

## The Poland of Solidarity, the Poland of Liberalism

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There is more than one Poland. From the economic perspective, there is a Poland of those who share in, or benefit from, her relative well being, and there is a Poland of those who do not, except that some of the latter are eligible for a minuscule unemployment benefit. Some of those who are destitute today did more as a group for the Solidarity movement's success than all the intellectuals who also participated in the movement; others, now in their twenties, simply cannot get a job. The gap between these two Polands is widening.

Seen from the political perspective, the picture is more complex. The obviously predominant one is that of Poland of an assumed modernity, as envisioned by the "enlightened liberals:" open to the outside world or, to put it less diplomatically, favoring the supranational and the postnational over the national; and hostile to the other Poland, until very recently almost unheard from, one accused of provincialism and clericalism by the former, but in fact advocating adherence to the Polish cultural identity, with Catholicism not banned from the public domain. While the former preaches economic liberalism as a means to raise the destitute in due course, the latter emphasize the state's role in bringing welfare to the poor as soon as possible. The latter also claims that its adherents think in terms of social solidarity, which is a key part of the fabric of a healthy society. However, they are accused of populism and socialist sentiments by the former. The "liberals" prefer anything individual over (almost) anything communal. The first of these two Polands has its major political representation in the party called the Civic Platform (PO) with Donald Tusk at the helm. Its main adversary is the Law and Justice Party (PiS) led by Jaroslaw Kaczynski.

Broadly speaking, both these parties are center-right. In the Parliament (Sejm), PiS has 155 seats and PO has 133. Four more parties have their representations in the Parliament. These are: the Self-Defense Movement with 56 seats, the Left Democratic Alliance (SLD) with 55 seats, the League of Polish Families (LPR) with 34 and the Polish Peasants Party (PSL) with 25 seats. The Self-Defense Movement and LPR are populist parties, the latter with a strong pretense to a Catholic tint. Both claim to represent the lower social strata, with the Self-Defense Movement having a chance to become a voice of those aspiring to the middle class in small cities and rural areas. The Left Democratic Alliance is a party led mainly by the postcommunists, with strong appeal to the old and, partly, the new Left. Most importantly, it is connected to, if not a part of, an informal power structure which has developed in Poland since 1989. This system rests on participation in the governing institutions of which the postcommunists had control in the years 1993–1997 and 2001–2005, and on the ensuing web of connections usually hidden from the public eye. In addition to running much of the country's economy, this system—with considerable help from Adam Michnik's newspaper *Gazeta Wyborcza*—has succeeded in making the society at large politically disoriented, and either alienated or deeply frustrated, or both. Those disoriented and frustrated (but not alienated from politics) are now the major constituencies of the four political parties. From that group comes also a part of the constituency of PiS.

The power system in which the postcommunists hold the invisible levers is now in disarray. Founded in 1989, it first manifested itself as a dominant strand of the sociopolitical ideology, and only later in the economic arena. Let us not forget that in 1989, in what can be described as a nick of time, Poland was declared a democratic regime of law and order, with its gaze focused on the bright future and with memory of the past erased. As alleged by some, the immediate memories were too painful, since "we all had been"—more or less, explicitly or implicitly—immersed in the service of the formerly totalitarian state. Lustration, let alone

decommunization, was declared to be abominable: we have all been tainted, so how could we lustrate ourselves? Remembering the past was said to be counterproductive; it slowed the tide of near-affluence and (post)modernity, of tolerance, multiculturalism and other blessings of postnational Europe (never mind that this dream of postnationalism has never become reality). Remembering the past was therefore unwelcome, to say the least. Catholicism was equated with clericalism, staying by tradition and cultural identity was equated with ignorance, the word “patriotism“ (read as “chauvinism”) was deleted from the vocabulary. Since the advocates of such views were numerous and vocal and virtually monopolized the media, many people lost their sense of direction and an ability to distinguish between true and false, or even right and wrong.

