

## WHY DO POLISH LIBERALS NEED THE LEFT?

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**Summary.** The paper is an attempt toward a diagnosis of the current status and role of liberalism in Poland's present political space. Author argues that chief reason for the current crisis of liberalism in Poland is a general tendency toward self-limitation of the Polish liberal parties in implementation of social emancipatory demands. For, from the very beginning of socio-political transformation of the country, they have deliberately limited their political tasks to elitist emancipation of some social agents within the economic sphere, and, at the same time, they have, no less deliberately, neglected egalitarian demands for emancipation within social, cultural and political spheres. As a result of this deliberate exclusionary self-limitation, the some important areas of public space, deserted by liberals, have been filled by radical, nationalist and fundamentalist political parties which in 2005 have won a significant popular support. The author points out also to the fact that a similar failure was suffered by those Polish political parties, which, although nominally leftist, have in fact pursued a neo-liberal agenda. Author argues that in order to achieve some level of political stability and accountability, Poland will have consistently to pursue an emancipatory agenda, addressing a range of current economic, social and cultural demands. In his opinion, liberals should engage into this in cooperation with parties of the left.

**Key words:** liberalism, the left, populism, fundamentalism, Polish political parties, the excluded

### THE GHOSTS OF THE PAST – THE GHOSTS OF MODERNIZATION

Like any country with the real-socialist past, Poland is grappling with two ghosts. One of them is the ghost of the past, the other – the ghost of the future. The Slovene philosopher, Slavoj Žižek, recently en vogue in Poland, wrote: „how to escape this double ghost, the ghosts of the historical past as well as the ghosts engendered by the swift capitalist modernization itself? Far from providing the answer, an anecdote about Poland is perhaps at least instructive as to this point, proving that we in Slovenia have a lot to learn from Poland. About a year ago, I heard the rumor that Adam Michnik and General Jaruzelski became personal friends. Skeptical as to this story, I asked about it Michnik himself when I met him at a party in New York – and, to my surprise, he confirmed it. Although – to avoid a misunderstanding – I have no great sympathy for the argumentation

of those who endeavor to justify Jaruzelski's imposition of the martial law by some „patriotic” reasons, I found this story extremely touching: this is what I would have called civility as the very basis of civilization, and a friendship like this is what is totally unthinkable in Slovenia, where we remain caught in ridiculous petty personalized struggles”.<sup>1</sup>

Although a Slovene, Žižek spends most of his time outside post-communist Slovenia. Which is probably why his idea of the national reconciliation and forgiveness between the former communist victims, embodied by Michnik, and the former oppressors, embodied by General Jaruzelski, is overidealized. The only comforting thought is that things are reportedly even worse in Slovenia.

At present, the key problem facing Polish foreign policy is to answer the question how to fight off threats symbolized by the two ghosts. I understand this issue as a question about the mutual relations between liberalism and the Left, about possible cooperation between these formations having a common goal in view: to defeat the specters of the past and successfully face up to the challenges of the future.

This question may appear entirely misplaced since in present-day Poland both ‘left-wing’ and ‘liberal’ have become words of insult rather than names of commendable attitudes, which they were so regarded in the not so distant past. It should also be added that liberalism is now not only ideologically conditioned but also seriously weakened while the Left has almost ceased to exist. Despite these difficulties, or actually contrary to them, I would like, when asking the question about the mutual relation between liberalism and the Left, suggest the plane of possible cooperation between the sociopolitical projects. I would like to examine the issue of the attitude of liberalism towards the Left by means, inter alia, of references to several statements, sometimes made in private, of Adam Michnik, the leading figure of the secular Left and democratic liberalism in Poland. These statements are not only symptomatic of certain mutual prejudices, which made cooperation of the liberals with the Left difficult but they also show that such cooperation is possible.

#### THE CRISIS OF THE LEFT

When Tony Blair arrived in Washington to one of the famous seminars at which the sense of the so-called third way was forged, he was not sure which way to go in the huge building, where the meeting was held. So he asked the doorman: „In which room is the meeting on the third way?” The doorman answered: „Dear Sir, there is no third way here. There is only one way, and it leads straight a head”.

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<sup>1</sup> Slavoj Žižek, *Przekleństwo fantazji* [The Plague of Phantasy] transl. by A. Chmielewski, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Wrocławskiego, Wrocław 2001, s. 13.

