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JANUS-FACE OF THE FAMILY 500 PLUS PROGRAMME

JANUSOWE OBlicze PROGRAMU 500 PLUS

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Summary: The aim of this article is to look from two angles on the ambiguous political and social The Family 500 Plus Programme. The programme will be analysed on the one hand as an opportunity for the realization of the principle of social justice and the real limitation of the poverty and social exclusion in Poland, which is partly due to the specific model and practice of socio-economic transformation in Poland after 1989. On the other hand, the redistributive nature of the program leads to question whether in the Polish social, cultural and economic realities can it be used to petrify the clientele relations between the ruling and large segments of society. The short duration of the programme and the lack of even one elections after it began make it impossible to draw far too many conclusions as to the risks posed by the introduction of the programme.

Keywords: The Family 500 Plus Programme, social justice, clientelism.

Streszczenie: Celem artykułu jest spojrzenie na program 500 Plus z dwóch stron. Z jednej przeanalizowano program jako sposób realizacji zasady sprawiedliwości społecznej i rzeczywistego zmniejszenia ubóstwa i społecznego wykluczenia, co było częściowo rezultatem transformacji społeczno-gospodarczej po 1989 r. Z drugiej strony redystrybucyjny charakter programu skłania do pytania, czy w społecznej, kulturowej i gospodarczej rzeczywistości program może utrwalić klientelistyczne relacje między rządzącymi a dużą częścią społeczeństwa. Krótki czas trwania programu i brak wyborów po jego wprowadzeniu nie pozwalają na wysuwanie wniosków o ryzyku jego wprowadzenia.

Słowa kluczowe: program 500 Plus, sprawiedliwość społeczna, klientelizm.

1. Introduction

The subject of the study is a political analysis of the causes of the implementation of The Family 500 Plus Programme and its emerging effects as a new but also controversial institution of social and pro-life policy (pronatalistic) in Poland since April 2016. The initial assumption is a sense of ambivalence about the causes and

formulas of The Family 500 Plus Programme. Noticing the positive effects of the programme in the social sphere (limiting the areas of poverty and economic and social exclusion within a large part of society), and the instrumental and paternalistic reasons for its implementation in the sphere of political relations cannot be overlooked. In this regard, the purpose of the study will be to analyse the positive and negative aspects of The Family 500 Plus Programme, which are dealt with in the context of political ideas and values such as freedom, equality and social justice. At the same time, the article points out that the way in which The Family 500 Plus Programme was introduced and constructed can consolidate or even enhance the negative forms of socio-political relations in our political system.

Due to the relatively short duration of the programme and the specificity of the researched phenomena, qualitative and speculative research methods will be used, although because there are also statistical data related to the effects of the Programme, quantitative data will also be included in the article. However, the basic research method is an intuitive one, which allows us to consider conjectures and problems in the context of notions used to conceptualize the research problem [Zieliński 2012, p. 49].

2. The Family 500 Plus Programme as a form of implementation of social justice

The concept of justice with the adjective “social” is used because it involves the distribution of social wellbeing, and not dispositions and sanctions (penalties) [Heywood 2009, p. 283]. Social justice serves a morally justified distribution of goods in society (such as wages, profits, housing, medical care, social benefits). At the state level this means reducing too much inequality in income between individuals and social groups.

Social justice signifies the fulfilment of the postulate of distributional equality formulated in Catholic social teaching, expressed in the *Rerum novarum* encyclical of Pope Leo XIII from 1891 and developed in the Christian Democratic doctrine and adopted by the Social Democrats [Świątkowski 2015, pp. 230, 231]. The road to equality and social justice leads through:

1. redistribution of part of the wealth accumulated by the rich,
2. distribution of the maintenance cost of the state to various social categories in proportion to their resources (including inherited) and current earnings,
3. equalization – through state interventionism – of the chances of start in life, regardless of the family of origin and position occupied by it in the social structure [Kubiak 2009, p. 288].

The forms of redistribution within the various political systems of the state, as part of various models of social policy, boil down to:

- redistribution (“bachelor tax”),
- vertical redistribution (aid to families with lower incomes),

- partial takeover by the state (society) of the cost of living, maintaining and raising the offspring,
- contribution to the equalization of living standards between parents with offspring and no children.

This is a controversial and relative notion, both from the social and scientific point of view [Miller 1976], because there are different ways of conceptualizing the idea of social justice. On the one hand, the concept of social justice has been formulated according to the requirements of the hierarchy of needs by A. Maslow (physiological needs –hunger, sleep, sex, security, belongingness and love, self-esteem and the need for self-reliance at the top). Therefore, it is immoral that anywhere in the world people are hungry, thirsty, homeless, sick, because each individual is a person with inherent human dignity.

