

The Crisis of Social Democracy in Poland: A New Start for the Left?

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THE DEMOCRATIC LEFT ALLIANCE (SOJUSZ LEWICY DEMOKRATYCZNEJ, SLD)

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| Official website: | www.sld.org.pl ; www.kplewica.pl |
| Party Leader: | Grzegorz Napieralski |
| Founded: | 1999 (in its present form) |
| SI and PES membership: | SI and PES member |
| Party membership: | 2010: 47,000 (declared by the party) 1999: 60,000 |

THE UNION OF LABOR (UNIA PRACY, UP)

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| Official website: | www.uniapraczy.org.pl |
| Party leader: | Waldemar Witkowski |
| History at a glance: | Founded in 1992; coalition with SLD and co-created the government in 2001; common lists to the European Parliament |
| SI and PES membership: | SI and PES member |

POLISH SOCIAL DEMOCRACY (SOCJALDEMOKRACJA POLSKA, SDPL)

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| Official website: | www.sdpl.pl |
| Party leader: | Wojciech Filemonowicz |
| Founded: | 2004 |
| SI and PES membership: | no membership |

SLD, UP, SDPL:

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| Electoral resonance parliamentary elections: | 2001: SLD-UP: 41.04 % of the votes; 216 seats |
| | 2005: SLD-UP: 11.31 % of the votes; 55 seats |
| | 2007: LiD (SLD, SDPL, PD, UP): 13.15 %; 53 seats |
| Electoral resonance European elections: | 2004: SLD-UP 9.35 %; 5 seats |
| | 2009: SLD-UP 12.34 %; 7 seats |
| | 2004: SDPL 5.33 %; 3 seats |
| | 2009: SDPL Agreement for the Future – center-left (PD+SDPL+Zieloni 2004/Greens 2004/) 2.44 %; 0 seats |
| Government participation: | SdRP/SLD formed coalition cabinets and remained in power throughout the whole tenure in 1993–1997 and in 2001–2007 as a »senior partner«. |

The Democratic Left Alliance (SLD) has for a decade been one of the largest and most important parties in the political arena but it seems that its period of dominance is now over. For the past few years two right-wing parties have tended to dominate the Polish political landscape: the Civic Platform (PO) and Law and Justice (PiS). These two conservative parties, both stemming from the Solidarity movement, enjoy the support of around 60–70 percent of the electorate, and in the last presidential election (2010) won over 80 percent of the vote.

The political system in Poland, inevitably, has been decisively shaped by recent history. As a result of the political transformations in Poland after 1989 a multiparty system was created in the form of a parliamentary democracy. One of the first legislative moves was to eliminate the article in the Constitution on the leading role of the communist Polish United Workers' Party (PZPR). The first freely elected Parliament was composed of representatives of 27 electoral committees, representing all milieus and all political forces. Since the fall of the PZPR, new parties have been created on its ruins (1990). The process of party building on the left was much slower and restrained than the creation of rightist parties on the remains of Solidarity which, until 1989, was the only influential opposition party in the country. The division into right and left in Poland is the result, among other things, of historical divisions: post-communist groups have automatically been classified as left-wing, while those which have grown out of the oppositional Solidarity, as right-wing. Party roles were assigned at the outset, so they have not had to work much on shaping their ideo-

logical identities, as historical divisions have also divided the electorate. sDRP (Social Democrats of the Republic of Poland, whose establishment was publicly announced at the same convention at which the PZPR was dissolved) was the most influential force on the left. The party has strong post-communist roots and formed, from the very beginning, an electoral alliance (SLD). The UP (Union of Labor) was created in 1992 as an oppositional party as a result of the fusion of several minor leftist organizations, independent of the post-communist sDRP. It united Solidarity representatives and members of the so-called reformist wing of PZPR. The left did not have to wait long for success and began to dominate the Polish political arena as early as 1993. The SLD was the biggest parliamentary grouping and helped form the government, while the UP formed the fourth biggest grouping. Although not at first institutionalized, the two parties initiated a cooperation which continues to this day. A split in the left occurred in 2004 when a new party, the SDPL, emerged from a faction of the SLD. It did not prove popular, however, and further splits led to a further decline in the left's fortunes.