Blair told this anecdote to justify his political decision about taking a road in between socialism and liberalism. It meant giving up the idea of the socialist welfare state and accepting the liberal though certainly misleading belief about the harmful effect of political interference in the economic sphere. This anecdote is symptomatic of the kind of thinking which is currently spread among the left-wing formations in many countries. They concluded that searching for alternative ways to the liberal way is no longer possible. Despite considerable differences between Tony Blair and Margaret Thatcher, the ideology of the „third way” and the manner of presenting it, did not differ significantly from the idea that symbolized the earlier Thatcherite liberal neo-conservatism: *there is no alternative*. Left-wing and social-democratic formations, especially in Great Britain and Germany, found the idea captivating. And so did Poland.

One of the stereotypes about both sides of Polish politics was that the Left was monolithic while the Right was internally divided. However, the left-wing monolith meant not only the despotic way of ruling the party by its leaders, who always knew better how to act than the rank and file, but also the imposition of ideological monolithicity. It was „the third way” that was this ideology. The ineffectual attempt to imitate the third way ideology drove out the remains of the left-wing substance and consisted almost exclusively of liberal pragmatism, as a result of which the SLD [Democratic Left Alliance] turned into a business club for investors and entrepreneurs. Not only were the traditional, already archaic working class content and postulates eliminated from it but so were the attempts to criticize the mistaken decision of joining the coalition of advocates of war in Iraq, although one may could accurately predicted that this war would lead to the present disaster while the way of Poland’s involvement in it would expose this country to ridicule.

#### MIXED LANGUAGES

Samuel Barber, a leading thinker of the American Left, has allegedly said that although they represent the interest of only 15 percent of US population, the US Republicans speak the language that appeals 85 percent of voters. The Democrats, on the other hand, who represent the interest of 85 percent of US population, speak the „language of lesbians and queers”. This observation is also to some extent relevant to the situation developing in Poland after the decline of the monolithic post-communist Left.

Probably nowhere in the world was it possible to consolidate different ideas and social tasks into a consistent program, which would unite diverse groupings on the left of the center. Alterglobalist, feminist, ecological, and antiracist ideas, the ideas of implementation and cultivation of the neutrality of the state in respect of worldviews, and ideas of struggle for the equal status of people with different sexual orientations are the natural constituents of left-wing thinking in the present-day world, but they are represented by diverse social and political

formations difficult to unite. A political party that would put all these ideas on its banners could not count on success in the elections in Poland. Nor is there anything strange about it. It would be very unusual, on the other hand, if any of the existing parties would wish to fight openly for the rights of the homosexual minority because it is a surefire way to become the butt of right-wing ridicule, which easily wins plaudits in the homophobic social consciousness. In a paternalist society it is difficult to hope for popularity from advocating feminist ideas; moreover, even women do not want to feminists in Poland. Which is why, the future Polish Left, if it ever arises, will face tremendous difficulties also in this respect: which of Polish politicians would like to be regarded as a representative of the unemployed, queers, lesbians, feminists, alterglobalists, or defenders of nature, which we are after all supposed to make subordinate to us?

It is difficult, especially in Poland, to count on the popularity of ecological and alterglobalist ideas, because Poland needs, in the public consciousness, more globalization and more energy-consuming jobs, which, as we are unable to afford or create by ourselves, we should adopt from foreigners, preferably from the Germans. However, this is possible provided that we manage to keep the wages of Polish workers at a „competitive” i.e. low level. The problem is that young and talented Polish workers do not want to waste their youth working for competitive or negligible wages; foreign capital, however, will not offer them higher pay because the reason for its presence in Poland will disappear. At present the problem has become complicated even more because young people do not want to wait until the liberal economic regime decides to raise the wages in this country: thanks to the European Union they have already found better-paid employment abroad. And those who have stayed are not enthusiastic about the jobs created in Poland by foreign capital being taken by imported workers from China and Korea, especially North Korea. The result of the gap between striving to modernize at the lowest cost possible and legitimate social expectations may be that we will soon be witnessing South Korean investors, tempted by cheap Polish labor, looking reproachfully, in the empty LG shop floor, at those who lured them to for example Bielany near Wrocław because, contrary to promises, they failed to make Poles work for a thousand zloty.<sup>2</sup>

#### LIBERAL SELF-LIMITATION

Hearing about my, I admit, rather monastic involvement in the attempt to restore the left-wing, Adam Michnik responded: „I bet you are going to come up with the problem of abortion as the main political issue? God forbid! You can't make politics against the Church in Poland!”

