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Social Policy in the Political Thought of Unia Wolności after 2000 : selected issues

Polityka i Społeczeństwo nr 8, 324-331

2011

Artykuł został opracowany do udostępnienia w internecie przez Muzeum Historii Polski w ramach prac podejmowanych na rzecz zapewnienia otwartego, powszechnego i trwałego dostępu do polskiego dorobku naukowego i kulturalnego. Artykuł jest umieszczony w kolekcji cyfrowej bazhum.muzhp.pl, gromadzącej zawartość polskich czasopism humanistycznych i społecznych.

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**SOCIAL POLICY IN THE POLITICAL THOUGHT
OF UNIA WOLNOŚCI AFTER 2000
(SELECTED ISSUES)**

The indication of 2000 as a temporal limit pertaining the described area of the political thought of Unia Wolności (UW – Freedom Union) was dictated by at least three reasons. The first reason concerned the necessity to leave the governing coalition that had been formed with Akcja Wyborcza Solidarność (AWS – Election Action Solidarity), which resulted in the fact that UW lost any real influence on power and, what was connected with it, on the sphere of public policies. The second reason was related to the divide within the party that occurred in December of 2000 causing the ex-members of Kongres Liberalno-Demokratyczny (Liberal-Democratic Congress) to leave UW, which led to the foundation of a new political force – Platforma Obywatelska Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej (Civic Platform of the Polish Republic). The third reason for the indicated time frame was connected with the ideological profile of Unia Wolności which featured, among others, challenges linked to the necessity to introduce reforms in the state, such as the restructuring of the public services sector, the system of health care, the pension system and the system of education¹.

According to some internal party evaluations, the implementation of the enumerated reforms was marked by their inadequate preparation whereas their results frustrated society, which, to a large extent, led to conclusions that political fighting as well as too much compromise had moved the AWS-UW government away from the implementation of their appropriate tasks, leading to unfinished reforms and the necessity to have them completed by a new government. Moreover, it must be stressed that the year 2000 was judged to mark the beginning of the

¹ The administration reform was purposefully not listed in the area of social policy.

second phase of transformation in the internal perspective of UW. The second decade of the state's transformation was to be a challenge in face of which skills, qualifications and education were to occupy the first and simultaneously the fundamental place in the area of UW's value system. Such were the goals that the party set out in 2000 (*Unia Wolności...* 2000: 14–15; *Ekspres...* 2001: 4).

The aim of the following analysis is to present the programmatic position of Unia Wolności as regards social policy. The presentation of the party's views is based on its programmatic documents, press materials and unpublished internal party sources pertaining the discussed political science category.

In the political thought of Unia Wolności social policy was given shape in the context of economic development. This development created a ground on which to solve the problems of social policy. However, they were not solved effectively. The aim of so understood concretisation of the economic factor was to counteract marginalization of social groups that did not contribute to and did not take advantage of economic development, especially in the period of globalization. The fundamental problem mentioned in the party documents was to secure fair living conditions and equal participation in social life for the disabled and children born in endangered families or those deprived of family care. Not satisfying those conditions threatened lacking social cohesion, civil marginalization or even social exclusion. During Unia Wolności's programmatic conference in April of 2000, Michał Boni raised the question for the debating representatives concerning the sources of those exclusions and inequalities. Those were neither civilizational backwardness nor transformation of the last decade. An analogy could be drawn with a film used in an analogue photo-camera. Until the film gets processed, nothing can be seen. And so true inequalities could be seen only after some time. To notice them, to understand the sources and causes of those inequalities one must take a look at the whole (*Deklaracja...* 2000: 22; *Materiały...* 2003: 35; *Konferencja...* 2000: 45). Among the determinants that were most important were a low level of education or lack of education and lack of mobility and active attitudes as well as lack of jobs.

A complete answer to the above posed question was thus related to the necessity for Unia Wolności to deal, on the one hand, with the problem of education, while on the other – with the creation and provision of jobs. During the conference proceedings, UW was still in coalition with AWS, which is why the evaluation of social policy was connected

to instruments that ensured effective intervention. The paradox was that Leszek Balcerowicz, being then the chairman of UW and deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Finance in Jerzy Buzek's cabinet did not always agree with social postulates of the coalition partner. This meant that the functions performed by Balcerowicz as Unia's „chief” and Minister for Finance that took care of issues that were important for government, hindered the agenda of UW, many times making its ideological face blurred (*Konferencja...* 2000: 46, *Uchwała Karta Polityki Społecznej...* 2000: 67).

Especially important was the necessity to introduce a balance between objectives and instruments of economic and social policy. Unia Wolności made appeals both to its own activists and to other politicians to make sure that the primacy of economic policy did not come at an expense of social policy. UW ideologues aimed at creating an innovative programme of social policy that was to be based on four pillars: initiative, primacy of the individual over the state, responsibility and family.

