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Communist and Post-Communist Studies 41 (2008) 421–442
Communist and Post-Communist Studies
www.elsevier.com/locate/postcomstud

The (not always sweet) uses of opportunism: Post-communist political parties in Poland

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Available online 13 November 2008

Abstract

The author argues that political opportunism, an attitude common among communist party members before 1989, turned into both the blessing and the curse for post-communist parties in Poland. Once hopeful of secure careers in the authoritarian structures of the old regime, after the regime breakdown communists found themselves in a situation where the only chance for such a career could be associated with the party reinventing itself as a player in the field of pluralist democracy. Opportunistic attitudes of communist apparatchiks and *nomenklatura* members were instrumental in transforming them, individually and collectively, into effective actors in market economy and competitive politics. Yet the same attitudes doomed the post-communists once the opportunities associated with access to political power opened up widely. The same people who in the 1990s were so apt in turning the rules of democratic game into their collective advantage, in the 2000s acted with a sense of impunity and lack of any consideration for political accountability that in democracies arrives at the end of any election cycle. Plagued by corruption scandals, they lost their popular base: the economically disadvantaged groups to nationalistic populists, the urbane libertarians to liberal democrats.

Keywords: Poland; Political parties; Elections; Communism; Post-communism

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doi:10.1016/j.postcomstud.2008.09.007

When in March 1968 – fortieth anniversary of these events has been much celebrated this year – Polish students organized a series of non-violent sit-ins and rallies in defense of basic civil rights (in particular freedom of speech), little did they know that their actions would mark the beginning of the end of the communist system in Poland. The protest was short-lived: the regime restored the "order" at Polish universities within a month. Yet the March '68 events (as this modest protest has been commonly known ever since), along with the much more spectacular developments of the Prague Spring and the subsequent intervention of Warsaw Pact armies in Czechoslovakia, made it clear that communism in its Central-European version had lost its utopian appeal. Before 1968 people could believe – as we today know naively – that participation in the communist movement may contribute to the creation of a more efficient economy and a better society. After 1968 such illusions were no longer possible. Furthermore, the nasty anti-Semitic campaign launched by the Polish communist leadership in connection to the March events as a mean to find a scapegoat to re-direct the popular discontent away from the current leaders and toward the selected group of former dignitaries of the Stalinist (1944–1956) period, indicated an important shift in the way the communist authorities sought legitimization of their rule. From the mechanism tying their legitimacy with a utopian promise (Rigby and Feher, 1982: pp. 1–26; Holmes, 1997: pp. 44–45), they moved, quite consciously, toward exposing the alleged association between their rule and the long-term interests of an ethnically defined nation. Instead of class solidarity, the regime propaganda began to stress its own peculiar interpretation of Polish *raison d'état* as the foundation of foreign policy. Similarly, ethnic solidarity replaced whatever had been left of class struggle as the basis of socio-economic and cultural policies.

Those developments, subtle and unimportant as they might have seemed at the time, changed nevertheless the dynamics of relationships between the party – the rulers – and the people. In particular, they affected the patterns of political recruitment into the party ranks, party apparatus, and *nomenklatura* positions. Ideological motivations have been replaced by a sheer desire to advance one's political and professional career. Sure enough, opportunists of all shapes and shades had been joining the party since the end of World War II. Their numbers were particularly high at the time of the massive recruitment effort that followed the party unification congress in December 1948, when the Polish Workers Party, PPR, merged with the Polish Socialist Party, PPS, to create the Polish United Workers Party, known by its Polish acronym as PZPR (*Polska Zjednoczona Partia Robotnicza*). Yet for most peasants and workers who joined the party in the 1950s and 1960s or simply accepted its leading political role as an unquestionable fact, the economic and social transformation the party presided over had a real potential of bettering their collective lot. Marxism–Leninism, to which the party officially subscribed, still had some appeal as an ideology of social transformation. In contrast, after 1968 not even the pretence of one's yearning to "change the world" was a necessary condition for party membership anymore; the proclaimed loyalty to the (current) party leadership became a sufficient standard. The newly recruited were talking quite openly about their motivations, albeit usually in negative terms: "If I

did not join, I would have had troubles in achieving important professional objectives.'' Only the most scrupulous ones would have added ''…and making a difference for the benefit of our country'' (but never: class). Political opportunism became a social norm.

It will be argued here that political opportunism, rooted in the attitudes that became common in the 1970s and 1980s, has turned into both the blessing and the curse for post-communist parties in Poland. It allowed these parties and, even more so, their particular leaders, to survive hard times and flourish in suitable circumstances. But it also limited the parties' popular appeal and contributed to a climate in which personal interests have been put above the party's – and the nation's – good, which ultimately led to a major crisis of the post-communist Left.

PZPR: toward the abyss

Linz and Stepan (1996: pp. 255–292) in their seminal work on democratic transitions and consolidations claim that among all former Soviet-bloc countries only Poland entered the transition period as an authoritarian (as opposed to totalitarian or post-totalitarian) regime, which in turn has had profound consequences for the patterns of transitional development. Whether a regime is called authoritarian or totalitarian is, of course, a matter of terminological conventions. Linz and Stepan (1996: p. 264), who apply their terminology in a disciplined and consistent fashion, obviously have a point here, even if they somewhat overemphasize the role of the military in Polish state affairs. Indeed, the Polish communist leader from 1981 to 1989, Gen. Wojciech Jaruzelski, wore a military uniform, as did many of his closest associates. Also, the authority of the military as an institution (remarkably popular among Poles even during and after the martial law of 1981–1983 – see Jasiewicz, 1995: p. 145) was instrumental in overcoming the resistance of party apparatus before the roundtable negotiations in autumn of 1988. Yet much more important than who the communist leaders were (military men) was who they were not: they were not communist true believers anymore.

A series of widespread popular upheavals – in 1970, 1976, and, eventually, the ''carnival of Solidarity'' in 1980–1981 – exposed the true nature of the communist system in Poland. The communists could no longer claim that they ruled ''in the name of the people.'' Their party, the PZPR, contrary to the letter of amendments made to the constitution in 1976, ceased to play any ''leading'' or motivating role in the process of economic and social development. It has become, as its critics used to say it in the late-1970s, ''the trade union of people in power.''

The naked desire to hold on to power as the chief motivating force of the PZPR leadership in the 1980s has been arguably best exposed in political speeches delivered periodically by Gen. Czesław Kiszczak, the Number Two in communist hierarchy. As the Minister of Internal Affairs and Politburo member, Kiszczak would occasionally speak at the forum of the *Sejm* or at party meetings, delivering updates on state affairs. His speeches (they still wait for a careful analyst, as Kiszczak himself awaits an able biographer) were completely free of any ideological references.

Kiszczak did not speak about socialism, Marxism, or Leninism; he hardly ever mentioned concepts such as "class struggle," "proletariat," or "social justice." Instead, his speeches read as a manual in technology of bureaucratic governance, with a strong militaristic bend.

