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## CHAPTER ONE



# Poland's Ex-Communists: From Pariahs to Establishment Players

*Jane Leftwich Curry*

The Polish United Workers' Party (Polska Zjednoczona Partia Robotnicza [PZPR]) suffered what seemed to be a terminal blow in 1989. In elections rigged so that the communists and their old allies were guaranteed 65 percent of the seats in the main house of parliament, the communists did so badly that their old allies deserted them. After what appeared to be a total defeat, all the communist reformers could do was turn the government over to the men and women of Solidarity they had interned and harassed for more than a decade. Then they had to disband themselves and form a new party to inherit the tattered remains of their mantle and resources. Less than four years after what looked like a complete rejection, in the 1993 free parliamentary elections, the successor party to the PZPR, the Social Democrats of Poland (Socjaldemokracja Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej [SdRP]), and its coalition, the Democratic Left Alliance (Sojusz Lewicy Demokratycznej [SLD]), did well enough to dominate the parliament and form a government. Two years later, in 1995, the leader of the SdRP and its coalition's presidential candidate, Aleksander Kwaśniewski (a junior member of that last communist government), soundly defeated the Solidarity leader and incumbent president, Lech Wałęsa. By 1999, when the coalition turned itself into a party, the SLD was, by far, both the most popular and the most stable party in democratic Poland. As a result, it dominated the parliamentary elections of 2001, leaving Solidarity's old parties so fragmented that they did not get enough of the votes to get seats. In the process, it raised the population's hopes that it could solve Poland's economic problems and bring the same economic boom Poles remembered from 1993 to 1997.

From ignominious defeat to what seemed to be ever-increasing popularity, the social democrats had transformed themselves, their ideology, and their public image. They went from an unpopular ruling communist party to a successful player in democratic and capitalist Poland. As their continued gains at all levels have proved, this was not an accident. It reflected the fact that the “new” successor party was the party that, in form if not in ideology, did what appealed to voters. Its successes haunted the other parties of Poland—triggering attempts at political revenge that ended up distorting post-communist Poland’s politics and its ideological spectrum.

This is the story of how the social democrats transformed themselves from the hammer and sickle of Marx and Lenin (however much it had been kept in the background during the waning years of communism) to a party symbolized by a single red rose and, finally, by a red and white S (a modernist version of the symbol of its decades-old opponent, the independent trade-union movement, Solidarity). It is a critical tale of democratic transformation and also a cautionary tale for those who thought they understood what communism was all about. In the end, though, it is a demonstration of how lessons of a rejected past and the desire to be accepted by other politicians can play a major role in determining how a party transforms.

The story begins with the outpouring of opposition to the PZPR that showed up in the partially free elections of 1989. The redesign and return of the former communists to power in Polish politics began as a reaction to the shock of this defeat and the bitterness generated among new politicians by the communists’ continued presence in the government bureaucracy and, as a minority, in the parliament. They were defeated in 1989 but not totally vanquished. So, they were easy to blame for Poland’s problems. The story then moves from the attempts to build on the rubble and resources of the once ruling communist party to the founding of the Social Democratic Party of Poland and the formation of an electoral coalition that tied together the SdRP, the old government trade union (Ogólnopolskie Porozumienie Związków Zawodowych/All Poland Trade Union Coalition [OPZZ]), and an odd assortment of small parties and interest groups. Then, in 1999, it ends when the SdRP disbanded itself, and the SLD coalition turned into a sleek new party designed to avoid the pitfalls of the old coalition, to leave the taint of “communism” behind, and to reclaim national leadership in the 2001 parliamentary elections.

## The Prelude

Poland’s communist party, the Polish United Workers’ Party, was always a “special case,” not just when it negotiated itself out of power but throughout

its history. It simply never was as "in control" as were communist parties elsewhere in the Soviet bloc. Even before de-Stalinization, communism in Poland repressed the Catholic Church and internal party dissidents less than in other Soviet-bloc systems. Reformists from within and popular revolts from without kept the party unstable for most of its forty-five years of rule.

After the workers' strikes in Poznań and the liberalization of the "Polish October" that followed in 1956, the "Polish Road to Socialism" went in the direction of private farming, more private industry and trade than anywhere else but Yugoslavia, and relative autonomy for the Catholic Church to teach religion and play a real role in political decisions. Over all this was an ideological veneer that did little to hide the party's own cynicism and reformist impulses.

With the Poznań workers' demonstrations and the Polish October of 1956, Poland and its communist party began a never-ending cycle of popular upheavals and party reactions. The worker demonstrations and strikes of 1956, 1970, and 1976 all resulted in repression and then at least momentary compromises with workers' demands. In the process, Poland opened up more and more to the West. In the 1970s, this openness involved not just scholarly and intellectual exchanges and tourism but also a policy of improving the economy by opening up for imports and exports from the West. The intellectual demonstrations in 1968, on the other hand, had resulted in repression and then a purging of the party and an anti-Semitic purge of both party and government.<sup>1</sup>

Finally, the shipyard workers' strikes in August 1980 resulted in the formation of "Solidarity," the first independent and legal trade-union movement in Eastern Europe since before World War II. By this time, though, Poland's economy was teetering, and the pattern of protest, repression, and compromise had worn down the party. Not only were Poland's party leaders ready to negotiate with the Solidarity strikers, but they also were ready to allow, for fifteen months, Solidarity to be a major actor in Polish politics. During this time, Solidarity had a membership of more than one-third of the Polish population. There was a virtually free press, with more open discussions in the establishment press and a plethora of Solidarity papers printed independently; there was also an upheaval in the PZPR that led to an "Extraordinary Party Congress" where old leaders were voted out.

After fifteen months of internal protest and Soviet pressure, the Polish leadership under Wojciech Jaruzelski declared martial law on December 13, 1981, interning Solidarity's leaders, intellectual critics of the regime, and the leaders of the PZPR from the 1970s.<sup>2</sup> Martial law essentially froze political change for the first half of the 1980s and left the society bitterly

split and those party members who did not leave the PZPR in protest isolated.<sup>3</sup> By the end of the 1980s, it was clear to both the party leaders and most of the old Solidarity leadership that the stalemate could not continue. The informal contacts between the establishment and the opposition that had gone on in the 1980s were turned into a public roundtable in 1989 that initially was aimed at setting up a new system whereby Solidarity would be included but not “in power” and the two sides could work toward opening up the system. Out of this came accords that were to protect workers’ interests, allow Solidarity to be a legal player in politics, open up the press, lead to partially free elections for the legislature (Sejm), and change the system so that there was a freely elected second house, the Senate, and a president who was to be elected by the two houses. Six weeks after the accords were signed, the old Soviet bloc’s first even partially free elections were held.

These elections, designed to begin a limited “power sharing” with the opposition, actually ended in a shocking defeat for the communists. The election had been planned so that the communists and their allies would be guaranteed 65 percent of the seats in the Sejm (the lower house of parliament) and would compete against nonparty candidates only for seats in the newly organized upper house, the Senate. In the first round of the election, virtually none of the “party” candidates won a majority. Even the few who “won” a majority in this round did not win a traditional victory: the party had required only twenty-five signatures for a candidate to get a place on its ballots. Most candidates campaigned with as little mention of their party connection as possible. For those who had to run in a second round, victory was often a result of Solidarity intervening to urge voters to vote again and to vote for a specific “regime” candidate as the best of a bad lot. In simultaneous elections for the one hundred Senate seats, the communist candidates lost all but one seat. Finally, in what was to be a “guaranteed” election for Communist Party leaders running on the National List with no opposition, most voters crossed off all or most of the candidates’ names. Only the two listed at the bottom of the list (where, presumably, single Xs over the whole list simply did not reach) got enough votes to win. The results were such a debacle for the regime that the Peasant Party and Democratic Party, loyal to the Communist Party through four decades of communist rule, bolted from this “sinking ship.” They went into a coalition with the victorious Solidarity opposition, leaving communist reformers with too little support to form a governing coalition.

Solidarity, at the same time, shifted from being a trade union to being a governing party. In that form, the former trade union imposed “shock ther-

apy” economic reforms that brought hardships to most Poles and left many Solidarity supporters feeling betrayed by their national leaders. Among the men and women who had believed the roundtable promises that social welfare would be protected in Poland, there was a real desire to find advocates for the return and preservation of social welfare.

In dealing with the past, the first Solidarity government advocated “drawing a thick line” between the past and the present. But, less than six months after they had turned over power, Communist Party members and leaders found themselves and the communist past subject to public criticism and attacks on “the party” and its rule. To these criticisms, the party leadership and its Sejm delegation had no real response. Most Sejm deputies had run against their ties to the party. Once elected, deputies who had been in the party were treated as pariahs by other deputies. The party’s reformist leaders, who would have led them, were out of power. They had, essentially, been ousted in what seemed a full-scale rejection of the national party list.

Furthermore, the party had no agreed-on direction. There was no clear party agenda for the election. After all, regime candidates ran against each other, not against the opposition’s candidates. Each candidate ran his own campaign, promoting himself against opponents who were also from the PZPR. What the PZPR platform officially promised was that the system would be “more democratic.” In the campaign, the party simply identified itself as “realizing the ideals of the working class as the party of working people which had and was going to have no other program than serving the nation.”<sup>4</sup>

The shock of Solidarity’s victory was so overwhelming that it swept PZPR deputies into joining Solidarity’s full-scale assault on the old system. Party deputies set aside many of the promises of the roundtable. The political changes they supported went much further to diminish communist power than anyone had expected. As a result, those elected as PZPR representatives were left without constituencies. At the local level, the party essentially crumbled. Members who had joined the party to get ahead professionally were no longer interested in it because it now hurt rather than helped their careers. Those who had supported the old system were alienated by PZPR deputies’ votes for the Balcerowicz Plan of economic shock therapy and also for political reforms made to end the communist system. By the end of the year, the PZPR group in the Sejm had essentially dissolved into small groups that eschewed any direct identification with the communist party: a “military group,” the “unaffiliated deputies group,” a “democratic left group,” and a “socialist group.”<sup>5</sup>

The men who had been the party’s leaders either left politics or committed themselves, in fall 1989, to establishing a new political party that could

make use of the resources the party still had. Working from the top, these leaders called an extraordinary congress to dissolve the party and to form a new one. By design, it was to distance itself from the past and focus on social democratic goals. These, they hoped, would draw not only former Communist Party members but also new supporters. Even party intellectuals did little real ideological rethinking as to “What next?” The rethinking that did happen was done in spontaneous groups formed in summer 1989, at universities in Warsaw and Kraków. They concluded then that the old party was finished but went no further.<sup>6</sup>

Many party bureaucrats had seen the “writing on the wall” even before the election debacle. Those with marketable skills and connections had been taking other positions for years. In moving from party posts, they often camouflaged their party past. The rest of them were trapped. Their situations were so difficult, even before communism had been defeated, that the PZPR Organizational Department published a book in 1988 touting party bureaucrats’ training and skills as managers and specialists. At the same time, PZPR leaders quietly shifted money to other accounts and to investments in various enterprises that were to cover the unemployment and retirement for those party bureaucrats who could not find employment after the party dissolved.

In 1989, when the first “noncommunist” government since World War II was formed, the communists got three key cabinet posts (the Ministries of Interior, Defense, and Transportation). Their appointments, like Wojciech Jaruzelski’s election by a bare majority of the parliament to the presidency, were justified as something the Soviet Union required in order to accept Poland’s transformation out of communist rule. Without the support of a panoply of party ministers and top administrators, the government bureaucrats who had gotten their positions in ministries through the communist-era nomenklatura system of appointment were essentially *persona non grata*. Most were kept in their positions because they had the expertise the new government needed and because there were few others who wanted to join the government’s bureaucracies. The new Solidarity ministers made it clear that these men and women of the nomenklatura were neither trusted nor needed. So the old bureaucrats, who knew how the system worked, laid low to avoid drawing attention to themselves.

