

POLISH CONSERVATIVE LIBERTARIAN MOVEMENT AND ONE OF ITS PROTAGONISTS

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Polish conservative-libertarian option is represented through the Union of Real Politics (In Polish- Unia Polityki Realnej, hence UPR). Ideologically it favours conservatism, libertarianism and monarchism.¹ Its program is based on the notions of decentralisation, deregulation, decommunisation, and demonopolisation. UPR although marginal or largely non-existent in terms of parliamentary representation and support it is nevertheless of some importance in the Polish political sphere. One of its main contributions which have remained more or less constant over the last two decades is the placement of the issue of decommunisation into the mainstream of public debate. In real terms UPR represents the only constant conservative-libertarian option in Poland. Its party programme has remained stable throughout its existence and it at last at face value is an ideologically based organisation that attempts to steer away, not always successfully, from the worst of partisan politicking.

UPR was formed on the 14th November 1987; the original founding members were, Ryszard Czarnecki, Stefan Kisielewski, Janusz Korwin-Mikke, Stanislaw Michalkiewicz, Robert Smoktunowicz, and Andrzej Sadowski. On the 6th December 1990 UPR became the first officially registered political party in post-communist Poland. UPR united the monarchists and the nationalist movements. In the 1990 and 1991 Senate and Sejm elections UPR put forth their candidates, although it did not win any seats in the Senate three of its candidates won seats in the Sejm, Janusz Korwin-Mikke (Poznan), Lech Pruchno-Wróblewski (Warszawa) and Andrzej Sielańczyk (Katowice). During the term a further candidates joined the UPR team in Sejm, Antoni Dzierżyński (Legnica), and Jan Skrobisz. In terms of political success 1990-1993 was the only period in UPR history when some, although very marginal, success was achieved. In the

¹ Monarchism is not a part of the official party program and is not favored by all of the party members.

1990 elections UPR gained a total of 253 024 votes (2,3%), whereas in 1993 parliamentary elections UPR gained 438 559 votes (3,2%). The problem which soon became apparent after the 1990 elections was the fragmentation of power, 29 parties sharing 460 mandates, which resulted in the inability to form a stable government. In order to solve this 5% threshold was introduced, which requires a political party to reach the threshold in the amount of votes cast in its favor in order to gain mandates. Regardless of the slight rise in popularity UPR, since 1990, it did not win any seats due to not reaching the required 5% threshold in any of the subsequent elections. The results of the EU parliamentary elections were also disappointing at 1.87%. UPR's situation was somewhat better when it came to regional elections where UPR's success was greater. It managed to place and win mandates for its candidates in various regional centers² in 2002.

The driving force and public face of UPR throughout the years has always been Janusz Korwin-Mikke. He held the position of the party leader from 1988 to 1997 and again from 1999-2002.³ He also registered in the presidential elections in 1990, but did not gather the 100 000 required signatures to run in the elections. Korwin-Mikke tried again to run in the presidential elections in 1995 and 2000, but again with little success.⁴ In 1997 Korwin-Mikke resigned from the position of party leader, from 1997-1999 Stanislaw Michalkiewicz held the post, resigning to yet again hand it back to Korwin-Mikke. Of late UPR has been experiencing upheaval within its ranks and struggle for internal power within the party structure. This has placed considerable strain on the allegiances and sympathise of individual members. None of the original founding members remain; the last two Korwin-Mikke and Michalkiewicz 'voluntarily' left the ranks after the October 2009 UPR congress. As of 20 October 2009 Janusz Korwin-Mikke is the leader of the reactivated Wolność i Praworządność (WiP)⁵ party, and has been actively encouraging UPR members to join.

² In Gdansk, Bydgoszcz, Plock, Leszno and Warsaw.

³ The other UPR party leaders were Stanislaw Wojtera (2002-2005), Jacek Boron (2005), Wojciech Popiela (2005-2008), and Boleslaw Witzak (2008- current).

⁴ Korwin-Mikke gained 2.4% (1995) and 1.4% (2000) of the votes in the presidential elections.

⁵ WiP – Freedom, Law and Order – originally known as PJKM (Janusz Korwin-Mikke Platform) the party changed its name to WiP in 2009. WiP is a political party formed by Korwin-Mikke for the presidential and parliamentary elections in 2005. WiP drew its candidates primarily from the UPR ranks however it also sported a few independent candidates. Its program was identical with UPR. The party was formed due to unsuccessful UPR attempts to form election coalition with other right wing conservative parties on the Polish political scene, such as LPR (League of

Political Agenda and Programme

UPR officially describes itself as a ‘conservative-liberal party, that links traditional moral norms with the conviction of superiority of freedom in social and economic realms of society.’⁶ The declaration of the party program demands radical changes in education, academic and cultural realms in Poland, the total abandonment of state protectionism in industry and economic spheres in society, no state intervention in the economy, and the ‘return to the intrinsic values of Polish and Latin civilisations’; such as ‘honour, truth, freedom, respect, responsibility and private ownership’.⁷ Some of the more controversial parts of UPR program are: the return of capital punishment, voluntary schooling, no public health care, strong pro-life stance, and opposition to the European Union.

As a party UPR aims at eliminating all manifestations of socialism, in the political as well as the economic spheres and to protect private ownership and individual freedom. However it also has an authoritarian streak as it supports a strong punishment and legal restrictions in the social sphere, to protect ‘natural law’, individual ownership, freedom and ‘right to life’.⁸ Thus its liberalism is limited to the economic sphere while its conservatism extends to all other aspects of social life. It is openly against preferential treatment of minorities of any sort, be they ethnic, social, religious. It also does not support social security, pensions, government grants or tax concessions and bureaucracy. The rule of the free-market and individual responsibility should prevail above all else, thus the government should offer no protectionism of any sort. According to the UPR the nation-state should keep its sovereignty, and limit its activities solely to the areas of national security, diplomacy, road infrastructure, environmental management and the up keeping of law and order through policing and court system. Military is to be professionalized

Polish Families). Once the elections were over in 2006 it temporarily suspended all activities only to be reactivated once again in 2009 by Korwin-Mikke. It received 1.57% of votes in the 2005 elections.