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<sup>2</sup> Compare for example one of many recent signals about his matter: *Robotnicy żądają podwyżek. Firmy podniosą ceny* [Workers demand pay raises. Firms to raise prices], „Gazeta Wyborcza”, 14 May 2007.

We should not be surprised with what Michnik said because this was in keeping with his consistent attempts to effect a lasting alliance of the secular liberal Left with the Catholic altar. Hearing his words, however, I was sorry to find that the Left, fighting for women's rights, would hardly find an ally in the leading representative of liberal democracy and the secular Left. I also concluded that it was highly regrettable that he should still believe that in Poland one is not allowed to make politics against the Church but one can do so against women's rights.

Shortly afterwards, however, two significant events happened: Manuela Gretkowska, without seeking Adam Michnik's approval, established the Women's Party, which is taking up the issue of abortion as one of many others. Actually, „Gazeta Wyborcza” rightly supported Gretkowska's endeavors with considerable publicity. The other event was the launching of a campaign by the Church and the radical Right, aimed at stiffening the antiabortion law. Despite Michnik's efforts to arrange an alliance between the secular Left and the Catholic Church, they also did not ask his consent because this is how the Church imagines an alliance with anyone, especially with the pro-Church secular Left.

The abovementioned, private words by Adam Michnik can be treated as one of the numerous symptoms of conscious self-limitation of liberalism in the carrying out of social emancipatory tasks. This is an example of how the union of doctrine and *Realpolitik* leads to compromises undermining the political force of the idea. Furthermore, voluntary recognition of the ideological domination of such a version of liberalism by the new „liberalized” Left in Poland has blocked the public space to certain emancipatory tasks, which liberalism would not undertake, because by not undertaking them itself, it prevented those who wanted to remain allied with liberalism from undertaking them.

This is an example of the degenerative evolution of liberalism, which attracted many followers and which stemmed from self-limitations which liberalism imposed on itself, usually in the name of *Realpolitik* and in order to preserve social peace. Some Polish liberals had a very narrow understanding of the emancipatory potential of liberalism, and demanded above all that the economy be freed from the state. They did not think that being liberal required carrying out a policy of the state's neutrality in matters of worldview and religion, and regarded this problem as a minor issue. This attitude made itself felt in the signing of the concordat with the Vatican, critically assessed by the secular-liberal circles, or in connection with religion in state schools, introduced in a non-constitutional way by the first non-communist government, or with hanging of crosses in schoolrooms and in the Parliament.

#### LIBERAL HYPOCRISY

Bertrand Russell spoke with irony about the nineteenth-century French free-thinkers, who readily took advantage of all liberal freedoms but they sought their wives among the Catholic women, treating their faith as a guarantee that they

would not be cuckolds.<sup>3</sup> The attitude of Polish liberals is quite similar. For example, Janusz Lewandowski said: „Although we, Polish liberals, were sporadically at odds with the traditions, we respected the stabilizing Christian values”; „We – the liberals – actually like [the elements of Western culture, including eroticism], but we believe that in the declining years of communism, it was nevertheless a tool of the devil.” As regards religion in state schools, Lewandowski declared: „I personally was not in favor of religion in the state school. The paradox is that religion is not an obligatory subject, but pupils attend this class under pressure of the custom. Nevertheless, I do not think that religion at school is the main dilemma of Polish liberalism. The main problem for me was that the revival of the free market required state intervention.”<sup>4</sup>

We all know: it was necessary to win the Church's support for the liberal transformation of the country. But it was not difficult because while fighting communism, the post-Council Church adopted many liberal ideas. It accepted the idea of human rights, ruthlessly infringed by communist totalitarianism; the idea of freedom of religion, violated by the former system; the ideas of freedom of speech and publication, restrictions on which made it difficult for the Church to fulfill its mission in the previous period, and even the idea of religious toleration, highly important in the postmodern multicultural world, the absence of which under real socialism was regarded by the Church as a sign of persecution. It was obvious, however, that the Church accepted these liberal ideas because it treated them as instruments in the struggle against communism. Once communism collapsed, however, the Church abandoned them as no longer necessary and thoroughly redefined its positions towards more and more popular liberal values in the political and social dimension.