It was the party loyalists in the local party bodies who felt the attacks first. Local party members were scoffed at or assaulted. Many party headquarters were robbed or attacked. Newspapers were suddenly filled with criticism of “the party.” According to their own reports, most members either wanted to forget they had ever been in the party or were outraged their lead-

ers had totally deserted them. Some local organizations tried to get credibility by “sharing their wealth”—their extra telephones, faxes, and mimeograph machines—with local schools, hospitals, and youth centers.<sup>7</sup> Many, among the party faithful, were angry with their old leaders for handing over power to the “Solidarity” enemy without protecting them. They also felt ignored by “their” Sejm deputies who were so focused on being reformers, surviving the defeat of their old party, and caught up in activity in the capital that they did not come back to their constituencies. Even their party membership was an embarrassment. To many, all it seemed to do was trigger attacks. At the same time, it was clear to the old party members that they were unwelcome anywhere else.

By January 1990, the system and the party had reached the point of no return. Even though Sejm deputies elected on the PZPR list had voted for all the new government’s reforms, the public blame for just about everything was placed on “the party.” Attacks and revelations about its “evil” past became a staple of the new media, and some Solidarity politicians went further. Legislation was passed allowing PZPR assets to be investigated and then seized (if not directly traceable to party members’ dues and collections). Accounting commissions were set up to reclaim the state assets shifted to Communist Party coffers over the years. So, for instance, the giant press concern the party had controlled, R.S.W. Prasa, had its assets broken up, sold, or given to private publishers. This was the beginning of the PZPR’s loss of all but a limited number of its buildings and accounts. Some in the new regime went further. They called for following the Czech and East German pattern of “decommunization” by removing from public positions all party officials and others who had held positions in party bodies as well as those who had worked for the secret police. All this heightened the fear and powerlessness of local party officials and people from the party.

As these attacks escalated, the PZPR announced and held what was presented, from the start, as its final congress. The groundwork had been laid by top national leaders of the PZPR to establish a successor party, which would represent “social democratic goals” but not reject the party’s remaining assets or its past. Another, smaller group of leaders and most of the Sejm deputies from the PZPR ticket had already taken a more radical position. They withdrew from the PZPR and created the Polish Social Democratic Union (*Polska Unia Socjaldemokratyczne* [PUS]) in fall 1989 before the final party congress was even held. Their new party advocated the establishment of a social welfare state but separated itself totally from the “ill-gotten gains” of the PZPR.<sup>8</sup> It was led by Tadeusz Fiszbach, the former Gdańsk Party leader who had become close to the Solidarity leaders in the early 1980s. In the ensuing fight



over what to establish and how, PUS stayed away from all that was tied to the PZPR. It ignored local party organizations. At the same time, the old top party leaders who wanted to protect the PZPR's legacy made their first forays back to local party meetings and tried to get commitments for support for the new party from people elected as delegates to the national congress.

When the congress opened in January 1990, there was a day of short speeches about the party's reformist past,<sup>9</sup> a playing out of old party rituals, a formal vote to disband the PZPR, and an announcement that delegates should adjourn to one of two adjoining rooms, either to the first session of the Social Democratic Party of the Polish Republic or to the session of the Polish Union of Socialists. The other option many party congress delegates took was simply to walk out the door and join nothing.<sup>10</sup>

In the end, the SdRP emerged as an awkward coalition of PZPR reformist leaders, a minority of the PZPR parliamentary deputies elected in 1989, and the local party *aktiv* who had nowhere else to go. There was no common ideology. The old party leaders essentially organized this transition and left the scene (or were simply ignored). The deputies to the Sejm who had voted for the economic reforms and the removal of the Communist Party from power were in a quandary. They had made their statement against the old Communist Party but then were welcomed into none of the new parties. So their only option was to join the SdRP. Local activists who joined the SdRP were, most often, conservatives opposed to the reforms supported by the PZPR deputies. But, again, if they wanted to belong to something, the SdRP and PUS were the only parties that would accept them. PUS, though, openly decried the party's heritage, wealth, and power, so it was not as safe a haven.

What the SdRP had going for it was an infrastructure, experience in organizing, and a tradition of members sticking with and working for the party. Their loyalty was further cemented by what seemed to be overwhelming anticommunism in the rest of the society. From the start, all this had made the social democrats a lightning rod for attacks on the communist past and the power anticommunists claimed it still had. These attacks, in turn, made even the most "Leninist" former communists see the SdRP as the only real defender for party members. So, no matter what liberal policies the new party supported, the old party "hacks" were sure to vote for it.

The Polish Social Democratic Union was supported by a majority of Sejm deputies and intellectuals from the "7th of July Movement" at the University of Warsaw and its equivalent discussion group in Kraków. For them, being connected with the old Communist Party was also nothing but a disadvantage. Their strategic problem was that, when they made rejecting the "ill-gotten gains" of the old PZPR and support for Solidarity's

painful economic reforms a major part of their program, they were left with no resources to build their party and no way to differentiate themselves from Solidarity parties. After all, supporting the economic and political reforms alienated party members and the losers in the economic transition. Refusing to take the PZPR's "ill-gotten gains" alienated activists bound up with the PZPR and left the PUS with no resources. But, no matter how it marketed itself, PUS remained "communist" in the public's mind. The only saving grace was that it was truly invisible: the media and Solidarity politicians focused on Solidarity's victories and the demise of the old communists they identified with the SdRP.

### **The Miracle: The Rise to the Top**

After the Rubicon of 1989 had been crossed the former communists looked as though they had no future at all. Solidarity and post-Solidarity parties fixated on attacking the communists and their past as a central element of their platforms. Ironically, out of these experiences, the SdRP developed its winning ideology, organization, and tactics. The miracle was that, out of what seemed near-total defeat and rejection, the new party formed a coalition, the SLD, which would succeed in dominating the democratic landscape for the next decade and beyond. True, the successive elections held during 1990 and 1991 were all disasters for the former communists. But the SdRP survived and had few defections, with none from its leadership, whereas, less than four years after the PZPR had disbanded itself, the other post-communist party (PUS) was dead. Meanwhile, along with a host of parties that broke off from their Solidarity base, a noncommunist left party emerged, but it was never really able to capture either the votes of former communists or the loyalty of "losers" from Poland's dramatic economic reforms. It was after this period that the SdRP-backed coalition was able to use the lessons and remaining resources of its "old days" and begin its "winning streak."

In the 1990 local elections, the former communists were virtually invisible. The few candidates identified with the SdRP did very poorly. PUS did not run any candidates because it was so strapped for resources and focused on its work in the Sejm. Because no candidate could run without a party affiliation, most former communist candidates disguised their past communist ties and ran under new, fake party labels. In the end, this meant that, even when communists did well, it was impossible to measure the party's support and equally hard to deny that this first truly free election had been a total disaster for the former communists. Specifically identified Social Democratic Party candidates got 2.7 percent of the vote, losing in all the major regions

of the country. Even counting the fake parties created by the communists, estimates of the total vote for all those connected with communism are no more than 6 to 7 percent.<sup>11</sup> Not only was this another public sign of weakness, but it left the successors without the hold on local jobs and privileges that had brought support in earlier years. The new rulers took over and cleansed their local administrations of “communists,” giving jobs to Solidarity supporters.

In the wake of this debacle, Lech Wałęsa’s supporters began a petition campaign for Jaruzelski to resign from the presidency. By the end of 1990, he had resigned after being a major figure in Poland for more than thirty years as head of the Polish military, first secretary of the PZPR, prime minister during martial law and after, and then the man who had governed during Poland’s exit from communist rule. His resignation seemed to many to be the ultimate renunciation of the past.

For the presidential election to fill Jaruzelski’s position in fall 1990, the SdRP formed a coalition of real or “imagined” leftist parties, social organizations, and trade unions. This was the coalition that would return election after election for the next decade. SdRP leaders were so “gun-shy” of another massive defeat that none of them ran. Instead, they supported the candidacy of Włodzimierz Cimoszewicz, a former PZPR member who headed the self-declared leftist group in the parliament and had not joined any of the new parties. In the campaign that followed, he, former communists, and their successor party were marginal to the public battles. The campaign avoided the old stereotypes by portraying him as a legal scholar and middle-class peasant.<sup>12</sup>

Cimoszewicz’s campaign, like the coalition that supported him, was a response to the unpopularity of the images of the old communist movement. It emphasized noncommunist things: his legal professionalism, middle-class life, and connections to one of the poorer and least “communist” sections of Poland, Białystok. His campaign did not even mention a return to state welfare. Instead, it stressed the normalcy of a market economy and called only for a more generous social welfare policy. This was a prototype of future social democratic campaigns. No matter how much voters were hurt by the economic reforms and wanted to return to the social guarantees and economic benefits of the communist regime, the social democrats were too concerned about not being tarred as being “still communists” to advocate for social welfare or to criticize the economic reforms. They dealt with the past simply by avoiding anything that would look “communist.”

In the election, Cimoszewicz drew 9.21 percent of the electorate by drawing votes from people in all social groups except those who defined

themselves as “religious.” As would remain the case for the SdRP and its SLD coalition, his strongholds were the smaller cities and towns hurt most in the economic reforms and the “workers” in the communist apparatus and government bureaucracies.<sup>13</sup> His vote put him fourth of six candidates in the first round: he came after Solidarity hero Lech Wałęsa (39.96 percent); the incumbent prime minister and Solidarity intellectual Tadeusz Mazowiecki (18.08 percent); and “dark horse” Canadian businessman Stan Tymiński (23.1 percent). At the same time, he was ahead of the Peasant Party leader, Roman Bartoszcze (7.15 percent), and the anticommunist group leader, Leszek Moczulski (2.5 percent).<sup>14</sup>

PUS, on the other hand, took what proved to be a suicidal stance. It did not join the coalition or run a candidate. Instead, the party stayed out of the election. Its leader, who had been head of the Gdańsk Party during the Solidarity era, gave his support to his friend, Lech Wałęsa. This neither benefited Wałęsa nor gave PUS a public presence.

The 1991 parliamentary elections were called early by Solidarity groups to “cleanse the system of its old communist representatives.” In a continuation of the process of responding to attacks and trying to prove they were not communists, the SdRP and its coalition produced a platform that did not reflect the frustration and fury of their natural electorate, those who had lost in the initial, drastic shock of Poland’s “shock therapy” transformation of the economy. They walked a fine line, avoiding taking a negative approach to either the communist system or the new noncommunist, capitalist system. As a result, their platform, from the beginning, did not truly stand for anything or propose any policy alternatives. Instead, it criticized those who attacked communism for ignoring the work and achievements of Poles over the past forty years, without ever mentioning the Communist Party or communist rule.

The slogan of the 1991 campaign was “It Can’t Be Like This Any Longer.”<sup>15</sup> But, as Cimoszewicz had done in his presidential campaign a year earlier, SdRP campaigners mentioned social welfare services only as products of the future growth of the economy and private industry. They also did not advocate special protections for state industries but, rather, called for equal treatment of state, private, and cooperative industries. They also did not support a return to state welfare.

Other aspects of their program were also purely defensive. They avoided arguments about communism and used the rhetoric of the former Solidarity opposition to defend themselves. For instance, instead of criticizing the Catholic Church, they stressed the need for “religious freedom” (something they had been criticized for denying in the communist era). What they did

say was that the state should be separate from the Church. On foreign policy, they played the “Russian Bear Card,” suggesting that Poland was only safe if its relations with the Soviet Union were as good as those with the new Germany. The platform went on to indicate that Poland was poised to take the lead in the newly emerging markets of the former Soviet bloc. Given their long connections with the Soviet Union, they hoped to gain from the assumption that they were the only ones who had the ties to make this happen.<sup>16</sup> This also was all they could claim: the West was so heavily invested in Solidarity and the ending of communism that the SdRP could make no claims in 1991 of even being welcome at the negotiating table with the West.