⁶ Official UPR website – (<http://www.upr.org.pl/main/artukul.php?strid=1&katid=79&aid=390>) accessed 20th November 2009.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ This is a somewhat ambiguous form since on one hand it seems to be authoritarian in the sense that it strives for strong law and order and conservatism in society, and on the other it supports individual freedom and minimal interference or censorship in society.

and voluntary.⁹ Taxation system is to be extensively reworked; income tax is to be abolished along with all other taxes except for a few local taxes.

Major Actions and Campaigns

In terms of impact of party led initiatives UPR foremost contribution to national level politics came in 1992 when Korwin-Mikke initiated and tabled a resolution regarding lustration of the members of Polish government and legal system. The resolution was accepted, although the constitutional tribunal later rejected the resolution as being unconstitutional. Nevertheless, Korwin-Mikke's actions lead to the release of the 'Macierewicz list'¹⁰. The ensuing scandal immediately brought down the government, with a vote of no confidence. Consequently, ever since these fateful events the issue of decommunisation and lustration has remained firmly in the mainstream of political debate in Poland..

In 1991 Stanislaw Michalkiewicz proposed the project of the 'small constitution', which gave more power to the presidential position; he tried to enlist Lech Walesa's support for his project but to no avail. His 1992 'new constitution' project also failed to gain support among the MPs and was rejected. Right from the inception of the party Korwin-Mikke has consistently criticised and refused to co-operate with 'Solidarity' due to perceiving it as a left wing organisation with too great an influence on the functioning of the state. In 1995/1996 he further refused to support the candidature of Lech Walesa in the presidential elections. These standpoints led to rifts and various splits within the ranks of UPR, and loss of membership. Korwin-Mikke is the most well known face of UPR, and he frequently speaks out about any issue, ranging from feminism through to global warming¹¹ or the loss of sovereignty to the EU. His viewpoints have earned UPR a certain amount of notoriety and controversy, which has also led to alienation from the political scene. In fact some members have at various times expressed the opinion that Korwin-Mikke sabotages UPR election chances with his controversial speeches and opinions.

⁹ This in fact did happen in 2009. Poland no longer has compulsory military service.

¹⁰ The 'Macierewicz list' (released on 4 June 1992) included the names of 64 MPs and senators who in the past were members of communist secret service. As a result President Lech Walesa called for immediate dismissal of the PM and the government. On the 5 June 1992 Polish Sejm placed a vote of no confidence in the government, consequently bringing it down.

¹¹ He believes that both feminism and global warming are ideas based on false premises, and thus can be dismissed.

Other activities are regular protests and demonstrations. These range from anti EU demonstrations, to martial law remembrances, anti-feminist protests, or mild harassment of protesting strikers. The protests, various happenings and official speeches are filmed and available through the UPR official YouTube channel.¹²

Membership and Mobilisation Structures¹³

The primary recruiting structures rely on the internet and the UPR website, where potential members or sympathisers can register their interest. Those who register should in theory be contacted by a UPR member however the structure of the website registry, and the lackadaisical approach of those who are responsible for contact often means that potential new members sometimes do not receive a phone call for months. There is very little if any effort by the local chapters to run campaigns aimed at getting new members. From time to time regional centres organise recruitment meetings. These are usually in a pub and according to the information from the Warsaw regional centre very poorly attended. Very few of the potential members that turn up for these meetings ever return. Those who become members will usually meet once per month in an informal way. Attendance at these meetings is seen as a sign of a commitment, declaring to do something (like poster actions) is a sign of huge commitment, while actually doing what you said you will, exceptional commitment. Part of the problem is the lack of organisation in the lower ranks. One of the former regional chapter leaders for UPR commented on his frustrations with the local members and their ‘inability to organise or care about the party’.¹⁴ The members are expected to self fund the party promoting and campaign activities; this also leads to high dissatisfaction among the ranks. The actual regional membership numbers are quite low.¹⁵

Lately the higher ranks of UPR have also experienced upheaval and discontent. Aside from the fight for power for the party leader position which at this time¹⁶ is still uncertain, there has been an ideological split in the party ranks. There is also a feeling that the party is no longer

¹² UPR TV - <http://www.youtube.com/user/UPRTV?blend=2&ob=1>

¹³ This information about membership and mobilization structures relate to the Warsaw region. Other regions such as Lodz for instance are more dynamic in terms of individual commitment.

¹⁴ Interview with a former regional chapter leader for Warsaw – 05/01/2010.

¹⁵ For instance, current membership numbers for the Masovian region stand at 27 members (05/01/2010). Although the number of ‘sympathisers’ is considerably higher.

¹⁶ 11 January 2010

ideological and that the missing presence of the ‘old guard’ has left the party bereft of strong leadership. This also has led to a feeling of discontent among some of the members who feel that the internal power struggles have not only ‘sold out’ UPR, but that the party is trying to commercialise and in effect is crumbling apart. The current morale is low. Although the internal power struggles and lack of good organisational structures in the lower ranks might, in theory, lead to dissolution of UPR, if enough members leave the ranks; but it can also have an effect of revitalising the party. After all, the entire party programme has remained almost unchanged for the past 20 years and so has the leadership. This has given the party a stable but also very stale platform. Thus the changes might offer new opportunities at restructuring which could influence the chances of future success.

