, of long-lasting stagnation. Martial law in Poland ended the co-existence of Solidarnosc with the communist authorities. All of this not only disrupted the issue of socialising authority and property,

but also led to a questioning of socialism in general. From at least 1983, Brus addressed the question not just of the feasibility of socialism in itself but of the possibility of a socialism that was durable and capable of development in a manner similar to contemporary capitalism. He used the concept of “conservative modernisation”¹⁷ to describe the stage beyond which real socialism was not capable of going. Except for the military sector, where costs did not count, the most real socialism could do was to copy the technological achievements of the West. It did not, however, introduce significant innovations of its own.

In a polemic with Alex Nove’s well-known book, *The Economics of Feasible Socialism* (1983), Brus argued that the real problem is not the feasibility of socialism, but its viability, its vitality.¹⁸ He distanced himself from the old idea of the reform of real socialism. The growing incoherence of the system meant that necessary partial reforms were without effect. Finally, in a 1987 article commenting on the above debate on the prospects of socialism among “exiles”, Brus departs from socialism understood as a distinct socio-economic formation in favour of continuity on the basis of social democratic transformation.

“I belong to those” - he wrote again self-critically, taking as the point of departure the gem of Kolakowski writings “How to be a conservative-liberal socialist” -

who for many years underlined above all the antagonism between socialism and capitalism, at first not appreciating completely the aspect of continuity, dependent upon a gradual process of adapting, among other things, institutional structures to new social needs, not rejecting “bourgeois” democracy with its representative system and freedom of speech and assembly, but enriching the wear and tear of the social barriers of access to public life, culture and occupational promotion with economic democracy. And thus not the universal etatisation of economic life, the smashing of the market or the stifling of enterprise, but the introduction of elements of macroeconomic planning - the conscious regulation of the processes of production and distribution - to the extent that the market mechanism of the ‘invisible hand’ proves inadequate.¹⁹

He now judged the prospect for the evolution of a mixed economy in developed countries to be better than the possibility of “wrenching oneself away from the trap” of real socialism. But even here he did not rule out a favourable coincidence, adding that “a fuller understanding of the complexity of the process of transformation, and most of all, the necessity of avoiding one-sidedness, may play an essential role”.

The compromise solution of market socialism demands the separation of the state in its function as owner from the state as the authority, as a regulatory organ and as a disposer of individuals not belonging to the enterprise sector, and also the mutual separation of the state enterprises themselves. There is no precedent for such a separation and one can say without exaggeration that this is an extremely difficult task. Even if we would establish that we already have this behind us, the state as owner must be empowered to realize the control capacities related to enterprises in matters pertaining to their financial outcome, especially the relationship of the factual outcome to the potential. If the state were to be deprived of this right, then nothing would remain of state property. Enterprises would have complete (but loosely defined) rights of ownership, and their only obligation would be to pay taxes from their activities. Of course, the arguments in favour of separating the state from enterprises should not be regarded as tantamount to the exclusion of the direct involvement of the state in every situation.²⁰

The view predominates that enterprises in public hands may lead to a situation in which income and property disparities will remain smaller than in a private economy, without simultaneously weakening the system of motivation. The weight of this problem equals the difficulty of solving it. Among assertions which had already become accepted truth in the process of reform in the countries of “real socialism”, is also a recognition of the need to allow for greater income and property disparity in order to strengthen the stimulus to growth in efficiency and, in particular, to promote behaviour typical for

enterprises. It is difficult to say where the ‘optimum’ income disparity lies, which will balance the activity of indicators one cannot find in the experience of developed capitalist countries, which present an incredibly varied picture of the relation of income and wealth, connected not so much with differences in the talents of enterprises, but with cultural difference, the different scope of social tolerance regarding the redistributive function of the tax system, etc. If we regard a country like Sweden as capitalist, we also have to recognize the possibility of introducing a distinct egalitarian tendency in the relations of distribution, stronger than in many countries of ‘real socialism’, while in no way correlated with public ownership of the means of production.²¹

The honing of a character

The hopelessness of the great crash of the 1930s and the spectre of fascism pushed him towards what passed for socialism at the time. After the Soviet shock, he placed his hopes in a Polish road that would be different. In the middle of the 1950s he bade farewell to “court economics”, involving himself in reforms that were failing again and again. And he rectified his views many times over. Generally, it can be said that he traversed the arduous road from “the apotheosis of revolution to reformism”.