In these elections, the SdRP gained again, and PUS essentially disappeared. While it did not make any great gains with its 11.8 percent of the vote, the SdRP coalition, the SLD, got only slightly fewer votes than the Union of Democracy (UD), the centrist Solidarity group of leaders who had run the first Solidarity government. The UD got only 12.31 percent of the vote. This meant the social democrats became the second-largest party in the fractured Sejm, holding only two fewer seats than the strongest party, the UD.<sup>17</sup> But neither could truly lead, as the rest of the Sejm was made up of a cacophony of tiny right-wing parties that had split off from Solidarity or emerged to oppose the “reforms.”

In the 1993 election, the SLD coalition gained again and won 20.41 percent of the vote. But the SdRP got 37.5 percent of the seats in the Sejm (171 out of 460) because the former Sejm had set 5 percent of the national vote as a minimum requirement for a party to enter the lower house of parliament. Right-wing parties were so fragmented that they could not meet this standard, so more than half of the votes went unrepresented. Support for the SLD in the Senate, however, made it clear that the post-communists were popular in their own right: in the plurality-based votes for the Senate, the coalition won thirty-seven of one hundred seats.<sup>18</sup>

This was the beginning of what would be a constant pattern of support. The SdRP and SLD retained the supporters they had in the two earlier Sejm elections (1989 and 1991) and the 1990 presidential election. Their permanent supporters were concentrated among people with strong ties to the old system: former party members, employees of the state sector (educated bureaucrats, administrators, and teachers), and people from the western and northern territories (with the exception of Gdańsk). These, after all, were the areas where communist power had been strengthened by the communists having controlled the postwar distribution of German agricultural land and where opposition to communism was weakened by the extraordinary losses of state farmers in the economic transition.<sup>19</sup>

But by 1993 the campaign and the party's own self-presentation had transformed it into a real "catch-all party." It gained among workers, farmers, and (perhaps most significantly) private owners. Workers were a "gift," not a result of any direct appeal. They were the people most hurt by the transition. So they voted economic reformers out of office. Even for many Solidarity loyalists, the hardships they faced in the new era made the communist past seem better. In addition, the anticlerical stance of the SLD fit workers' views: they traditionally were opposed to the Church dominating politics.<sup>20</sup> Farmers in this election were the targets of special appeals. The SLD campaigned to get them to shift from what had been the communist era's special "party" for the peasants, now transformed into the pro-Church Polish Peasant Party.

The result was a geographical concentration of social democratic support in the so-called second Poland of small and middle-sized towns where state industries had closed and there was high unemployment. These were the communities hurt most by the transformation.<sup>21</sup> To them, the SLD offered some promise that they would not continue to be marginalized—coalition leaders went to these areas to campaign and stressed the "forgotten" Poland in their election literature, if not their actual programs. In the process, the SLD also made limited inroads among other groups who lived outside the intellectual and Solidarity strongholds of Warsaw, Kraków, and Gdańsk.

In this process, though, the SLD lost some of its support from the "losers" of the transformation (the retirees, white-collar workers, and the unemployed). These groups either did not vote or shifted to the noncommunist left (Union of Work) or the populist right.<sup>22</sup> In reality, though, the noncommunist left was an intellectual organization supported by the "losers" only when its candidates ran popular campaigns and got out the local vote. This meant those who got elected as Union of Work candidates, the noncommunist left, saw it as their personal victory, not the victory of the party or its ideas.

The SLD got its final boost to control the parliament from the strength of its coalition partner, the Peasant Party. It had been "born again" after 1989 (from its former pro-communist status) to support the Catholic Church and private farming, so it appealed to another sector of the population. Its overwhelming support among peasants resulted in it getting 15.4 percent of the total vote and 28.6 percent (131) of the seats in the Sejm.

For all of these gains, however, the SLD remained weak in key areas: youth, religious people, and the heart of Solidarity country.<sup>23</sup> It was these voids and the sense that women could be a key component of their constituency that would shape SdRP and SLD strategy in their next elections.

The broad strength of the SLD continued, even expanded, in the 1995 election for president. The number of voters who actually voted for Aleksander Kwaśniewski in the first round (35.1 percent) was more than double the number who voted for Solidarity candidates in 1993 parliamentary elections. The “left’s take” was slightly more than the total first-round support for Solidarity hero Lech Wałęsa (33.1 percent). The difference looked even more dramatic when the other two left-leaning candidates (Tadeusz Zieliński, supported by Union of Work, who got 3.5 percent, and Jacek Kuroń, from Solidarity’s old leadership, with 9.2 percent) were out of the running in the second round. Then Kwaśniewski, facing only Wałęsa in the second round, got 51.7 percent in comparison to Wałęsa’s 48.3 percent.<sup>24</sup>

In the first round, Kwaśniewski did best among those in their forties who knew only the failing years of communist rule (37.8 percent as opposed to Wałęsa’s 30.6 percent); from small and middle-sized cities of the “second Poland” (36.7 percent as opposed to 31.9 percent for Wałęsa); with high school (35.9 percent) or higher education (30.2 percent as opposed to 25 percent for Wałęsa and 19 percent for Jacek Kuroń, the Union of Democracy candidate); in groups whose jobs were based in the old communist power and welfare state, such as the police, army, and security services (64.8 percent as opposed to 16.2 percent for Wałęsa), office workers (37.4 to 28.8 percent), and managers of enterprises (38.8 to 28.8 percent). Ironically, two years after the social democrats had taken over the government, the social democratic candidate also did well among the unemployed (38 to 28 percent) even though unemployment had continued to rise. In all other categories, the vote was almost evenly split in the first round between Wałęsa and Kwaśniewski.<sup>25</sup>

Once the other candidates were removed, the election was portrayed, by the right, as a choice between Solidarity and the communists. In part, the gains Kwaśniewski made were the result of his emphasis on being rational and middle class—not communist—whereas Wałęsa came to be seen as unpredictable and irrational.<sup>26</sup> Much of the shift to Kwaśniewski happened as a result of the right’s raging about communism being a serious threat while the communists held to the moderate center. The right coupled this raging about the evils of communism with calls for a return to the social welfare that had been provided under communism. By then, all this was truly counterproductive. SLD politicians had gotten so much public respect that, even if the public still thought communism was bad, the SLD seemed not only far from that past but also comparatively more sane and rational than those who were not “tainted” by communist pasts.

Kwaśniewski gained in the second round among eighteen- to twenty-nine-year-olds but lost support from those over fifty. He continued to hold

small and middle-sized towns and, marginally, held his plurality in villages, but he remained almost 10 percent behind Wałęsa in major cities and industrial centers where the ethos of Solidarity was strong. His greatest support, of course, came from those associated with the old regime: enterprise managers, peasants, the military, and the police. Wałęsa did better among specialists and professionals, private owners, retirees, and housewives.<sup>27</sup> Ironically, given the support Kwaśniewski got from the unemployed (59.6 to 40.4 percent), he got less support among the least and the most educated than Wałęsa did.

In the second round, Kwaśniewski picked up voters from the Peasant Party (67 percent of those who voted for Waldemar Pawlak in the first round); the Union of Work candidate (66 percent of Tadeusz Zieliński's voters); and voters who voted in the first round for Andrzej Lepper, the radical, anti-system candidate. In addition, 58 percent of those who had not voted in the first round and went to vote in the second round voted for him against Wałęsa.<sup>28</sup>

With these two victories, the SLD had become the first Polish party or coalition in the post-communist period to win two successive elections rather than winning one and being thrown out in the next. After Kwaśniewski's presidential victory, the party also made major inroads in the local government elections.

Then, in 1997, although the SLD increased its share of voters, it lost its hold on parliament. Its proportion of the vote went from 20.4 percent in 1993 to 27.13 percent in 1997. "Second Poland" was still its stronghold; but, in the face of a troubled right-wing coalition, the SLD "caught" voters from even more groups. It gained among small businessmen and retirees (even though there were two parties explicitly for retirees) and also among the religious. Among its target groups, women and youth, the SLD improved but not as significantly. Even though the Solidarity Election Action coalition (Akacja Wyborcza "Solidarność" [AWS]), the right-wing coalition claimed Solidarity as its heritage, 18 percent of the SLD electorate in 1997 had been members of the original Solidarity trade-union movement in 1980.<sup>29</sup>

What ended the SLD's control of the government in 1997 was the fragmented right's decision to form a coalition essentially against the SLD and its Peasant Party partner's self-destruction. Rather than face certain defeat as little parties that again could not make the requisite 5 percent voting requirement, the parties on the right papered over their differences before the election to form the AWS. That coalition won 33.83 percent to the SLD's 27.1 percent, even though its members fought publicly to come up with even a minimal platform that went beyond calls for punishing the



communists and returning to “Polish ways.” At the same time, the Peasant Party lost most of its support and went from 15.4 percent to 7.31 percent.<sup>30</sup>

Even with the right wing’s strength and the losses of the Peasant Party, the final defeat of the SLD remained a product of its history: no post-communist party would join with “former communists” in a coalition, no matter how close their policy interests were. The noncommunist left party, the Union of Work, although it had prominent leaders who had been Communist Party members, insisted on running on its own rather than join in a coalition with the tainted SLD. On its own, though, it got only 4.74 percent of the vote rather than the requisite 5 percent to get seats in the Sejm. Then the centrist intellectual party that had come out of Solidarity, the Union of Democracy, got 13.4 percent of the vote—enough to form a viable governing coalition with either side.<sup>31</sup> It refused to consider joining a coalition with “communists” even though it had more in common with the SLD than it did with the AWS, which railed against the very economic reform the UD (and the SLD) had championed.

That the SLD was not on a real decline became clear in the October 2000 presidential race. Aleksander Kwaśniewski was assumed to be the winner from the start. As a result, he did not really have to campaign as anything more than Poland’s successful president. No other party could put up a candidate who could come near him. In the first round, Kwaśniewski got 53.9 percent of the vote to independent candidate (and former communist) Andrzej Olechowski’s 17.3 percent and Solidarity alliance leader Marian Krzaklewski’s 15.6 percent.<sup>32</sup>

In the October 2001 parliamentary election, the victory of the newly formed SLD party, Alliance of the Democratic left (discussed below), was also assumed from the start. The centrist-based Union of Freedom, the Peasant Party, and the SLD were the only parties from the past that ran in this election. The Union of Work joined in a coalition with the new SLD party when faced with the latter’s overwhelming popularity well before the election and its own lack of resources to mount a campaign. The AWS ruling coalition essentially admitted defeat before the campaign began, had groups split off, and collapsed (taking only 5.6 percent of the vote, less than the 7 percent required for a coalition). The Union of Freedom, having left the coalition with the AWS in 2000 and changed its top leadership, could not stop its downward slide into oblivion with this campaign. It got 3.1 percent of the vote, well under the requisite 5 percent.<sup>33</sup> What emerged in its stead were issue parties<sup>34</sup> that focused on either the marginal fame of their founders or the pull of a single, stark message.<sup>34</sup>

The SLD, in this melee, truly proved itself to be a catchall party with support coming from all groups: the gainers and the losers of the transformation, old and young, men and women, and urban and rural dwellers. The AWS coalition's policies had been so disastrous that it lost most of its supporters, and the SLD was able to get support simply by running "against" the last four years. Although the party was strongest in districts where it had been successful before, loyal Solidarity districts essentially disappeared. Every group, everywhere, except among the very religious, had a significant portion of its electorate vote for the SLD.<sup>35</sup>

### **The Crucible of Rejection: Building a Winning Party under Assault**

From the start, the SdRP, ideologically and organizationally, was a product of its rejection by everyone else in the new political elite. Its communist predecessor had controlled not only the coercive apparatus of the state but also all the jobs and material rewards. As a result, it had been able to block almost all criticism of it or its policies. So, when its successors found themselves without their usual hold on power and subject to personal and media criticism, the sense of being a pariah was overwhelming.