The attitude of such rightist parties as the PO and the PiS has undoubtedly also contributed to the electorate's shift to the right. The declared aim of these parties is not only cooperation but also the need for restoration or rather the moral reconstruction of the state which had been »depraved« by the rule of the left. The parliamentary and presidential elections which took place in the second half of 2005 were an unqualified success for the right and led to the marginalization of the left. For the first time since its establishment, the SLD entered parliament as the third party (behind the populist Samoobrona or Self-Defense), winning only 11 percent of the votes. This rightist trend was repeated in the early elections in 2007 and in the presidential election in 2010.

The left in Poland has always played and continues to play an important role in the formation of the political system. Many left-oriented groups are registered, but the vast majority of them remain in the political background, exerting no influence. The institutionalized left is the Democratic Left Alliance (SLD) which, under different names, has been present in the Polish party arena virtually from the beginning, in 1989. It is worth underlining that the SLD long dominated the political scene in Poland. Attempts to create alternatives to the SLD (for example, the SDPL) have weakened the party but have never really threatened its existence.

The party continued to strengthen its position for over a decade. After the 2001 parliamentary elections, won by the coalition of the SLD and the

UP (SLD-UP), it seemed that the left would form a government for at least two terms. But less than four years later, before the next elections, it was not even certain whether any of the left-wing groups would pass the 5-percent election threshold. The SLD constitutes the biggest and the most significant social democratic formation, so the crisis in which the party found itself well illustrates the condition of the Polish left overall.

The aim of this analysis is to show the reasons for the crisis, both internal and external, and the present state of the party, and to set out a program to overcome the crisis.

Historical Overview

In East-Central Europe, the post-communist social democratic parties have arisen in a completely different way from their western counterparts. They were fairly small, created by former communist elites, especially at the parliamentary level. The post-communist left in Poland – sDRP – was created on the rubble of the dissolved Polish United Workers' Party (PZPR). It inherited most of the PZPR's activists, but most importantly all its finances and its local organization, which made its start in the new democratic system considerably easier. Since the first presidential elections in 1990, together with 20 other parties, the sDRP has formed an effective electoral alliance under the name of the Democratic Left Alliance (SLD), finally transformed in 1999 into a unified party of the same name. The result of this loose alliance was a centrally managed party incorporating a number of features of a ruling party.

An SLD president ran for re-election in 2000. Aleksander Kwaśniewski was re-elected – so far the only president to have achieved this – in a first-round victory, receiving over 53 percent of the votes (almost 9.5 million). He was also supported by the UP which had not had any electoral success since 1993. This led to closer cooperation with the SLD and resulted in the signing of a coalition agreement. The left also succeeded in the 2001 parliamentary elections which enabled the SLD-UP coalition to form, with the PSL (Polish People's Party), a government with a stable parliamentary majority in which most ministerial offices fell to the left. Unfortunately, the opportunity was squandered. The government did not carry out any important and necessary reforms. There were conflicts regarding the leadership within the party and also corruption scandals. Poland's accession to the European Union in 2004 – an unquestioned success on the

part of the SLD – was not enough to stop the erosion of the party and the decline in public trust. After a period of weak parliamentary rule, internal conflicts and many occurrences which tormented the party in 2001–2005, cracks appeared in the party monolith. However, the painful election defeat of 2005 resulted in an attempt to reinstate the left coalition. Before the 2006 local government elections a coalition group called LiD (Left and Democrats) was created, uniting social democratic parties (SLD, SDPL, UP) and the center party (Democratic Party – PD). Their goal was to improve guarantees of human and civil rights and the freedom of the individual, and to accelerate industrial progress and national modernization. But fundamental in Poland and particularly important for leftist parties are slogans related to the fight against poverty, social exclusion, and improving the position of Polish women.