So many mistakes in one life, because such was the century: “as wonderful as it was terrible”. In this responsibility for defeats he was not alone. Did not Lange, Kalecki, Lipinski, Strzelecki, and the younger ones - Kuron, Modzelewski, and Malachowski - not bear similar responsibilities? Perhaps the only thing that separates Brus is the fact that he submitted the clearest and most complete analysis of their causes.

Who was he - and is he - for the non-submissive of my and my children’s generation? Why do I regard my friendship with him as a treasure? He has been and remains a moral authority in a double sense. Throughout his entire life he pursued what he regarded as a realisation of fundamental socialist values. He has remained faithful to these values to this day. His conviction about the political character of economics meant that he always regarded economics as a tool to

improve the economy, to give work and social security to all. He spent the greater part of his adult life in a system of perfected opportunism, hypocrisy, and defamation of character. We are gathering the bitter fruits of this to this day. For Brus this was a school of character. Seductions, threats, petty annoyances, attacks, layoffs from work - these were the factors that shaped and polished this rare metal.

Endnotes

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Aline Pieńkowska, Solidarity founder, dies



Alina Pieńkowska, the young nurse who played a key role in the formation of Solidarnosc in 1980, died on 17 October at the age of 50. Born in Gdansk in 1952, she worked in the regional hospital before transferring to the emergency service in the Gdansk shipyard in 1975.

She was one of the founders of the Committee of Free Trade Unions of the Baltic (KWZZ), set up in 1978, a key organisation which prepared the way for the worker mobilisation in August 1980. It was established on the initiative of Workers Defence Committee (KOR) members and brought together ex-student militants of 1968 and workers who had been involved in the leadership of the 1970-71 strikes. KOR played a key role in the lead-up to 1980. As Anna Walentynowicz said at the time: “Kuron told us that what we had to do was form committees, not set fire to them, as was the case in 1970.” Pieńkowska agreed that “the influence of KOR on social awareness was immense.”¹

In its statement of aims, the free union declared that “Society must conquer the right to democratically control its state. All strata must obtain the right of self-organisation, and the right to create the social institutions that will make their rights a reality.” In September of that year, the first issue of the free union’s bulletin was published - *Robotnik Wybrzeża* (The Coastal Worker). Alina Pieńkowska contributed articles on workers’

safety and health. One of the leading figures in the editorial board of *Robotnik Wybrzeża* was Bogdan Borusewicz, a young 29-year old historian living in Sopot. He had studied at the Catholic University of Lublin where he had been one of the organisers of the student movement in 1968, for which he received a two-year prison sentence. He and Alina Pieńkowska were later to marry (1983). The free union worked openly and distributed *Robotnik Wybrzeża* after mass and at factory gates.

According to reports written by Anna Walentynowicz and others at the time, Alina Pieńkowska played a pivotal role in the early days of the August strike. The strike was declared in the Gdansk shipyard on 14 August. The shipyard was occupied. Two days later, on 16 August, the negotiating committee agreed to end the occupation, having accepted an offer on wages. This agreement caused considerable confusion and opposition among some workers in the yard and in other enterprises that had joined the strike. But the majority of workers headed for the gates and home. Here is Anna Walentynowicz's account:

Someone shouted "You want to strike - go ahead!" I burst into tears, but Alinka [Alina Pienkowska] jumped onto a barrel and began to speak about the need to show solidarity with those who supported us. Someone in the crowd called out, "She's right. They're not going to forgive us these three days either." The gate was closed. The scene was repeated at Gates 1 and 2. When the last one was shut, about 2000 workers remained in the shipyard.²

The Inter-factory Strike Committee (MKS) was established that day and Pieńkowska was a member of its presidium. She was one of the authors of the famous "21 Demands" of August 1980. The rest is history. Pienkowska remained active in the leadership of the strike and she led the occupation strike of the Prefect's office in November 1980, a



This rather poor quality picture from Labour Focus on Eastern Europe from 1981 shows the Gdansk leaders of Solidarity: Andrzej Gwiazda, Lech Walesa, Bogdan Lis, Bogdan Borusewicz, and Aline Pienkowska.

protest against the non-fulfilment of the health and safety conditions of the Agreement (point 16).