This redefinition started with an attack on human rights, which led to a dramatic infringement on the freedom of choice for men and women in planning a family. Through the political parties over which it gained control, the Church led to the violation of the liberal idea of the neutral state, forcing the introduction of religious instruction in state schools in an unconstitutional way. By exerting moral pressure, it forced school authorities to hang crosses in the classrooms. Representatives of the Church challenge the right of other denominations to freely practice their own religion by using the deprecatory term „sects”, thereby violating the freedom of conscience and freedom to profess a religion, which it itself demanded not long ago. The Church condemns the media for popularizing harmful lifestyles, incorrect political and moral ideas, pornography and blasphemy, which expresses its disagreement with the liberal idea of the freedom of speech, which it itself sought, when its rights to the freedom of speech were restricted. It is building up its own media network,

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<sup>3</sup> B. Russell, *Portrety z pamięci, Wartość wolnej myśli* [Portraits from Memory and Other Essays] Wrocław 1995, s. 89.

<sup>4</sup> *Wolność, nie równość* [Freedom, not equality], interview with Janusz Lewandowski „Gazeta Wyborcza”, 15–16 January 2000.

forcing the liberal-democratic state to lend it political, administrative and financial support with the hands of servile politicians.

### THE TRAP OF FUNDAMENTALISM

Hegel called medieval Catholic Christianity an unhappy consciousness. He showed that the more relentless it was trying to achieve its ideal, the more it made it impossible for itself to do so. He observed that while seeking the ideal in corporal asceticism, the Christians fell victim to focusing all their attention precisely on what they intended to escape from, i.e. their own corporality.

The Church in Poland and its fundamentalist supporters fall into a similar trap, which awaits every fundamentalism. An instance of this is the activity of Marek Jurek, former Marshal (Speaker) of the Sejm, whose intransigent anti-abortion maximalism prevented him from attaining his ideal, i.e. an all-out ban on abortion, or the activities of the ministry of education of the so-called Republic of Poland IV, which, striving to root out homosexuality and sexuality from school, did more to popularize sex and homosexuality at school than all gay and lesbian associations put together ever did.

The present attitude of the Catholic Church in Poland is in fact aimed against the liberal worldview because it is the only opponent that is left and actually threatens the strength and influence of the Church among the nation, which declares itself to be Catholic but is, spontaneously, departing in its lifestyles more and more from Christ's moral imperatives. The Church's importunity in the current political life in Poland is not so much the result of its actual power as the weakening religious fervor of the faithful. The strengthening, which the Church receives through political and financial support from the constitutionally neutral state, is hardly ever a spiritual strengthening, for it is usually material contribution, to which the impoverished faithful respond with increased aversion. This political and financial support rather results in the Church systematically metamorphosing into an impressive but increasing empty edifice. What is important is that the Church did not try to secure an alliance between its altar and the throne to be subordinated to the throne but in order to subordinate the throne to its own altar. Under these circumstances, the liberal demand that policies should not be aimed against the Church is no longer justified. What's more, it is a step towards the self-destruction of both liberalism and the Church.

### LIBERAL EXCLUSIVITY

At the beginning of transformations of the Central-East European countries, a liberal Hungarian parliamentarian (it might have been Janoš Kiš) said, in a manner characteristic of the liberals known from Polish political life, that he be-

lieved liberalism should be an exclusive club. At the same time he made a reservation that admission to this club should be highly paid.

Although these words were said in the mid-1990s, one can easily find in them the reasons why liberalism failed in many places in the world at the beginning of the twentieth century. Its failure stemmed from the fact that various liberal formations became complacent with their partial successes, plunging into elitist exclusivity, conveniently forgetting about the condition of many social groups. Liberal parties, as soon as they gained privileged social positions, usually became entrenched in them immediately, denying access to those who also expected emancipation. Because it limited itself, liberalism wasted its emancipatory and political capacity and social support. As a result of liberalism having given up its emancipation potential, political doctrines and movements appeared which undertook the task of transferring the potential that liberalism did not want to utilize onto the social areas neglected by liberals, thus taking away their power.

This is what happened at the beginning of the twentieth century.

And this is what also happened in Poland undergoing a liberal transformation.