While other PZPR leaders, including Kiszczak's mentor and boss Wojciech Jaruzelski, never removed the concept of socialism from their official vocabulary, they would typically apply it in ways revealing the shift away from the utopian and toward the nationalistic legitimization of communist rule. A phrase used as a slogan for the Ninth Extraordinary Congress of PZPR in the summer of 1981 and often repeated in official propaganda throughout the 1980s proclaimed: "We will defend socialism as independence" (meaning: we will defend socialism *with the same zeal* with which we would defend national independence). Nation's independence appeared here as an absolute value, one that does not need any justification in the eye of the message's recipient – the Polish people. Socialism's merits, on the contrary, needed to be validated by the association with the national sovereignty, even if only in a form limited by the satellite relationship to the Soviet Union.

The demise of ideological orthodoxy was, of course, instrumental in promoting pragmatic approach of PZPR leaders to the question of dialogue with the Solidarity-led opposition and the eventual transfer of power in the late 1980s. The Polish model of transition has been symbolized by the negotiations between the government and opposition conducted in Warsaw in winter and spring of 1989 and concluded with the Roundtable Agreement (April 5, 1989). To be sure, Jaruzelski, Kiszczak, and their cohorts did not enter these talks with a vision of communists giving up power. On the contrary: their intention was to co-opt Solidarity's leadership into, as Adam Przeworski (1991: pp. 54–66) put it, a "broader dictatorship." They understood the necessity for economic austerity measures and were hoping that Solidarity's re-legalization and participation in structures of governance (as small opposition in the parliament) would legitimize those measures and diminish the possibility of social unrest. Creating new institutions (presidency, senate) and accepting new electoral rules (limited competition), the communists were hoping to re-group over the period of four years and subsequently defeat Solidarity (compromised in the eyes of the public by its endorsement of austerity measures) in a more competitive election in 1993. As Jacqueline Hayden convincingly shows in her analysis of the collapse of communist power in Poland (2006), this calamity came about as a result of a series of strategic misconceptions and miscalculations made by key communist actors (Dudek, 2002; Paczkowski, 1995).

If there were any elements of true foresight by communist leaders, they could be found in the deregulation of command economy launched by the government of Mieczysław Rakowski in 1988–1989. This deregulation, in particular the January 1989 law on "commercialization of state enterprises" (Roszkowski, 2002: p. 401), allowed quasi-privatization of state assets with certain property rights acquired by factory-level managers, as well as opened up practically unrestricted possibilities to set up new companies. Particular popularity achieved the joint ventures set up by individual managers with the very enterprises they had been running. Those ventures would later become known as *nomenklatura* companies (Zubek, 1995: p. 276). All in

all, these actions created for the party apparatus and state *nomenklatura* powerful incentives to accept the new economic (and, by implication, political) order. Individuals for whom loyalty to the party was once the way to secure their lot, now could see better opportunities in taking advantage of privileged access to scarce resources in an emergent market.

The golden parachute received by the many *nomenklatura* members contributed to the perception that the leaders of PZPR and Solidarity made at the Roundtable negotiations a secret deal, in which the latter guaranteed the former political and economic security in exchange for a peaceful transfer of power (Kurski and Semka, 1992; Zybertowicz, 1993). Allegedly, this deal was made at informal meetings of certain key Roundtable participants in a Warsaw suburb of Magdalenka (Dubiński, 1990). The actual participants of those meetings, from both sides, deny that any such deal was ever made (Geremek and Żakowski, 1990; Wałęsa, 1991; Rakowski, 1991; Bereś and Skoczylas, 1991; Hayden, 2006; Friszke, 2002). Also party documents of the period (Perzkowski, 1994) indicate a widespread confusion among the party top leadership rather than any clever scheming or cunning on their part. Above all, however, any conspiracy theories do not take into account the scale of the enormous surprise with which both the political elites and the public greeted Solidarity's sweeping victory at the polls on June 4, 1989. The elites had negotiated a limited power-sharing agreement; the voters transformed it into the beginning of a peaceful regime transition.

In an analysis of Polish communists' considerations, one should also remember that they faced a truly formidable foe. The strength and depth of Polish democratic opposition was a factor important in shaping a peaceful, negotiated transition. Polish opposition was well-organized already in the late 1970s and since 1980 it was united under the Solidarity umbrella. Its leadership was composed of people who were either seasoned politicians, or top Polish experts in their respective fields (law, economy, social policy), or both. In addition, in the final decade of the communist system (between 1976 and 1989), the general level of political activism in Poland was much higher than anywhere else in the region, "perhaps by a factor of 100," in Padraic Kenney's assessment (2002: p. 15). In short, Polish communists, unlike their comrades in other Soviet-bloc state, faced at the end of their tenure both counter-elites generated by dissident movements and civil society existing and operating completely outside of party control. Yet even this powerful opposition appeared overwhelmed by the speed and scale of communist system disintegration in 1989–1990 (Zubek, 1995: p. 279).

SdRP: neither Phoenix, nor ashes

Mieczysław Rakowski, once a party liberal hated by the hard-line apparatus, then a hardliner despised by Solidarity, eventually became not only the last prime minister of the People's Poland, but also the last First Secretary of the PZPR. In this capacity, he presided over the XI Congress of the PZPR and, on January 28, 1990, uttered, in breaking voice, the line: "Post the colors of the Polish United Workers Party [out of

the congress hall]!'' On the same day most of the delegates to the Congress voted to establish a new party, the Social Democracy of the Republic of Poland (*Socjaldemokracja Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej* or SdRP). A splinter group of delegates, lead by Tadeusz Fiszbach, a popular party secretary from Gdańsk, left the Congress and created the Polish Social-Democratic Union (*Polska Unia Socjaldemokratyczna*, or PUS). PUS, initially an honest attempt to create a left-wing party that would not carry any post-PZPR legacy, was nevertheless haunted by internal quarrels, and it officially dissolved itself in July 1991, without ever contesting a national election (Paszkiewicz, 2004: pp. 87–88).

Besides SdRP, PUS, and their subsequent permutations (SLD, UP and SdPl – see below) no other party of any significance emerged from within the former PZPR membership. A group of hardliners who had opposed the Roundtable Agreement (and the very idea of negotiating with the ''counterrevolutionary'' Solidarity) established the Union of Polish Communists Proletariat (*Związek Komunistów Polskich Proletariat*), based mostly in Warsaw and Silesia. The party joined the SLD coalition, but played there a marginal role. There were also some attempts to organize alternative post-PZPR groupings locally (for instance in the Wielkopolska region), but also those would eventually either end up under the SLD umbrella or quickly cease any activity.