Even when they were elected in democratic elections, individual deputies were shunned by their colleagues. There were no parties other than their old albeit now reformed ally, the Peasant Party, that would even consider joining them in a coalition. For the communists and, as a result of their continued presence on the political stage, for the other parties and politicians, this meant the past frequently became far more important than issues of economic reform or social policy. The successor party's politicians' response to this, over the first decade after the fall of communist rule, was to "circle their wagons" and create their own social and political world, even as their ultimate goal was clearly to be accepted by noncommunist parties. To make itself more palatable, the new Social Democratic Party avoided anything that would link it to the communist era, even if this meant eschewing its worker constituency. Even without any formal way to hold onto members and hold the party together, its elites insisted on looking united but not "controlling" as a party and on doing whatever was pragmatic to get the broadest possible support.

The series of losses and affronts that made for its isolation also made being in the party uncomfortable for some and kept a negative image of the party before the public. Ultimately, however, the attacks and the isolation helped the party to create a new and respected persona. Poles came to see the

social democrats as professionals who could run the government better than anyone else—in part because they were excluded from the great policy and personal battles of the early nineties.<sup>36</sup>

The successor social democrats were not only defeated but also stripped of their old resources. This was so despite the concessions the PZPR had received in the roundtable agreements as well as after its initial defeat in the June 1989 elections: its leader, Wojciech Jaruzelski, was made president; party leaders got three major positions in the postelection cabinet; and party members or people who owed their original appointments to the party were not formally removed as they were in Czechoslovakia and East Germany. The reality, though, was that there was one assault after the other against the new SdRP in the next three years. Even after the SLD won power and became popular, its earlier rejection remained a decisive factor in all its decisions.

From the start, even if they did well in elections, SLD politicians simply could not win the battle to be included and respected. Once in parliament in 1991, the SdRP/SLD deputies, already a significant force in supporting the reforms, were ignored in debates and coalitions in what was a highly fragmented Sejm, with its loud set of eight small right-wing parties among the seventeen parties that won seats. Even former friends would walk away rather than sit next to SLD deputies in the parliamentary dining room or lounges.

This left the social democrats no choice but to socialize and work almost exclusively with each other. Under the leadership of Aleksander Kwaśniewski, the party's Sejm offices became virtually "a home away from home." There, relations were convivial. Social democratic deputies tightened their social bonds of "us" against the "them" who were shunning them. In the process, a clear and visceral sense of the importance of "the party" developed.<sup>37</sup> This tight loyalty and sense of a group identity, as well as the unity of the top leadership group that emerged, would define the party for at least the next decade.

At the same time, consciously or unconsciously, they developed other strategies to "cope" with their isolation. These became such a part of the new organizational and institutional model of the Social Democratic Party and its SLD electoral coalition that they continued to define it even after the isolation ended.<sup>38</sup> One strategy was to focus on organization and infrastructure by using what the party retained of the PZPR's resources and also by depending on their parliamentary deputies' resources as their new party "base." The second was to be the "professionals" in politics who did not debate and fight over procedure or grand issues but, rather, focused on making things work. The third was to do all they could to be a "catchall" party that represented "the nation" rather than any particular group or issue.

The focus on organization and on using parliamentary offices as party offices was also necessitated by attacks from outside against the resources the SdRP inherited from the PZPR. Beginning in 1990, the right insisted that anything inherited from the PZPR was the product of “ill-gotten gains.” Most of their former buildings, accounts, and equipment were confiscated or threatened with confiscation. So the only resources the SdRP had that were safe from confiscation were state funds allotted to Sejm deputies. The SdRP deputies used these funds for offices, staff, and equipment in the Sejm and in their districts. In addition, they used their allotments to meet with their constituents. Their individual offices usually doubled as party headquarters and were stocked with communications equipment. When they could, deputies opened district offices in the unconfiscated and least visible buildings of the old Communist Party, thereby protecting them from confiscation.

The party did have some other monies and resources. These included individual members' dues, funds from foundations formed by West European social democratic parties, and “businesses” created by party leaders with monies they could access.<sup>39</sup> Whether or not this gave it more assets than the new noncommunist parties got in 1989 and 1990 from their early supporters and Western funders, the SdRP ended up with a much better infrastructure. SdRP leaders, from their training in the Communist Party, saw infrastructure as crucial and made the choice to invest in it as a first priority. Beyond this, they used the PZPR membership lists to find contacts among now displaced former communist workers and activists to serve as “free” labor in the new social democratic district offices and campaigns.

The other parties that emerged in 1989, on the other hand, had gotten the idea that “glitzy” campaigns were the avenue to victory. Western advice along with their victories in 1989 and 1990 seemed to prove that they won voter support largely because they opposed communism and led the changes. By 1991 and 1993, however, when they fought each other rather than “the communist enemy,” it became clear they also needed offices, phones, and faxes. But by then the cost of equipment and office space had risen so much and most salaries had dropped so far that there was no money to buy them. So, although they had parliamentary allocations and state electoral funds, the new parties were left emphasizing what they could afford: campaigns rather than local offices.

The attacks on “communists” meant few newcomers joined the SdRP. Instead of looking for new members, it depended on those who had worked in the PZPR bureaucracy or as local activists. For them, public attacks on the “communists” made the SdRP their only possible haven. The politics of organization and loyalty were all they knew. So the SLD and its SdRP got a

cost-free cadre of people to do the legwork of putting leaflets under doors, organizing voter meetings, and marching for candidates. This was supplemented by the once “communist” trade union, the OPZZ. It mobilized its members for demonstrations and other actions. In short, voters saw the SdRP as a permanent and accessible presence in the community, not a temporary phenomenon focused on getting out the vote so its leaders and deputies could live in the capital.<sup>40</sup>

In addition, the unwillingness of deputies from any of the other parties or coalitions in the 1991 parliament to do anything with those connected to the SdRP and its coalition partners kept the social democrats out of what were bitter and public ideological and personal battles within the Solidarity grouping. These attacks and battles dominated the headlines and lowered the prestige of the other parties. Because SLD deputies were unwelcome in the backroom negotiations, public debates, and fragile coalitions that were the key to parliamentary life in the Sejm (but not particularly popular with the population), they took the only three roles left for them: (1) “detail people,” professional legislators who reviewed legislation and made corrections so laws would actually work; (2) “links” between their regions and the national government; and (3) “advocates” for their districts. By default, the social democrats were seen as the ones making things work better in practical and non-ideological ways and advocating on behalf of individuals feeling the brunt of the economic reforms.

This gave them ways to look like they “fit” in the new system. Ironically, even among the deputies who shunned them, the focus on being practical and professional wore down their negative images. It seemed to voters that these were the men and women who cared about the public’s needs and could get things done. By the end of the term, research showed SLD deputies were, on the whole, perceived as the most effective legislators both by the public and by other deputies in the Sejm. This would remain the case even as the Sejm and its deputies as a whole declined in general public esteem.<sup>41</sup>

The final strategy was to do everything not to be “communist.” This strategy was triggered, as were the party’s organizational decisions, by the social democrats’ isolation within parliament, the pervasive sense that “communism was dead,” and ongoing and escalating attacks on the former communists’ real and presumed resources. The strategy went far beyond their willingness to vote for drastic political and economic transformation measures. It involved not reaching out to appeal to their old constituencies: the workers and state employees (even the former Communist Party workers were immediately hurt by the reforms). In their image making,

even the few party leaders from the working class made no effort to look “working class.”<sup>42</sup> Instead, they presented themselves as successful, middle class, and entrepreneurial.

When the right-wing parliament fell apart, Lech Wałęsa called new elections only a year and a half after the 1991 elections. The increasing popular disgust of many groups with the new politics and economics of Poland opened the door for the SdRP to mobilize supporters by being far more explicitly antireform in its platform for the 1993 parliamentary elections. The formulation of that platform, however, was constrained by the interest of the party leaders in being accepted by their peers as well as by the ability of a significant group of former PZPR and state officials to make money in the privatization game.<sup>43</sup> Hence the decision not to play on the anger of most Poles over the losses they had suffered as a result of “shock therapy.”

The leaders' goal was, first and foremost, for the SdRP and the SLD to be welcomed into “normal” political coalitions and not treated as evil pariahs.<sup>44</sup> This crystallized in the drafting of the 1993 platform: the word *workers* disappeared from the text. The real losers from the reforms (retirees, single mothers, and the unemployed) and their plight were not mentioned. Instead, a new, blanket phrase was coined, “the people who work.” The program focused on how there should be social support and also state money for the needs of the middle class: higher education, academic and scientific research, and culture. It made no explicit mention of the basics of free education, health care, unemployment support, and increases in welfare and pensions.<sup>45</sup>

In dealing with the communist period, the 1993 platform's response was essentially a criticism of governance during the first three years after the communists handed over power. It virtually mirrored the right's criticism of the communist period and stressed the SdRP's ability to defend all Poles' interests:

Currently, the politics in Poland is . . . directly tied to “strong armed” and dictatorial attempts to direct social change and public opinion. It does not have to be like this any longer. The S.L.D., standing as a political structure to integrate the party, trade unions, social organizations, and people who are not organized but are tied to social democratic ideals of fairness and social equality, is trying to effectively end the degradation of Poland and develop conditions to fill the needs of people who work. At the same time, we are moving to systematically develop our [national] political and economic life. This is being done by our representatives to parliament, by the Sd.R.P., and O.P.Z.Z. organizations, and also by our leaders in self-government. In a situation where there is an expansion of the right politically, where it controls significant financial resources and has easier access to the mass media, this has not been an easy

task. Aggressive attacks on our group and bitter attempts to isolate us in the Sejm clearly show their arrogance and prove their lack of respect for the hundreds of thousands of left-leaning voters. These are ineffective attempts to force us into resignation . . . from responsible and constructive opposition in the interests of the nation and the state, to correct the situation of Polish families and guarantee Poland an equal and safe position in Europe and the world.<sup>46</sup>

Along with this attack on their attackers, the SLD platform focused its economic proposals on improving conditions in the new market economy for producers as much as, if not more than, for workers. In the process, even though they were running beside their Peasant Party allies, they gave farmers as much and even more specific attention than the working class.

In foreign policy, the SLD focused on the failings of the right both to represent Poland well and to draw together all groups in Poland: "The picture of Poland in the world has worsened. We are taken as a country that is sympathetic, capable but weak and unable to solve its problems. . . . It is absolutely necessary in our opinion to develop a minimum understanding of all the significant political groups in Poland as to the aims and directions of its foreign policy."<sup>47</sup> It was the SLD that articulated the need for greater societal involvement in foreign policy decisions and for a less ideological foreign policy (again shifting the negative images of the old PZPR to the new rulers' politics). By 1993, the SLD actually turned West, supporting Poland's entrance into the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the European Union. Relations with the former Soviet Union and its former allies in Eastern Europe fell to the bottom of the list of foreign-policy priorities, with merely the mention of the need to establish "equal and good relations with our neighbors to the East."<sup>48</sup>

Finally, in the critical area of religion and the state, a central issue for the right in this campaign, the SLD muted its tone. It made the case for "freedom of religion" and for respect of religious rights, without any religion dominating the state.<sup>49</sup> Defending women's right to abortions and reaffirming the need for academic freedom without Church control were key points. The SLD also opposed, in its campaign, the *konkordat* the government had signed with the Vatican. In opposing it, leaders did not frame their opposition in terms of an unwillingness to come to a special agreement with the Vatican. Instead, they framed it in terms of their support for the principle that secret agreements were bad and it was inappropriate to sign agreements giving outside powers special authority over issues normally within the purview of the Polish government.