#### LIBERAL COMPLACENCY

When the Samoobrona [Self-Defense] movement was starting its early activities and, led by Andrzej Lepper, blocked the country's roads, Adam Michnik spoke at his lectures about what kind of democracy Poland needed. I asked whether he did not think that democracy in Poland was no longer threatened by the political heirs of Wincenty Witos (peasant PM of the early 1920s), criticized at the time (1990s) that they grabbed government posts with rapacious peasant greed, but rather by the heirs of Jakub Szela (early-19<sup>th</sup>-century peasant rebellion leader), Michnik first joked that Waldemar Pawlak (then Prime Minister) resembled Wincenty Witos to the same extent as Andrzej Lepper resembled Jakub Szela. Then he added, more seriously, that there was no cause for concern in Poland because populism is a common occurrence in the majority of stable democracies: after all, France has its Jean-Marie Le Pen, Italy – Gianfranco Fini, Germany – Gerhard Frey, and Belgium has its Vlaams Blok.

I regarded the two answers as proof of liberal overconfidence. And I still do.

This was when irresponsible populism in all Central Europe was only beginning its slow but systematic work of driving moderate and liberal groupings out of politics. Vladimir Zhirinovskiy in Russia and Andrzej Lepper in Poland were soon joined by Istvan Csurka in Hungary, Jan Slota and Vladimir Meciar in Slovakia, Miroslav Sladek in the Czech Republic, and Jörg Haider in Austria.

Especially symptomatic were the statements by Polish liberals in the face of Haider's victory in Austria. The then Polish Minister of Foreign Affairs, Bronisław Geremek said that Haider was „neither left- nor right-wing; he is entirely outside the political spectrum”, and „propagates views entirely running counter to the



European heritage". It was indeed a novel contribution of this eminent historian to the history of Nazism. On his part, the champion of freedom, Jan Nowak-Jeziorański appealed to the Europeans to give up going skiing en masse to the Austrian Alps, owing to which Austria's economy would be brought to its knees, which „would have a salutary effect on Austrian society”.

That much remains, more or less, of the liberal faith in philosophical rationalism, and of the political sense of the liberals themselves when faced with threat, not to mercifully mention the liberal postulate of separating economy from politics.

Although Haider and other populists were soon defeated, the situation did not change for the better later, just the opposite. The star of Gerhard Frey in Germany was soon overshadowed by the successes of the previously excluded PDS; the Belgian Vlaams Blok, after an order to disband, underwent reorganization and is gaining a consistently increasing political support; in the Netherlands Pim Fortuyn appeared, whose death in the assassination attempt on 6 May 2002 only won popularity for his party. The future does not look any better.

We should appreciate the role played by the „Gazeta Wyborcza” daily in stopping the further advance of the populist Samoobrona by exposing corruption and violation of women's rights, which occurred in this party. However, overconfident liberal complacency in dealing with the early stages of Samoobrona-style populism paved the way in Poland to the rise of the present, extremely anti-liberal system of government, which succeeded in driving liberalism onto the periphery of public life and branded it with an ugly label, transforming the term „liberalism”, not long ago a term of praise, into an insulting epithet.

#### BOTH HANDS FREE

After the defeat of the Left in the elections of 2005, Rafał Ziemkiewicz, one of right-wing ideologists and the author of the book *Michnikowszczyzna* [Michnikishness, the Michnik syndrome], when responding to a timid remark of one of the liberals that Polish politics needs the left-wing, answered in a typical, „right-wing” way, brooking no argument: „Whatever for...?” In the first years of the exercise of power by the present political system these words acquire an unexpected new meaning: indeed, the Right does need the Left in Poland; owing to this fact, the Right has both hands free in order to destroy liberal groupings even more easily and to grab the entire public space for itself.

The Right is well on the road to attaining this goal. It will find it all the easier because its doctrinal fundamentalism and political tenacity allow it to ignore the liberal opinion about itself. The Right regards the unfavorable opinion about itself, voiced from the liberal standpoint, only as an additional confirmation that it had rightly chosen its anti-liberal way, which only strengthens its relentlessness. That is why it can afford to act in keeping with an arrogant conviction that the Right should be allowed far more than anyone else. The right-wing parties often turn out to be just

as greedy and corrupt as the post-communist Left. The difference being, however, that the post-communists were ashamed not only of the sin of their illegitimate, communist descent but also of their own malfeasance.