Unlike in Serbia, Romania, or Russia, in the post-1989 Poland communists did not generate (or even attempted to) a nationalist party. This outcome may be seen as a surprise, given the developments during the time when PZPR was in power. As mentioned above, Poland's national interests, as interpreted by the communists, were, at least since the 1960s, the major vehicle through which the party tried to legitimize its authority. Also earlier, in the years immediately following WWII, the defeat of Nazi Germany by the Soviet Union and Poland's acquisition of the formerly German Silesia, East Prussia, and Pomerania were pointed out by communist propaganda as sources of regime's legitimacy. Paradoxically, the anti-German resentments, particularly strong in times of Władysław Gomułka (the party's leader from 1956 to 1970, for whom the alleged German threat was a true obsession), coupled with pro Russian/Soviet orientation and overt (1967–1868) or covert anti-Semitism, made Polish communists the executors of foreign and domestic (ethnic) policies advocated before WWII by their then ideological mortal enemies, National Democracy (commonly called *Endecja*). It was not a coincidence that during the 1968 anti-Semitic campaign several writers associated with *Endecja*, who had been barred from Polish press since 1945, reappeared in print, as did their old ideas, now articulated by card-carrying members of PZPR (Eisler, 1991; Stola, 2000; Osęka, 2008). The national communists organized themselves, albeit not as a party (*Zjednoczenie Patriotyczne ''Grunwald*,'' Patriotic Union ''Grunwald''), and loudly articulated their ideas during the 1980–1981 period, when the popular unrest led not only to the creation of Solidarity, but also to an unprecedented openness in public debates and virtual suspension of state censorship. But the national communists, whose ideas remained attractive to many PZPR members throughout the 1980s, soon found themselves in a trap. In 1981, they had enthusiastically supported Jaruzelski and his imposition of martial law – only to become bitterly disappointed by

his decision to enter the dialogue with Solidarity in 1989. By supporting Jaruzelski as a "true patriot," they completely undermined any nationalistic credentials they could have enjoyed among the public, which, by and large, saw in Solidarity the embodiment of centuries-long Polish longing for national independence. In 1989 national communists could in no way compete with Solidarity in the realm of patriotism; in the years that followed they could not outdo parties such as Confederation for an Independent Poland (*Konfederacja Polski Niepodległej*, KPN), Movement for the Reconstruction of Poland (*Ruch Odbudowy Polski*, ROP), and more recently League of Polish Families (LPR) and Law and Justice (PiS), in expressions of Polish nationalism. Of these, the LPR has openly presented itself as an ideological successor to the *Endecja*. On the level of popular attitudes, Polish nationalism has traditionally been associated with anti-communism and this connection was only reinforced by the developments of the 1980s and 1990s. Hence, in the Polish political arena of the late 20th – early 21st century there was no demand for anything the "national communists" could have offered.

On the genuine Left, but outside the old PZPR membership, there were attempts to revive the Polish Socialist Party (*Polska Partia Socjalistyczna*, or PPS), an important actor in late 19th – early 20th century, then in the inter-war Poland the dominant party of the Left (with the popular following many times stronger than that of the communists), and finally one of the pillars of Polish government-in-exile during WWII. The exiled leadership never accepted the fusion of the domestic PPS (led at the time by leaders subservient to Soviet interests in Poland) with the communist PPR into PZPR in 1948. Yet the four decades of institutional absence from the national political scene did to PPS damage that could not be offset even by its lasting image of an effective left-wing alternative to communists. Endorsements from surviving venerable émigré leaders notwithstanding, the restored PPS, marred by internal quarrels, failed to attract any significant following. One of its wings joined the SLD coalition for the 1993 and 1997 elections (see below).

As a result of these developments, the SdRP established itself for over a decade as a virtual monopolist in two ways: as a successor party to the communist PZPR and as a voice of the broadly understood Polish Left (united under the Democratic Left Alliance umbrella – see below). The so far only serious challenge to the latter function came after the turn of the century from the Self-Defense (*Samoobrona*), a radical populist party without, however, any overt claims to the institutional or ideological communist heritage.

The SdRP's name was a paraphrase of the Social Democracy of the Polish Kingdom and Lithuania (SdKPiL), the party of the late 19th – early 20th century that was the direct predecessor of the Communist Party of Poland (KPP). The SdRP claimed not only the ideological legacy but also the assets of the PZPR, including its infrastructure, such as the buildings. Eventually most of the buildings had to be relinquished since they were state property; the PZPR had never bothered to acquire legal titles. After lengthy legal wrangling, the SdRP had to reimburse the state treasury for other assets as well. What was left, however, proved to be a most valuable source of party financing. Equally if not more important were the human and organizational resources (Grzymała-Busse, 2002).

The SdRP departed from the mass-party model utilized by PZPR, which membership stood in 1970 at over three millions and in1985 still at over two millions (Grzymała-Busse, 2002: p. 43). Most of the former PZPR members ceased any political activity in post-1989 Poland. According to Jarosław Pawlak (1997: p. 312) among all Polish party leaders in 1993 only 17% had ever belonged to the PZPR; for economic elites this number stood at 52%. The estimates of the card-carrying/dues-paying membership in the SdPR oscillated in the 60,000-to-90,000 range (Grzymała-Busse, 2002; Gebethner, 1996; Szczerbiak, 2001). In Aleksander Kwaśniewski's apt formulation "it's better to have 100,000 members and one million voters then vice versa" (Grzymała-Busse, 2002: p. 103).

Nonetheless, the new party, mindful of its legacy, did not contest national elections under its own name. Instead, it became the core element of the Democratic Left Alliance (*Sojusz Lewicy Demokratycznej*, or SLD). This alliance first emerged in July 1991 as an electoral bloc of various post-communist and other left-wing organizations getting ready for the October 1991 general election. It renewed its status in July 1993 in order to participate in the September 1993 election (Paszkiewicz, 2004: p. 241).

SLD (the coalition) was joined at various times and for differing lengths of time by the All-Poland Trade Unions Accord (*Ogólnopolskie Porozumienie Związków Zawodowych*, or OPZZ), an organization of pro-communist trade unions created in 1983; a faction of the Polish Socialist Party (PPS), the Union of Polish Communists Proletariat, and various national, regional, and local non-governmental organizations representing women, youth, the unemployed, the retired, and others.

Throughout the 1990s, the SLD functioned as a loose electoral bloc and never developed any specific organizational structures. Decision-making took place within the SLD parliamentary faction – the sign of domination of "party in public office" over "party in central office" or "party on the ground" (Katz and Mair, 1994). The SLD became a catch-all quasi-party, attracting supporters from all social classes and strata. Over the course of two years it more than doubled its popular support (from more than 1.3 million votes in 1991 to over 2.8 million in 1993 – see Fig. 1), while the number of its seats in the *Sejm* increased from 60 to 171 and in the Senate from four to 37. It was able to shed the ex-communist stigma and to present itself as a modern, West European style social democracy. Within the national leadership, however, the old PZPR apparatchiks never ceased to dominate. These included Aleksander Kwaśniewski, Chairman of both the SdRP and the SLD until his election as president of the Republic in 1995; Leszek Miller, SdRP's Secretary General; Włodzimierz Cimoszewicz, presidential candidate in 1990; Józef Oleksy, Prime Minister in 1995–1996; Izabella Sierakowska; and Józef Wiaderny (leader of OPZZ).