The parties participated in the last parliamentary elections in 2007 as a joint left-wing block, the Left and Democrats (LiD). That project did not bring the expected growth in electoral support, however, and the newly-formed Joint Parliamentary Group of the Left has only 43 deputies in the parliament. Before the presidential election in 2010 the parties could not agree on a joint candidate. What is more, the SLD itself could not decide who to nominate. Many names were mentioned by different left-wing factions and camps. Finally, seeking a compromise, the SLD put up Jerzy Szmajdziński, deputy marshal of the Sejm and former PZPR activist. After Szmajdziński's tragic death in a plane crash near Smoleńsk chairman of the party Grzegorz Napieralski was nominated. The decision seemed natural as the shortened electoral calendar made the quest for a new candidate or the attempt to promote someone new virtually impossible. In the face of early presidential elections most parties put up their chairs or party leaders.

In fact, from the very beginning the electoral battle was fought out by the two largest and, at the time, most mutually antagonistic camps: the PO and the PiS. To be precise, it was a personal clash between Jarosław Kaczyński (PiS) and Bronisław Komorowski (PO, the incumbent president). Despite an extremely hard campaign (national mourning, flood, radicalization of the public mood) the leader of the SLD managed to make his mark and became the sole alternative to the rightist candidates. As the youngest and most free of historical baggage he aimed his program not only at the traditional left-wing constituency but also at young people, claiming to want to surmount the old divisions.

Present Condition of the Party

For a decade, the SLD has been improving its results from election to election, taking advantage of its leadership status on the political left. Given this leadership position, it has not elaborated a proper ideology or program. We cannot charge the party with lack of slogans but in the socio-economic sphere its sloganizing has become disconnected from legislative activity. The institutionalized left has to some extent parted from its traditional electorate, the trade unions. It does not really have a comprehensive vision of development and the goals it wants to achieve.

Ideological weakness and an excess of power in the hands of party activists have led to internal conflicts, erosion of support, and leadership disputes. By 2005, support had receded to 1990 levels. The SLD, once the dominant party, ended up as a parliamentary grouping of minor significance. At that time, initiatives were launched to reunite the various left-wing factions and to put forward a joint election list. The LiD election coalition gained the support of over two million voters in the 2007 election, which means that the status quo of the 2005 election was maintained. But it was a very broad coalition, also incorporating the centrist party, the PD. The coalition therefore lost its left-wing character without gaining any more support. SLD candidates obtained 70 percent of all votes, as they were the most recognizable candidates on the lists. In percentage terms, however, the LiD as a whole did not obtain as much support as all the members of this alliance had received in previous elections, when they were standing for election separately. The reasons for this included the specific plebiscitary character of the election, and a lack of preparation as far as the program and organization of the campaign were concerned. The early presidential election in 2010 had a similar character; the sole left-wing candidate, chairman Grzegorz Napieralski, received over two million electoral votes (2,299,870 or 13.68 percent). The result is not very satisfying, compared to previous results, especially if we consider the fact that the two main candidates were both from rightist parties. However, we must emphasize that the SLD leader strengthened his position as chairman and at least showed that there is an alternative. This constitutes a starting point for the restoration of the left's position on the party scene. Generally speaking, the campaign was not aggressive, but it did not touch on serious matters, either. There was no debate about the parties' visions of Poland. All the slogans can in fact be reduced to one: we will build Poland's future together. The

left-wing candidate mainly addressed young people, proposing a break from the past and familiar social slogans. The more important debate related to the role of the Church, although it really got going only after the campaign ended and only between the rightist parties. Nevertheless the left is trying to take advantage of it. We may also hypothesize that this dispute may develop into an attempt by the left to determine its ideological identity.

The SLD has relatively even support all over the country, with a marginal dominance in small and medium-sized towns, as well as among young people with a secondary education or a university degree. It's worth mentioning that the party's lowest support is among people over 60, with only elementary education, and living in the countryside (based on: »How Poles Voted: Presidential Election 2010,« in *Gazeta Wyborcza*, June 21, 2010). Until recently, it was believed that SLD support comes mainly from older people nostalgic for the days of the PRL, but this has changed. Slogans referring to the party's global vision are becoming more important than economic ones. The SLD can be seen as a national party and not only as representative of one group or social class.