In Search of Ideal Poland – the Case of Stanislaw

One of the important behind the scenes players within UPR is Stanislaw¹⁷, who is reasonably well known political commentator and columnist, although by no means an iconic figure in either field. He is also one of the founders and unofficial spokes people for the UPR party¹⁸. His viewpoints are firmly right of centre and broadly speaking S. self defines himself as a libertarian. Regardless of his self-definition S. political standpoint is as multi-faceted as his public appeal, for some he is libertarian, for others he is a nationalist, anti-Semite, Christian Right campaigner, or a patriot besieged by the new found Western imposed Liberalism. In Poland, both publicly and privately, he is admired, loved, hated, marginalised, seen as a freedom-fighter, spokes person for the Far Right Libertarian side, whistle-blower or a curiosum of a bygone era. His articles appear in press titles that are at odds with each other ideologically, some are patriotic-Christian Right based, others libertarian or even anti-clerical. S. has also held the post of an editor for the UPR associated ultra-conservative weekly ‘Najwyższy Czas!’ (‘About time!’)¹⁹. He also regularly

¹⁷ Born on the 8 November 1947 in Lublin, Poland.

¹⁸ Although during the writing of this article his association with UPR has come to an end. I will explore the closing of this important chapter in S. life further on in this article.

¹⁹ ‘Najwyższy Czas!’ is a weekly with a libertarian-patriotic euro-skeptic profile. It has been accused of anti-Semitism, nationalism and xenophobia in a 2008 report on hate-speech in the Polish press, commissioned by Ministry of Internal Affairs.

appears on radio shows on the laicized public radio as well as in the super conservative Roman Catholic Radio Maryja²⁰ where he has a regular weekly spot. Besides his regular political columns and radio appearances S. also regularly publishes a compilation of his recent writings in book form and updates his website and blog which has a lively discussion forum attached to it. The books are published by a niche patriotic publisher and distributed through street sellers and Radio Maryja bookshops. Besides writing and actively participating in UPR activities S. also maintains a busy schedule of public appearances at various UPR and Młodzież Wszechpolska²¹ ('All Polish Youth') meetings. The rest of his public appearances are Radio Maryja related, and organised by various Catholic-Patriotic groups. Part of his yearly schedule consists of a lecture tour of the Polish ex-pat communities in North America. These provide him with an opportunity to garner support and offer additional opportunities for the distribution of his books. S. is certainly not only interesting but also a very intelligent and complex person who is not afraid to express his controversial opinions. S. writings have been known to raise alarm and controversy in the mainstreams of Polish society, but for the most part S. remains on the outskirts and marginalised, even though his political blog has won the Blog of the Year award in 2009.

The Context of the Interview

When I arrive at Stanislaw's home I'm warmly greeted by his wife. S. lives with his wife and their two teenage daughters; he also has an older son from a previous marriage who lives apart. S. apartment is in the centre of Warsaw, in an old pre-war apartment block. It is large, finely renovated, and sparsely furnished with antiques matching the era of the building. The apartment is a new material addition, previously S. and his family lived in a small cramped two room apartment in a communist block in the suburbs of Warsaw. S. does not place too much emphasis on material possessions, ideas, knowledge and actions have always held more sway for him.

²⁰ Radio Maryja is a highly controversial Roman Catholic national public broadcaster. So far throughout its 18 year old existence it has consistently attracted public attention due to accusations of politicisation, corruption, hate-speech and anti-Semitism.

²¹ Młodzież Wszechpolska (MW) is a controversial nationalist youth group – its agenda is to foster and nurture new political elites in the spirit of 'patriotism and Catholicism', based on the pre-WWII ideology of national-Catholicism. MW is strongly homophobic and opposed to liberalism, tolerance, political correctness and relativism. Its activism and violence has been widely condemned by Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, various GLBT organizations and the UN.

We settle in S. study with glasses of brandy accompanied by cakes and start the interview. This is not S. first interview with me, so the atmosphere is relaxed²². We start by discussing his past and how he has come to be who he is now, I consciously do not steer the interview and let S. guide me through his life, thus allowing him to define and place emphasis on what he considers to be important to him.

Searching for Truth and Integrity – Navigation Dangers and Tangled Territories

S. is a complex person. Essentially his idealism and search for truth and answers has led him to conclusions which are uncomfortably extreme, but he is able to argue them in a coherently intellectualised manner due to his exceptional knowledge of history and law, which does not necessarily mean that he arrives at the only correct answer. He is a formidable intellectual sparring partner that is honest and forthright. S. is no fool and he can clearly see that some of his ideas can never be implemented in reality and will always remain a part of the ideologically utopian realm. However, this does not mean that he is willing to step away from libertarianism and trade it for any other ideology. S. idealism, self-integrity, determination, dedication to his work, desire to ‘fix the world’; ability to not take himself too seriously at times and to accept difference is admirable. S. personal code of honour and integrity is second to none. He is always good-humoured, exceptionally fine-mannered, helpful, patient and respectful. These traits are probably not clearly visible in his writings and speeches due to his sharp and uncompromising public style.

On the whole, S. political commentaries are firmly libertarian in nature with a few notable exceptions where he diverges into irregular and uncomfortable territories. These diversions are worth explaining because they offer an insight into what makes him attractive to his followers, aside from his sharp wit. His writings are euro-sceptic where EU becomes the new occupation force aimed at depriving Poland of its sovereignty. They also frequently contain references and musings on the secret service agenda for Poland, as well as the Jewish cartel world conspiracy²³. Although his writing style is witty and humorous his vision of Poland’s present and future state is

²² My previous interviews and contact with S. were in relation to my PhD research project on the socio-religious movement of Family of Radio Maryja.

²³ S. is an avid proponent of conspiracy theories.

bleak and unyielding. For S. Poland has become an occupied state of the EU, devoid of freedom, run by secret agents whose aim is to enslave it, destroy its culture and break its character while reaping the economic benefits from its greatness. Poland is not free. It is a land where foreign interests dictate terms and decisions. It is a land which is perceived as a danger to the West due to its great economic potential and to its strong and valiant culture, thus it must be diluted and polluted with Westernisation which aims to break traditions and instil, by ideological force, alien ideas of political correctness and tolerance. For S. tolerance is intolerant and minority rights are an artificially imposed category which legitimise perversions such as homosexuality. The Jews, Russians and Germans are traditional secret foes. S. thinks that Germans and Jews aim to break Poland economically, through property restitution and compensation payments. He argues that the Jews are demanding millions in compensation payments for the Holocaust from Poland and use idea of anti-Semitism as a weapon against those who are not willing or are knowledgeable enough to realise their ploy of oppression and enslavement.

