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TECHNOCRACY AND SOCIALIZATION IN THE POLISH ECONOMIC REFORM  
IN THE LIGHT OF STUDIES AND EMPIRICAL OBSERVATIONS

The methodological position accepted by me in this analysis consists in affirmation of socio-political foundations of socialism. I shall be speaking about reforms of socialist economies and, thus, about such reforms which do not infringe upon: /a/ predominance of the social ownership of means of production; /b/ strategic central planning; /c/ basing of distribution mainly on the criterion of input and results of work, and partly needs; and /d/ wielding of power in the state by forces adhering to principles of socialism or to the three above mentioned principles.

1. An enterprise - a basic economic link

The theory and international experience allow to consider one of the basic directions of reforms conceived in such a way as an undoubted one. It is consolidation of the position held by the socialist enterprise i.e. placing it more or less consistently in the role of the basic economic unit and a decisive source of economic effectiveness. In all or almost in all system changes in the past thirty years, which deserve to be called reforms, reliance on the enterprise, although it was concretized in different ways, remained a leading direction or, at least, one of the leading directions.

The conclusion about a necessity of basing the economic mechanism on the enterprise should be interpreted as an actual departure from the traditional doctrine voicing a possibility and advisability of replacing microeconomic decisions and effectiveness by decisions and effectiveness of a higher level identified with economic activity of the state. This replacement by subordinating allocation to the so-called "direct account"<sup>1</sup> or direct and aggregate confrontation of needs and resources in

their natural expression was to put into motion the law of planned and proportional growth and ensure an incomparably higher dynamics and effectiveness for the economy. Practical experience and theory generalizing it revealed illusoriness of the above view and its two sources: praxiological and motivational.

The praxiological or technical-economic barrier ensues from limitations of the regulatory potential of any institution and thus of the state apparatus as well. There exists a certain ceiling to the stock of information, which a given institution or a group of institutions are able to store rationally and process in forecasts, guidelines and decisions.

The motivational or socio-economic barrier is simply the fact that the state, regardless of the range of its economic functions, remains a political institution. These are political criteria, influence of pressure groups, conditions of carrier and maintenance of power, routine administrative-bureaucratic procedures and not economic calculus, economic rationality, and innovativeness which constitute a dominating indicator in its behaviour. The state control of the economy weakens its effectiveness by incorporation of the political factor. Political democracy and effectiveness of the state administration may cushion this dependence on the political factor but not eliminate it. Experience of theorists of the macroeconomic calculus, central planning and centrally inspired innovativeness is full of disappointments.

Autonomy of enterprises in the sphere of allocation and microeffectiveness are obviously connected with market orientation of the economy, which promotes an enhanced role of horizontal ties between micro-units. The state affects allocation processes mainly by means of indirect instruments i.e. utilizing commodity-monetary categories. What is more, the scope of this influence is subject to hard constraints. This results both from the earlier mentioned barrier and from usefulness of indirect instruments. Accordingly, a substantial part of allocation processes, especially of detailed processes, must be performed according to market self-regulation procedures. It is not an uncontrolled spontaneousness at all. Limits and rules of self-

regulation are determined by the state, by the system policy. Moreover, such self-regulation remains under an influence of centrally steered spheres.

## 2. Economic and socio-political dimensions of the reform

Autonomy of enterprises and microeffectiveness constitute only one part of an answer to the question about directions of the reform. Its other part is constituted by its social-political dimension. Its task in the area of the economy is to determine socio-political implications of development of productive forces and non-consumption aspirations of the society. And thus, in which direction will and should be changing social relations in the economy, including the roles played by its particular participants and their groups, structure of social institutions rendering services for the economy and social determinants /motivations, etc./ of economic decisions. Fundamental social transformations are already entailed by the very autonomy of enterprises and microeffectiveness. They lead to a different location of certain groups within the enterprises entering into roles of decision-makers.