In the 1997 general election the SdRP-led SLD, despite gains (see Fig. 1) in both the absolute numbers (to 3.5 million) and the share of votes (to 27.1%), which brought it 164 seats in the *Sejm* and 28 in the Senate, still lost to the Electoral Action Solidarity (AWS). The major factor in this defeat was related to the electoral mechanics. In 1991 and 1993, the post-Solidarity Right was deeply fragmented (many of its parties failed to clear the 5% threshold introduced in 1993), but for the 1997 election it managed to unite under the AWS umbrella and, without any

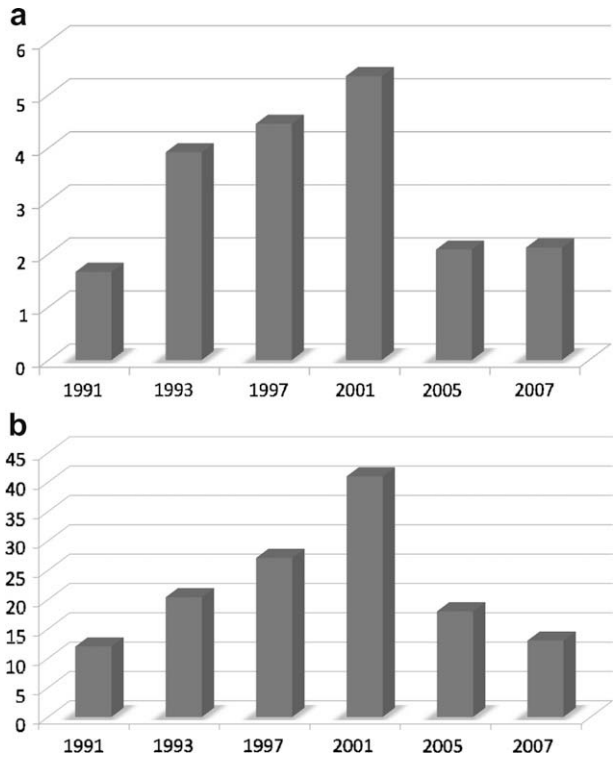

Fig. 1. a. Post-communist electoral results, in millions of votes received, 1991–2007 (1991, 1993, 1997: SLD; 2001: SLD/UP; 2005: SLD + UP + SdPl + PD; 2007: LiD). b. Post-communist electoral results, in percent of popular vote, 1991–2007 (1991, 1993, 1997: SLD; 2001: SLD/UP; 2005: SLD + UP + SdPl + PD; 2007: LiD). Source: Author's compilation from official election returns.

significant increase in the number of votes, win a plurality of seats in each house. In addition, Polish Peasant Party (PSL), the SLD's 1993–1997 coalition partner, did not fare well in this election. The 1997 debacle, along with changes in the electoral law giving certain advantages to entities registered as parties (as opposed to coalitions) contributed to the decision of registering the SLD as a single political party and thus terminating the life of the SdRP. This action took place in April 1999.

In their programmatic statements both SdRP and SLD (first a coalition, then a party) focused on issues of economic and social policy. While endorsing the reforms aimed at the introduction and strengthening of the market economy, they emphasized the need to preserve the social safety net, to limit unemployment, and to protect the economically weaker segments of population (young families, and pensioners). Nevertheless, during its first four years in power (1993–1997), the SLD did not attempt to overhaul the overly bureaucratic and financially bankrupt institutions of the welfare state inherited from the communist system, such as public health care system or social security fund. On ideological and cultural issues, both the SdRP and the SLD stood firmly in favor of separation between state and church

and voiced strong support for pro-choice legislation, but again did little to amend Poland's restrictive abortion law when the circumstances (command of a parliamentary majority) were seemingly favorable to such action. Obviously, the post-communists vehemently opposed any policies aimed at de-communization or lustration (vetting of former communist officials), although the way such policies were, until the most recent (2006) legislation, legally framed and implemented made them much more dangerous to former opposition members who could have had any real or fabricated covert ties with secret police than to former party members, apparatchiks, or even overt secret police officers themselves. Finally, in foreign policy, in a spectacular turnabout from the position of their predecessors, the SdRP and SLD opted in favor of Poland's entry to both NATO and EU.

It seems quite fair to characterize the actions and policies of the SdRP throughout party's existence as opportunistic. On the one hand, the party did its best to avoid exposure of its communist legacy and to create an impression that its goals were of a most noble nature. After the victory in 1993 election, the party offered the Prime Minister position to the leader of its junior coalition partner, Waldemar Pawlak of PSL, to remove any impression of being hungry for power. On the other hand, it also evaded decisions that could alienate either significant segments of its constituency or important institutional actors, such as the Roman Catholic Church. The easiest to accomplish were arguably decisions to shed the communist legacy in the field of foreign policy: there were no serious anti-Atlantic or anti-European resentments among the public and the Soviet Union was no more either. The anti-American or anti-NATO phraseology of the late communist period was, even among party apparatchiks, more of a ritual expression of loyalty to the Soviet Union than any genuine negative feelings. Consequently, the post-communist had no problems in satisfying the pro-Atlantic and pro-European sentiments of the public – along with their own vested interests. Since most of them had joined the PZPR motivated by expectations of perks (symbolic as much as material), the demise of the USSR and the growing role of NATO and EU in Central Europe meant for them only the change in frame of reference and opening of new opportunities. To put it metaphorically, the cookie jar has been moved from Moscow to Brussels – and they have always known how to get their hands into it.

The successful comeback of Polish post-communists was also facilitated, to a great extent, by the ease with which they were able to establish good rapport with their Western left-wing counterparts. Once they re-invented themselves as social-democrats and chose a pro-integration stand vis-à-vis both NATO and the EU, the former communists without much effort cast themselves as the genuine Left, in both cultural and socio-economic sense. As such, they had no problem in finding a common language with socialists and social-democrats of Western Europe. In contrast, many former Polish anti-communist dissidents have been often looked at with a lot of suspicion by the Western cultural liberals (of socialist or liberal-democratic orientation), because of the close ties to the Roman Catholic Church, and by Western conservatives because of the trade-unionist (Solidarity) background (a phenomenon foreseen already by Timothy Garton Ash in his history of Solidarity, 1983).

Throughout the 1990s the only competition the SdRP/SLD could face on the Left came from the Labor Union (*Unia Pracy*, or UP). This party was established in June 1992 by former Solidarity members who claimed a socialist identity and were active in various small groupings, such as Solidarity of Labor (*Solidarność Pracy*, or SP), Polish Socialist Party (PPS), or the Democratic Social Movement (*Ruch Demokratyczno-Społeczny*, or RDS), as well as a group of former reform-minded communists, at the time mostly associated with the PUS. It has been the only major Polish party whose leadership and membership came from both Solidarity and the PZPR. Ideologically, the UP placed itself firmly on the left in both socio-economic and cultural dimensions. Its leadership took a stand highly critical of pro-market reforms of the entire post-1989 period, which put the party to the left of the SLD. The UP electoral base, however, was more supportive of these reforms and located closer to the center of the political spectrum. Former Solidarity activists such as Ryszard Bugaj and Karol Modzelewski, a veteran of the pre-Solidarity democratic opposition, and members of the PZPR who stayed within its ranks till the very end, such as Wiesława Ziółkowska and Marek Pol, were among founding fathers and leaders of the UP (Czerwiński, 2004: pp. 76–93). In 2001, the UP joined an electoral coalition with the SLD.