As the twentieth century was coming to a close, however, it became clear to many that democracy and the (relatively) free market, while being real blessings, could also be exploited by ex-apparatchiks, by the former communist secret service agents, and by other functionaries of the now-defunct Soviet-occupied “People’s Poland.” Still later, some people realized why there was no reprivatization of individual property confiscated by the communist state, and why the privatization of large enterprises has proceeded in strange twists. And only recently, we learned that corruption has achieved unbelievably high levels. To the amazement of all, there happened the Rywingates, Orlen-gates and PZU-gates.(1) The common people began to comprehend that there is a clandestine power system whose ambition is to dominate our country. This system functions in a mafia-style fashion, and it is partly controlled by the former communists and apparatchiks.

Professor Zdzislaw Krasnodebski was right when he attributed the obvious crisis within this system to the following three factors: the parliamentary investigations of the Rywin case and other cases; establishing the Institute of National Memory; and—despite all their shortcomings—the media.(2) All three have helped the Polish people to see the real state of Polish affairs. Jaroslaw Kaczynski is also right when he points out that the years of successes of the special interests made the postcommunists overconfident and convinced that they can go unpunished whatever they do. They became less cautious and were caught in their dirty dealings. Such was the background of the offer Lew Rywin made to Adam Michnik. If accepted, the offer would have subjugated Michnik to the web. Michnik declined and made the offer publicly known, and so the corrupt system was shaken for the first time.

The system’s erosion was what PiS leadership was waiting for. Jaroslaw Kaczynski, with his twin brother Lech’s support (Lech is now President of Poland), wished for the dismantling of the Round Table compromise forged under duress, and relieving Poland from post-communist infiltration. This was the reason that already in 1990 the Center Alliance (PC), the predecessor of PiS, also led by Jaroslaw Kaczynski, was declared a “threat to democracy” by the liberal-social-democratic ROAD movement, at that moment the dominant faction among the political circles that emerged out of Solidarity and the main architect of the Round Table compromise from Solidarity’s side (ROAD later became the Democratic Union, or UD and, still later, Freedom Union, or UW). Kaczynski himself, who, along with his brother, was then the closest advisor to Lech Walesa, was dubbed “Walesa’s evil genius” by the members of the ROAD movement.

To make a long story short, after three years of feuding between the politicians who claimed Solidarity connection, SLD, in coalition with PSL, took over power in 1993. In the elections to the Parliament in 1997, out of 460 seats SLD won 164 seats, Akcja Wyborcza Solidarnosc (AWS) 202 seats, and UW 60 seats. The AWS-UW coalition was formed, but it fell apart even before the next elections in 2001. In the mid-2000, UW left the coalition and AWS formed a minority government. Thus throughout the 1990s the post-Solidarity parties and factions were in disarray, regrouping as if in a haze, and leaving parts of their potential

constituencies rudderless and helpless. SLD, this time in coalition with PSL and the strongly leftist Unia Pracy (UP), took power again and ruled until 2005.

The center-right forces learned their lesson, at least in part. In the early 2001, PO and PiS were formed and since then rose to become the major contenders for power in 2005. Interestingly and rather unexpectedly, it was the conflict between AWS and UW which greatly facilitated the formation of PiS. When UW left the coalition with AWS, Lech Kaczynski, a retired politician, was offered the position of the Minister of Justice, made vacant after UW Minister had been dismissed. Not surprisingly and to the horror of the liberal legal academia, Minister Kaczynski proved determined to change the criminal code into a more severe one. He also tried to reform the everyday workings of the legal system. Kaczynski occupied the position for a very short time, but his short tenure sufficed to gain him much popularity within the society at large. He began forming PiS largely on the basis of this popularity. PiS was later taken over by his brother, a seasoned politician in his own right.

Prior to the parliamentary elections in September 2005, it was widely predicted that PO and PiS would gain the majority of votes. Virtually all polls said that PO would have a slight edge over PiS. The predictions were wrong only on which party would be the winner: it was PiS that got a slight majority, not PO. A clear majority of those who voted for either of the two parties wished that after the presidential elections in October a coalition would be formed between PiS and PO, regardless of whether Lech Kaczynski or Tusk won the presidency. That it did not happen was a shock to the public, in fact the first one in a series.