Thus, although Leszek Miller promised that he could make pigs fly with his decree, this was not so much an expression of his faith in the power of his post-communist party as his personal arrogance and media-targeted impudence. Although he led the SLD to take thousands of state jobs, he at least never talked about it openly like Marian Krzaklewski unreasonably did. Although Lew Rywin came to Michnik to demand 17.5 million dollars for something that – despite the intense efforts of a special parliamentary committee – I could never understand, he was immediately put in prison, even though no one gave this money to anyone. However, when 175 million zloty (ca. 60 million dollars) of public money was actually wasted on the Catholic TV station „Plus”, no one was sent to prison, or even charged. Corrupt SLD politicians, perpetrators and victims of the Pęczak scandal, meekly went to prison, where they often remain until now, and in this way they differ from for example Marek Kolasiński, who, on the last day of his parliamentary immunity, escaped like a thief, which he allegedly actually was, and found shelter in a Catholic cloister in Slovakia. He sought impunity under the cover of the priestly robe, which in Poland, unfortunately, often serves as an inviolable immunity for many dishonest and dissolute people.

## TWO POPULISMS

Ivan Krastev named a number of characteristics of contemporary populist movements. These are: genuine anger; dislike of elites; vagueness of proposed politico-economic solutions; economic egalitarianism; cultural conservatism; nationalism; xenophobia, Euroskepticism; anti-capitalism; and anti-corruption rhetoric.<sup>5</sup> We can see at once that we cannot regard the Polish parties that profess to be left-wing as populist in this sense. Populism broke away from its roots in the left-wing ideologies and movements, of which it was the traditional hot-bed, and moved entirely to the parties, which, in Poland and elsewhere, declare themselves to be right-wing.

Although Andrzej Lepper, regarded in Poland as an epitome a stereotyped populist, did not take over power, he and his party have become one of the pillars of the political bloc, which has all the distinguishing features of populism. The ideology of this bloc can be summarized in the following slogans: „We won’t be taking captives alive! We will overturn the card table at which politicians, businessmen, former secret service members, and corrupt journalists are playing their game! Balcerowicz must go! The Geremek Corporation must also go! We

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<sup>5</sup> I. Krastev, *The new Europe: respectable populism, clockwork liberalism*, „Open Democracy”, 21 March 2006.

will eradicate the Michnik syndrome and Michnik himself! We will build three million flats! I will remain Catholic till the end of my life; I will also force all the others to be so for there is no alternative to Catholic morality in Poland. We will defend the national interest and the country's energy security, especially against the eternal German and Russian threat!" Only anarchism, the inseparable element of the former, left-wing populism, was replaced in right-wing populism by the repressive ideology of law and order and by grotesque attempts to militarize the public space.

What values and principles did contemporary Polish liberalism manage to oppose to this populist rhetoric? The only serious alternative is what has already been termed as neoliberal populism. It appeals to neoliberal values, substantiated each time with compelling, logical and irrefutably rational arguments. These values include the idea of inalienable human rights, inviolability of individual autonomy, the idea of the rule of law to be guarded by the minimum state, and the idea of economic freedom, especially freedom from state intervention. This attitude is also called free-market populism: it is a modern, curbed and trimmed version of social neo-Darwinism. This ideology, which is easy to observe, best appeals to young, enterprising employees of Western corporations and to first-year political-science students, who, before they give it up for good when they start looking for a job at a state university, are usually proponents of the conglomerate of ideas associated in Poland with the name of Janusz Korwin-Mikke. We all know the ideology in a more elegant form also from the journalistic comments of Witold Gadomski. The problem is that even if he is usually irrefutably, logically and rationally right, his arguments appeal neither to supporters of Andrzej Lepper nor to those who cannot afford to buy „Gazeta Wyborcza” every day. When I told that to Adam Michnik, he admitted that he sometimes argues with Gadomski. But he added at once: „But you must admit: what a splendid columnist he is!”

I do. But Kinga Dunin is not bad, either.<sup>6</sup>

We can also see that there cannot be any common ground for agreement between the two populisms because this is out of the question owing to the features of discourses they use. The present-day clash of these two forms of political activity, behind which there are well-diagnosed political ideas, appears to be a modern form of class struggle.

In other words, what we are dealing with at present in Poland is an instance of the Lakan/Žižek „return of the repressed”. The present fundamentalism, populism, irrationalism, and the religion-based and exploited social herd instinct are the result of driving out from the public space the phenomena that liberalism regarded as highly incompatible with liberal values. Unable to find its place in

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<sup>6</sup> See for example Kinga Dunin, *Podatki są fajne* [Taxes are cool] „Gazeta Wyborcza”, 24 February 2007; Witold Gadomski's answer, *Rynek jest ciepły* [The market is warm] „Gazeta Wyborcza” 3 March 2007; and Kinga Dunin's answer, *Niewidzialna noga rynku* [The invisible leg of the market] „Gazeta Wyborcza” 23 March 2007.

the dominant liberal discourse, which described them exclusively in terms of blinded negation, patronizing condescension or helpless condemnation, they returned as redoubled and twice as strong, marginalizing and repressing liberalism itself in revenge.

