

**Pienkos - Poland elections from 2**

seats in the parliament, even though together they received more than fifty percent of the popular votes in the election. It was a mess and enabled the SLD to be a major force in Poland's politics until the early years of this decade.

But that situation has since been reversed. The SLD has been marginalized and Poland's two major rival parties (both of which have genuine origins in the Solidarity movement and a commitment to democratic values) now dominate the country's political system.

In short, the very same proportional representational system of elections has produced dramatically different results in Poland since 1993. I think that's significant.

3. Another interesting feature of Polish politics is that Poland's two current dominant parties are quite different from our two major parties in the U.S. and the two major parties in Britain. This is because Poland's politics has evolved along its own lines since 1980 and 1989. The Civic Platform party, for example, is not Poland's Republican Party and the Law and Justice (PiS) party is not its Democratic Party, or vice versa, although there are certain aspects of the Civic Platform - its commitment to market capitalism, for example - that resemble the Republicans, and PiS has a strong support base among working people and small farmers.

Indeed, party formation is a long term process. For example, the U.S. party system bears little or no resemblance to what existed in 1789! In fact, it wasn't until the beginning of the 20th century that the Democrats and Republicans began to assume the characteristics that we attach to them today. And party systems are always evolving, as we can see today in the U.S. with the increased polarization of our two parties, something that dates back to the presidency of Ronald Reagan, and perhaps before.

This is because political parties in a democracy are voluntary organizations, here and in Poland, Britain, Germany, etc. This means they are continually evolving, even though they may keep the same names over time.

4. Poland's method of election is a matter for the Polish people and its leaders to decide - pure and simple. We as Americans can watch and be of help, when and if we are asked. But that's it. The good Doctor for his part can argue his views there and I wish him well. But it is for the Polish people to decide for themselves what is best for them.

And let's keep in mind that since 1989, Poland has had a host of national elections - four for president, six for the legislature, a couple of referendums, and lots of local elections (where local issues count more than national party labels - just as it is in the U.S.)

All of these votes have been marked by relatively high turnouts, lots of competing parties, fair counts of the votes, good debates on the issues, substantial media coverage, and respect for the results - all in an environment where everyone can vote over the age of 18.

Poland indeed has a great deal to be proud about as a democracy!

5. Incidentally, Polish public opinion is decidedly in favor of Poland's membership in both NATO and the European Union. And in Europe, Poland is a valuable and valued contributor to both organizations. I really found this out for myself during my recent visit to both NATO and EU headquarters.

Our fellow Americans and our government ought to give more attention to Poland, a true and important ally, and a thriving democracy with a solid economy besides.

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Donald Pienkos' articles on the 1995 and 2005 Polish elections are published in the December 1997 and June 2006 editions, respectively, of the quarterly journal, The Polish Review. □

**Who decided and who is to decide about the Polish electoral system?****Prof. Prystawa's response to Professor Pienkos' remarks.**

Let me start from the end of Prof. Pienkos' statement:

*Poland's method of election is a matter for the Polish people and its leaders to decide - pure and simple. We as Americans can watch and be of help, when and if we are asked. But that's it. The good Doctor for his part can argue his views there and I wish him well. But it is for the Polish people to decide for themselves what is best for them.*

First of all, I am not some "good Doctor" who argues his views in order to patronise others. I am one of the Polish people. I live in Poland and am a member of the Polish Nation. Whether others wish me well or not, I will speak about the electoral system which was imposed on us in 1991 and which, among other things, deprives us of the right to freely stand in elections. I could not agree more with Professor Pienkos when he says that *it is for the Polish people to decide what is best for them*. We are denied that right through a corrupt and undemocratic electoral system and this is the main point of my argument.

Ever since the so called "First Completely Free Parliamentary Elections in Poland" of 1991, I to belong to those who are raising the following question: "Why the Free Poland, at the birth of her democracy had not adopted the electoral system of her greatest historical Allies, of those about whom Winston Churchill wrote his monumental work 'The Great Democracies' - the British, the Canadians, the Americans, the Australians etc. - but a system completely different, a system which was in fact already totally compromised by the 20 years of practice of the II Polish Republic of 1919 - 1939?"

There cannot be any doubt that that system was compromised, preventing Poland from creating a sensible political elite and a sensible state: General Sławoj - Składkowski, the last Prime Minister of that Poland, happened to be the 19th Prime Minister within 20 years of the existence of the State. The situation with all the other ministers was even worse: it was virtually impossible to find a governmental minister who would be able to stay in his office even for one year! Constant, permanent changes of government, a weak state incapable of solving any internal or external problem - this was the result of the faulty and senseless electoral system. Our ancestors tried to repair that system many times and never succeeded. For some reasons they avoided the system practiced for nearly two centuries by their greatest friends and allies: the British and the Americans and also by Poland until the partitions in the XVIII century.

It is remarkable that Donald Pienkos, an American Political Science Professor, in a far away University of Wisconsin, made an observation identical to what the Polish Movement for Electoral Reform has been pointing out for the last 20 years: the decision after 1989 was to go with a very generous PR system of electing legislators. This action had the effect of saving the former communist party from extinction. This was because the Communists, or post-Communists, or SLD or SDRP, or whatever they called themselves, had they operated in a "single member district plurality wins" system would nowhere have won more than 10 or 15 percent of the total vote in any district. As a result, the party would have been relegated to the "ash heap" of politics in Poland.

