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FAREWELL TO MARXISM

by Stanisław Kowalczyk

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Eastern and Central Europe has entered a stage or radical, social, economic, political and ideological transformations. The latter changes will be of our main interest in this essay, although obviously they are all strictly interconnected. In addition, our reflection will be limited to the situation in Poland which, in fact, has initiated the ideological restructuring of the states of "real socialism." At the end of January, 1990, the last, Eleventh Congress of the Polish United Workers' Party (PZPR) was held. It was then transformed into a foundation congress of the Social-Democratic Party of the Republic of Poland (SDRP) (actually of "Rzeczpospolita," the traditional name of the country which is a literal translation of "res publica"). The manner in which the transformation was performed was most unusual: the new party came into being already on January 27, while the old one definitely ceased to exist only on January 29. Thus, for some time, the same people-deputies to the Congress of the old party and, simultaneously, founders of the new one-belonged to both parties. In this way the organizational and personal continuity has been preserved, so that the SDRP can now lay claims to the property of the former PZPR.

The ideological declaration of the SDRP is extremely reticent, limited to the enumeration of some ideas of socialism and some republican concepts. It announces a willingness to foster such ideals as social justice, emancipation of the workers, parliamentary democracy, human and civil rights, and a state based on the rule of law. Special emphasis has been put on the lay character of education, separation of Church and State, and freedom of conscience and belief. There are also brief remarks on the postulates of the independence of science and of courts of justice. The enumerated concepts are connected with the category of socialism and republican ideas. It is easy to notice that the declared set of the intentions of the new party is closer to republican ideals, derived from the French Revolution of 1789, than to American republican ideals; the latter overtly refers to the idea of God.
The ideological declaration of the new party totally ignores everything that once constituted the basis of the PZPR, namely, Marxism, Leninism, Communism. The absence of dialectic and historical Marxism is particularly striking. It means an abandonment of the philosophy of materialism, theory of the class of war, and the dictatorship of the proletariat. Quite distinctly emphasized is the renouncement of the leading role of the party in the life of the state and acceptance of parliamentary democracy. The lack of democracy in social-political life has been denounced as a grave mistake of the PZPR. The declaration of the new party stresses the need of continuing the traditions of the Polish nation. Among others, one can also find a favorable remark about the social teaching of the Catholic Church and the conception of humanism in the teachings of Pope John Paul II.

Can one therefore speak about a complete and definitive departure from Marxism, including a rejection of the philosophy of naturalism and atheism?

The name "social democracy," accepted by the newly founded party in Poland, is by no means new. It was used in Germany in 1869 when a Social-Democratic Workers' Party was founded. In Western Europe numerous social democratic parties, under the influence of the First International were subsequently founded. Those parties later created the Second International, called social democratic. At the turn of the nineteenth century the social democratic movement split into two main trends, known as the reformist-revolutionary and Marxist-revolutionary. The first trend was denounced by Marxists as opportunist and revisionist. In the atmosphere of bitter polemics, Lenin wrote an essay entitled "The Failure of the Second International." Social democracy also existed in Poland which, at that time, had no independent state. It was called the Social Democracy of the Kingdom of Poland and Lithuania and came into being at the end of the nineteenth century. Its activists included, among others, Roza Luksemburg and Feliks Dzierzynski. Most of the activists of this party were opposed to the idea of independence of Poland and supported the Russian Revolution of 1917. In the next year the party was united with the Polish Socialist Party (PPS "Lewica") and formed the Polish Communist Party. One of the press organs of the new party was Trybuna. The history of social democracy makes it possible to speak about its common ideological origin with Marxism and communism. Later, the paths of social democracy and Marxism frequently diverged, especially in countries of western and northern Europe. The new social democratic party is looking for rapprochement with the social democracy of the West.