To begin with, the SLD was perceived as a post-communist party, which carried a considerable stigma, at least in certain quarters, especially among rightist politicians. Over time, however, it has become the major representative of the left. Interestingly, people generally no longer recall the party's post-communist origin and it has become a potential partner for any party. The SLD's biggest problem is the loss of primacy of left-wing parties in the electorate's eyes; many political and moral slogans connected with the left have been taken over by other parties. The SLD is not an opinion-former; it does not offer a vision or shape public discourse. The terms of debate are imposed by rightist parties engaged in disputes on whether or not to create the Fourth Rzeczpospolita. The SLD has lost its traditional left-wing constituency – workers from large industrial plants – and is unable to attract the young due to its lack of radical positions on the Church, abortion, gay relationships, and so on. The party participates in the public debate but never initiates it. Unfortunately, the party concentrates more on advertising and election campaigns than anything else. Absorbed in its own internal arguments and personnel reshuffles it seems to have forgotten about creating and maintaining its own image.

The party scene in Poland is rather static and reorganization within the present framework almost impossible. This is due partly to the electoral system (proportional representation with electoral thresholds and

using the d'Hondt method), but chiefly to party financing by the state. New parties face enormous problems trying to establish themselves on the political stage. The disgrace in which the left still finds itself at the beginning of the twenty-first century, the fulfillment – ironically – of at least some promises of the left (for example, a higher standard of living), and the turn to the right (to the Church after the death of Pope John Paul II in 2005) have resulted in growing support for right-wing parties. The two major political forces – the Civic Platform (PO) and Law and Justice (PiS) – are rightist parties with their origins in Solidarity and enjoy the bulk of electoral support.

The SLD – and the left in a broader sense – has generally allowed the two biggest right-wing parties to co-opt some of its basic issues: a number of social issues have been taken over by the PiS (at least the policy program, even some slogans) and the defense of democratic procedures by the PO. The division between the »post-communist« and »post-solidarity« camps increases the SLD's coalition possibilities in the future, however. Moreover, in the present distribution of power in the parliament, the left is beginning to hold the balance of power in some political endeavors of the ruling coalition. The lack of organized groupings which could function as an intellectual core for the party is a disadvantage for the SLD. So far, the latter has been perceived mainly as a party seeking power in which ideology does not play an important role. There are many different reasons why there has not been closer cooperation with, for example, the circle of Krytyka Polityczna which can and should be regarded as furnishing the left's most important intellectual support. Unfortunately, the party itself has no such backing.

According to its *program*, the SLD is concentrating on equality of opportunity and the fight against social exclusion and unemployment. The party espouses the protection of employees' rights, free education, and public health care. However, so far slogans tend to predominate rather than policy content and concrete legislative proposals.

The SLD is a pragmatic party, not an ideological one. Electoral pragmatism was justified in the first years of the sDRP, when the party targeted a relatively narrow group with its election programs, but as early as 1993, the leaders of the SLD consciously accepted the concept of developing broad electoral appeal to maximize election results. The culmination of that approach was the transformation of the sDRP into the SLD and the party's shift towards the center. Moreover, party programs have generally been approved unanimously, without any internal

debate. There has been little discussion of what the party's vision is, or what its goals or expectations are. In contrast to western European social democracies, until recently in Poland economic issues have not been the most important matters for political parties. However, attitudes towards church and tradition are key, and seem to be the main factor in the eyes of the electorate. This is why the non-institutional left or parties which have tried to establish themselves to the left of the SLD have not found their sociopolitical place. Poland is becoming more secular and liberal, which is why there is room for a third party on the political scene, dominated at present by conservatives and liberals. Support for Grzegorz Napieralski in the presidential elections was in large part due to work carried out by intellectual circles outside parliament. The party must impose its vision and give life to the ideas it is fighting for, otherwise all its actions will remain incomprehensible to the electorate.