Well said. However, "Saving from extinction" is, to put it mildly, a slight understatement. Has Professor Pienkos not noticed a decade of presidency by a former high-ranking communist apparatchik? Has he not noticed, numerous governments led by similar communist frontmen, like Miller, Oleksy, Cimoszewicz, Belka, or Pawlak for that

matter? Has he not noticed how former communist apparatchiks and people of the communist secret service were taking over Polish banks, land and property? And first of all the all-powerful media: newspapers, television and radio networks? Nice escape from extinction, no doubt!

But what has this "generosity" given back to us - the generous Polish people? What have we got in return?

In return we received a state even weaker than that between the two world wars. Poland has become a laughing-stock of international politics while consecutive Polish governments proved themselves totally incapable of solving a single serious domestic problem. We have a collapse of the national system of education, a collapse of the national health service, a collapse of the state public transport - roads, railways and airlines; we have merely remnants of the Polish army, all our banks are in foreign hands, the overall national debt has shocking dimensions, we have annihilated our industry and reduced the agriculture and one would have a very hard time trying to find a Polish product on both the international and domestic markets. About two million young people emigrated for jobs, another two million jobless in Poland, every second university or college graduate without any perspective of finding a qualified employment. Polish jails are overcrowded, the most applications before the European Court of Human Rights are filed from Poland and in many thousand cases the State of Poland is found guilty and has to pay high compensations!

And how can it be otherwise when Donald Tusk is the 15th Prime Minister of Poland since 1989 and in each of his ministerial departments the situation is even more pathetic: Krzysztof Kwiatkowski is the 24th Minister of Justice; Jerzy Miller is the 21st Minister of Interior, Marek Sawicki is the 24th Minister of Agriculture; and so on and so on. The constitutional post of a minister is nothing more than a sinecure for some chosen people!

People in Poland demand change. Numerous opinion polls document that an overwhelming majority of Poles want to vote for persons not for political parties! Our National Movement demands the American system of elections. We have organized literally hundreds of conferences all over the country, published many books, brochures and articles, staged street demonstrations and so on. For all these 20 years any access of the representatives of the Movement to public television or radio had been denied. When we stage a demonstration all TV cameras carefully look other way.

Nearly a million signatures of Polish citizens have been collected to demand a national referendum on this issue. The signatures were presented to the Sejm and were not even discussed! A couple of weeks ago the Polish population learned that all those signatures had been shredded! Presently we are filing a complaint to the European Court of Human Rights. Yes, we totally agree with Professor Pienkos that it is for the Polish people to decide about the electoral system. We only want to point out that this basic right of the Polish people is being permanently violated.

*We as Americans can watch and be of help, when and if we are asked* - writes Professor Pienkos. Really? Look at what is he telling us now, when we have come to ask for his support. Is he encouraging us to use the American example and learn from America? I could not find any words of encouragement in his statement.

It is a very interesting question in itself.

**Let us look at the history of the world and see how America is spreading and developing democracy all over the world.**

We know from the Memoires of Konrad Adenauer that this great German politician proposed the British system of elections in Germany after the WWII "but the Allies did not agree to that". Did General MacArthur introduce the American system to the infant democracy of Japan? Was the American system introduced in Italy after the unconditional surrender of Badoglio? Is the US implementing single-seat constituencies in Iraq or Afghanistan?

Upon this experience one could come to the conclusion that the US, while helping other countries to build democracy, has always preferred some other systems to the one you have in America. And if I understand Professor Pienkos properly he also suggests that we should go a different way rather than try to follow America! I must admit I find it a bit strange.

Undoubtedly Professor Pienkos is right in his remark that *there is no absolutely "best" system of elections*. In Poland we are not looking for the "best" but for a better system. For a system that will respect our citizen's rights and will lead to a sensibly ruled state. After 21 years of democracy the Polish population has no respect for politicians and no confidence in their parliamentary representatives. In fact, opinion polls reveal that politicians in Poland occupy the lowest positions in rankings of social esteem. The present Prime Minister Donald Tusk once said: "the Polish voters, from one election to another, are more and more convinced that the Day of Election is a Day of a Great National Fraud". These are his very words.

Polish voters feel cheated and manipulated. The majority does not understand the election rules and do not see a connection between their voting and the outcome of elections. Therefore the majority of voters abstain from voting. They do not consider these elections free and there are good reasons for that. The most obvious reason is that a Polish citizen has no right to stand as a candidate in the parliamentary elections on his own. The only possibility to stand is through a political party channel, i.e. with consent of the party leadership. Political parties and their leaders enjoy various legal privileges and in such a way the electoral equality of citizens is seriously violated. Polish democracy has long ago turned into partitocracy, which in many respects resembles the communist political system

Again, I totally agree with Professor Pienkos: it is for the Polish people to decide for themselves which system is best for them. The Polish people, for a long time, have been demanding a referendum on this issue. The trouble is that the Polish politicians, of all political parties, do not want even to hear about it! They think it is a decision for them and for them alone. The Polish people have no right to interfere. □

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