Aleksander Kwaśniewski: a success story?

Aleksander Kwaśniewski joined PZPR in 1977, as a student at Gdańsk University. A year earlier, workers in several Polish cities had launched massive protests against price hikes and, in general, government's economic policies. The government responded with brutal repressions; in turn, a group of intellectuals established the Committee for the Defense of the Workers, which became known internationally by its Polish acronym KOR. Many students, also from Gdańsk, volunteered to work for KOR, accepting various forms of police harassment as a price. A year later, a group of manual laborers founded in Gdańsk (the site of workers massacre by the military in 1970) the Free Trade Unions of the [Baltic] Coast, the underground predecessor of Solidarity.

Kwaśniewski's decision to join PZPR was at the time perceived by his teachers and fellow students as an act of political opportunism (Chróścicka, 1995: p. 19). Kwaśniewski was not known among his friends for any ideological commitment; he was well known for his political ambitions. He considered party membership as a necessary step in his political career – and what a career it was! Between 1977 and 1982 he held several positions in the university, regional, and national leadership of the Socialist Union of Polish Students. From 1981 to 1984 he was the Editor-in-Chief of *itd*, a popular student weekly magazine, and from 1984 to 1985 he held the same post in *Sztandar Młodych*, a national daily newspaper catering to young readers. In 1985, at the age of 31, he became the youngest minister in the Polish government and held a portfolio of youth affairs and sports (which actual name changed a couple of times during his tenure) until 1990. From 1988 to 1991 he was the Chairman of the Polish Olympic Committee. A very active participant of the

Roundtable negotiations, Kwaśniewski is often credited (Chróścicka, 1995: p. 51; Hayden, 2006: p. 99) with the idea of resurrecting the Senate as a chamber elected, unlike the *Sejm*, in a fully open contest. He subsequently contested the 1989 Senate election in his native region of Koszalin and lost, albeit gaining a higher percent of votes (38) than any other PZPR candidate in this election. He made amends in 1991, when in the *Sejm* election he won more votes (148,533) than any other single candidates nation-wide.

In 1989–1990 Kwaśniewski found himself on political sidelines, as many of his older comrades in the PZPR leadership held him at least co-responsible for the party's defeat. Yet the party itself – still a member of the coalition government – was undergoing a process of profound generational change. PZPR had been led by the generation that came of age in the 1950s; now the much younger leaders, once hopeful of secure careers, found themselves in a situation where the only chance for such a career could be associated with the party reinventing itself as a player in the field of pluralist democracy. For them, this reinvention equaled the end of the PZPR and the establishment of a new party. Kwaśniewski sided with the young reformers and soon became their leader. He was chosen the SdRP's Chairman, and led the party to a decent showing in the 1991 general election and to its surprising victory in 1993. Two years later, he challenged the incumbent Lech Wałęsa in a presidential race.

Kwaśniewski took the lead in the pre-election polls from the onset, and did not relinquish it till the election day. His conduct of the presidential campaign – in particular when contrasted with that of Wałęsa's – illustrates very well how effectively this former apparatchik was able to adjust to the formal and informal rules of democratic political process. Kwaśniewski, whose carefully created public image of a smooth, educated, and modern man was designed to contrast with the image of the rough-edged, plebeian Wałęsa, made perhaps only one potentially damaging mistake, when he claimed to have earned an M.A. degree he had never received.

The slim margin of Kwaśniewski's victory in the first round (just by two percentage points) left the runoff contest wide open, with the momentum apparently on Wałęsa's side. Before the runoff, however, two live TV debates between the candidates took place. Both candidates, regardless of enormous differences in individual styles, had in fact established good records as speakers and debaters. But these two debates were an uneven contest: the tight, incoherent, and rude Wałęsa was not even a shadow of himself of yesteryear, in contrast to the relaxed, focused, and seemingly conciliatory Kwaśniewski. For him, unlike for his foe, the debates had been planned as the logical climax of his whole, almost-a-year-long campaign, designed by a renowned French public relations firm. Wałęsa, on the contrary, came to the TV studio without a consistent plan and well-defined objectives. The recurring theme of his monologues was, as it had been throughout the campaign, "Only I, Wałęsa, can save Poland from return to communism." In 1995 such a slogan was nothing but an anachronism: nobody, neither Kwaśniewski's supporters nor his foes, believed seriously that his election would mean a restitution of the communist regime. Wałęsa campaign, as amateurish as his opponent's was professional, failed to respond adequately the changing mood of the public. On the runoff day,

Kwaśniewski won by a three percent margin. The issue of Kwaśniewski's doubtful education credentials became the object of an unprecedented number of almost 600,000 formal protests questioning the legality of his election. The Supreme Court ruled that, while Kwaśniewski indeed misrepresented himself in the official election documents, it wouldn't be possible to prove that this misrepresentation influenced the final outcome of the election, and therefore his election should be considered valid. After the election, Kwaśniewski relinquished not only the leadership, but even the membership in the SdRP – he aspired to be the President of all Poles.

When five years later Kwaśniewski run for re-election, his outright victory in the first round (he won gathering 54% of the vote, to 17% collected by the runner-up) was hardly surprising. His popularity rankings were high throughout the entire first term (1995–2000) and he consistently led by a large margin in the pre-election opinion polls. On election day, he captured virtually all votes among supporters of the SLD/SdRP, yet his popular base exceeded that of his old party, perhaps by as much as twofold. Such enormous support for a former communist apparatchik in a country where the communists were swept from power by a landslide electoral victory of Solidarity only eleven years earlier obviously puzzled observers, Polish and foreign alike. Kwaśniewski's popularity escapes sociological interpretations, as the demographic and social composition of his constituency was exactly the same as the composition of the whole society. He was rejected only by those for whom the overriding consideration was the condemnation of communism on moral and/or ideological grounds – still, at over 40%, a substantial part of the electorate. Among factors explaining the "Kwaśniewski phenomenon" one may point out to a widely shared belief that he was a moderate, a true middle-of-the-roader; on the one hand a leader committed to the continuation of political and economic reforms but on the other also a politician who never lost the plight of an ordinary man from his sight.

This perception was created no so much by spin doctors (although, as noted above, Kwaśniewski pioneered the use of political campaign professionals in Poland) as by Kwaśniewski's actual actions. Since he and his party remained isolated from the post-Solidarity camp on the level of political elites, he more or less consciously tried to reach out directly to the voters. In this, he was remarkably successful, despite being a court-certified liar and despite persistent rumors of alcohol abuse and other indiscretions. Ordinary citizens, aware of their own imperfections, were willing to forgive him, since he never attempted to create around himself an aura of moral superiority, as did his predecessor (and also his successor has been trying to do more recently). Furthermore, the Polish public became weary of the never-ending debates about the past and accusations of who had done what in old communist days. Older people did remember that life under communism was often, well, complicated; younger, by and large, preferred to look into the future. Kwaśniewski and his comrades, having little in their past to brag about, were obviously willing to cater to this expectation.