In this campaign, the SdRP and its coalition presented themselves as "professional politicians" who did not argue with each other but, rather, worked

to serve their communities and provide their expertise in writing legislation. They did not present themselves as successors to the Communist Party but, instead, as virtually a “catchall party” (with no prior history) that was focused on representing “all Poles.” Indeed, their program and image were explicitly noncommunist. They advocated the West European economic and political models as well as ties with the West. The party, in its style and structure, looked like the opposite of the traditional Communist Party. It completely ceased to speak as a representative or protector of the “workers” and “losers” and turned into a party trying to draw support from the “gainers.”

None of this was an accident. In interviews about both their ideological stances and their electoral calculations, SdRP leaders focused, in 1993, on how they were cleaning up their image, opening doors for coalitions with noncommunist parties, and drawing on a much broader constituency than they had in the initial post-communist elections. They assumed, no matter how far the social democrats deviated from the old communist ideology, old party members, some of whom had gained and others of whom had lost from the transition, would either not vote or would vote for the social democrats simply because they were welcome nowhere else.<sup>50</sup> This, they felt, created a solid base from which to seek new support and work in the new system.

### From Rejection to Legitimacy

The SLD won in 1993 not only because of this ideological and organizational base but also because of how the right had used its power when in government. As the society chafed from losses triggered by the economic reforms, the right tried to shift the blame to the “communist” past. In a society that had supported the Catholic Church in its opposition to communism but not in its teachings about abortion (Poland traditionally had one of the highest abortion rates in Europe), the right put through one of the strictest anti-abortion laws in Europe. These policies, along with public fights within the right and anticommunist attacks from the right just before the election, benefited the SLD. After all, the right’s politics made the SLD look eminently rational in comparison to what looked like the irrationality of the rest of the political world. This, ultimately, delivered the SLD its electoral surge and furthered the trajectory of its organizational and political development.

The passage of a bill, at the very end of the 1992 Sejm session, that barred abortions and included criminal penalties for the women and doctors involved also gave the SLD its first opening to do public advocacy and work with a noncommunist party. The SLD and the newly formed Union of Work, the leftist outgrowth of the Solidarity movement, organized parallel petition



campaigns to force a referendum on the issue. In the end, that nascent cooperation failed, but the SLD and the Union of Work, on the local level, had found some common ground. While the Union of Work gained in the process a public forum to make its name, the SLD got its first opportunity to fight visibly “with society” with a group associated with “Solidarity.”

The second and more direct, if inadvertent, assistance the right gave the post-communists came from its attempts to pass laws removing communists and “secret police agents” from government positions. The minister of interior also took it upon himself to present to the Sejm a list of politicians who were, purportedly, implicated in the secret police files. These included Lech Wałęsa and other Solidarity heroes as well as former communists. The presentation of the Macierewicz list resulted in Wałęsa using his presidential powers to disband the Sejm and call new elections. But these attempts to “decommunize” still culminated in preelection right-wing demonstrations against the communists, demanding the “cleansing” of former Communist Party members and secret police agents from the government. These took place at the very end of the campaign and made headlines. To former communists who had done well in the transition as well as those who had lost from the transition, the proposed laws and related moves seemed to be potentially more serious threats than the ongoing and seemingly endless audits and court cases over reclaiming the PZPR’s old buildings and bank accounts. In the end, the right’s actions delivered to the SdRP both the old PZPR apparatchiks who had previously not voted for the SdRP because it had betrayed the cause and the nomenklatura entrepreneurs who had more in common with the reformist Union of Democracy and the Congress of Liberal Democrats than with most of the SdRP/SLD voters. The attacks made it clear to both groups that the social democrats were their only protectors.

With these attacks and the SdRP’s response of focusing on disproving them by its actions, the model was cemented for what the SLD coalition would stand for, how it would present itself, whom it would represent, and how it would ultimately govern. It was a model that would hold firm even after 1999 when the right’s attacks decreased and the SdRP dissolved itself, transforming its coalition into a party in its own right.

From its 1993 election victory, and even after it lost control of the Sejm in 1997, the SdRP and its SLD coalition remained relatively stable not only in their ideological stands but also in their voter support, organizational structures and goals, leadership, and strategy for electioneering and running the government. The goal was to be “establishment politicians” in an electorate divided, by its own rhetoric, not on economic grounds but on ideological grounds of religious *versus* secular and anticommunist *versus* pro-communist sentiments.<sup>51</sup>

Basically, the former communists' programmatic options were limited by their fear of being seen as "communist." Even when they were at their most popular, this burden continued pushing them ever further into the center. This made representation of the particular interests of "losers," seen as linked to the old communist "workers' state," seem counterproductive. The refusal of other parties to be tainted by being in coalitions with the SLD exacerbated all this. No matter what the social democrats did, they were an anathema to the rest of the political elite.

As the social democrats continued to try to convince other political leaders they were not "communists," their natural constituency of workers and people who were surviving in state jobs or on state welfare fell to new right-wing parties. The latter condemned both the communist rulers for their repression and the first generation of liberal reformers for "shock therapy" and the withering of the welfare system. At the same time, they promised there would be a return to communist-style social welfare. In the right's never-ending rhetoric, both Solidarity, the once archenemy of the communists, and the communists had betrayed the workers. Only these "new parties" on the right claimed to have had no responsibility for anything before they emerged: these leaders had not done anything in the communist era and had not been in the first Sejm to vote for "shock therapy."

The SdRP's position after 1993 was further complicated by the emergence of the Union of Work, a noncommunist left party. It was a blend of leftists from the Solidarity Sejm delegation and former PZPR reformers. This group was clear about its support of the losers' needs in the new system. It looked back to the promises of the roundtables and to the Scandinavian model of social welfare democracy. Its policy plans were far from vague and general. They were laid out in detail in its program. It was committed to rational, nonideological politics to the point that both former communists and Solidarity activists were welcomed into the party. But, in reality, it was a party of intellectuals for whom consistency, not electoral popularity, was critical.

Thus, although the SdRP and the SLD had the resources the Union of Work needed to get established in the electorate in terms of both name recognition and an organizational base, leaders of the Union of Work considered the successor social democrats too centrist, opportunist, and also compromised and compromising to be an appropriate coalition partner.<sup>52</sup> As a result, the Union of Work, although it did reasonably well in the 1993 election, was virtually squeezed out of any positions of power. Only when it did not make the necessary 5 percent to have seats in the 1997 election did its founding leadership leave and a new, more pragmatic group emerge.

From its 1993 victory on, the SLD's position was essentially stabilized. True, in the 1997 parliamentary elections it lost control of the government even though it gained voters. But as the second-largest party in parliament, albeit in opposition, the SLD continued to maintain a high profile even as the right continued to attack it. After all, Kwaśniewski was elected president in 1995 and reelected for a second five-year term in 2000. Then, after it became a party, the SLD got its first real breakthrough in "making it" with Solidarity-based parties. Andrzej Celiński, a Solidarity activist and prominent politician in the Union of Democracy, joined the SLD and was instantly promoted to head of the Program Committee. Moreover, just before the October 2001 Sejm elections, the Union of Work, threatened with extinction, joined in an electoral and governmental coalition with the SLD.

In victory and defeat, the SLD kept its public image as a coalition of rational professionals focused on practical issues. Although its base of voter support spread far beyond former Communist Party members, its top leadership remained stable. In coalitions, it and its members would do almost anything to hold together. When there were divisions over economic policy between the OPZZ (the SLD's trade-union partner) and the SdRP leadership, coalition deputies voted with the coalition even if they disagreed with the policy. And, as is elaborated below, after the SLD's self-transformation from coalition to party (which effectively excluded the OPZZ's troublesome presence), it agreed to form a coalition with the small Union of Work on the latter's terms. Quantitatively, the Union of Work got far more seats than its numbers would have indicated, and, at least in the agreement, it was guaranteed a real presence in the government.

### **The SLD: From Successor Coalition to Successor Party**

The SdRP formally disbanded in April 1999 when the SLD coalition registered as a party in its own right. In its new incarnation, membership was only on an individual basis, not by groups. The new SLD was essentially a "successor party" to the "successor party." The hope was that it would no longer have to deal with its communist past and, without group members like the OPZZ trade union, that it would be more internally coherent and easier to manage.<sup>53</sup> In the process of becoming a "successor" to the "successor," it also moved back to a more structured and controlled membership. It was no longer totally open. Membership, according to the new party's rules, required acceptance by the membership "circle" or, if that was not possible, by higher-level regional organs. Once a member, there were obligations: members were expected to "care for the good name of the party, seek out sympathizers and

supporters of the party, be involved in the activities of the party, carry out the decrees of the party leadership and observe the regulations of the party statutes, and pay their party dues.”<sup>54</sup> Those who had public functions were, additionally, “responsible to the party for their activities.”<sup>55</sup> In reality little changed, given the persistence of that tightly knit cohort created in the hard times before its 1993 victory and the disinterest of most Poles in party politics. What did change was that the SLD leaders simply gave up the pretense of internal democracy taken on to disprove their rightist critics. The SLD leadership (of both the old coalition and the new party) continued to run its own show, using local and regional offices to deliver votes rather than having them be independent forces. Now it had a structure that granted the leadership real authority.

In its program as in its governance, the trajectory of the SLD did not change. It continued to move toward increasingly liberal capitalist doctrine and further away from any of the pillars of Marxism. So, as a provisional member of the Socialist International since 1997, the Polish party stands as one of its more centrist parties.

What changed when the SLD was voted back into power in 2001 was that its image as a successful and undivided party of skilled administrators tarnished rapidly. So, in spite of warning that it would not be able to reverse the decline in the economy and social services immediately, the failure of the Polish economy to right itself resulted in divisions in the leadership and a dramatic downturn in its popular approval ratings less than six months after the SLD formed a new government.<sup>56</sup> Beyond this, although the top party leaders got posts in the new government and the Peasant Party and Union of Work got only a few posts, the new SLD party clearly sought new faces. Few, other than the top party leaders and those who controlled economic ministries, were from the old cabinet or party leadership. Instead, they were men and women in their forties and early fifties who were nonparty professionals or SLD experts on various policies—proof for the SLD that they were no longer rejected by “establishment politicians.” As a result, although there were established local leaders who had served in the Sejm or Senate and ran large local parties, they were not given cabinet positions.

What did happen was that the top party leaders, in taking over the key ministerial positions (interior, defense, and foreign affairs), lost their tight control of the party's day-to-day affairs. Beyond this, once the SLD had no real party competitors on the left, right, or center, the pressure for unity decreased. The result of all of this and the pressures of a failing economy were open splits between President Kwaśniewski and Prime Minister Leszek Miller and within the cabinet.<sup>57</sup> Finally, the economic crisis, the weakness of the

peasants, and the pressure put on local and regional leaders—as well as the sense that positions in state industries and government posts had been political prizes under the previous AWS government and were now the rightful bounty of SLD—led to battles in the SLD leadership that had been avoided in the 1993–1997 period.

### Leadership

Throughout the 1990s, at the top levels of the party and its coalition, there was little difference between its leaders and those of the rest of Poland's parties. Studies of party elites show that SLD leaders, like the leaders of all of Poland's major parties and coalitions in the transition, tended to be middle-aged (from thirty-five to fifty-five), well educated, and financially successful. Almost all were male (in the 1990s, only one woman, Ewa Spychalska, head of the OPZZ trade union, was on the Executive Committee). The only features that actually differentiated the social democrats and their leaders from their counterparts were that they were less likely to go to church and more likely to have been members of the PZPR or, at least, not to have been affiliated with Solidarity.<sup>58</sup> (Although data are not yet available as to the membership of the new SLD party, it appeared that this would remain the case even though, as former party members aged, a past of PZPR membership was on the decline.)