When Solidarity was made illegal in 1981, Alina Pieńkowska was detained for more than a year. She remained active in the Solidarity underground.

She stayed as a nurse at the shipyard until the early 1990s. In the free elections after the end of the Communist regime, she was elected to the senate on the Solidarity list, where she spent one term. She returned to Gdansk where she was elected of the City Council and was active in local politics and health issues.

According to a report in the *New York Times*, Andrzej Wajda said that Aline Pieńkowska had been a model for one of the characters in his film, *Man of Iron*. He said the actress who played the part spoke Pieńkowska's words: "Here in the shipyard, I stopped being afraid, stopped running away and became a real person."³

She is survived by her husband, Bogdan Borusewicz, and two children.

Gus Fagan

1. "Solidarity and KOR an Interview with Gdansk Leaders", *Labour Focus on Eastern Europe*, vol. 4, nos. 4-6, 1981, p. 14.

2. Quoted from *The Birth of Solidarity: The Gdansk Negotiations, 1980*, translated and introduced by A. Kemp-Welch (Macmillan, 1983).

3. *New York Times*, 28 October 2002.

Reviews

Boris Kagarlitsky, *Russia under Yeltsin and Putin: Neo-liberal Autocracy*, London: Pluto Press, 2002, ISBN: 0-7453-1502-X pb.

The volume of analysis of Russia's emergent political, economic and social systems has steadily expanded over the past few years to the extent that there are few major publishers without a text seeking to present the basics of Russian politics to an undergraduate or more general audience. The problem with many of these works is, however, that their starting point is usually Western (read American) political science with its concentration on the mechanics of the system: how the electoral system works, the relationship between presidency and parliament, the nature of the party system, etc. When it comes to the economy there is usually some anguish that the privatisation process was not carried out effectively enough, that there's loads of corruption, the mafia, and of course not enough done to tackle that annoying Soviet habit of retaining workers in patently unprofitable enterprises. Generally speaking, there is an incapacity to analyse the emergent social relations, the nature of the state and Russia's place in the postcommunist world.

This should of course be where leading Russian socialist Boris Kagarlitsky comes in but, to be honest, I found his latest book to be rather frustrating. He is scathingly critical of Russia's leaders, nascent capitalists, and 'liberal' intellectuals who have defended outrageously illiberal acts in the name of destroying the remnants of communism and the Soviet Union, but it is never clear which audience Kagarlitsky is writing for. Is he addressing the Western left?, a more general Western audience?, the Russian left? I think part of the problem here is that Kagarlitsky is now primarily a writer of shorter, more journalistic, pieces rather than works in the vein of the major books he produced in the 1980s - *The Thinking Reed*, *The Dialectic of Change* and *The Mirage of Modernization*. Although the latter was not published in the West until 1995, Kagarlitsky had actually begun writing it a decade earlier. So, *Russia under Yeltsin and Putin* is

Kagarlitsky's most substantial book specifically on Russian politics since the collapse of the Soviet Union. It would seem unlikely, however, that this book was written as a single project as some of the material is reworked from previous books, especially his *Restoration in Russia* published in 1995. I feel, therefore, that it lacks some of the coherence of his earlier works. Nevertheless, it contains much of value and is an essential counterweight to the more anodyne treatments found in most books about Russian politics.

The framework within which Kagarlitsky views Russia's current development and which has been elaborated in his latest book was originally developed in *Restoration in Russia*. This framework is that the post-1991 period represents (surprise, surprise!) a restoration analogous to the restoration of the Bourbon monarchy in France after 1815. This process, 'the natural continuation of the political cycle began by the Russian Revolution of 1917' (p.3), has resulted from a combination of economic problems and defeat in the Cold War. Moreover, this is a protracted process: the post-August 1998 political crisis represented not the end of the restoration but the 'beginning of its end' (p.7). The element that Kagarlitsky introduces into his analysis and represents a step forward from *Restoration in Russia* is that this process is placed in the context of Russia's place in the world system. Thus Kagarlitsky refers repeatedly to Russia being a peripheral capitalist state and it is this status to which Russia has been 'restored'. My dislike of this usage of the term 'restoration' is that previous restorations have involved a combination of the re-establishment of pre-revolutionary political systems (i.e. the monarchy) with the retention of the progressive elements of the revolutionary transformation, which the reactionary political systems were unable to overcome. In Russia's case, neither of these processes has occurred, although one can talk about the installation of authoritarian quasi-monarchs both of whom have attempted to reintroduce symbols of the pre-revolutionary regime. In particular, the progressive elements of the old system embodied in the nationalised planned economy, the provision of full employment and other welfare benefits have been swept away.