The party was created on the basis of a parliamentary group, but inherited a well-organized local structure, with offices and human resources. At its peak, the party numbered more than 60,000 members and although today it claims to have more than 40,000 members, the number of activists is lower. They include older members who have been in the party since the days of the previous regime, as well as an entire generation of managers who today are in their fifties. The party leader is trying to cement the party by keeping the so-called old guard while opening the party up to newer, younger members. Despite the fact that the party – which is social democratic, after all – officially supports parity, in practice this is not applied and women comprise a marked minority both on voting lists and in positions of power. The party is seeking to remain open to all groups and does not advocate any form of radicalism. This is how the general public tends to regard it, too.

The SLD's glory years are long gone. For many years it was the main or at least a dominant group on the political stage. From party ranks have risen such figures as Aleksander Kwaśniewski, a two-term president in 1995–2000 and 2000–2005, as well as four prime ministers: Józef Oleksy, Włodzimierz Cimoszewicz, Leszek Miller, and Marek Belka. Since 1989 it has twice won the elections and co-formed six governing cabinets as first partner (it handed the prime minister's office to coalition members on two occasions). The party systematically improved its electoral results until the parliamentary elections of 2005 and received record support in 2001, which almost enabled it to form a government in its own right. Under the SLD, Poland joined both NATO and the European Union.

However, the party has not achieved any spectacular successes in social or ideological terms. On the contrary, it adopted a number of bills which went against key left-wing values, such as the annulment of the Alimony Fund and the announcement of restrictions regarding the revaluation of retirement pensions, as well as gestures and declarations of a religious nature. At present, the party is yet to take a stand on such issues as threats to the environment, biotechnology, or genetics.

The present political situation does provide an opportunity for the SLD to develop, however. As already mentioned, the electoral system and the fact that the party is granted money from the state budget virtually »freezes up« the political scene, but the recent elections indicate that there is still room and a need for a social democratic party, and not just one with an explicitly left-wing face.

The SLD, as befits a social democratic party, is open to everyone, while excluding none and striving for all groups of voters. Even as an electoral alliance, before it became a true party, it had many organizations centered around it, such as trade unions (OPZZ, ZNP) and employers' organizations (such as Lewiatan), as well as various smaller parties. During its time in power the party lost contact with social organizations, however, and failed to take care of the interests of trade unionists and members of cooperatives. The SLD is now trying to restore contacts and rebuild its representation. It remains open to society and to strategic partnerships.

The European Union is, from the SLD's point of view, a priority issue with regard to Poland's foreign policy. It is very critical of other foreign policy directions, such as expanding partnership with the USA. The SLD is, for example, against the deployment of the anti-missile shield in Poland. According to them, it would do nothing to enhance the country's security and could in fact lead to the start of a new arms race. Poland's membership of NATO remains a sufficient guarantor of security and it should enhance the quality of its involvement in NATO missions. At the same time, the party leader has declared himself in favor of the withdrawal of Polish troops from Afghanistan as soon as possible, taking the view that the government betrayed leftist ideals by involving Poland in a war. Furthermore, the party, in a Congress Resolution, has appealed for a change in policy towards Ukraine and Russia: »Polish diplomacy should strive to base cooperation with Russia on the principles of partnership while remaining pragmatic and separating ideological and historical notions from economic issues.« It should be noted that, beyond campaign slogans, the SLD has not sought to utilize any options for improving

things with the aid of the European Union. Although it is a member of PES, it neither initiates nor promotes common initiatives and therefore seems unable to provide an answer to current challenges and global problems.