The top SLD leadership differed from other parties basically in its experience, strength, and continuity. The men at the very top of the SdRP and its SLD coalition had been PZPR regional first secretaries (Leszek Miller and Josef Oleksy), secondary national government or party officials (Aleksander Kwaśniewski) in the 1980s, or younger academics (Włodzimierz Cimoszewicz). During the twelve years between the collapse of the PZPR and the emergence and electoral victory of the “successor to the successor party” in 2001, these men rotated the top party, parliamentary, and governmental positions. But no one new entered into this top level.

Surrounding them initially were men who had been in the PZPR apparatus or organs at the end of the communist era. Most came in as candidates for election to the early Sejm or as academics. Then, beyond these ten or so individuals, there was a number of more established academics and professionals who sat on the successor organizations' various executive councils or were brought in for government positions.<sup>59</sup> Where conflict occurred, it was almost always at the second level of power, with the women and trade-union activists who rose up and held such positions as chair of the women's organization or the trade union. Their positions as the heads of separate groups within the SdRP (in the case of the women's organization) or the SLD coali-

tion (in the case of OPZZ) marginalized them. They became more marginalized when they remained or were involved in independent advocacy. At this second level of party leaders there was really not any significant change until 2001 except that Ewa Szychalska, who led and fought for the OPZZ trade union, was sent as ambassador to Belarus.

Even though there were ideological differences among the top five leaders of the party, the sense of the need for unity at the top remained unchanged for the first ten years.<sup>60</sup> They were, after all, the successor party's de facto decision makers. Rather than compete for top offices, the SLD top four or five leaders traded them. Indeed, their differences, until 2001, were more about the strictness of "party line" votes and party ideology issues than about economics. The splits occasionally became partially visible in what were played out as essentially jocular discussions within the SLD parliamentary group or in the nuances of their public statements.<sup>61</sup> Although some outsiders saw the leaders' history of joining and working in the party during the martial law period of the early 1980s as a sign of their conservative tendencies, none ever came near voicing anything close to neo-Leninist positions or defending the virtues of martial law.

The commitment to consistency and loyalty was quite clear at all levels until 2001. Even when Josef Oleksy was accused of having had close relations with a Soviet Russian agent and had to resign as prime minister, the SdRP did not censure him or distance itself. Instead, it demonstrated its loyalty by making him head of the party. Only in the new SLD party did he move from visible leadership to de facto leadership. Aleksander Kwaśniewski, who played a major role in creating the SdRP and its parliamentary community both informally and as its chairman, formally left the party when he became president. He presented this as a way to "represent all Poles" as president. But he continued to be involved with internal party issues behind the scenes. Only after 2001, when Poland's economic problems threatened his position and that of the party was it clear he was taking a more centrist line and was not in full agreement with Leszek Miller.

The party's attempts to draw new people into its leadership were so marginal that when Solidarity activist Andrzej Celiński, of the Union of Democracy, joined the SLD in 1999 it was a major event. He was instantly made head of the Platform Committee. Indeed, that was the only formal change in the top leadership circle when the SLD went from being a coalition led by the SdRP to being a party in 1999. The reality was that there was no real change in the top leadership even though the new party rules required that there be a representative of youth and women's groups in the executive. The two people who were brought in were clearly tokens, too young and marginal to have a real role.<sup>62</sup> By this time, though, a cadre of local leaders had begun to emerge, interested in

moving into the top leadership and also in getting the local positions seen as having been the “fruits of victory” for the Polish Peasant Party (Polskie Stronictwo Ludowe) in 1993–1997 and the AWS after its win in 1997.<sup>63</sup>

When the SLD finally was able to form a coalition with a Solidarity-based party, the Union of Work, this coalition did not involve any shift in leadership. All the parties agreed to do was work together in the election, form joint candidate lists based on their relative size, and develop a common platform. Once in government, although the heads of the Union of Work and the Peasant Party were made vice–prime ministers and the Peasant Party was also given the two “agricultural” ministries, the Union of Work got no ministerial positions. Essentially, Leszek Miller controlled all the appointments himself. Indeed, SLD leaders were so accustomed to working together that policy was made as often by default by the top leaders as it was by open discussion. In the process, the cabinet drifted apart and conflicts between economic cutbacks and social welfare benefits complicated policy.<sup>64</sup>

More important than the backgrounds of the leaders was their public demeanor. The SdRP and SLD leaders not only were middle class but, even though few had real professional training other than law or extensive experience in administration, presented themselves as administrative and policy professionals. To the public, they stressed their restraint and control, avoiding even in the heat of campaigns relying on “charisma” and rallying the crowds.<sup>65</sup> In negotiations and conflicts, they always acted as though they were at least willing to compromise, to forgive partners or potential partners for not cooperating, and to take no strong policy stances. When the SdRP was in a governing coalition with the Peasant Party in 1993, it first made Waldemar Pawlak, Peasant Party head, the prime minister, even though the social democrats were the dominant coalition partner. During this entire coalition period from 1993 to 1997, the SdRP came through every confrontation looking like it had avoided conflict and compromised, while its partners in the Peasant Party looked increasingly intransigent and confrontational. Even as the dominant party in the preparation of the new Polish constitution, it sought out the participation of the right-wing parties not in parliament, made real compromises on the issue of Catholic influence in the state, and did little to strengthen the powers of the presidency. Its leaders were also willing to have a national referendum on the constitution rather than appear to push through the draft the Sejm had passed against the objections of the right.<sup>66</sup>

### **Party Organization**

The internal structure of the SdRP and the image it projected initially reflected the social democrats’ desire to disprove those who attacked them as

“communists.” At the same time, they carried with them a clearer sense than anyone else of the need for internal communication and organization. In the process of both avoiding any appearance of being communist and following the lessons of its past that organization is important, the SdRP developed a formal and informal structure. Its informal structure, since 1991, was of an elite clustered at the top that ran the party and held the power in the parliamentary group. After the party created a governing coalition in 1993, some of these leaders took on a third set of positions, becoming cabinet ministers.<sup>67</sup>

Between this small and closed elite group and the membership, there were no real links, only formal organizational structures. The actual power of the middle and lower levels was limited at best. Even in the national party headquarters, the visible staff, including building guards, hovered at less than thirty. As long as the wealth of the party was questioned, party leaders did everything they could to not look well endowed. Funding came from members' dues to the local bodies and from the state allocations that were made to each party's parliamentary deputies. Support came as well in “donations” of manpower and materials from the OPZZ, other small parties, and special-interest organizations. Beyond that, the SdRP had a variety of small-scale enterprises and endowments structured in ways that their origins were hard to trace directly.

The formal structure of the SdRP was touted as proof that it was not like the old Communist Party but, rather, involved relatively autonomous bodies at all levels. Membership in all these organizations required no selection or candidacy period. All prospective members had to do was fill out a membership card and agree to pay minimal dues to the local organization.

The top levels of the party were supposed to be directed by party conferences held every two years and congresses held every four. At the conferences and congresses, the party delegates, elected with no guidance from the top, were supposed to be able to remove party leaders or question and change party policy. These congresses then had the formal right to elect a top leadership from among their ranks that included a director and governing council to make ongoing decisions. (In reality, at the middle and local levels there was so little interest in what happened that no one actually used these “rights,” and attendance at the congresses and conferences was pro forma: delegates listened to top leaders' speeches and engaged in orchestrated discussions.)

The top had little real or independent role in this formal structure other than to represent the party publicly, based on the conference and congress policies, and to serve the needs of party deputies. There certainly was no built-in bureaucratic base. Ostensibly, the top had no funds other than those



sent up to it by local groups. In reality, of course, the top leaders were a self-sustaining group with funds from the Sejm allocations and its own “businesses” as well as local allocations. The lower levels had little contact with these leaders and certainly no power over them.<sup>68</sup>

The electoral coalition the SdRP formed around itself went even further to avoid any sense of party dominance or control. There were never any published accords for the electoral alliance. Instead—according to people in the national leadership—parties, unions, and social organizations were welcome to join, if they wanted, even when they had a history or took positions that set them against the SdRP or its predecessor, the PZPR. Indeed, even the radical group claiming to be from the prewar Polish Socialist Party, which had been actively involved in some of the most open and violent resistance to communism, was welcomed into the coalition. For the SdRP, the most important thing was to get legitimacy from having others join it. But, given the social pressure against being a part of the “old regime,” the groups that joined were marginal at best, and there was never any rush to join.

Once in the alliance, the various groups’ leaders went to coalition meetings prior to the elections to propose their own candidates for slots on the coalition ticket. They were focused on political action. The SLD coalition had no permanent structure or independent resources. The SdRP representatives on the steering committee had not only a majority of the seats but also most of the resources and the only real permanent organization. According to SdRP leaders who were members of the SLD coalition steering committee, the various organizations were “given” places on the electoral lists based on their size, significance, or importance to the coalition’s aims. Beyond this, individuals were assigned districts where they were either the “locomotives” to draw voters or could be assured of party support even if they did not have name recognition. Individual candidates’ campaigns were not funded by the party or the coalition. Candidates themselves had to front the money for the basics of the campaigns. Then, unlike other parties, when the SLD got money back from the state based on the size of its “win,” it did not return the money to any candidates.<sup>69</sup>

Of the member organizations in the SLD, of course, the prime organization (other than the SdRP) was the OPZZ. It was the communist-era trade union formed when Solidarity was forced to disband. It bore the stigma of having been imposed to replace the popular, mass-based Solidarity after martial law was declared in 1981. But, in building on the Solidarity funds it inherited and the government’s allocations to it, the OPZZ became a major force for workers’ welfare. By the end of the decade, in spite of its dependence on the PZPR for its very birth and initial position, the OPZZ had weaned it-

self away from the control of the PZPR. In the process, it became a political force in itself so that, in the roundtable discussions, OPZZ was a partner to the settlement.<sup>70</sup>

After the 1989 elections, the OPZZ found itself in competition with Solidarity for both members and funds on a workplace and national level. It billed itself as the trade union that represented the working class, especially those that worked in state-owned enterprises. But it and its leaders were not welcomed even at the enterprise level into Solidarity meetings or organizations. They were, though, players in a Tripartite Commission to discuss economic policy along with Solidarity, the Ministry of Labor, and representatives of various producers' organizations. In addition, the OPZZ formed its own "Movement of Working People," a more Marxist-Leninist, labor-oriented miniparty that also had candidates and deputies in the coalition.

The relations between the OPZZ and the SdRP were not easy when the coalition was in power. Although not ministers in the government, OPZZ leaders were in the SLD parliamentary delegation and were thus involved in the decision-making process and in dealing with government experts. As a result, their views were closer to those of Solidarity union leaders who had the same experiences or who worked with them in the Tripartite Commission than they were to the more alienated workers they represented. At the same time, OPZZ deputies led the union. This meant that OPZZ deputies would vote in parliament for the national budget, labor regulations, and salary limits that were part of the government's economic program. Then, many would walk outside of the Sejm building, talk critically to reporters about the SLD's program, and join in demonstrations against that very legislation they had just voted for in the Sejm. This soured relations within the SLD enough that the two conjoined organizations drafted a formal agreement in 1996 allowing them to differ but ensuring that the differences would be controlled and that the OPZZ would stay in the SLD and not make other alignments. For the SLD, this was critical, because the OPZZ provided a source of critical campaign "foot soldiers" as well as funds that could not be taken away as ill-gotten gains from the communist era.

By the end of the decade, the ongoing tension was a major reason given in internal papers and discussions for the SLD to transform itself from a coalition to a party. Typical of the SdRP's avoidance of conflict, however, this was not stated publicly as a reason for the shift; rather, it was attributed to the need to comply with the Sejm's new "Law on Parties." That law ruled that organizations could not belong to parties and that trade unions could not actually run in elections. Because the OPZZ had no other options if it was to align with a political party, the shift was a safe one.