On the other hand, however, there is a concept of justice based on rights that have been shaped by the sharp opposition to the doctrine of the welfare state and the interventionism in the sphere of the distribution of goods. According to this concept, the basis of “rights” is hard work, skills and talents. R. Nozick [1999] formulated three principles for the acquisition of goods:

- acquisition of wealth in a fair way (lawful, without harm to others);
- transfer of wealth from one responsible person to another;
- if the wealth has been purchased or transferred in an unacceptable way, it must be mended.

On the basis of conservative thought, there is a concept of justice, according to the needs, in which a person who commits a crime deserves a fair punishment. Social inequality, on the other hand, is the result of the nature of order that is “righteous”. Also, H. Spencer has translated Darwin’s ideas into people’s society, pointing out that individuals are naturally polarized because of their abilities and skills which determine their lives and survival of the strongest. So the division of wealth reflects “the actions of nature” and the intervention of man does not make sense, even if it means tolerating hunger, poverty and other forms of suffering. Today, however, we have more technological opportunities to solve the problems of poverty, hunger, diseases.

In Poland, after the political transformation in 1989, a liberal model of social policy was introduced, referring to the concept of justice based on rights or merits rather than social justice. New provisions adopted at the beginning of the transformation in the Social Assistance Act [Ustawa z 29 listopada 1990] provided their solutions primarily “to enable people and families to overcome difficult life situations [...], using their own means, entitlements”. Social assistance should, as far as possible, lead to the empowerment of individuals and families as well as their integration with the environment. According to this new approach, the best place to meet human needs was to be the free market [Zalewski 2005]. A category of discretion was introduced in the area of social assistance: “the needs of the person and family benefitting from

social assistance should be taken into account if they correspond to the objectives and possibilities of social assistance” [Ustawa z 12 marca 2004].

Although successive political parties have reformed their social policies in line with their ideological views, it was common to use budget cuts, reduce social protection, and decentralize social and pro-social responsibility to local government. Reducing allowances, cutting social benefits, and a flexible labour market were to impose a new labour discipline, “forcing people to work harder and harder for less money, with minimal job and social security” [Hardy 2010].

As a result, marginalization and social exclusion have become a secondary problem of social policy resulting with unemployment, poverty, addiction, disability. Welfare and social assistance and other institutions of social protection were seen as direct means (“fish”) to deal with the problem of social exclusion. On the other hand, active social policy (“fishing rod”) was to become a real answer to the inadequacies of traditional forms of social empowerment. Counteracting marginalization and social exclusion has been undertaken for the protection of human rights (human dignity) and the reduction of negative effects on social development. However, it draws attention to the small subjective scope of active social policy in Poland due to small investments in active labour market policy or effective social assistance, while maintaining a large scale of transfers of funds to economically inactive persons.

Therefore, a real remedy for the inadequacy of the social security system was The Family 500 Plus Programme which was adopted as an instrument of pro-family policy (pronatalistic), but two years after its entry into force, its social function for the implementation of the constitutional principle of social justice was pointed out. Among the advantages of the programme are the following factors:

1. Real action limiting social exclusion for people with low income.
2. No dependency on any of the conditions and duties like in the case of other social programmes.
3. Strengthening the least profitable employees, especially women.
4. Increase in domestic demand (advantage, but also fault according to the economists).
5. The rising position of women in the labour market [Woś 2017].
6. Raising the minimum wage accompanying the programme.

At the same time the real and potential defects of the programme can be pointed:

1. A model that discourages innovation and creativity in the labour market and entrepreneurship,
2. Reduced funding opportunities for social infrastructure and increases in the budgetary sphere,
3. Potential effect in the future excludes the “push” from the labour market of people receiving low wages (no pension).
4. Lowered retirement age – entry to common low citizen pensions.

3. The Family 500 Plus Programme in the light of the phenomenon of political clientelism

From the above analysis of the approach to social policy in Poland after 1989, it is clear that in the system of the Third Republic of Poland, the elements of social justice existing in the Polish People's Republic were largely removed. This was partly due to ideological reasons, and partly because of limited possibilities in this area and the need to pay benefits for the unemployed for several months. However, in a large part of the society a claim and expectation for state care was present, and the lack of such care resulted in discouraging of the liberal political elites. Thus, according to J. Skowron [2011], the dissatisfied citizens are "big political capital" which can be used and exploited by a political party that will choose a broad redistribution of income. The political force that took advantage of the attachment to the myth of social justice was, thanks to 2015 parliamentary elections, Law and Justice (PIS). However, this may lead to the consolidation of the clientelistic relationships existing between the ruling and large groups of their electorate.