Reasons for the Crisis of the Social Democrats in Poland

The crisis of the Democratic Left Alliance manifests itself on many levels, including program, personnel, and organization. Some symptoms of the crisis, as well as events leading to the decline of the SLD, were already apparent during the time of the SDRP. The bipolar division of the political scene resulted in the post-communist camp basing its program on criticism of the post-solidarity government and thus having virtually no need to come up with an ideological position of its own. It was enough for them to construct election platforms based on opposition to the governing party. This lack of programmatic and ideological clarity made it possible for the left to form a coalition comprising several political groups under the aegis of the Democratic Left Alliance. The transformation of the coalition into a single party represented a victory of the pragmatic faction, which had been attempting to create a suitable vehicle for electoral contestation. A centralized and disciplined organization was built to ensure electoral victory. The efficiency of the apparatus was more important than pluralism of ideas and viewpoints within the party. Internal tendencies and growing divisions within the party itself were ignored, as were the voices calling for a reflection on the party's identity. The party also underestimated the changes that were taking place in its political environment. It continued to treat the parties on the right as weak and defeated. Despite the SLD's unquestioned victory in the parliamentary elections of 2001, no notice was taken of the fact that the electorate had begun to drift towards parties with a more defined ideological platform (for example, Law and Justice, the League of Polish Families, and Self-Defense [Samoobrona] all entered the Sejm at that time). Since 2001, the electorate has put more emphasis on axiology and values – and those have been sorely lacking. The SLD's formula of political pragmatism exhausted itself in 2005.

Leadership has been another area in which the SLD clearly reveals its weaknesses. Leszek Miller, an efficient and effective leader of the opposition party, failed as head of government and party leader (2001–2004).

During that time the media uncovered a number of scandals involving members of the party, a pathology Miller was unable to do anything about. In addition, personal disagreements resulted in a split of the party into supporters of Leszek Miller and supporters of Aleksander Kwaśniewski (then president). The symptoms of the growing crisis were ignored until 2004, when the ranking of the prime minister and the party in polls had dropped so low that any further ignoring of society's disappointment with the government of the left might have led to the Alliance being eliminated from parliament altogether in the coming elections. In the end, the party was much weakened and a group of its members associated with Marek Borowski abandoned it to form an alternative to the SLD called Polish Social Democracy (SDPL). The removal of the »old guard« and the ascent to power of politicians of the younger generation was supposed to improve the situation. However, these young politicians did not have the necessary leadership abilities. After the plane crash near Smolensk the party's current leader, Grzegorz Napieralski, was able to take the reins smoothly. The election confirmed him in this role. This does not mean that the problem of the party's leadership has been solved, but at least it has been put on hold for the time being.

Another problem the SLD has to struggle with is the voters' perception of it. Its manner of wielding power led to the development of an image of a corrupt party intent only on guaranteeing benefits for its members and devoid of any leftist orientation. Furthermore, attempts to »disguise« the political origins of the party through the lack of a unified attitude towards the People's Republic, or the downplaying and lack of opposition to unfair assertions about the PRL era, caused the SLD to be regarded as lacking an ideological compass, betraying its traditional electorate, and simply conformist.

Returning to the question of ideological identity, it is difficult not to agree with the theories of Roy Hattersley or Ralf Dahrendorf that left-wing ideology has run out of steam and that, according to the so-called »narrowing thesis,« room for a social democratic movement has become limited in the party spectrum and is increasingly being encroached upon by conservative parties. More precisely, in Poland its place has been taken by parties with rightist roots, such as Law and Justice (PiS) and Civic Platform (PO). After the difficult years of 2001–2005 under a leftist government, the thesis that left-wing parties no longer dominate public discourse because their level of competence is declining and, indeed, that they are seen as positively incompetent seemed to be confirmed.

The party now suffers from a lack of identity, which makes any future programs it may come up with short-term strategies at best.

As a result of its 2005 election defeat, the SLD was confronted with the need to rebuild and reform the party. This it has begun to do and it appears to be bringing about gradual but measurable improvements at the ballot box. Most importantly, the image of the party itself has improved thanks to its newer, younger management and the introduction of left-wing elements into the party's rhetoric. An electoral alliance, the Left and Democrats (LiD), has also been formed, but it has not brought the expected results. This may be a result of the fact that the 2007 elections were held early and were rather in the nature of a plebiscite. The majority of steps taken by the party in 2004–2009 were fairly chaotic and of little consequence, dictated by a perception of electoral expediency, not as a result of any deep, wide-ranging reflection on the party's program or ideology. Also, the party leaders themselves did not present a consistent vision regarding strategy and did not make independent decisions. The changes were mostly on the surface and did not come about as a result of any deep conviction in the party about the necessity of reform. Nonetheless, by the end of the first decade of the twenty-first century an awareness of the crisis within the party had become commonplace, but a coherent approach is still lacking to improve the party's image.