The concept of initiative was understood in terms of an ideal. This proposal, according to Bronisław Geremek, who had been elected the party's chairman in December of 2000, was to be an engine driving the whole society and was treated in terms of a „cure for all evil”. It consisted of UW activities undertaken in order to create new jobs and counteract unemployment which involved inter alia lowering non-wage costs of labour, flexibilization of employment contracts and hours of work, simplification and lowering of taxes, inclusive of the income tax, as well as introducing new regulations concerning craftsmanship, inclusive of definitions of vocational qualifications. Economic policy was to support human initiatives and not to destroy them (*Ekspres...* 2001: 4).

It is worth mentioning that according to some internal party evaluations of the existing social situation, the indicators of unemployment that were in use showed some decrease in the number of unemployed people. It was stressed that 45% of the unemployed lived in the countryside and that the number of unemployed women declined from 60% in 1997 to 55% in 2000. There was no change in the disproportions related to finding job opportunities, which were evidenced by the 30-percent rate of unemployment in the age cohorts of 18–24. According to those evaluations, almost 70% of the unemployed were persons with barely basic education or less than that, while 34% of the unemployed had vocational education. The rate of employment decreased – in 1997 the growth was 2 051 316 persons, the reduction 2 584 393 persons,

while in 2000 the growth was 2 475 876 persons, while reduction 2 123 005 persons. Labour offices had in 1997 915 827 job offers, while in 2000 – only 607 705 offers (Boni 2001: 8–9).

The reforms introduced by the coalition AWS-UW made visible threats related to poverty and excessive social inequalities which in a way forced a redefinition of objectives of social and family policy since apart from the phenomenon of poverty, there appeared a risk of structural poverty that could result from lacking job offers and low levels of education (Boni 2001: 2; *Materiały...* 2003: 38).

The second criterion of the new social programme of UW was to be the supremacy of the individual over the state, in accordance with the principles of *Konstytucja Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej z 2 kwietnia 1997 r.* (Constitution of the Polish Republic of 2 April 1997). This concept had been formed on the basis of the state's obligations towards society and it was a subject of programme analysis by UW in the context of the health care system. It was expressed in the following statement: „if an individual is more important than the state, then it is the patient and not the administrative officer that must be the centre of attention in health care”. A partial solution to this problem was the change in the way that medical services were financed coupled with transferring on the local level more responsibility for health care and securing maximal national standards of the provided services irrespective of the place of living. This was related to the preponderance of the principle of subsidiarity (*Ekspres...* 2001: 8; Fandrejewska-Tomczyk 2000: 197–199).

Responsibility was the value according to which politicians' credibility was to be judged. According to the premises of Unijny kodeks wartości [Union's Code of Values] that constituted a decalogue of UW politicians' behaviour, this responsibility was perceived as a kind of specific social sensitivity to the fate of helpless and weaker individuals. This social solidarism required, in the perception of UW ideologues, lending help to those who needed it. They believed that the state insofar as its implementation of social policy created a society of passive people, labelled „clients of the bureaucratized welfare and not active citizens”. According to the programme's assumptions, Unia Wolności's duty was to take care of the well-being of citizens and to defend their interests as well as to appeal to society to make citizens understand how important values sympathy and solidarity were and not successes of particular individuals. In this respect, a role was spotted for active assistance from non-governmental organizations constituting an ele-

ment of civil society. This issue was discussed not only in terms of financial indicators but also in terms of some essential dimension of human existence, a possibility to fulfill aspirations in one's life whose unfulfilling could lead to social degradation and frustration of people deprived of jobs. To break the standstill, such instruments of social policy were proposed as: financial benefits, material assistance and other forms of assistance that, in view of UW politicians, were to be constantly monitored and analysed in order to increase their effectiveness all the time (*Unijny...* 1998: 4; *Konferencja...* 2003: 82; Kryńska 2004:18, 25–26).

The family was the last of the supreme values enshrined in the modern programme of UW's social policy, constituting the factor that neither democracy nor economy could shape but that was essential for the purpose of community development and developing responsibility for that community. The family was burdened with most important tasks related to the maintenance of family bonds, upbringing and educating children. The problem pertained also pregnant women and employers' practices towards them, which was demonstrated, among others, by diminished opportunities for promotion, moving to a lower rank employment, reduction of wages, and even risk of losing one's job. The plan was to introduce a strict ban on such practices and to execute it without exemptions. The position of Unia Wolności in this respect was best expressed in the statement saying that „the strength of the Polish economy should not grow out of the weakness of the Polish family” since otherwise neither of those forces would have credible foundations (*Ekspres...* 2000: 10). If the family is endangered, this would affect the condition of the Polish economy badly. The aim was thus to create conditions conducive to the growth of family as this was seen as conducive to the growth of economy.