According to S. there is no Polish anti-Semitism, in fact it is the Jews who are guilty of anti-Polonism by seeking compensation from the victims. Poles have become victims of history and politics of correctness. They have the right to react against the injustices committed against them by the Jews, but this right has been consistently denied to them under the guise of political correctness, which has become the new weapon of oppression. Similarly Germany is implementing the secret plan of 'Mitteleuropa' through the EU channels. Whereby it aims to annex all the Polish territories, destroy Polish industry, depopulate the area in order to form a pleasant recreational buffer zone between the West and the East and enslave the remaining population through economic dependence on the West. Admittedly most of S. writings seem too far on the political limb to be influential or have a wider audience appeal. The truth is that S. has a faithful following among the Christian Right as well as among the patriotic circles. He also has a wide appeal and a quiet following among the general population, and in the Polish ex-pat communities, which is evident by the popularity of his books and regular columns in the various titles he writes for.

Family Background, Childhood and Education

Stanislaw thinks that there was nothing in his life or background which predisposed him towards activism. His father came from a very poor background; he was an orphan. The family house was a place of lively discussion on many subjects, his father was an anti-communist, but he was no fan of the pre-war Poland either. Everything that his father achieved in life was through his own intelligence and effort, starting from a position of extreme poverty and ending up at a Warsaw university. Even though his father was an anti-communist he also saw the positive aspects of the new system, such as social equality, opportunities to change social position, advance and gain education; something not present in the pre-war Poland 'which was more caste like'.

S. is full of admiration for his father and the travails of his life. There is no tradition of activism in S. family background, likewise S. vocational desires were focused on law practice and not on activism. S. very much sees himself as an accidental activist. 'I come from a family of teachers, ordinary provincial teachers. My mother finished secondary school in Lvov and my father started but did not finish his university degree in Warsaw due to the war...he came from the former Polish territories in what is now Belarus'. Prior to the war Stanislaw's father was a provincial teacher and saved up his money in order to be able to fund his university degree in Warsaw. Since a part of his degree requirement was that he needed to be married²⁴, a friend of his in Warsaw decided to introduce him to a young lady who later became his wife and S's mother.

S. has two older sisters. 'By the time I was born my family moved to Malkuszow near Lublin, in eastern Poland. There was no secondary school there. When my older sister reached high school age we moved to a village where my mother came from... so my sisters could start school, while my parents took on jobs at the local primary school. We also inherited a house from my mother's family in this village'. After S. finished high school, in Belzyce, he started a law degree at the University of Marie Curie in Lublin, as he wanted to become a lawyer.

'I did not involve myself with politics. Since high school I decidedly had an anti-communist viewpoint. Although they weren't deeply thought out, more emotionally based

²⁴ The university degree was in 'colonial migration studies'. It was somewhat unusual in the sense that the graduates were supposed to choose a country in which they wanted to settle; once they graduated a ship chartered by the university would deliver them to their chosen destinations. S. father chose Brazil. However, the additional eligibility requirement was that all graduates/new settlers had to be married, so his father needed to desperately find a wife.

and irrational... I remember my first collision with the communist viewpoint. It was the first lecture I attended at the law department. My first time in a lecture hall... The professor started the lecture and his first words were 'We Marxists'...[laughs]... I was no Marxist so I was petrified.... Where did I end up? This was no university, this was no place of knowledge; this was some Marxist hog-wash.'

Luckily for S. the Marxist professor was not influential in the department, and overall S. thinks that the law department was 'not too bad and there were people there that weren't really Marxist'. Initially S. was frightened that 'in order to finish a law degree I would have to pretend and recite by heart some Marxist nonsense'. I ask him how the time he spent at the university formed his attitude towards the communist establishment and his ideology.

'It strengthened my ideas and enabled me to rationalise my anti-communist stance... Thanks to the knowledge I gained from my studies. For instance I really liked Roman law; I really liked Civil Law due to the logic of it. It aesthetically pleased me and I liked learning it. Because of this I decided to specialise in Civil Law.... What formed and rationalised my dislike for establishment was the first year lecture on political economics in capitalism. I learnt new things; the capitalist economics were clear, logical and obvious... I really liked it... during the second year we had the political economics of socialism. ... it was full of terrible nonsense... I could no longer understand what I was saying... and writing ... it was total babble... This is when I became full of disgust for communist knowledge. It is better to know nothing '.

Early Career and Further Education

In 1969 S. graduated from the Marie-Curie University in Lublin, with a Master of Law degree. After S. finished his studies he became aware that his career possibilities were limited due to not being part of the Communist party. He wanted to become a lawyer and open up a practice. The standard procedure at this time was to make an application for the permission to practice, however the chances of the application being approved without backing of Communist party membership were slim. Lublin was a city with very closed and impermeable legal environment and S. realised that it was highly unlikely that he would be let into the inner-circles, which is what he needed in order to practice. Furthermore, the presence of a local university meant that there was fierce competition in the application process between the Law graduates. So, S. thought that since neither Gdansk, Gdynia nor Sopot had a university at the time, these were possibly

places that he stood a greater chance of success with his application. On this off chance S. travelled to Gdansk, in the hope that this might help him; he was willing to take on any job, as long as it allowed him to survive. His first job was with the Gdansk City Council, in the local Town Planning and Administration department. After he settled into his new job, he went to the Head of the voivod Courts in Gdansk. S. recalls:

‘The only question that he asked me, he didn’t even ask me if I finished my degree, was if I’m a Party member. When I answered no, he looked at me as though I was a Martian. And I understood the inappropriateness of my attempt. So I gave it a rest. I realised that I will not become a lawyer unless I sign up and I didn’t have the slightest intention to join the [Communist] Party’.