The return of the repressed is also the return of the political. However, liberalism, which understands politics as a procedural, strictly regulated lawmaking activity, has lost its political initiative in this confrontation and is making a pitiful spectacle of itself, trying to curb the roused and raging force by means of a powerless web of laws. The liberals forgot about the words of their forerunner, Thomas Hobbes, that the laws that are not supported by power are merely empty words.

#### SEEKING AN ALTERNATIVE

Is there any alternative? What would effective political action consist in, which is not a dogmatic, exclusive liberalism limiting itself and others but an irresponsible fundamentalist populism? Does the dialectical struggle of right-wing liberalism with right-wing populism, which turns into a peculiar Hegelian symbiosis, contain a gap, in which the left-wing thought could come to life again and make an alliance with democratized liberalism? There appears to be such a possibility and it could be sought more or less in the same place where the radical left-wing thought first appeared as a political force in the nineteenth century.

The partial realization of liberal postulates in the past made other social groups undertake emancipatory aspirations, which liberalism formulated but did not undertake. This was done for example by women, who did not become beneficiaries of the undoubted but only partial successes of liberalism. An expression of disagreement with the partial fulfillment of emancipatory promises was also the movement of intellectuals assembled in the Bloomsbury group. Encouraged by Lytton Strachey and his scandalous book *Eminent Victorians*, they rebelled against the hypocrisy of the Victorian age, as much liberal in economy as conservative in morality. The Bloomsberries fought successfully not only against moral hypocrisy but also with the repressive British law system. Thanks to them, the law under which Oscar Wilde was imprisoned for his homosexuality was amended. One of the few representatives of feeble Polish tradition of common sense, Antoni Słonimski used to meet in his time some members and acolytes of this group, e.g. George Herbert Wells. Słonimski later became Adam Michnik's mentor.

#### THE EXCLUDED

The social groups that did not become beneficiaries of former liberal social and political aspirations also included the working class. It is a banal historical truth that both early and mature socialist-emancipatory doctrines were formu-

lated after the first political and economic successes of liberalism. They were in fact aimed against what liberals themselves viewed as their own success. This was because this success was a success of the liberals themselves only and because they did not want to share it with anyone. For example, the utopian socialist, one derided by Karl Marx, Pierre-Joseph Proudhon attacked the most sacred liberal gain and value, the ownership, stating rather hysterically that „ownership is stealing.” The socialist and communist movement was therefore an unwanted child of liberalism, which lost its emancipatory potential. The left-wing thought took the potential abandoned by liberalism and radicalized it.

The radicalism of the left-wing program consisted, first, in the postulated, considerable extension of the scope of freedom and access to goods onto social groups which were neglected and/or excluded by liberals. Second, it consisted in widening the level of emancipatory demands. Or rather, the broadening alone of the scope of emancipatory activities led to the egalitarian redistribution postulates, which the then establishment, like today's, regarded as an irresponsible, populist radicalism. The maximization and extrapolation of emancipation aspirations, postulated by the left, was in turn directly proportional to the degree of complacency of the liberals, who, after their initial successes, fell into exclusivity and elitism, analogous to the exclusivity and elitism which made themselves felt in Central Europe after the first successes of the local variety of liberalism.

Karl Marx's message had basically an ethical-emancipatory character and first of all related to the economic sphere; in the way closely resembling some versions of liberalisms, the emancipation of man in this field would result in his/her emancipation in the other spheres, superstructured on the basic one. Like liberalism, Marxism was also a comprehensive doctrine. It was admitted even by Alasdair MacIntyre, the current hero of the Polish extreme Catholic right, who refuses to remember that in his leftist youth he believed, like one of the heroes in Thomas Mann's *Magic Mountain*, that Christianity exhausted its emancipation potential and it was taken over by the new, salutary doctrine of Marxism.<sup>7</sup> Jesuit Naphta, a character modeled by Thomas Mann after the Marxist philosopher Gyorgy Lucacs, says in the *Magic Mountain* that all economic principles of the Fathers of the Church are resurrected after centuries of oblivion in the modern Communist movement. The consensus is complete here. There is even the same sense in the demands for power by the international labor against international traders and speculation – by the world proletariat, which today opposes the ideas of humanity and the City of God to the bourgeois-capitalist depravity. In the proletarian dictatorship, which our times demand politically and economically, without which there is no salvation for them, the point is not to eliminate the conflict between the spirit and power but to overcome it under the Cross, to overcome the world by ruling the world. The proletariat undertook the work of Gregory the Great, they have his enthusiasm for divine laws and just like him,