Also, unlike both his predecessor and his successor, Kwaśniewski was hardly an activist president. Contrary to fears articulated in 1995 by Wałęsa, Kwaśniewski never attempted to reverse any of important reforms of the post-communist period. Only once did he use president's constitutional powers in a way potentially harmful

to the economy, when in 1999 he vetoed a government-sponsored bill on personal income tax reform, apparently to please the SLD (then in the opposition) on the eve of his re-election campaign. But he also did little to introduce or promote any specific solutions to the many economic and social problems Poland faced during his tenure.

Only in the area of foreign policy was Kwaśniewski acting with a true vigor and often not without foresight. He was instrumental in securing Poland's entries to NATO and EU and in promoting the image of Poland as a consolidated democracy. Doing this, he might have been thinking about a future position in international institutions for himself (he would leave the presidency at the age of 51 – a very young age for a statesman, indeed). But his motivations notwithstanding, he became a walking proof that former communists can reform themselves into respectable social democrats – and that Poland indeed was a pluralist democracy with a plenty of room for anybody, regardless his political past.

Kwaśniewski's approval ratings were stellar also throughout his second term, at the level of over 70%. They began to decline in 2003, in a fashion somehow parallel to the plummeting ratings of the SLD-led government, but never fell below the 45% mark (see Fig. 2).

SLD: the fall of the house of Miller

The SLD-led government of Leszek Miller ascended to power as a result of the 2001 parliamentary election. The election ended in a landslide victory for a coalition formed by the SLD with Labor Union (UP). The coalition won 41% of the votes (see Fig. 1), well ahead of the runner-up, the Civic Platform (PO), but still short of securing an outright majority of seats in the *Sejm*. In order to form a majority government, the SLD/UP coalition expanded to include the Polish Peasant Party, PSL. This spectacular victory came in the wake of the accumulation of negative

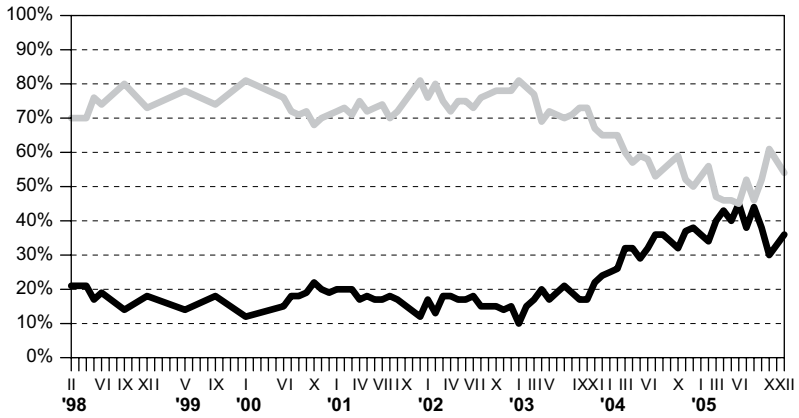

Fig. 2. Public Opinion on President Kwaśniewski, 1998–2005. Positive. Negative. Source: CBOS Research Report BS/201/2005. Warsaw: CBOS 2005.

effects of social welfare system reforms, undertaken by the AWS/UW government in 1998–1999 (long overdue, as they were never attempted by SLD during its first tenure in government, 1993–1997) and a series of corruption scandals plaguing the AWS government in 2000 and 2001. The SLD learnt its lesson and avoided socio-economic reforms also during its second tenure. It did not, however, avoid corruption scandals of its own.

In euphoria after the 2001 electoral sweep, the SLD leaders at all levels not only rushed to share postelection spoils, but also did it in an apparent conviction that their rule would last, unchecked, for years to come. Early warnings, like poor SLD showing in the 2002 local elections (Alberski, 2007: pp. 87–88), were ignored. By 2003, several blatant cases of abuse of power and corruption turned into open scandals; some, involving SLD leaders of national stature, received wide publicity. Among these, the so-called Rywin Affair (from the name of its central character, Lew Rywin, a film producer) gained arguably the highest notoriety and become the focus of an inquiry by a special *Sejm* committee (the first ever such inquiry in Poland) as well as several criminal investigations (for a collection of materials on this affair see Skórzyński, 2003). But perhaps another case, involving central- and provincial-level party leaders associated with the *Świętokrzyskie* province (among them Zbigniew Sobotka, the last member of the former PZPR Politburo still active in Polish politics at the time), in which those officials tipped local organized crime bosses of impending police actions, best illustrates the nature of the problem. This case exposed the local SLD in *Świętokrzyskie* as a virtual private fiefdom of a few "party barons", the term already commonly used at the time in reference to provincial leaders of the SLD (Tomczak 2007: p. 95). There were several criminal convictions in this case; Sobotka received a three-and-a-half year sentence. Yet Sobotka never went to jail: President Kwaśniewski, just hours before his term was to expire, pardoned him.

All these affairs made up only the proverbial tip of the iceberg, as many more cases of corruption, nepotism, and cronyism were reported by the media. In addition, there were also other factors contributing to Miller's and SLD's fall. The SLD/UP government failed to resolve (or even to address in a consistent way) the major socio-economic problem of post-Communist Poland: unemployment (which fluctuated slightly throughout the Miller tenure at the 20 percent level). The National Health Fund, the Miller government's cure for the much-criticized health care reform of its AWS/UW predecessor, proved to be more lethal than the disease. Last but not least, the SLD/UP coalition managed to alienate the left-wing core of its catch-all electoral base by neglecting to undertake any significant changes in culturally determined social policies, such as regulations of access to abortions, which are among the most restrictive in the EU.

Miller's fate was sealed on March 25, 2004, when several deputies, led by the *Sejm* Marshal (speaker) Marek Borowski, left the SLD caucus to form a new party, the Polish Social Democracy (*Socjaldemokracja Polska*, usually abbreviated as SdPl). The next day, Miller announced his resignation, which would become effective on May 2, 2004, just one day after Poland officially had become an EU member, when corks were still popping from champagne bottles across the country. This resignation

was by no means unexpected; in fact, it would have occurred much sooner, had it been not for the consensus that Prime Minister Leszek Miller and his cabinet deserved to stay until the formal conclusion of the long and laborious accession process, over which he and his ministers presided and to which they made an undeniably positive contribution. Yet, regardless of this achievement, the approval ratings in public opinion polls of the PM and his government, as well as the support for his party (SLD), sank to rock bottom, reaching single digits in March and April—the worst rating recorded by any Polish government since the birth of democracy in 1989 (see Fig. 3).

As a care-taker PM, President Kwaśniewski chose Marek Belka, a member of the SLD, an experienced economist, a former Deputy PM and Minister of Finance. The SLD attempted to reinvent itself by purging its old leadership and selecting new one, composed of very young activists (in their twenties or early thirties), untainted by accusations of corruption.