At the same time he found out from another source that the University of Warsaw was taking applications for the post-graduate Diploma in Journalism. This event changed S. life-course. There was no further point to staying in Gdansk, since the only reason why S. moved there was to try to become a lawyer. S. applied, moved to Warsaw and started his post-graduate Diploma at the University of Warsaw. Here he made friends, some of which he keeps in touch with even today. S. describes the environment as: ‘broadly the students could be divided into two groups; the Marxists and Us’. Each group was roughly the same size, and then there was the group in between which was apolitical. Their single most success was the taking over of the edition of the departmental post-grad journal, which was usually edited by the Marxists, but for one issue the anti-establishment group was able to print their own issue.

‘This was probably not this important but we had this idea of asking Cardinal Wojtyła²⁵ for an interview. There was some discussion about abortion even then, it was 1971...and Wojtyła published a book on this subject, so we thought he would be a good person to ask for an interview. When we were writing the invitation letter to Wojtyła one of the assistants noticed this and reported us to the university... we were all dismissed from the journal editing board’.

Their brief sojourn into free speech only lasted about a month; with only one edition before full dismissal. According to S. there was no organised opposition at this time.

²⁵ Cardinal Karol Wojtyła later on became Pope John Paul II, who some view as the crucial lynchpin in the downfall of the communist regime. Wojtyła even back in 1971 was considered as a radical church figure; one not well liked by the communists.

In 1972, S. finished his studies; his son was born at about this time so S. had to quickly find a job. He was lucky to get a job with 'Zielony Sztandar'²⁶ (Green Banner), who at that time needed a lawyer²⁷ that would offer legal advice for the farmers. This offered S. an opportunity to start writing for the paper, of course this meant that he had to exercise careful wording his articles. 'Now everyone can say what they like, and they don't exert themselves. Then you had to learn to use the right code words and suchlike. Have the right sort of finesse to get around all the Cerberuses. I think it was very good for my writing as it made me exert myself, it allowed me to express my political temperament, as much as it was possible.' When I ask him if he liked his job he says: 'well... hmmm... it was about responsibilities, that is what guided me, but allegedly I was liked by my co-workers'. The work situation didn't change much until 1980 and Solidarity.

Becoming an Activist

S. became involved in the anti-communist opposition in 1977 where he met Wojciech Ziembinski and Adam Wojciechowski. He self describes this period as 'passing into conspiracy'. When asked about his motivation he replies:

'The first thing is that Komitet Obrony Robotnikow (KOR)²⁸ and Ruch Ochrony Praw Czlowieka (ROPCiO)²⁹ was created. Well I thought to myself, 'what type of anti-communist are you? Here there are taking action, doing things publicly and putting their names to it, so if you are an anti-communist then you must join them, otherwise you can't call yourself anti-communist'. Maybe I wouldn't be brave enough but I came to the conclusion that [due to the political situation at the time]... they won't kill us, or at east they won't kill us immediately. This gave me the bravery to join; otherwise I maybe wouldn't have done so... my wife rang one of their reps from an advert... he came over to my house to talk... [and that's how] I joined ROPCiO'.

²⁶ 'Zielony Sztandar' was a magazine with a socio-political profile. From 1956-1989 it appeared twice weekly and served as the official paper for the 'Zjednoczone Stronnictwo Ludowe' (ZSL) (United People's Party). ZSL supported and co-operated with PZPR (Polish United Workers Party). During the communist period it co-ruled with the PZPR and represented the rural population. It was a satellite party of the PZPR.

²⁷ Their previous lawyer was arrested and imprisoned for his part in the conspiracy in the Nowa Huta Lenin Statue plot which aimed at exploding the statue.

²⁸ KOR – Workers Defence Committee (later Committee for Social Self-Defence) was a civil society group which aimed to provide aid to the imprisoned workers and their families after the 1976 strikes. It was the first major anti-communist civil group in Poland. In many ways it was the precursor to the Solidarity social movement.

²⁹ ROPCiO – Protection of Human Rights Movement was a centre right anti-communist independent organisation created on the 25 March 1977. Their main aim was to force the government to respect and implement Human Rights.

Thus, S. involvement in the opposition was rational and calculated. He was a little bit worried that the price might be imprisonment but S. says ‘I couldn’t just stand on the outside and not risk anything... I counted in the possibility of prison, but at the same time I hoped that they wouldn’t kill me’. If the known price for conspiracy was death then S. clearly states that he definitely would not risk involvement. As he says his motivation was a sense of duty to his principles and maintenance of self-integrity, which he felt would be compromised if he didn’t join. If he wrote anti-communist texts then he was also obliged to join the opposition openly and stand by his words otherwise his own integrity would be highly questionable. I ask him if this is about the consequence of internal cohesion of viewpoints and action and deeds. He replies: ‘yes, you could call it that’.

After he joined the first task given to him was to create an underground monthly paper for the farmers, ‘Gospodarz’³⁰ (‘The Farmer’) with a run of 2 thousand copies of 2-4 A4 pages per issue. In a way this was a continuation of his work for Zielony Sztandar, where for the past 5 years he provided legal advice for the farmers. Since he already had good contacts with the rural networks; he knew if his paper was to have authority for the farmers then it would have to be printed, so he mobilised his friends and even managed to raise some money for the venture. To provide extra money and not to affect his family budget he took a second job for TAS (Soviet Press Agency) as a Russian-Polish translator. His job was to translate Russian press articles for the Polish press. He invested all the money from the second job in conspiracy work – such as the publishing of the underground paper. The printing press was set up in the spare room in the family apartment. The whole operation was very much hidden and illegal. Stanislaw’s son told me that as a child he was not allowed to ever go into the spare room, once S. took him into the room showed him the printing press and told him ‘never tell anyone about this, if you do they will throw me in prison and kill me’. S. laughs about this now saying ‘of course I made it more important than it was and the first thing that my son did is he told his grandmother about the printing press’.

³⁰ The political agenda of ‘Gospodarz’ was strong defense of private ownership of land, family centered economics, and rural autonomy.