Judging from what the public heard and saw after the elections ended, PO leaders did much to make the coalition not happen. It was obvious from the outset that the PiS's main objective or, better to say, mission, was to bring back law and order, curtail corruption and reorganize the intelligence and security services, all this through deep institutional changes. No wonder that PiS needed to gain control over the Ministries of Justice, Interior Affairs and Administration, and Defense. It was equally obvious that PO was reaching for power as a guarantor of enhancing economic improvement, in particular via changes in the revenue and value-added tax codes (PO refused to show more of its economic program, reportedly because it was too radical to be presented to a wide audience prior to the elections, the more so as the PiS's counterpart included much wishful thinking and all too obvious signs of a dangerous populist utopia). And yet PO decided to make the appointment of one of its leaders, Jan Maria Rokita, to the Minister of Interior Affairs and Administration a necessary condition of joining the coalition. Because of a well-known rivalry between Rokita and Tusk, a noted commentator, Krzysztof Czabanski, called the PO condition, whose fulfillment would have strengthened Rokita's position within the party, a "joke of the year."<sup>(3)</sup> Another leader of PO, Bronislaw Komorowski, before he was made another PO's "must," in this case for Speaker of the Sejm, started a campaign of insults against PiS. The campaign swiftly achieved the level of complete absurdity. Simultaneously and from the beginning, contrary to evidence, PiS was consistently accused of only pretending to forge a coalition with PO, while in fact heading for such a coalition with the Self-Defense Movement and LPR. Such were the first several weeks after the elections, during which Jaroslaw Kaczynski and PiS under his guidance proved much abler players.

Apparently, for PO to form a coalition with PiS as a dominating partner was not an option (at one point, Jan Rokita, otherwise a shrewd politician, complained that PiS does not agree to treat PO on a par, as if forgetting that PO lost the elections). It did not help PiS to send signals of restraint and rationality when it came to state welfare programs—evidently, the PiS pre-election program was not to be read literally in practice and there could have been room for compromise on economic matters.

Attacks on PiS by PO and by the PO-inspired media have continued. In some media, PiS has been presented as a threat to democracy. Given the persistence of these attacks, one is

tempted to wonder whether the web of informal connections, while originating with the postcommunists, had in fact spread to wider segments of the political and business circles, has reached the media, and made PO involved in preventing the web's total destruction. It remains unclear whether PO acts in the name of self-interest or is motivated by political realism which calls for moderation when striving for any betterment.

Whatever the reasons for the conflict between PO and PiS, and however weak the Polish political system still is, it would be best for Poland if the two parties agreed to act together. If this were to happen, PiS would have to impose constraints on its plans for administrative change, while PO would have to stop indiscriminately opposing PiS's initiatives. Nothing in the programs of both parties prevents them from sitting down together and working out a viable compromise on economic reform, first and foremost lowering the costs of labor and moving on with privatization based on transparent rules. All this needs to be done for the common good, including the good of the now-destitute segments of society. Yet nothing like that is likely to happen soon.

In 1989, after 50 years of German and Soviet occupations, "the third republic" of Poland was established as a successor to the second republic of 1918–1939. With the Rywin-gate and other scandals revealed, many hoped that year 2005 would mark the end of the third republic and the beginning of the fourth one. It now remains to be seen if the noncommunist political class is able to make this dream come true.

*Warsaw, February, 2006*

#### EDITOR'S NOTES

1. Lew Rywin, a Polish financier now accused of major corruption; Orlen, a Polish energy company likewise accused of corruption; PZU, a major Polish insurance company.
2. Zdzislaw Krasnodebski, *Rzeczpospolita*, 10 September 2005.
3. Krzysztof Czabanski, *Rzeczpospolita*, 3 November 2005.