Directions of socio-political transformations, unlike economic changes with their characteristic trend towards decentralization and market orientation, continue to be an open issue, to a large extent. Theory and practice of socialist economies do not provide explicit answers here. There can be distinguished two lines of evolution:

- technocratic, assuming concentration of the economic power in enterprises and at higher levels, including the central level, in the hands of experts and elites selected in some way;
- democratic, called also socialization, in which certain types of economic decisions at all levels, and first of all strategic decisions are taken and controlled directly by the society /e.g. by direct self-management at the place of work/ or by its authentic representatives and organizations acting in a democratic, self-managing and autonomous way.<sup>2</sup>

A sharp distinction between both lines is a model construction useful in theoretical approaches, but having no exact equivalent in the reality. In practice, technocratic and democratic elements appear together, but proportions between them and directional trends of these proportions may be and are different. In this sense, the dichotomic model of choice between technocracy and socialization seems to be adequate.

### 3. Technocratic variant and its shortcomings

Arguments quoted to support the technocratic variant have big validity as they correspond with typical opinions of traditional managerial environments and those of the state and political organs. They underline that owing to technocratic solutions it becomes possible: /a/ to direct economic processes in a competent manner, which requires specialist knowledge and expertise considering their present complexity; /b/ to take decisions effectively and promptly without intricate procedures connected with voicing the will of aggregations and with negotiations; /c/ to implement consistently long-term strategic programmes, and this cannot be accomplished by democratized institutions submitted to the pressure of current interests.

But technocratic reforms do not derive their popularity only and may be not mainly from the force of arguments concerning their very nature. They are easier than democratic reforms to be accepted by managerial groups and the political authorities. Departure from the traditional system is always connected with a change in the way power is exercised. The point is that the technocratic reform reduces these consequences. It restricts to a big extent but nonetheless in a cushioned manner, interference, and especially high-handed interference in relations between the state and political organs and enterprises with their professional managerial cadres. These cadres are to benefit most in the social hierarchy as the technocratic reform assumes after all "socialist managerial revolution". On the other hand, outside these relations the functioning of the organs of state power may not undergo any major changes.

The overcoming of the traditional system inevitably calls for involvement and pressure of progressive forces and, first of

all, the working class in big industry. For reasons already mentioned this pressure may be relatively weaker in technocratic reforms. The technocratic reform represents some kind of the next line of defence, the "second best" position for groups wielding political power.

I suppose that the above interrelationships decided about predominance of technocratic reforms in the past practice of socialist countries. After all, such was basically the character of almost all previous attempts at reforming the traditional system with the exception of the Yugoslavian reforms, the Czechoslovak reform from the years 1967-1968, and, to some degree, Polish reforms from the years 1956-1957, and the present reform, and especially its programme from 1981.<sup>3</sup>

Thus, technocratic reforms have some advantages as regards their effectiveness, and they are relatively easier. Or - as some interpret it - they are more realistic. They omit, however, a number of tasks, which are expected to be solved by changes in the socio-economic system.

First, technocratic reforms do not safeguard from restoration of the traditional system as they do not create relationships and institutions that would be changing decision-making procedures in the centres of power in such a way as to safeguard effectively from supremacy of conservative tendencies. Isn't sufficient, however, to achieve the same objective the threat itself of a mass social dissatisfaction aroused by lack of reforms and ineffectiveness and the awareness of this threat among enlightened decision makers - a result of their own experience and that gained by neighbours? I think that probability of such an optimistic variant is rather slight. So far, we have at our disposal only one and here quite specific example of a relative success attained by the technocratic reform.

Second, and what expands the first point, the technocratic reform does not protect against voluntarism and protracted mistakes in the economic policy. Autonomy of enterprises in the sphere of allocations does not deprive the state economic activity and economic decisions made by it of their huge significance. In conditions of the reform, these are primarily



decisions, which cannot be explicitly based on an objectivized economic calculus. They are characterized with a high degree of uncertainty /long-term, strategy/ and valuation of social objectives competing with one another for resources /distribution of the national income and budgetary means/. Accuracy of these decisions requires adequate mechanisms through which social interests and preferences would be articulated, and subordination of planning choices and social control over execution of the plan to them. The technocratic reform does not create these mechanisms.

Third, the technocratic reform jeopardizes its pillars: autonomy of enterprises and microeffectiveness.