### Ideology and Policy

During their time in government in 1993–1997, the SdRP and SLD became much more moderate in their policy positions than they had been even in the 1993 parliamentary election or the 1995 presidential election. They were active public advocates for Polish membership in NATO and for Poland's membership and cooperation with the European Union. They were also, in their platform and actions, committed to privatization and the development of privatized public services. For them, state subsidies and increases in welfare provisions were basically "nonissues." In areas of religion and social policy, the SLD continued to copy the rhetoric of the communist-era opposition's attacks on communist rule by calling for "freedom of religion" and also intellectual freedom. Their goal was clearly to be seen as modernizers, professionals, and rational actors, not as men of the past or ideologues.<sup>71</sup>

In control of the parliament from 1993 to 1997, and with Kwaśniewski as president from 1995 on, the SLD's policies were little different in substance than those of the previous Solidarity-based governments. In power, the SLD moved further to the center than its election platform had suggested. It continued the Balcerowicz Plan free-market reforms with no real changes even in their speed. This meant passing legislation that hurt workers and cut back on social service funding as well as forcing a number of major state industries into *bankructcy*.

Its position as a secular party did not spell real action to repeal laws against abortion and for religious education in the schools. Under the SLD coalition, the *konkordat* with the Vatican was ratified even though the SLD had campaigned on how it put the Catholic Church "above the law" by, for instance, exempting Church property from state control and making Church weddings separate from the civil code. In spite of the SLD's criticism of the antiabortion law passed in 1992, it made no move to repeal or even liberalize the law. In the area of Church presence in schools, the SLD minister of education offended the Church by instituting sex education, but he did nothing to end required religious education at all levels in state schools.

In foreign policy, the SLD basically ignored the minor parts of its platform that stressed the importance of Poland as a bridge between the states of the former Soviet Union and the rest of the world. Western support and confidence were its priorities beginning in 1993. The SLD government, in fact, took the lead in getting Poland into NATO and the European Union, while the right increasingly challenged the encroachment of Western influence and power.

In the presidential campaign of 1995 and the parliamentary election of 1997, the SLD stressed, programmatically, that it had "Kept Its Word" and "Today Is Good, Tomorrow Will Be Better."<sup>72</sup> In both campaigns, the em-

phasis was on rational style and the economic gains that would result from such “professionalism.” The party leaders continued to focus its program on promoting a “high-tech” Poland. Public policy, they claimed, was to be focused not on group interests but on the development of a strong private sector with specific government incentives rather than either control or subsidies. In the SLD program and electoral statements, the emphasis was on how the poor would gain from the “trickle down” of wealth generated by increases in technology; the growth of private industry; and the jobs generated by the establishment of a housing industry as well as by the expansion of Poland’s infrastructure of roads, transportation facilities, and communications links. Indeed, the party promised that taxes would decline as the government reduced its involvement in the economy and focused on the most significant issues for the “whole society: research, education as well as the security of the state and the individual.” Again, none of its promises responded to the needs of workers or even those state-sector professionals who had supported the SLD and the Union of Work. The ultimate goal was to be part of the “Western world” of advanced industry and technology.<sup>73</sup>

Ironically, in 1997 the SdRP’s stance on its past was more complex than previously. Publicly, in its overall program, there was no reference to the SLD being an outgrowth of the PZPR. Instead, the SLD traced its ideological legacy to the interwar Polish socialist movement. There were acknowledgments that, in the postwar settlement, Soviet control was forced on Poland and that excesses occurred in the Stalinist period, followed by periods when Poland was the most liberal of the communist states and reformers played as strong a role as they could. But the SLD insisted that a large portion of the nation, instead of being demeaned by attacks on the past, deserved credit for rebuilding and industrializing Poland in the communist era. This assessment, however, was written as if it was a historical review almost of someone else’s past actions. The SLD linked itself and its politicians only to the initiative to hold the roundtables.<sup>74</sup> Attacks on them for being “communists” were characterized as an inappropriate shift of attention away from the gains and concerns of the present.

All the while, SdRP leaders were privately engaged in discussing campaign strategies and holding meetings with other successor social democratic parties in such countries as Lithuania and Hungary. These were deliberately held out of the public eye. But in private discussions, the people involved made it clear that it was important to their strategies that their reformist counterparts won electoral victories elsewhere in the former Soviet bloc. Aleksander Kwaśniewski, while making his initial state visits to the West,

did not ignore what happened in Russia and the neighboring Ukraine, but he went there as a supporter of Poland's presence in NATO and the European Union.

Although the leaders of the SdRP were always clear that their goal was to form coalitions with centrist parties and the noncommunist left party (Union of Work), they also wanted to use membership in the Socialist International to prove they were not communist but, in fact, were a legitimate center-left party. So, in 1996, they fought hard to be Poland's one representative to the Socialist International. At the same time, this was not something that they touted in the general media in Poland or that Poles actually cared about. In the end, this association of European socialist and social democratic parties, including Tony Blair's New Labour Party, Germany's Social Democrats, and the French Socialists, recognized both the SdRP and its then competitor, the Union of Work, as provisional members in 1997.

The newly transformed SLD party's victorious campaign platform in 2001 was marked by a continued move to the center. The move itself was one that had been debated since 1999 and was reinforced by public opinion research commissioned by the SLD and presented in various party meetings. Although the party promised to help "the poorest," the concepts of class and of worker did not appear. Instead, the platform continued to talk about alleviating poverty by the development of business, increasing the strength of small and medium industries, and getting Poland into the European Union as soon as possible. It emphasized making education accessible without making any promises to assist those who could not afford to go to school. The past was essentially ignored, although the party platform did mention the need to have normal relations with Russia.<sup>75</sup> Two "new" figures in the SLD, one a former Solidarity leader and former member of the Freedom Union, were assigned to respond to the Catholic Church's attacks on the party as still being "communist" by simply denying that connection and saying "the Church is an important part of Polish life."<sup>76</sup>

The focus of the SLD–Union of Work coalition program was specific. Its slogan was "Let's Return to Normalcy—We're Winning the Future." Its focus was on the AWS government's poor administration and policy that had hurt Poles as well as Poland's economy and position in the world. In turn, the SLD emphasized its professionalism by promising that the coalition would work together (as opposed to the fractious AWS–Freedom Union coalition) while not promising an instant solution to Poland's problems: as head of the coalition, Leszek Miller promised "a competent government and competent coalition."<sup>77</sup> The SLD, once closely associated with state welfare and a huge state bureaucracy, also promised to cut drastically the government bureaucracy

and even the number of ministries (including the AWS “dysfunctional” bureaucrats) and make state administration much sleeker and less costly.<sup>78</sup>

After the SLD's first one hundred days in office, the new SLD prime minister, Leszek Miller, reported that his government had made real cuts; gotten Poland back on track toward European Union negotiations; and developed a less wasteful budget that, while significantly reduced, still provided for the poorest segment of the population.<sup>79</sup> In the process, though, his government suffered from its experience in 1993–1997 when people had learned to expect little and got an economic boom: this time what they inherited was an economic disaster and a population that expected them to “do it again” and bring about a new economic boom.

### Organization Is Everything

A decade after the first partially free vote in June 1989 came out against the communists, the men who had been second-rung leaders of the Polish United Workers' Party in the 1980s managed to become the most successful centrist politicians in Poland's otherwise fragmented and fractionalized political world. In campaigns and in governing, they appeared as professionals, taking, at best, vague ideological positions and making no real promises. Ironically, the lessons they learned from joining the party just after the repression of 1968, holding power in the last decade of communist rule, and being condemned after the 1989 election ultimately made them much better at amassing support and governing in a democracy than the politicians who had cut their teeth opposing communism and the men and women who came to the fore after communism fell. These groups were more ideologically strident and prone to bitter battles than the politicians of the successor center left.

If anything, those who had been in the Communist Party before it fell entered politics with a clear sense of the importance of organization and coordination. They knew how to do it and had the initial resources, left over from the communist era, to do it. The rejection and attacks they experienced in the aftermath of their first defeat in 1989 gave substance to this: it was the crucible that brought them together and created a sense of “us” versus “them” that would last more than a decade. This ensured not only that the SLD coalition spoke with one, or almost one, clear voice but also that its leadership would remain stable in spite of its “open” membership, attacks from the outside, and early setbacks. It was this professional, nonconflictual, and consensus-oriented style that corresponded to what a majority of Poles evidently wanted from their politicians.

There was little desire on anyone's part to support "communist ideology." The PZPR had been one of the most liberal parties in the Soviet bloc during the 1950s and early 1960s. The debacle of the economy's collapse and martial law in the early 1980s ultimately strengthened the hand of the party's liberals. So, by the end of the 1980s, its leaders had moved far from doctrinaire Marxism-Leninism.<sup>80</sup> In the face of attacks on the successor party's deputies and leaders for being responsible for all that was bad in the old system, the men and women who ran the SdRP tried to shield themselves by avoiding doing or advocating anything that could be construed as "communist." Meanwhile, no one else was willing to risk being tarred as "Red" by taking on searing social problems or working with former communists. The ultimate irony of all this was that the rejection the communists' successors suffered from other politicians determined their platforms, not the interests of voters, until the "successor" to the "successor party" emerged in 1999. As a result of the incessant anticommunist attacks in the 1990s, the SdRP always structured political debate and advocacy so as to underscore both the fact that it was not communist and the right's inability to tolerate or cooperate with anything or anyone it saw as "Red." The successors became successes because of the lessons of their party's failure and subsequent rejection—they reacted to being unwanted by their political peers rather than to any sense that they were representing a social group or ideal.

## Notes

1. Jane L. Curry and Luba Fajfer, *Poland's Permanent Revolution* (Washington, D.C.: American University Press, 1996).

2. Curry and Fajfer, *Poland's Permanent Revolution*.

3. Paul L. Lewis, *Political Authority and Party Secretaries in Poland, 1975–86* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

4. "Deklaracja Wyborcza Polskiej Zjednoczonej Partii Robotniczej" (original in *Trybuna Ludu*, May 6–7, 1989), in *Programy partii ugrupowań parlamentarnych, 1989–1991*, vol. 1, ed. Inka Słodkowska (Warsaw: Instytut Studiów Politycznych, 1995), p. 12.

5. *Początki Parlamentarnej Elity, Posłowie Kontraktowego Sejmu*, ed. Jacek Wasilewski and Włodzimierz Wesołowski (Warsaw: Instytut Filozofii i Socjologii PAN, 1992), p. 80.

6. The main group was a group of young professors and graduate students mostly connected with the University of Warsaw on July 8, 1989, and came to be called the Ruch 8-ego Lipca (Movement of the 8th of July).

7. Mimeographed PZPR internal document, 1989.

8. "Deklaracja Socjaldemokracji Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej uchwalona przez Kongres Założycielski w dniu 28/01/1990" (original in *Trybuna Kongresowa*, February 3–4, 1990), in *Programy partii ugrupowań parlamentarnych 1989–1991*, vol. 1, ed. Inka Słodkowska (Warsaw: Instytut Studiów Politycznych, 1995), p. 98.

9. Of these, the speech by the first secretary and former prime minister, Mieczysław Rakowski, was the defining one ("Przemówienia Pierwszego Sekretarza"). See the reports of the discussions and ceremonies in *Trybuna Kongresowa*, January 28, 1990; and Antoni Dudek, *Pierwsze lata III Rzeczypospolitej, 1989–1995* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo GEO, 1997), p. 88.

10. Dudek, *Pierwsze lata III Rzeczypospolitej, 1989–1995*, p. 88. (Indeed, a number who would later become leaders of the social democratic movement did not affiliate with any party. In Katowice, on the other hand, a small group formed the League of Communists that was neo-Leninist and never went beyond its declaration.)