Once things started to get a little too close for comfort with the authorities, with investigations at S. place of work, he decided to move the whole operation to a friend's (Tadeusz Szozda's) place. S remembers that the printing process 'was extremely exhausting, I had to learn how to do it, set, print, fold... each A4 page would take me 12 hours to type-set... and there were only two of us... we couldn't have more people. More than two means that it becomes too hard to keep it secret'. S. laughs and says that now it sounds very marginal, '2 A4 pages, this seems like nothing now, I knew even back then that it wasn't much, and Brezhnev was not losing sleep over our activities'. In a way he sees this anti-communist activity with lots of distance and good humour when he says 'I felt I was doing something which amounted to no more than menacing wagging of my toes in my boots. But it offered me immense satisfaction; I was proud of it and felt I was doing something against the system; that I have my own voice. This is how I arrived in politics³¹'.

Solidarity and Underground Publishing

When Solidarity started in 1980 then 'these types of home based underground activities no longer made any sense'. Even though such things as trade unions seemed ridiculous to S. 1980 and the rise of Solidarity was 'only a confirmation of the rightfulness of what I've been doing'. S. formed a local chapter of Solidarity at his workplace – 'Zielony Sztandar' – he became the local leader of the chapter.

'Of course it [Solidarity] didn't really have much meaning or importance, but when Martial Law³² arrived of course I became the first in line for liquidation, as the worst enemy of the people... I was dismissed from my job with Zielony Sztandar so I had no income...then I was interned at the camp in Białołęka ... I remember Białołęka fondly as the company within the internment camp was most pleasant. [During my time there] I met a lot of very interesting people who I keep in contact with to this date. I was there for a short time... only 3 months. When they released me I had no money.'

The atmosphere at the internment camp in Białołęka was highly conducive to the formation of new political allegiances, friendships, networks, and plans. The intention of the authorities was to

³¹ The rural protests in the summer of 1978 are partially attributed to the influence of 'Gospodarz'.

³² Martial Law was imposed in Poland on the 13th of December 1981. It lasted until 22 July 1983.

destroy the opposition, but in fact internment camps such as Białoleka became places of integration, as through close contact the bonds and desire for activism was strengthened. Ideological differences and divisions between the various members of the opposition were crystallised. S. goes as far as saying that the ‘internment camps were the places of formation of the ideological divides which remain in Polish political scene to this very day’.

Times were lean. After S. was released he no longer had any money reserves, in his desperation he managed to find a job as a fruit picker near Warsaw. When the fruit picking season was over he was employed by a Polish ex-pat company, and started to involve himself on a full time basis in the underground opposition. His knowledge and contacts with the printers and the distribution networks meant that he became an expert point of contact for various opposition groups. Eventually S. and his friend Marian Miszalski³³ decided that they would form their own underground publishing house, ‘rather than let others benefit from this’. In the spring of 1983 they mobilised all their networks to publish the first issue of ‘Kurs’³⁴ magazine. They spent all their available money on the first issue; consequently they had no money for the second issue. Janusz Korwin-Mikke helped them by buying half of the first issue run, which provide enough funds to start printing the second issue. From thereon their publishing venture became financially viable and they moved onto publishing books as well as the magazine. Their first books dealt with the subject of conservative politics, such as Guy Sorman’s ‘Conservative Revolution in America’ (1985). They aimed to popularise conservative political and economic ideas in Poland due to their fascination with Thatcherism and Reaganomics. Books such as Sorman’s became very popular. Initially Kurs published two thousand copies; these sold out immediately so another run of two thousand was printed, again it sold out immediately, so a third print run of 1.5 thousand finally satisfied the market.

The publishing house was doing so well that it wholly supported both Stanislaw’s and Miszalski’s family, even allowing them to save. Overall they published 25 books. The technical side of things was for S. his biggest production challenge ever, for instance for supplies he needed to buy 4 tonnes of paper. They rented an apartment to house the printing press, where on

³³ S. first met Marian Miszalski in 1971 at Warsaw University where they both were completing their post-grad Diplomas in Journalism.

³⁴ Kurs (The Course) was a monthly underground magazine. Kurs was also a publishing house aimed at publishing liberal literature for the underground market.

the insistence of the owner of the apartment in order not to raise suspicion they ‘installed a tenant’ an old homeless man, who they literally found at the local rubbish tip. The old man was in really bad shape, S. remembers that ‘he was almost dead when we found him if we didn’t get him he would have died from hunger and exhaustion... his state was so bad that once we got him home we had to burn all his clothes’. The presence of the old man caused a problem due to his habit of amassing large quantities of off food all over the apartment which they had to clean out once a month; nevertheless they kept him on throughout the existence of the publishing house.

‘Kurs’ was a larger operation; however the core still only consisted of four people, but the network of people around ‘Kurs’ was larger, and S. had to rely on their good-will, generosity and help. He states that no one ever refused any requests. The help was flowing in regardless of the personal risks this posed. ‘I risked very little, but those who helped risked a lot, their possessions, security, careers, families, everything...their dedication to the cause was far greater than mine’ – says S. The publishing house made good money, in not too long a time they even had their own car, which in those times was a considerable achievement. From 1983-1989 there were 40 issues of ‘Kurs’ concurrently they also published over 20 books: such as Guy Sorman’s ‘The American Conservative Revolution’ (1983), ‘The New Wealth of Nations’ (1987), and Milton & Rose Friedman’s ‘Free to Choose’ (1980).

In 1989 after the 4th of June elections, free press came into being and they thought there is no further point in ‘playing underground opposition, especially since inflation was killing us economically’. Thus, ‘Kurs’ was disbanded and from March 1990 S. started work with ‘Najwyższy Czas!’ who he works with to this very day.