Does Polish, post-PZPR social democracy depart from Marxism? Speaking about the ideological-personal lineage of Polish social democracy, the leaving leader of the PZPR recalled several names, such as Traugutt, Abramowski, Krzywicki, Pilsudski, Daszynski, Hochfeld, Prochnik. Those were men of highly varied ideological provenance although most of them were close to Marxism. Romuald Traugutt (d. 1864), the leader of the January
Uprising, was a man deeply experiencing his Catholic faith although at the end of his life he was connected with the fraction of "the reds." Edward Abramowski (d. 1918) was initially connected with Marxism, but then he promulgated the ideas of stateless socialism. Ludwik Kryzwicki (d. 1941) took part in the translation of Marx's *The Capital* into Polish, while selectively accepting some elements of Marxist historical materialism. Ignacy Daszyński (d. 1936), an activist of Polish Socialist Party (PPS), was the Prime Minister of the leftist People's Government in Lublin in 1918. Julian Hochfeld (d. 1966), member of the PPS before World War II and of the PZPR since 1948, wrote such works as *Marxism and the Sociology of Political Relations* and *Studies in the Marxist Theory of Society*. The ideological convictions of Oskar Lange (d. 1965) were similar; he was an activist of the PPS and then of the PZPR; as a distinguished economist, he propagated Marxist interpretation in the domain of political economy. Adam Prochnik (d. 1942) was a representative of the Left of the PPS. Józef Piłsudski (d. 1935) was naturally far from Marxist ideology, but his person is included in the lineage of social democracy only because of the early period of his life.

Does the elimination of the category of Marxist, characteristic of the ideological declaration of the SDRP, mean a total renouncement of this ideology? The positive answer to this question is difficult because of some historical reminiscences: the ideological origin of social democracy derives to some extent from Marxism although in Western Europe there occurred later a departure from this trend. More alarming is the personal reference, mentioned above, since most of these activists were in one way or another connected with Marxism. There may therefore appear some doubts: does the absence of philosophical-social categories of Marxism mean their definitive renouncement? One should probably wait with an answer to this question until the declared intentions are authenticated by pragmatic abandonment of the praxis witnessed by the period of over forty years of the states governed by Marxists.

The ideological transformation of the Marxism-inspired PZPR into the republican SDRP is very striking. Of course, and ideological conversion of a person is always possible, but is the ideological and world view conversion of millions of people equally probable? And the PZPR had as many members. There may arise a suspicion that the connection of the former party with communism and Marxism was merely a matter of expediency ("pragmatism"). Is there no similarity in the departure of the SDRP from Marxism? After all, millions of people do not suddenly give up the ideals professed and practiced so far. Marxism was considered by them "a scientific worldview," a philosophical conception of the world and of the human being, a revolutionary method of social action, a justification of the method of coercion in social-political life. All this has now been rejected by the nations of East-Central Europe. It is understandable that the discredited ideology can no longer provide a doctrinal-ideological element of social democracy. The departure from Marxism-Leninism
and communism has therefore been compelled by the societies in this part of the world. Losing "the lay arm" of the state-administrative apparatus, the communist parties depart from the scene as arbitrary decision-makers in social and cultural life.

This fact opens new perspectives for Christianity in Eastern and Central Europe. Its situation in Poland was not too bad, relatively speaking, since in other countries of the communist bloc it was much worse. At any rate, in Poland Christianity, too, acquires a chance to influence the model of social life in the country through its social teaching.

Does Marxism already belong to history? There are still some sanctuaries of Leninist-Stalinist Marxism in Albania, China, and Cuba. A strong Marxist inspiration is evident in the extreme trend of the theology of liberation and revolution, although there, too, the distinction of the ideology of historical materialism will probably compel far-reaching corrections. The Institutes of Marxism-Leninism, still existing in Poland, are now being transformed into institutes of general philosophy, but their staff remains essentially the same. The high school curriculum still formally contains a course in the science about religion whose methodology is based on Marxist ideology. In Polish universities, philosophy is taught by many scholars who previously unequivocally affirmed their allegiance to Marxism. In the past, Polish Marxist philosophy was connected with the activities of the PZPR and, in a sense, constituted the party's intellectual weapon. The disappearance of the party patronage will certainly change the climate of philosophical life in Poland, though it is quite likely that there will still remain a group of philosophers of Marxist inspiration. Yet, it will no longer be an orthodox-integral Marxism but rather a selective variety of Marxism. Most probably, some elements of the original ethos, such as social justice and appreciation of human labor, will be retained from Marxist philosophy.

During the meetings of Polish Christians and Marxists, the former proposed a separation of Marxism and atheism, renouncement of the theory of dictatorship, class war, and others. The other side usually responded to that with an objection that the conception would undermine the ideological principles of Marxism. It now turns out that life itself has surpassed the scope of the proposed changes. The Social-Democracy of the Republic of Poland renounces--at least in its declarations--not only atheism, but also Marxism. Nevertheless, Marxism constitutes a part of modern philosophy, and in this perspective, it remains a necessity to know something about it.