11. For a full discussion, see Bohdan Jałowiecki, *Narodziny Demokracji w Polsce Lokalnej* (Warsaw: University of Warsaw, Instytut Gospodarki Przestrzennej, 1990), pp. 87–88; and Jacek Raciborski, *Polskie Wybory* (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Naukowe "Scholar," 1997), pp. 116–122.

12. Ironically, for the Solidarity camp, *communist* was an epithet Lech Wałęsa and his supporters used against intellectuals and Tadeusz Mazowiecki, the very man Wałęsa recommended in 1989 to Jaruzelski to be prime minister of the first noncommunist Polish government since World War II.

13. Raciborski, *Polskie Wybory*, p. 69; and Mirosława Grabowska and Ireneusz Krzemiński, *Bitwa o Belweder* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie Kraków, 1991), pp. 119–139.

14. Raciborski, *Polskie Wybory*, p. 69; Grabowska and Krzemiński, *Bitwa o Belweder*, pp. 119–139; and Radosław Markowski and Gabor Toka, "Zwrot na lewo w Polsce i na Węgrzech pięć lat po upadku komunizmu," in *Wybory parlamentarne, 1991 i 1993* (Warsaw: Instytut Studiów Politycznych PAN, 1995), p. 202.

15. Sojusz Lewicy Demokratycznej, "Tak Dalej, Nie Może Być," leaflet, April 1991.

16. Sojusz Lewicy Demokratycznej, "Tak Dalej, Nie Może Być."

17. Stanisław Gebethner, "System wyborczy: Deformacja czy reprezentacja?" in *Wybory parlamentarne, 1991 i 1993* (Warsaw: Instytut Studiów Politycznych PAN, 1995), p. 10.

18. Gebethner, "System wyborczy," p. 10.

19. Raciborski, *Polskie Wybory*, pp. 151, 180–186.

20. Raciborski, *Polskie Wybory*, pp. 53–54, 178–216.

21. Raciborski, *Polskie Wybory*, pp. 148–166.

22. Raciborski, *Polskie Wybory*, pp. 180–185, 253–255.

23. Raciborski, *Polskie Wybory*, pp. 53–54.

24. Raciborski, *Polskie Wybory*, pp. 89–90.

25. Raciborski, *Polskie Wybory*, p. 91.

26. Raciborski, *Polskie Wybory*, pp. 82–85; and, for another analysis, see Dudek, *Pierwsze lata III Rzeczypospolitej, 1989–1995*, pp. 359–364.



27. Raciborski, *Polskie Wybory*, pp. 97–98.
28. Raciborski, *Polskie Wybory*, p. 90.
29. Jacek Wasilewski, Maciej Kopczyński, and Sławomir Szczur, “Stabilność zachowań wyborczych,” in *Wybory Parlamentarne, 1997*, ed. Radosław Markowski (Warsaw: Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, 1999), p. 101.
30. Stanisław Gebethner, “Stabilność i dynamika zmian w polskim elektoracie w latach, 1991–1997,” in *Wybory Parlamentarne, 1997*, ed. Radosław Markowski (Warsaw: Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, 1999), p. 234.
31. Gebethner, “Stabilność i dynamika zmian w polskim elektoracie w latach, 1991–1997,” p. 234.
32. Richard Rose, Neil Munro, and Tom Mackie, *Elections in Central and Eastern Europe since 1990*, no. 300 (Glasgow: Centre for the Study of Public Policy,).
33. Rose, Munro, and Mackie, *Elections in Central and Eastern Europe since 1990*.
34. These included the right-wing Samoobrona Rzeczpospolitej Polskiej (Self-Defense of the Polish Republic), the Catholic Ligi Polskich Rodzin (League of Polish Families), and Platforma Obywatelska (the Citizen’s Platform), as well as the more centrist Prawo i Sprawiedliwość (Law and Justice) run by Andrzej Olechowski, a former communist activist and academic who admitted to having been an informant for the secret police for a short period of time.
35. Rose, Munro, and Mackie, *Elections in Central and Eastern Europe since 1990*.
36. In interview after interview after 1993, this was an issue and an experience SLD deputies raised.
37. Jerzy Wiatr’s *Krótki Sejm* (Warsaw: BGW, 1993) tells the story of this period from the perspective of one of the leaders of the SLD coalition.
38. For an examination of the internal dynamics of the SdRP, see Ewa Nalewajko, *Protopartie i Protosystem?* (Warsaw: Instytut Studiów Politycznych PAN, 1997).
39. Interview data, 1993–2000. In what would become a celebrated basis for attacks on the Social Democratic Party, Mieczysław Rakowski borrowed a million dollars in cash from the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in the waning days of the Polish United Workers’ Party. Apparently, he intended to use it to support the SdRP, but the political situation changed so rapidly that he never made use of the monies. In the end, he was in the anomalous position of not having used the cash but having the Soviet Union collapse before he could return it. When he finally did return it, the transaction leaked out and created a “mini scandal” because he returned the last half when he was accompanied to an ambassadorial dinner by Leszek Miller, one of the SdRP’s more prominent new leaders.
40. Joanna Kuszlík, “Pragmatyczna Zjednoczona Partia Rządca? Socjaldemokracja Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej szczebla lokalnego na tle ugrupowań postsolidarnościowych,” in *Korzenie demokracji*, ed. Mirosława Grabowska and Tadeusz Szawiel (Warsaw: PAN Instytut Studiów Politycznych, 2000), pp. 49–76; and Krystyna R. Sielawa-Kołobowska, “Partie polityczne na lokalnej scenie publicznej,” in *Korzenie demokracji*, ed. Mirosława Grabowska and Tadeusz Szawiel (Warsaw: PAN Instytut Studiów Politycznych, 2000), pp. 233–280.

41. Krzysztof Zagórski and Michał Strzeszewski, *Nowa Rzeczywistość* (Warsaw: DIALOG, 2000), pp. 63–66.

42. Of the four top leaders in the SdRP, the only one who could claim to be truly from the “proletariat” was Leszek Miller. Yet he was the leader who dressed and presented himself as the most “upper class” and did not show any affinity to workers.

43. Gil Eyal and Jacek Wasilweski, “Pochodzenie społeczne i postkomunistyczne losy nomenklatury,” in *Elity w Polsce, w Rosji, i na Węgrzech*, ed. Ivan Szelenyi, Don Treiman, and Edmund Wnuk-Lipiński (Warsaw: PAN Instytut Studiów Politycznych, 1995), pp. 105–132.

44. Interview data, Warsaw, 1993.

45. Sojusz Lewicy Demokratycznej, “Wybory '93: Program SLD,” “Karta Społeczna i Ekonomiczna,” and “Co i Jak Zmienić w Polskiej Gospodarce: Materiały Wyborcze,” leaflets, 1993.

46. Sojusz Lewicy Demokratycznej, “Tak Dalej Być Nie Może” (“It Can’t Be This Way Any Longer”), in “Wybory '93: Program SLD,” leaflet, 1993.

47. Sojusz Lewicy Demokratycznej, “Tak Dalej Być Nie Może,” p. 17.

48. Sojusz Lewicy Demokratycznej, “Tak Dalej Być Nie Może,” p. 17.

49. Sojusz Lewicy Demokratycznej, “Tak Dalej Być Nie Może,” p. 6.

50. Interview data, Warsaw, 1993.

51. Krzysztof Jasiewicz, “Portfel czy rożaniec? Ekonomiczne i aksjologiczne determinanty zachowań wyborczych,” in *Wybory Parlamentarne, 1997*, ed. Radosław Markowski (Warsaw: Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, 1999), pp. 149–168.

52. Interview data, Warsaw, 1996.

53. “Nowe Partii,” internal document, 1999.

54. Sojusz Lewicy Demokratycznej, “Statut,” Article 10, April 15, 1999.

55. Sojusz Lewicy Demokratycznej, “Statut,” Article 10.

56. CBOS, “Preferencje Partyjne w czerwcu” (June 2002), p. 2.

57. The splits have been much discussed in the Polish press since the 2001 election. In July 2002, the resolution of the shake-up of the cabinet was delayed by disagreements between Miller and Kwaśniewski that spilled into the press. See, for example, “Pojedynek Generałów,” *Wprost* (July 14, 2002), pp. 18–21.

58. Ewa Nalewajko, “Posłowie Sejmu X kadencji. Charakterystyka ogólna,” in *Początki parlamentarnej elity*, ed. Włodzimierz Wesołowski and Jacek Wasilewski (Warsaw: Instytut filozofii i socjologii PAN, 1992), pp. 73–97; and Jarosław Pawlak, “Polityczne korzenie nowej klasy politycznej,” in *Zbiorowi aktorzy polskiej polityki*, ed. Jacek Wasilewski (Warsaw: Instytut Studiów Politycznych, 1997), pp. 303–337.

59. Nalewajko, “Posłowie Sejmu X kadencji,” p. 141.

60. Nalewajko, “Posłowie Sejmu X kadencji,” pp. 119–202.

61. Marjorie Castle and Ray Taras, *Democracy in Poland* (Boulder: Westview, 2002), p. 129.

62. Interview data, Warsaw, 2001.

63. Interview data, Warsaw, 2002.

64. Among others, Janina Paradowska's "Trochę pudru, trochę różu" (*Polityka* 28 [2002]) discusses the splits in the cabinet over the budget and public expenditures.

65. Aleksander Kwaśniewski did attempt to make his presidential campaign "popular" by modeling it and even his appearance on Bill Clinton's presidential campaign. So, for instance, he took a bus with other top leaders around the country. In this, though, his stress was on "personality," not on whipping up crowds.

66. Stanisław Gebethner, *W Poszukiwaniu Kompromisu Konstytucyjnego* (Warsaw: Elipsa, 1999).

67. Leszek Miller was head of the Council of Ministers; Jerzy Oleksy was prime minister after Pawlak; Włodzimierz Cimoszewicz (never actually a member of the SdRP but a candidate and deputy for the SLD) was prime minister and minister of justice at various times; and Zbigniew Siemiakowski was minister of interior. Other academics who had been identified with the reformist wing of the PZPR—Grzegorz Kołodko, Dariusz Rosati, and Jerzy Wiatr—held parliamentary positions; were in the party's broader elite; and were, respectively, minister of finance, minister of foreign affairs, and minister of education.

68. Anna M. Grzymała-Busse, in *Redeeming the Communist Past* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp. 103–105, presents this picture as well, although she emphasizes party rules rather than personal connections.

69. Interview data, Warsaw, 1993–2000. For a full discussion of campaign finance issues in Poland and a comparison of the parties, see Marcin Walecki, "Wydatki polskich partii politycznych," in *Finansowanie polityki*, ed. Marcin Walecki (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Sejmowe, 2000), pp. 116–138.

70. Grzymała-Busse, *Redeeming the Communist Past*, p. 255.

71. Socjaldemokracja Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej, "Program Socjaldemokracji Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej," March 1997.

72. Sojusz Lewicy Demokratycznej, "Program Wyborczy: Dobre Dziś—Lepsze Jutro," Warsaw, 1997.

73. Sojusz Lewicy Demokratycznej, "Program Wyborczy."

74. Sojusz Lewicy Demokratycznej, "Program Wyborczy," pp. 7–9.

75. Sojusz Lewicy Demokratycznej, "Porozumienie Programowe SLD i UP," May 2001.

76. Sojusz Lewicy Demokratycznej, "Celiński i Czapiński o liście biskupów," November 9, 2001.

77. Janina Paradowska, "Zespół Millera," *Polityka* 42 (2001).

78. Sojusz Lewicy Demokratycznej, "Porozumienie Programowe SLD i UP."

79. Sojusz Lewicy Demokratycznej, "Miller: 100 dni rządu," January 24, 2002.

80. Leszek Miller is quoted as saying, "I was interested in Marxism, but not as instructions on how to carry out a revolution but as an analysis of the contemporary world" (Paradowska, "Zespół Millera").