The European Perspective

The Democratic Left Alliance and the Labor Union are members of the Party of European Socialists (PES) with full rights, and their representatives regularly take part in the programmatic work of the party. Within the scope of thematic networks on the modernization of political parties, climate and energy, and Social Europe common positions are being developed. Individual positions can be found in the party's documentation but there is no deeper debate. The most important values are the concern for unity, sensitivity, and solidarity. The left's fundamental goals are to ensure fairness for citizens in a Social Europe, to prevent financial crisis, to ensure gender equality and tolerance, to impose an effective immigration policy, to fight against climate change and environmental pollution, and to strengthen Europe's role as a partner for peace, security, and development. The SLD's position is that the left has to concentrate on economic recession, the rise in unemployment, and the growing cost of

living. There is a need for cooperation, particularly within the framework of the European Union, which is a crucial link in the era of globalization. Thanks to the Community, the member states have more power to resolve the problems of the world, particularly those which affect us locally. According to the SLD, the European social democratic parties argue that the social market economy will give everybody a chance to make use of the opportunities brought by globalization. Acting in support of environmental protection, the left wants to reshape the economy by developing environmental technologies and creating new jobs in that sector. Protection of the rights of immigrants in modern Europe should consist in preventing abuse and human trafficking, and should rest on the principles of equal rights and responsibilities for all. We should also enable immigrants to integrate with the societies in which they come to live. According to the party, European social democracy should take action to better protect the lives and health of its citizens with regard to threats to democracy and civil rights, terrorism, crime and extremism. The members of the European Union must act as one to promote peace and development. In fact, the Polish social democrats are taking a stand and incorporating these things into party programs, but they are not debating them.

Suggestions for Future Development

Among the various parties of the left in Poland, the SLD has the most potential to transform itself into an authentic left-wing party as still commonly understood. There is a pragmatic current within the SLD that has resigned itself to the current order of things, but there also exists a need to create a critical current to help formulate answers to new challenges; to articulate new ideas and define the interests of various groups. In order to become a modern left-wing party it should define its own ideological identity while remembering that the traditional divisions into left and right have become somewhat anachronistic. It should also come to terms once and for all with its own past, the era of the People's Republic of Poland. Challenges confronting the parties as well as the party's function should be redefined.

With regard to values, the SLD is trying to open itself up to different environments, social groups, and minorities. The party must also remain open to society in general. It should establish priorities that are

in accordance with the axiology of the »new left« and devise a program with a long-term vision in matters of social, economic, and international policy. It is not enough simply to select new leaders; the members must also be suitably qualified and prepared to take power. There is room in the Polish political arena for a party that will both advocate freedom of outlook and concern itself with the economy.

The recent presidential election also confirms that the party has become a factor in the »balance of power« when it comes to forming a majority in parliament. Its relevance is increasing and it is becoming a potential coalition partner for both right-wing parties. What is really important here is that the SLD has ceased being »undesirable« merely because it is a »post-communist« party, and has resumed its position as equal partner in the political arena. Nevertheless, before it enters any coalition, the SLD should first properly define its own identity, otherwise it risks being marginalized and its slogans risk being adopted by larger parties. Clearly, for a party that was until recently the dominant force on the political scene, its position today as the »third« party cannot be seen as satisfactory.

As an institutional party of the left the SLD has parted from its traditional electorate, but has not yet acquired a new one. It has not answered the fundamental questions of whom it wants to represent and how, and has not identified an electorate it can count on. The SLD has become a party seeking power and has distanced itself from both labor and particular segments of the intelligentsia. In addition, inevitably, other parties have co-opted some of the achievements (especially socio-economic) of the left, to which the SLD has been unable to respond. The fundamental problem which the SLD is facing today is programmatic in nature: answering the question of what it means to be a party of the left in the twenty-first century. The division between right and left has definitely become blurred: common program elements shared by the three parties are readily apparent. The question now is, how the SLD can make itself stand out.

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