Politics and Activism

The internment at Białołęka was pivotal for S. political identity. In fact S. states that the single most important event at Białołęka was the opportunity of close contact with Janusz Korwin-Mikke. He first saw him at Solidarity meetings, where:

‘Janusz frequently expressed his libertarian ideas on economics which were openly laughed at and he was treated as an idiot by the other Solidarity members. Unfortunately this is the way it is in Poland, a pathetic imbecile is more respected than a normal person. At this time I was not too sure myself if this man was insane. When I met him in Białołęka I realised that he is not an idiot and that he, in fact, is a highly cultured and civil

man with crystallised viewpoints. Under his influence I tried to become who I am now, a conservative liberal. Prior to this I only thought of independence for Poland, that was my only aim. Then one day I thought to myself – independence can't be the only aim, it is the first condition ... but what do we do once we become independent? And in Białoleka I learnt what the next steps are'.

From this point onwards Korwin-Mikke and the ideas he was trying to popularise became the main influence and driving force in Stanislaw's life. The books published by Kurs were specifically aimed at popularising this newfound viewpoint among the wider population, thus preparing the ground and 'consciousness of the nation for the coming independence'. For S. wide circulation of these conservative liberal titles was crucial to the future of Poland. He very proudly mentions that even the Head of State – General Jaruzelski – had copies of the books S. and Miszalski translated and published.

S. is one of the founding members of UPR. When in 1987 S. signed the founding declaration of UPR he adds:

'I must admit that when I signed it I didn't believe that this party would in my lifetime ever have any significance politically. I only signed it because I thought it was necessary and right and that I should sign it. However I never held any hope that the political option represented by UPR would ever win in Poland. And I was right, it didn't win.'

In 1988 S. was arrested and interrogated.

'These were already mild and relaxed times, they interrogated me about the illegal political pamphlets they caught me with, I was also accused of being in an unregistered organisation [UPR], if this was 1982 he [the secret service officer] would have knocked out all my teeth but this was 1988 ... so I told him we will register our organisation tomorrow right after the communists register their party, he couldn't be bothered with me and released me'.

Then came 1989 and freedom and the slow road to democracy. From the inception of UPR until December 1990 S. limited himself to journalism and writing, while he remained on the steering committee of the party. From 1990 UPR 'became a political body. On the 6th of December 1990 UPR was officially registered as a political party. This formalised our existence.' In 1991, 1993 and 1997 S. was one of the UPR candidates in the national elections, but with no success. In 1992 he was nominated for the State Tribunal as a judge, he took on the post until 1993. S. held the

function of Head Leader of UPR from 1997 until 1999. After two years he resigned as: ‘party leadership is a dirty job. You have to manipulate and lie to people. It was against my principles, I do not want to stoop down to this, and therefore I was no good as a leader’. He also did not want to continue as he felt he no longer had any ideas, he also felt he no longer wanted to be a part of the formalised party structure. Nevertheless, he states that: ‘ I will remain a member, unless UPR changes its political profile then I will quit, but until it does so I will remain a member... I’m more in support of the general political direction and the idea [of libertarianism] rather than a specific political party’.

Less than a month after this interview S. cancelled his honorary UPR membership. As of October 2009 S. is no longer a formal member of UPR, although he still writes for and edits ‘Najwyższy Czas!’

Current Activism

When asked about his current activism he says he is no longer an activist, because:

‘I no longer have any ideas, if I had any ideas on how to enliven or how to facilitate success, then I would try to enter politics again and become an MP. But I don’t have any, so I just let others that think that they have the answers play with politics... these days I only limit myself to journalism and commentary... I will never pretend that I’m something which I’m not.’

He currently sees himself as a supporting person for the conservative liberal option, something which he can do through his writings rather than active political involvement. His writing was always more successful than his political career, S. adds ‘I never even managed to become an MP; somehow I didn’t have the luck. I wanted to, I tried... but no’.

At this point we enter the rather specific world view espoused by S. According to S. the ideological option of UPR is not popular in Poland due to the influence of the secret services. In 1989 as a result of the ‘Round Table Talks’³⁵ Poland did not transform into a standard capitalist

³⁵ Round Table Talks took place in Warsaw between 6th February and 4th April, 1989. The negotiations between Solidarity and the Communist government were initiated in order to settle and defuse the growing social unrest. The Round Table Talks initiated the peaceful revolution and process of democratisation in Poland. The negotiation and decisions reached during these talks have to this day remained a subject of controversy in Poland, with factions of

country but into a form of capitalism which is controlled by the state who in turn is controlled secret agents, mainly composed of the communist Military Information Services (WSI), which was the main acting agent and beneficiary in the transformation process. According to S. although the former communist Intelligence Agency structures, such as the WSI, have been disbanded³⁶ their influence and power remain real even today. ‘This is the tip of the iceberg’ says S ‘the real power is not held by the government but by former officers of the Intelligence Services, they control the entire economy’. I ask who controls the secret agents, S. replies ‘only God knows... hmm... they probably work for themselves, because they surely don’t work for the state. They occupy Poland; they control politics and have the real power... you just have to be able to read between the lines’. He brings up an example of the Polish Public Television (TVP) and the September 2009 sacking of the Board of Directors by the Supervisory Board, where for a while the sacked President of TVP (Piotr Farfal) refused to accept the newly appointed President (Boguslaw Szwedo) and would not let him enter the office building until the courts settled the matter. It was a simple matter of changing the official court registry of TVP records and penning in the new names, apparently a bureaucratic error occurred and the old Board of Director personnel were not struck from the record, the courts promptly updated their records and the whole matter was settled within days. However, for S. this is part of reading between the lines, in his version of events the whole matter was controlled by secret agents whose communication lines broke down; or they forgot to issue the right directives to the courts that were frozen and unable to act on their own volition until the agents gave the right directives. S.’s world is full of such examples which he gives in jest and good humour to prove his case.

I ask S. how his time in UPR and his activism has influenced who he is today. ‘Well... it has defined me. Today Stanislaw is known everywhere as a conservative liberal. Loved by some and hated by others.’ He likes this label because:

Polish society believing in various conspiracy theories or expressing general dissatisfaction with the peaceful handing over of governmental power in 1989.