The first test of the re-grouped post-communist Left came in the elections to the European Parliament in June 2004. They did not do well at all: the SLD/UP coalition collected 9.4% of votes and the new Polish Social Democracy 5.3%. The outcome of this election indicated, in addition to the rapid decline in popularity of the ruling SLD/UP coalition, the growth of the moderate, strongly pro-EU center (liberal-democratic PO and UW), but also the consolidation of the Euro-skeptic Catholic conservatives (LPR) and the radical populists (Self-Defense). These developments, coupled with the absence of an heir-apparent to President Kwaśniewski, indicated a possibility of a forthcoming major realignment in Polish politics.

Indeed, the sequence of national elections in the Fall of 2005, parliamentary on September 25 and presidential on October 9 (first round) and October 23 (the runoff), resulted in such major realignment of the political scene, which was different

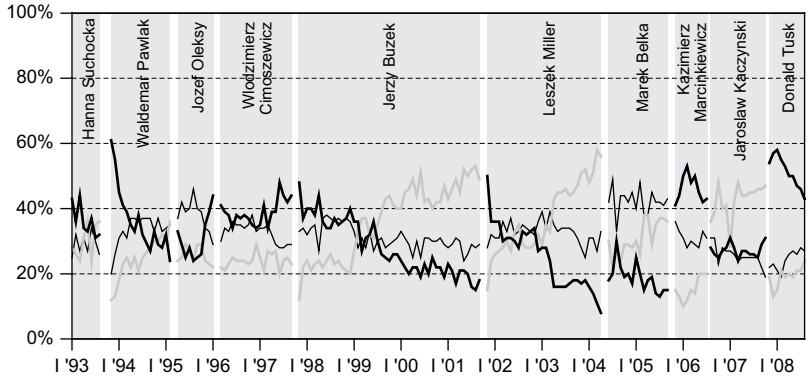

Fig. 3. Public Opinion on government performance, 1993–2008 (SLD-led coalition governments: Pawlak, Oleksy, Cimoszewicz, Miller, Belka). Negative. Neutral. Positive. Source: CBOS Web site: http://www.cbos.pl/PL/Trendy/trend_01.shtml. Warsaw: CBOS 2008.

from all previous realignments. On the one hand, the parliamentary election returned to the *Sejm* the same six parties that had won any seats in 2001. This perfect continuity contrasted dramatically with the high level of party turnover in all previous elections and seemed to indicate a growing stability of the party system. On the other hand, voter volatility not only remained very high, but this time, unlike in any previous elections, was an outcome of a massive swing of voters from the left to the right side of the political spectrum. In the Sejm election, two right-of-center post-Solidarity parties did best: Law and Justice (*Prawo i Sprawiedliwość*, or PiS,) with 27.0% of votes and 155 seats, and Civic Platform (*Platforma Obywatelska*, or PO) with 24.1% of votes (133 seats). The SLD/UP coalition (11.3 percent, 55 seats; see Fig. 1) was also outdone by the populist Self-Defense 11.4 percent. The SdPl did not clear the 5% threshold. Results of the Senate election were similar. SdPL's leader Marek Borowski contested, as the only candidate of post-communist (or of moderate…) Left, the presidential race, finishing a distant fourth (10.3%), behind not only Lech Kaczyński of PiS (the eventual winner) and Donald Tusk of PO, but also Andrzej Lepper of Self-Defense.

This way, over the course of barely three years, the SLD managed to virtually destroy not only itself, but the entire post-communist-turned-social-democratic political field. Its leaders, on central, regional, and local levels, saw their access to political power not as a civic responsibility, but as a set of opportunities for personal gain. The same people who in the 1990s were so apt in turning the rules of democratic game into their collective advantage, in the 2000s acted with a sense of impunity and lack of any consideration for political accountability that in democracies arrives at the end of any election cycle.

LiD and beyond

The post-communist Left did not do any better in the hastily organized 2007 election. The early election was, more than anything else, a referendum on the policies of the PiS-led government. PiS ruled since 2005 either as a single-party minority government or in coalition with the populist Self-Defense and the League of the Polish Families (*Liga Polskich Rodzin*, or LPR), a party of Catholic fundamentalists and radical nationalists. PiS's inept governance faced a growing criticism from the opposition and large segments of the public.

The post-communists again failed to capitalize on popular discontent. They contested the election as the Left and the Democrats (*Lewica i Demokraci*, or LiD), a coalition in which the three post-communist parties, SLD, SdPl, and UP, have been joined by the tiny Democratic Party, the successor to the Democratic Union and Freedom Union, once dominant actors of the post-Solidarity field. Aleksander Kwaśniewski attempted a political comeback of sorts, campaigning actively on LiD's behalf. To no avail: LiD collected only 13.2% of votes, less than the sum for all four parties in 2005 (17.6%) and far behind the PO (41.5%) and PiS (32.1%). Obviously, for the post-communist Left the need to reinvent itself has become as urgent as may be never before.

But this time political opportunities do not line up for the Left in a convenient way. To understand the dilemmas the Left presently faces, we need to examine briefly the spectrum of party competition in Poland today (for analytical frameworks and in-depth analysis see Kitschelt, 1992; Kitschelt et al., 1999; Evans and Whitefield, 1993). The Left–Right cleavage, that so conveniently organizes West European politics, reflects at least two parallel dimensions: the socio-economic, delineated by the options in favor of either free market regulation of the economy or redistributive policies of an interventionist (welfare) state, and the cultural, where one end of continuum is defined by an libertarian, inclusive, and cosmopolitan political philosophy and the other by its authoritarian, exclusive, and particularistic opposite (Kitschelt, 1992).

Not so in Poland. The communist regime's approach to the economy and social policy was not simply redistributive, but carried the state intervention in the economy to the extreme (command economy); its political philosophy, while paying lip service to universalistic values, was since at least 1968 based on ethnic particularism; its political practice was authoritarian. No wonder that democratic opposition to communism evolved, over the course of 1970s and 1980s, toward the negation of this redistributive–particularistic–authoritarian syndrome: it accepted the universalistic–libertarian position on the cultural dimension, but, after communism's collapse, even more strongly articulated its support for free market regulation of the economy, as the only possible antidote for the accumulated ills of communist misdirection and mismanagement.

Hence, the voter identification and party competition in post-communist Poland has been organized according to patterns in some ways similar to those known in the West, but also significantly different in other manners. As in the West, the space of political competition is defined by two cross-cutting dimensions, socio-economic and cultural. The former represents the discord between support for neo-liberal free market/free enterprise policies and support for state intervention in the economy and welfare state-type social policies. The latter manifests itself chiefly as a conflict between confessional (particularistic/authoritarian) and secular (universalistic/libertarian) approaches to politics and policies, and is closely related to contrasting assessments of Poland's communist past and opposing stands on the issue of de-communization (Jasiewicz, 2006).

It should be noted that positions of particular parties are usually strongly articulated in relation to only one of these cleavages, and more ambiguous in relation to the other. In effect, and contrary to commonsensical expectations, political competition in Poland, at least during the 1990s, was driven not so much by the socio-economic considerations, as by the cultural ones. In the rivalry of the post-communist and post-Solidarity camps voters made their choices based not on alternative socio-economic policies, but on parties' position on culturally defined issues, such as women's right to abortion or role of the Catholic Church in public life. Consequently, religiosity was a much better predictor of voting behavior than one's position in class stratification (Jasiewicz, 2003; Fodor et al., 1997; Grabowska and Szawiel, 2001).