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<sup>7</sup> A. MacIntyre, *Marxism and Christianity*, Pelican Books, Penguin, London 1995.

they will not be able to stop at bloodshed. The objective of the proletariat is to arouse terror to save the world and to attain that which was the Savior's goal to achieve: the stateless and classless realm of the Son of God.<sup>8</sup>

The social philosophy thus arisen had the characteristics of a complex doctrine in the sense analogous with liberalism. Thus, Marxism was, like liberalism, an emancipatory doctrine. Only far more ambitious because egalitarian.

#### A DISILLUSIONED SOCIALIST

I once witnessed Adam Michnik in a conversation with a representative of Polish business fervently denying that he was a leading Polish capitalist. Responding to this exceptionally inaccurate complement, Michnik, highly embarrassed, answered: „Actually, I am a socialist who cannot forgive socialism that it does not work”.

This idea, expressed in a jocular manner, contains a significant truth. It can be interpreted as a manifestation of conviction that the all-embracing Marxist social project did not offer guidelines as to efficient social or economic practice, on the contrary – the emancipatory doctrine led to oppressive practices. Consequently, the anti-liberal emancipatory road resulted in disaster. The blame for this disaster lies with the errors in identifying human nature. The most important error lay in an overoptimistic belief that one can control the possessiveness of human nature, in failing to understand that efficient organization of productive work, the effect of which would be production of goods sufficient to satisfy human needs, not so much required renouncing the possessive instinct as skillfully setting it to work.

Marx's intellectual mistakes, and above all the tragic errors of his political imitators in the economic sphere, caused this idea to be irrevocably abandoned. This is one of the reasons why, a decade after the collapse of real socialism, Tony Blair and Gerhard Schröder unanimously concluded that in this area there was no other way but only one, and it leads straight ahead. And that there is no deviation from this way. However, at least some of the problems, with which Marxist-inspired practice failed, did not disappear with the decline of the traditional left-wing parties. These problems still pose a topical challenge both to modern liberalism and the modern Left: xenophobia, racism, nationalism, injustice and social inequality, which stem from the permanently re-emerging imperfections of market mechanisms, violation of human rights, political exclusion, etc. These are the challenges that both liberalism and left-wing parties (if they manage to restore themselves) must stand up to.

It would be best if they did this together.

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<sup>8</sup> T. Mann, *Czarodziejska góra*, [The Magic Mountain] transl. by J. Kramsztyk, Czytelnik, Warszawa 1982, vol. II, p. 74.

## DISILLUSIONED WITH LIBERALISM

Is there any niche, in which the Left could be reborn? This niche should be sought in the defeat suffered by liberalism at its own wish. Yet in building the modern Left, one cannot ignore liberalism and its emancipation potential in all the spheres of its influence: economic, political and moral. The separation of Church and State, the state's neutrality, the right of women to self-determination, equalization of opportunities, are the objectives that were first formulated by liberalism.

All the areas, in which the traditional Left strove for emancipation, should be taken away from the liberals, especially from those who became dogmatic and ossified thanks to their initial success. These basic liberal ideas should be taken away from the liberals, but only in order to harness them to work, especially economic liberalism, in the service of democratic and egalitarian values in the modern sense. The modern Left, having gotten rid of the archaic class character, should replace it with its concern about the common good of all people inhabiting a modern state. It should also understand that because the difference between domestic and foreign policy is blurred, this concern cannot be isolated from international issues, although, it seems, the universal cosmopolitanism of liberalism should be replaced by constructivist regionalism.

To paraphrase one of the above anecdotes, the proponent of the contemporary Left should say that he is actually a liberal, who cannot forgive liberalism that it does not work. That is, he cannot forgive it that it did not fulfill its emancipation promises and fell victim to its own followers who imposed restrictions on themselves in implementing the postulates of freedom.

A man of the contemporary Left is a liberal.

But far more liberal than the latter.

Thum. Jerzy Adamko