³⁶ Military Information Services (WSI) – (*Wojskowe Służby Informacyjne*) was the Polish Military intelligence and counter-intelligence agency. It has remained virtually unchanged since 1991 and was officially dissolved in October 2006, due to alleged illegal activities and corruption. Thus, the intelligence services were restructured and reformed, under the PiS (Law & Justice) government.

‘it is a good formula since liberalism is the attempt to answer the question of: how to set the relations between the individual and the state in such a way that the state does not eat away at individual freedom – because it always has an appetite for this -, and that on the other hand human wantonness doesn’t destroy the state, which after all is necessary. And this is liberalism... Conservatism is a stance of loyalty, respect, protection of three values. The three fundamentals on which Latin civilisation is based... it is the Greek conviction that there is only one truth, the implementation of Roman Law, and Christian Ethics... and the State should be based on these... the aim of our activism is to change the model and structure of the state in Poland ... in the direction and in agreement with these ideology, so the state is not oppressive to human freedom and does not enforce economic anomalies like the current version of the state in Poland’.

S. then goes back to discussing the influence of the communist secret agents force on the economy and the functioning of the state in Poland. In his opinion these secret elites detrimentally influence the economic scene so the full potential of the nation is not utilised. ‘We have to mobilise ourselves so we are prepared for all possibilities... our nation has lost meaning ... it has lost importance ‘. When I ask him what type of world he would like to live in he says: ‘in a world where there is a lot of individual freedom within the state, but where responsibility is enforced, and where the economic system is normal ... [based on the] free-market [model]. That’s all I need to be happy.’

He self describes himself as a Catholic, although he adds that the Roman Catholic Church ‘irritates me more and more, because a part of the clergy has stopped believing in the basic tenets of their own religion, and I’m afraid that the Church will transform into a version of the Living Church³⁷... true Catholic faith has become more and more ironic, a type of heresy where the most important thing is no longer the Almighty God but that no one should be offended...Peace. So instead of paying homage to Christ our Lord another God is created... Holy Peace’. By this S. means that ‘true faith’ has given way to compromise, peace and political correctness.

There are no outside heroes or inspiring role-models for S. He insists that his parents, and also partly his friends, were the biggest influence in forming him as a person, as well as the writer Jozef Mackiewicz³⁸. After some thought he lists Janusz Korwin-Mikke, Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan as the primary influences in his life:

³⁷ Living Church – a.k.a. Renovationism – was a pre-war schism within the Russian Orthodox Church. Among its many problems it was infiltrated and corrupted by the Soviet secret services.

³⁸ Jozef Mackiewicz (1902-1985) – was a Polish writer and publicist who staunchly opposed communism.

‘...because they had decisive opinions and viewpoints and always acted in accordance with those, they were true to their beliefs. These types of people are rare these days... I’m impressed by people who have very strong beliefs that have no price... those who are not afraid to speak up and are not afraid of the price they will pay for this. Those that live by what they preach... they are people of the truth... They are more predictable and reliable... I aim to be like them’.

For S. righteousness is more important than beliefs, be they right or wrong, rational or insane. Character and personal integrity is the highest value. So does that mean that it is better to be a righteous communist than vague liberal? ‘Yes, of course. The righteous communist won’t betray you like the vague liberal’ – says S.

Cultural Consumption

S. finds it difficult to talk about the ‘most important’ books or those who have influenced him the most. As he says ‘at different times different books were important to me but I will try’. The books he recites as important are: Tolstoy’s ‘War and Peace’, Dostoevsky’s ‘The Possessed’, Henryk Sienkiewicz’s and Mackiewicz’s works, Hasek’s ‘The Good Soldier Svejk’, Robert Penn Warren, Stanislaw Lem, Jean Raspail ‘Lands Holy and Profane, Orwell’s ‘1984, Adam Mickiewicz ‘Dziady’. Other books which he found important are: Konrad Lorenz ‘On Agression’, Tadeusz Zieliński ‘Rzeczpospolita Rzymska, Cesarstwo Rzymskie’, Feliks Koneczny ‘Polskie logos i ethos’, Solzhenitsyn ‘Gulag Archipelago’, Hoimar von Ditfurth, Stanisław Cat-Mackiewicz ‘Europa in flagranti’, Stefan Kisielewski ‘Dzienniki’, Leopold Tyrmand ‘Dziennik 1954’, and various biographies and dairies. As far as films are concerned S is not a great connoisseur. Those that have impressed him are: ‘Winchester ’73’ (1950), Fred Zinnemann’s ‘High Noon’ (1952), ‘The Battle of the V.1’ (1958), ‘The Cruel Sea’ (1953), ‘On the Beach’ (1959), Ciel sur la tête (1965), ‘The Mouse that Roared’ (1959), ‘Ballad of a Soldier’ (1959), ‘La Grande Bouffe’ (1973). S. listens to traditional jazz and to fragments of opera and operettas. His favorite artists include Marlena Dietrich, Edith Piaf, early Elvis Presley and Duke Ellington.

Addendum

In October 2009 S. formally resigned from UPR, because he saw no further point to being a member. When I rang him up and asked him why he said: ‘they got rid of Korwin-Mikke, so I quit in solidarity ...[UPR] commercialised and was no longer a party based on ideals. There is no further hope for politics in Poland now. The future has been lost. I am no longer interested in politics, since there are no further choices and all ideals have been subsumed into a commercialised corporate world of pseudo-politics’.

Regardless of S’s pessimism the situation might not be so bleak, even though the future of the movement seems unstable at this time due to the upheavals and power struggles within the higher ranks. UPR will most likely continue however the direction of its development is in a state of flux for the moment; this is the primary point of concern for the long-standing activists who have grown used to the stability of the UPR programme and membership. The split within UPR’s organisation caused by Korwin-Mikke leaving the ranks, voluntarily or otherwise, is an opportunity for regroupment and reassessment of the last 20 years. For those party members who were not faithful followers of Korwin-Mikke and saw him as an encumbrance rather than an asset, this offers an opportunity to restructure UPR, expand its electorate and maybe finally gain some mandates in the next elections.