The situation has changed somehow during the 2000s, in connection to the process of European integration. The pro- and (much weaker) anti-EU stands

adopted by particular parties allowed to organize these parties and their voters along a single continuum. Still, the differences with West European politics remained in place, as this continuum runs not in a parallel, but in perpendicular manner to the traditional Left–Right dimension. Those opposed to EU tend to be motivated by particularistic values, of religious (the EU as the epitome of Western materialism and secularism) or nationalist nature, but they also demand state intervention in the economy to protect local producers and consumers against foreign interests and what they see as unfair competition within the common market. Such ideas are common among the core constituency of PiS. Conversely, the EU proponents' rejection of this economic nationalism has been motivated not only by their universalistic and libertarian values, but also by their genuine commitment to the principles of free market. This way of thinking dominates among supporters of PO.

In their search for voters, the post-communist parties may either move to the left or try to establish themselves more solidly in the political center. They can apply each of these strategies in either the socio-economic or in the cultural dimension. If the Left were to seek a stronger support among socially and economically disadvantaged, it would face a stiff competition from PiS and other populist parties, since in Poland those who are disadvantaged (less educated, poorer, older) tend to be also socially and culturally conservative. Such voters are concentrated mostly in the devoutly Catholic, traditionalist rural communities in central, eastern, and south-eastern Poland – the stronghold of Solidarity (in the 1980s and 1990s) and PiS (since 2001). If the Left were to accentuate its libertarian/inclusive position on the cultural dimension, it would be forced into competition with the PO, whose urban, young, well-educated constituency may be receptive to universalism and inclusiveness, but is also strongly committed to market economy. If anything, the latter strategy – but only if it were to include Left's reaffirmation of support for free market policies – seems to carry some hope, and only in a long run. Such was apparently the meaning of the LiD coalition, where the post-communist SLD, SdPl, and UP cooperated with the UD, a party committed to neo-liberal economic reforms and still led by the veterans of the Solidarity movement. Finally, post-communists may also apply both drive-to-the-left strategies simultaneously, but likely with disastrous results, at least in a short run: they would have to compete with both PO and PiS at the same time…

But that is exactly what the SLD leaders seem to be doing these days. On March 29, 2008, Wojciech Olejniczak, the SLD Chairman, announced that "the formula of SLD's cooperation with UD within LiD has been exhausted." This proclamation (inspired, as a rumor circulating in Warsaw has it, by advice received from Spanish socialists) surprised not only UD and other coalition parties, but also some members of the SLD leadership. Nonetheless, *centrolewica* (Center-Left) is no more: in the *Sejm,* in the place of the LiD, three new caucuses were established in the spring of 2008: the Left (*Lewica*; 42 deputies, mostly from the SLD), the SdPl—New Left (*SdPl—Nowa Lewica*, eight deputies), and Democratic Deputies Caucus (three deputies from the PD). The Left has been re-grouping also outside of the parliament: in May 2008 the SLD Congress elected new party leadership (Olejniczak was replaced by Grzegorz Napieralski), while a few weeks earlier the former prime minister Leszek Miller established a new party, the Polish Left (*Lewica Polska*).

Conclusions

In the 1980s, the communist leadership ruled Poland in an authoritarian (not totalitarian or post-totalitarian) fashion, having abandoned any attempts of ideological domination. The party membership was composed mostly of people who joined the party mindful of boosting their career opportunities. The party faced a formidable foe: a well-organized, broad opposition movement, led by Solidarity.

Polish negotiated transition, symbolized by the Roundtable Agreement, became a model emulated across East-Central Europe. The opportunistic attitudes of communist apparatchiks and *nomenklatura* members were instrumental in transforming them, individually and collectively, into effective actors in market economy and competitive politics. Post-communist political parties had no problems in recasting themselves as social democrats and accepting a pro-Western orientation in foreign policy.

Yet opportunistic attitudes doomed the post-communists once the opportunities associated with access to political power opened up widely. Plagued by corruption scandals, they lost their popular base: the economically disadvantaged groups to nationalistic populists, the urbane libertarians to liberal democrats.

Polish post-communist parties are presently at the crossroads. Their current troubles are, at least in part, the fruit of the ease with which they have adopted to liberal democracy.

Appendix A

Gazetteer: Polish political parties.

Communist, post-communist, and other left-wing parties:

KPP: Komunistyczna Partia Polski (Communist Party of Poland, 1919–1938)

Lewica Polska (Polish Left, 2008–)

LiD: Lewica i Demokraci (The Left and the Democrats, 2006–2008)

PPR: Polish Workers Party (Polska Partia Robotnicza, 1942–1948)

PPS: Polska Partia Socjalistyczna (Polish Socialist Party, 1892–)

PUS: Polska Unia Socjaldemokratyczna (Polish Social-Democratic Union, 1990–1991)

PZPR: Polska Zjednoczona Partia Robotnicza (Polish United Workers Party, 1948–1990)

RDS: Ruch Demokratyczno-Społeczny (Democratic Social Movement, 1991–1992)

Samoobrona (Self-Defense, 1992–; current official name: Samoobrona Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej = SRP = Self-Defense of the Republic of Poland)

SdKPiL: Socjaldemokracja Królestwa Polskiego i Litwy (Social Democracy of the Polish Kingdom and Lithuania, 1983–1919)

SdPl: Socjaldemokracja Polska (Polish Social Democracy, 2004–)

SdRP: Socjaldemokracja Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej (Social Democracy of the Republic of Poland, 1990–1999)

SLD: Sojusz Lewicy Demokratycznej (Democratic Left Alliance, 1991–1999 coalition, 1999– political party)

SP: Solidarność Pracy (Solidarity of Labor, 1991–1992)

UP: Unia Pracy (Labor Union, 1992–)

ZKP "P": Związek Komunistów Polskich Proletariat (Union of Polish Communists Proletariat, 1990–2002)

Other parties referred to in the article:

AWS: Akcja Wyborcza Solidarność (Electoral Action Solidarity, 1997–2001).

KPN: Konfederacja Polski Niepodległej (Confederation for an Independent Poland, 1979–)

LPR: Liga Polskich Rodzin (League of the Polish Families, 2001–)

Endecja (ND-cja): Narodowa Demokracja (National Democracy, political movement that generated several political parties since the late 19th century)

PD: Partia Demokratyczna (Democratic Party, 2005–; also known as demokraci.pl)

PiS: Prawo i Sprawiedliwość (Law and Justice, 2001–)

PSL: Polskie Stronnictwo Ludowe (Polish Peasant Party, 1893–)

PO: Platforma Obywatelska (Civic Platform, 2001–)

ROP: Ruch Odbudowy Polski (Movement for the Reconstruction of Poland, 1995–)

UD: Unia Demokratyczna (Democratic Union, 1990–1994)

UW: Unia Wolności (Freedom Union, 1994–2005)

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