The essence of clientelism is personalized and graded and the hierarchical relationship of exchange between entities is unequal in hierarchy and importance, as well as in terms of resources held, connected with lasting bonds of mutual duty and responsibility [Hopkin 2006]. Clientelism is one of the strategies of aggregating and incorporating interests into the processes of governance by means of personal relationships and/or networks of relationships between the patron(s) (politician, decision maker, clerk, political party) and client(s) (individuals and socio-professional groups). Clientelism is a representation of politicians (decision makers) attention for certain interest groups (social and professional groups) in return for political support (in elections and in power). Clientelism is most often seen as a method of mobilizing electoral support, which offers various kinds of material goods in return for electoral support [Roniger 2004].

A specific type of clientelism is the bureaucratic clientelism. It occurs when the ruling party becomes a collective patron around which a network of clientele is formed, based on the possibilities of control over the bureaucratic apparatus. Group clientelism may also be based on the fact that a particular interest group will establish a relationship of exchange with the individuals and entities in power (political parties and representatives of the ruling groups, high officials). The dependency groups also include social organizations that are not treated in partnership by the organs of political power and administration at both national and local level, which forces them to enter into a clientele relationship in order to participate in decision-making and distributed funds from national and EU reserves. Local level can only be more widespread and based on personal, hierarchical relationships between patrons and clients who have even more limited resources. In addition, at local level there are even less independent control institutions (media, NGOs).

4. The reasons for clientelism in the field of politics

In poorer societies, clientelistic relationships are becoming more frequent, where there is often a step towards institutionalization of politics [Brusco, Nazareno, Stoker 2002]. Clientelism also appears where the state and the market come from the outside (southern Italy), and at the same time the phenomenon of clientelism can also adapt to the modern society and coexist with modern forms of mediation and representation, without hindering economic development and politics (at least in the short term) (e.g. Italy, Japan).

As other researchers point out, the poorer citizens do not look much to the future, but rely on quick and direct awards from politicians [Kitschelt 2000]. Therefore, appealing and referring to direct, clientelistic exchange will bring faster political success than more abstract and far-reaching political proposals. Poor people prefer to have the proverbial “bird in hand” in the form of direct transfers of a redistributive nature. Moreover, it is also pointed out that not poverty per se, but income inequality favours clientelism [Hicken 2007]. Therefore, if it turns out that these social transfers will burden the growing middle class in favour of lower social class, a form of resistance can occur. But in Poland the security is in the universality of The Family 500 Plus Programme (rather, there are allegations that it is unfair, for some categories of poor, e.g. single mothers).

S. Piattoni notes that clientelism allows people to easily and affordably meet their interests and needs through a “vote for benefits” system. The term ‘public interest’ is a kind of fiction that allows for bypassing the interests of less influential groups of society during the political process [Piattoni 2001]. In turn, institutionalized forms of articulation of social and economic interests (lobbying, corporatism) through interest groups and political parties require the involvement of time and money without guarantee that the interests of individuals and of certain social groups will be sufficiently taken into account in the political process [Olson 2012].

5. Conclusions

Equality and justice are, in addition to freedom and solidarity (fraternity), the standard of modern human rights. The practical implementation of the principle of social justice also serves for application of the idea of positive liberty, as the state helps individuals expand their freedom and their ability to free themselves from unemployment, poverty, homelessness, illness or ignorance (education obligation). Satisfaction of basic needs enables a worthy existence to enable full and subjective participation in society [Doyal, Gough 1991]. In this context, the doctrine of the welfare state is justified if it means an effective power that enables citizens to self-fulfilment and autonomy and freedom [Heywood 2009, p. 251]. One cannot forget, however, that apart from distributional justice, based on political and hierarchical

distribution mechanisms, there should also be room for meritocratic justice based on market mechanisms (rivalry). If political dominance prevails, it testifies about the supremacy of clientelism in predominant groups of society. Socio-cultural factors, such as low level of social trust, favour this attitude. Meanwhile, the quality of society and democracy is not based on the state's constitution, but on the quality of social capital and the ability of the government to cooperate with institutions of civil society [Kaminski 2014]. Poland is still an "immature democracy", characterized by weak civil society, low political culture and illusory political domination of society. A hierarchical division into the etatistic and paternalistic power is present, so authority should be a "good host" and a passive society is limited to participation in the election of the current one, which finally realizes L. Miller's promise of "pie in the sky". At the same time, a genuine tender for resources takes place between the ruling and strong interest groups that have a real impact on the central and local authorities.

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