Rather fatalistically, the conclusion that Kagarlitsky draws from the 'restoration' is that, in keeping with other restored regimes, Russia

will experience a renewed cycle of revolutionary change (p.9). He is, however, pessimistic about the present capacity of any social forces in Russia to enact such profound change, which he views as not just inevitable but also essential if Russia is to escape its peripheral character. I will return to this theme in a moment.

I agree with Kagarlitsky that Russia is now a peripheral capitalist state but the conditions of its peripheralisation are markedly different from those of the Tsarist Empire. As Kagarlitsky notes, Russia has had to be broken back down from a comparatively high technological level, potentially capable of competing with Western capitalist states, to a state whose main functions are the provision of raw materials and a market for Western goods. This was a major function of the neo-liberal 'shock therapy' of the early 1990s. The social consequences of this peripheralisation have been the impoverishment of vast swaths of the Russian population alongside the emergence of social strata – the 'New Russians' and the 'oligarchs' – which have benefited from the privatisation of industry at knock-down prices. The latter, in particular, have become intertwined with the state bureaucracy, which has itself expanded beyond the numbers employed in the entire Soviet Union before its collapse, leading to the formation of business-political 'clans', usually encompassing financial institutions, raw materials companies and elements of the media, which have fought over the division of property. Far from developing Russian industry, oligarchic capital has been unproductive, corrupt and 'anti-national' (p.191). This is a typical phenomenon of peripheral capitalism.

Despite the penetration of the state by the oligarchs Kagarlitsky suggests, in a comparison of Yeltsin and Putin, that the Russian state was actually stronger under the former. The justification for this assertion is that Yeltsin had the political experience and status to be able to act, like Machiavelli's 'prince', as an arbiter between warring oligarchs and regional leaders in defence of the Kremlin's interests (p.269). With regard to Putin, however, Kagarlitsky asserts that he is 'too weak to accept responsibility for his actions' and '... too weak to become a full-blown dictator, but also too feeble and inexperienced to play at democracy ... With each day that passes, the impotence of the regime becomes more obvious' (p.278). This is, of course, the

reverse of conventional wisdom which viewed Yeltsin as the ageing sick alcoholic and Putin as his exact opposite: young, dynamic, teetotal. It is undoubtedly true that Yeltsin was always stronger than he was portrayed and that Putin is weaker than his media image would lead us to believe but it is hard to view Putin as weak in the way he has set about strengthening the Russian state by bringing the oligarchs and regional leaders into line, restructuring the institutions of parliament in the process, and compressing the political spectrum through control of the media and the law on political parties. In 'Unified Russia', the elite has for the first time established a coherent and viable 'party of power' capable of confronting the Communist Party.

Indeed, although the book is purportedly about Putin as well as Yeltsin, the level of analysis of the former is very limited. Of course, this is partly to do with Putin's novelty but, even allowing for the time taken to translate and publish the original text, more could have been provided on the relevance of his background in the security services and in St Petersburg to his style of leadership, his connections to the people he has appointed to government and other senior positions (what Kagarlitsky has elsewhere referred to amusingly as Putin's 'Northern Alliance'), his relationship to the oligarchs and Kremlin apparatus, and his overall programme. What we get is intimations of these features, but not the depth to be hoped for. Much of Kagarlitsky's discussion of Putin centres around his insensitive reaction to the sinking of the 'Kursk' submarine in August 2000 (pp.274-6). Important as that episode was, it does not appear to have radically affected Putin's popularity amongst the electorate – there is no viable alternative for president in 2004 – and detracts from discussion of his economic programme, his attitude to the West, and other aspects of his state-building mentioned above.

