
*by Katarzyna Zawadzka*

The author is a professor of the University of Warsaw, political scientist and graduate of the Journalism and Political Science Faculty of University of Warsaw. The author’s works published so far are focused on forming democratic systems in countries of Central Europe and the Balkans, functioning of the European political parties as well as on the system of local authorities in Poland and Europe. The reviewed book has been issued in 2014 and refers to the hitherto research carried out by the author. The author, perceiving social democratic parties as a indissoluble component of the political scene, saw the need to carry out the study focusing on the area of Central and Eastern Europe. The elaboration discusses the functioning of the social democratic groups after 1989, focusing on seven countries. These are: Bulgaria, The Czech Republic, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia and Hungary. The author pointed features common to each of these countries as the key selection criteria. These included: over forty-year period of communist rule, unstable period of democratic governance and launched at the end of the 1980s and 1990s time of changes towards liberal democracy and market system. As shown by the author himself, the subject of analysis constitutes internal transformations of communist parties in the area of Central and Eastern Europe.

The book consists of the introduction and five parts. Tables indicating the election results of social-democratic parties of Central and Eastern European countries in the years 1990–2013 have been attached as the annex. The first political science monograph in Poland was fully devoted to the analysis of the formation and functioning of the social democratic group of Central and Eastern Europe (Antoszewski, 2005, p. 23; Antoszewski et al., 2003, p.63).

The elaboration includes both Polish and foreign literature; acts among which are constitutions of the analyzed countries

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(except the constitution of the Republic of Poland) and platform documents of political parties. Among scientific elaborations, the largest base constitutes understandably political science sources. Among a wide bibliography one will find sociological works. There are also important historical writings, such as *Europe. A History*, Norman Davies. The revelation of fate of social democratic groups, indicating both personal connotations related to individual politicians and historical background as well as democratic breakthrough, might be recognized as the author’s scientific intention. An interesting aspect, in the political and historical context, is the author’s demonstration of examples of trials of bringing so called historical parties to legal life proscribed during the introduction of the communist dictatorship.

The layout of the book is clear. The first part, entitled the Radical transformations in post-communist parties, opens Hungarian Socialist Party (MSzP). One may find there such issues as: the process of internal reforms in Hungary, Gorbachev effect and the „Solidarity” effect, the turning point in the party leadership, the personnel comebacks, or the negotiations at the „triangular table”. The author also presents research on electoral preferences since 1991, showing the systematic impairment of social support for the of that time centre-right governmental coalition and the upward trend for the socialists. Articulated MSzP’s aspirations aiming at the neighborhood cooperation and target accession in the European Union are also mentioned. The second subchapter refers to changes in left – wing post-communist Slovakia. The author shows Slovak left – wing as an example of the fragmentation till 2005 when the left-wing groups have reached a stage of consolidation. The process of shaping the Slovak Democratic Left-wing Party (Partia Lewicy Demokratycznej) and political scene in Slovakia in general are portrayed as well. Mistakes and omissions, that affected and resulted in weakening the influence of the left-wing in the course of the election to the National Council, were pointed as well. The third subchapter centres its main focus around post-communist transformations in Slovenia including coalition named United List of Social Democrats (ZLSD), and the creation of a new party under the same name. The political manifest specified ZLSD as *a party of agreement between the diverse social interests* (Wojnicki, 2014, p.40). The author identifies ZLSD with the successful transformation of the post-communist grouping into the party of a social democratic type.

The second chapter, entitled Social Democratic Parties in Poland, is divided into six parts, each of which is a subject concerning different political group. The first part is dedicated to the Social Democracy of the Republic of Poland (SdRP), and, inter alia, the process of merging of the party into the democratic system. Issues related to carried out questionnaires inside
PZPR, proposals for the personnel reshuffle and circumstances accompanying turning the party into a new left-wing group based on the values of democratic socialism, are described in this chapter (Wojnicki, 2014, p.46). The second part raises an important aspect of the formation of a new party instead of converting the hitherto existing SdRP. The mentioned aspect refers to the reasons for the Democratic Left Alliance (SLD) success of the time – that relied on the combination of the moderate social democratic rhetoric with the openness to liberal values and vulnerability on teaching of the Church (Wojnicki, 2014, p.58). The author pointed out, highlighted by the coalition SLD-UP, need to introduce efficient, effective, fair and stable rule as an another attempt to build a democratic country. The author focused his attention on the processes of turbulence in the party and decreasing social support for the SLD and center-left coalition of the Left-Wing and Democrats, as well as on political transfers of Robert Biedroń and Wanda Nowicka. One may find here an interesting overview of the election campaigns and „titbits ” in the form of strategic errors or unfortunate moves. The third part concerns the Social Democratic Union of the Republic of Poland. It is adequately short to the history of the Left-wing group created during the last convention of PZPR. The fourth part refers to another initiative aiming at forming the social democratic party in Poland, i.e. the Labor Union (Unia Pracy), that would be in line with tradition of social democratic parties in Western Europe. The author presents platform elements of the party, depicting itself as a left-wing alternative to SLD, as well as the party’s dilemmas associated with joining the centre and left-wing coalition. The fifth part shows another attempt to establish alternative to the SLD social democratic party. It refers to successes and failures of Polish Social Democracy, as well as attempts to find a place for SdPl on the political scene. The substantial value of the monograph is significantly affected by able permeation of personal factors dividing particular parties and those associated with the external environment. The sixth and the last but not least part refers to unsuccessful reactivation of the Polish Socialist Party (Polska Partia Socjalistyczna). The author presents two strategies which emerged before the parliamentary elections in 1991. The first strategy assumed the party to be a part of the centre-left structure inclusive of not only the socialist milieu. The second strategy concerned the establishment of the clear-cut opposition party. An interesting aspect concerning the difficulties about
defining socialist ideology in the end of the 80s of the 20th century appears in this chapter.

An example of a successful reactivation, that is the case of social democracy in the Czech Republic, is adduced in the third chapter. It is precisely the third chapter in which the historical background is dated back at the latest – until the 19th century.

In the fourth chapter the author has decided to present a social democratic parties from Bulgaria, Romania, Hungary and Slovakia as examples of unsuccessful restoration of historical parties. He describes the political breakthrough in Bulgaria and the problems of the central and left coalition. The processes of splits, unification and coalition of the groups in Romania are also the subjects of the author’s concern. The subchapter regarding Hungary is a description of the unification of left-wing power. The fourth subchapter contains information about the attempt to arise reactivated Czechoslovak Social Democracy on the political scene. The author also pays attention to the formed in the mid-1990s of the 20th century bipolar model of the political scene.

The last but not least chapter is devoted to gradual changes in particular post-communist parties. The author adduces two examples, the Bulgarian Socialist Party and Social Democratic Party in Romania. The evolutionary changes concerned in terms of the unsuccessful historical parties are mentioned in the chapter. The author points out the reorientation of the existing strategy, the scope of the changes in some of the post-communist groups or the role of social-democratic parties stemming from particular governing parties.

The author meaningfully and in an interesting manner discusses the issue of the social-democratic parties. The publication can become a valuable book for a wide range of customers, including researchers and students. The monograph presents numerous opinions and figures which demonstrate that the author has made important synthesis on the basis of the analyzed genesis, operation and changes in particular social democratic parties. The book is worth attention and will definitely enrich the Polish publishing market with a written piece not widely analyzed before.

**BIBLIOGRAPHY**