The supremacy of the principles of freedom and human agency vis-à-vis the state in the programme was reconfirmed in the declaration published by Unia Wolności in 2002 concerning fundamental aims of its activities among which the top position was attributed to the human well-being and equal opportunities within society as regards free development. The first category of goals was related to the freedom of human beings and their striving for personal happiness. Unia Wolności spoke in favour of free and responsible citizens who, within the bounds of law, would identify and realise their own visions of happy and successful lives. In such a way, UW was referring to a „wise use of free-

dom”, constituting an element of the Christian tradition, aimed not only at material well-being but also at cultural and spiritual wealth of the whole society (*Unijny...* 1998: 2–3; „Nowości...” 12, 2002: 1).

The second determinant involved equal opportunities entailing a broad framework of competences and basing upon a few axioms. The first of them was a constitutional guarantee of the exercise of one’s rights, meaning beliefs, preferences, circumstances etc. The second was concentrated on levelling the chances of various Polish regions, cities and rural areas. It entailed standardisation of the functioning of health care and social assistance in all parts of Poland, regardless of one’s place of residence and the status of the individual concerned. The third condition was linked to Poland’s accession to the European Union and the policy of equal rights for women and men in the EU. An emphasis was put on the actions of the European Communities in this area, with references to the Treaty of Rome of 1957, stressing its art. 119² that obliges all member states to implement the norm of equal pay for women and men. This was reaffirmed by directives of the European Council no. 75/117/EEC of 1975³ and no. 72/207 of 1976⁴. Pertaining equal treatment of women and men as far as their access to jobs, conditions of work, promotion, and training as well as the directive of the Council no. 86/613⁵ that prohibited discrimination of women on the basis of their family status or civil status. Only in 1992 did the European Council oblige employers to evaluate work conditions from the vantage point of risks to health of pregnant women and to guarantee them at least part time jobs („Nowości...” 18, 2002: 2; „Nowości...” 32, 2003: 2). Those objectives, formulated in connection with Poland’s membership in the European Union, were perceived by Unia Wolności as a test in political

² According to this article each Member State ensures in the first stage an introduction and later implementation of the principle of equal pay for female and male employees for the same work (*Traktat...* 2004: 79).

³ Cf. *Dyrektywa 75/117/EWG w sprawie zbliżania ustawodawstw państw członkowskich dotyczących stosowania zasady równego wynagradzania kobiet i mężczyzn.*

⁴ Cf. *Dyrektywa Rady nr 76/207/EWG z dnia 9 lutego 1976 r. w sprawie wprowadzenia w życie zasady równego traktowania kobiet i mężczyzn w zakresie dostępu do zatrudnienia, kształcenia i awansu zawodowego oraz warunków pracy.*

⁵ Cf. *Dyrektywa Rady 86/613/EWG z 11 grudnia 1986 r. w sprawie stosowania zasady równego traktowania kobiet i mężczyzn pracujących na własny rachunek, w tym w rolnictwie, oraz w sprawie ochrony kobiet pracujących na własny rachunek w okresie ciąży i macierzyństwa.*

maturity, in terms of reinforcement of Polish democracy and economic policy, which was to produce tangible political and social benefits.

The signing of the accession treaty as well as an active campaign by Unia Wolności in support of the positive answer to the question asked in the accession referendum became important as far as defining the party's views on social policy. UW began its European campaign the moment that the accession treaty was signed by Poland in Athens on 16 April in 2003. Poland's accession to the European Union was to secure an appropriate place for the Polish state in the family of the European nations. Also in this case UW was for equality of the European nations. In reference to this, Unia Wolności launched a series of social campaigns whose important element was a debate about social issues, with a special emphasis on problems in education, unemployment, levelling differences and lifting barriers in access to jobs, respect for national identities and the rebuilding of Poland's image so far treated in Europe as a state of the second rank (*List otwarty...* 2004: 5; *Unia Wolności...* 2004: 6; *Przemówienie...* 2003: 6).

Summing up, we need to agree with Ludmiła Dziewięcka-Bokun's statement that the paradigm of a modern state was a distinctive feature of modern social policy of Unia Wolności. This opinion is confirmed by Unia Wolności's approval of such social policy that implies levelling of social inequalities coupled with transferring the responsibility for the „state and degree of social security” on the family, which is also connected with the issue of upbringing (Dziewięcka-Bokun 2008: 399). Modern social policy in the political thought of Unia Wolności is characterised by sensitivity to values such as family and human dignity, security and responsibility for others, indispensable civic rights and the right to freedom. An opportunity to effectively impact on society through implementation of the listed components made the party favour the levelling of the existing differences in access to schooling and education, health care and equal access to jobs while the process of Poland's integration with the European Union was perceived as an investment in human capital and an opportunity to grant citizens better social assistance.

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