The strongest elements of the book, in my opinion, are his discussions of the decline of the Russian intelligentsia, the weaknesses of the trade unions, the aftermath of the 1998 financial crisis, and the war in Chechnya. In all of these instances Kagarlitsky demonstrates the impact of the changing nature of the social relations on the ideology and behaviour of particular actors. If we take Chechnya, for example, Kagarlitsky indicates the conflicts of interest between the elements

of the state, oligarchs and oil companies which led to the incursion by Chechen fighters into neighbouring Dagestan in August 1999, then the murky involvement of the security services in the bombings of Moscow apartment blocks a month later, and the decision to recommence a full-blown conflict. Surprisingly, though, Kagarlitsky does not discuss the value of this new war as a means of really putting the skids under the bid by Evgenii Primakov and Yurii Luzhkov to succeed Yeltsin and of boosting the prospects of the then virtually unknown prime minister Vladimir Putin.

Kagarlitsky's discussion of the left, and particularly of the Communist Party of the Russian Federation (CPRF), is another strength of the book. Kagarlitsky is clear that the CPRF is no longer a potential vehicle for radical change: 'In its political essence it is a right-wing nationalist, conservative formation, expressing the interests of the most hidebound layers of bureaucratic capital' (p.173). Kagarlitsky is right to suggest that there were forces inside the CPRF which could have played a progressive, oppositional role but particularly since 1995 the leadership around Zyuganov has crushed any alternative to his 'great-power patriotism' (p.219). For the CPRF now the main problem is not capitalism but foreign oppression and 'cosmopolitanism', the answer to which is economic freedom plus a strong state (pp.174-5). Kagarlitsky suggests that through its gradual accommodation to the authorities in 1997-8 and its undermining of Primakov's government in 1999, the CPRF had become discredited (p.220). This is, however, difficult to square with the party's performance in the December 1999 elections at which it improved on its result in 1995 (when discontent over the economic transformation was at its peak) both in terms of absolute support and in terms of percentage of the vote. Kagarlitsky's comment that this was a protest vote and that people voted for the communists 'in spite of everything that Zyuganov had said and done in recent years' (p.263) is not very convincing. There would appear to be a much more stable core of support for the CPRF even despite a haemorrhaging of members than Kagarlitsky is prepared to admit. Recent opinion polls still put the communists as comfortably the most popular party with around a quarter of the votes despite recent conflicts in its leadership and its comparative isolation in parliament.

So if the CPRF is not a viable instrument for radical change, how can Russia begin to overcome its peripheral status. Here Kagarlitsky is generally optimistic. While acknowledging that only revolutionary changes to existing structures can transform Russia's situation, he suggests that modest economic growth, insufficient in itself to transform the global balance of power, can provide the conditions for the development of struggles in society as contradictions are exposed and strata and classes begin to realise where their real interests lay (pp.282-3). The quasi-corporatist relations inherited from the Soviet system which promoted an identity of interests between workers and bosses in maintaining the enterprise and extracting resources from the centre have begun to break down. In these conditions, the trade unions, weakened by loss of membership and industrial decline, and with a leadership reluctant to challenge the authorities, can begin to transcend the hunger strikes and, in some cases, collective suicides which characterised the desperation of workers in the 1990s. Ultimately, Kagarlitsky argues the left's programme should combine democratic capitalism with state management and democratic socialism, rejecting market ideology but not market mechanisms (p.281). It is unclear here what is meant by 'democratic capitalism' as Kagarlitsky reiterates several times that no capitalist class exists in Russia. Are we back to the pre-1917 Bolshevik scenario of workers (if not peasants) creating the conditions for the emergence of a liberal capitalist class? It is also unclear how a Russian left is to emerge to promote such a programme as there is little discussion of the core issues and campaigns that such an embryonic movement should take up, how it should orient to the emerging anti-globalisation movement, etc.

While I have indicated my dissatisfactions with this book, and it is not really for those without some background knowledge of postcommunist Russia, its virtues outweigh its shortcomings. Kagarlitsky remains one of the few writers published in English engaged in analysing the emerging social relations of Russia and attempting to paint a picture of the development of Russia since the collapse of communism in all its complexities.

Rick Simon

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