

October 15, 2002

There is still hope for democracy in Poland

Josef Stalin would feel proud today of his comrades, who have managed to instantly change into capitalists with the quiet help of the USA. When George Bush calls the President of Poland Aleksander Kwasniewski, a former member of the communist party, his best friend in Europe, we know that democracy in Poland is a myth not a trend. It is very ironic that former communists like Kwasniewski and Putin have become the staunchest supporters of the President of USA.

The history of cooperation between the US politicians and big business with Polish communists goes back many years to the 70s when the first international loans were given to Poland and there was a wide road established between White House and Belvedere. The simple truth is that Americans talk only to the key decision makers in foreign countries. For almost 50 years the only people in Poland that could develop managerial skills had to carry a communist membership card.

During the 80s communists in Poland came up with the idea to allow “joint ventures” with foreign companies or individuals. Those ventures had special privileges such as exoneration from corporate taxes for 3 years. They were quite visible at the time as all cars owned by them had to have green license plates. The most successful joint ventures were those where one of the partners was a well-connected member of the communist party. This way the communists were preparing themselves for a free market system, which would officially start in 1989, when loans from the West already exceeded 40 billion dollars. That year Poles were subjected to 600% inflation practically overnight while the former communists were able to borrow millions of dollars just before it happened. They could later repay their loans in highly devaluated currency. The start of capitalism is never easy but the working people of Poland were subjected to extreme poverty for the first time.

I have recalled this history to demonstrate that at the time of change from communism to democracy the vast majority of Poles never had anything to say as it was all pre-planned and nothing was permitted to happen by chance. Yet the democratic countries of the West were quick to applaud elected governments in Poland at par with their own. The reason for this is that the communists of Poland joined hands with the West to exploit Poland together. Both had a similar goal – maximum economic gains at the expense of the working people.

Obviously such an environment is not conducive to the establishment of sound democracy. On the contrary, the former communists who are ruling Poland today still have the same dictatorial mentality and they are still fully in control of the elective,

administrative and judicial powers. The separation of these powers, which is the basis for democracies of the West, does not exist in Poland. Former communists have it all.

The reason for this concentration of power is that historically communists have never allowed for either critique or competition and also they are fearful of their recent past. So they have a habit of creating the election games where they are guaranteed to win. Such a game is called “proportional election law”. Unlike with direct election law, common in USA, France, England, Italy and Australia, when the Poles vote, they never know who will be elected, apart from the perpetual faces of the former communists. The reason is that with proportional election law, those who get elected are mainly from the top of the lists prepared by each party. The former communists themselves finance the only political parties in the Polish parliament.

So it is of no surprise that lately the communists have “improved” the election law to permit reimbursement of election expenses from the public treasury so that all their future elections will cost them next to nothing. Now, any new party that wants to compete with them, has to raise money from the public, which is not an easy task in a post-communist society.

Those that have thought that America will act as a guard dog for democracy in Poland (or anywhere else) have been proven wrong. America has always enjoyed the support of dictators like Pinochet of Chile, the Shah Pahlavi of Iran or Marcos of Philippines. As it turns out more can be gained with reliable, subservient dictators than with uncertain newly elected strangers, who might decide to be patriotic to their own countries rather than the interests of foreign powers.

The only chance for Poles to abolish dictatorship in Poland is to change the election law from proportional to direct so that the people are free to elect and recall their representatives. This is the only way to elect honest patriots and to make sure that they will be accountable for their actions. In fact the proportional election law was imposed on the losers of the second war – Japanese and Germans and Italians to make them weak and easily manipulated from abroad. Especially Italians had dozens of government flops before their recent change to the single district election system. Germany faced with government corruption scandals is now trying to get rid of the proportional election law.

For vast the majority of Poles, those who have never been members of the communist party, the present situation is very sad as there is a common feeling of betrayal. They naively believed that when Poland becomes democratic country with the help of the West, they will benefit from the same principles that made those countries strong and enabled them to grow and prosper. Disappointment is the main reason for a poor turnout of voters in all proportional elections in the recent years.

The long range prognosis is that the former communists in order to keep political, judicial and administrative powers concentrated in their hands, will certainly resist change to a direct election law. Also their long time partners from the West will resist such a change

as the former communists serve them well, practically on their knees. Will the people themselves be able to organize and to revolt to have true democracy in their country?

But we must never lose hope that Poland still has a chance for democracy against the will of the former communists and their foreign friends. Due to economic hardship, corruption and violation of the basic principals, these communists have mismanaged the economy and forced millions of Poles to emigrate, mostly to the USA. These Polish emigrants, practically exiled from their native land have had the opportunity to see with their critical minds how democracy works somewhere else. With time they will communicate this knowledge to their families and friends left behind. Their words like seeds will create understanding and demand for a definite change in election rules so that Poles can elect the leaders that they respect and trust.

True democracy is of monumental importance for Poland. How can the Poles be strong when they are not free to elect their own leaders? How can the Polish economy liberate itself from the predatory practices and corruption induced by former communists? How otherwise can Poland be the country where individual property rights are respected and protected and each Pole who has to pay taxes is not a slave but citizen?

For this reason I urge you to write what you know about democracy to your families and friends in Poland. We, who live in America, we know that democracy needs to be nourished and defended by us all. With time your words will germinate and will become flowers, much like the red poppies of Monte Casino. Your written words of truth, wisdom and courage have more importance than any money that you may send to your relatives and friends. Your words will signify that against all odds and policies of the superpowers you still care. That living in a land of opportunity you want to share what you have learnt. It will confirm to them and yourself that you still are a Pole.

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