Autonomy of enterprises is jeopardized by a high degree of dependence of their management on state and political organs. Evaluation of directors' performance, course of their professional carriers and material status are controlled by these organs, and it should be remembered that decisions concerning these issues are characterized with their discretionary nature and valuating judgements. In this situation, assurance of their autonomy within the socio-economic system in acts of law becomes problematical. Informal or quasi-formal interference /e.g. ministerial law etc./ makes it possible to preserve relations based on central commands and centralized allocations of means of production. This is confirmed by the experience gained in the course of the Hungarian reform<sup>4</sup> and the present Polish reform.<sup>5</sup> Some perceive a chance to eliminate this threat in popularization of supervisory boards<sup>6</sup> and the capital market.<sup>7</sup> I tend to support both solutions although I cherish some doubts if they can be effective enough.

Microeffectiveness is based on self-financing of enterprises and on hard budgetary constraints. It is assumed, and probably quite justly, that it should be accompanied by a strong subordination of employees' wages to economic effects achieved by their enterprise. This is to create a collective proeffectiveness motivation and counteract the inflationary pressure. The fact is that in the technocratic system this construction becomes incoherent. The income responsibility of employees for effects of their work is not balanced by delegation of

appropriate rights. In case of less favourable results, and gradually in most cases it is recognized in a natural way that responsibility should be carried by those who control the main determinants of the enterprise's activity, which is - by the organs of power. Can it be prevented? Theoretically, it might seem possible through /a/ consolidating directors' position, who are strongly motivated in favour of profit and development and who are able - despite pressure of their employees - to conduct a rational wage policy; /b/ liquidating, apart from absolute exceptions, budgetary aid for unprofitable enterprises or those which gradually lose any prospects for profitability in their activity. Practical application of this variant seems to be, however very difficult and even doubtful in socialism, which is among others due to reasons mentioned above. The above hypothesis is confirmed by absence of positive examples from the past practice.

Fourth, the technocratic reform does not satisfy non-consumption aspirations of the working people. They include a need for co-determination and co-creation, which was called by Marx a desire to overcome alienation and develop natural and typical characteristics of a man. Along with growth of the cultural level and professional qualifications, the contradiction between this desire and technocratic solutions assumes a common character and more strength. It is synonymous with at least a drastic restriction of chances for proeffectiveness non-material motivation. This problem, always important, in periods being less favourable for consumption may become of crucial importance. The above mentioned contradiction may be also a source of dissonance between the society and the authorities and lead to socio-political destabilization. Finally, it carries major implications for prospects of the reform itself. If the reform is launched in unfavourable economic conditions, more specifically - in the situation of disequilibrium and devastated markets, this factor may become critical.

Consequently, the technocratic reform does not seem to be an encouraging option. In most situations, we are speaking here about, it would be difficult to cherish hopes that it will

fulfil economic and, all the more so, socio-political expectations connected with the reform. This, of course, depends, to quite a big extent, on concrete conditions of place and time as well as on the degree to which the socialization factor is introduced to the system.

#### 4. Democratic reform

The democratic reform makes it possible to remove drawbacks and threats carried by the technocratic reform.

The democratic reform, and socialization of the economic management being proper for it, is a multidimensional process but, at the same time, an integral process. Its main spheres - democratization of the state economic organs, enterprises and their groupings, the lowest and indivisible links of work organization within enterprises and local organs - although quite different in many respects are interlinked and affect one another. This is confirmed, first of all, by the Yugoslavian and the Polish experience, positive and negative, and the theory generalizing it. An important source of knowledge is here the experience of highly developed capitalist countries, which for at least two decades have been making efforts and experiments aiming at the so-called industrial democracy and job enrichment.<sup>8</sup>

These interrelations result, firstly, from a dense network of functional, economic, social and organizational ties linking the spheres distinguished above. If the state economic organs operate autocratically there are poor chances for enterprises to become autonomous. In enterprises directed by managers controlled "from above", that is, by the organs of power and owners of capital without any greater participation of employees, development of direct self-management at the lowest levels encounters resistance and it does not pass beyond the scale of experimenting as a rule.<sup>9</sup> Secondly, the interrelations have their foundations in the individual's situation, which is underlined increasingly stronger these days.<sup>10</sup> Incapacitation in one sphere can hardly be linked in a harmonious whole with the role of a coparticipant in others. It should not be expected that a man deprived of the right to codetermine about the



destiny of his society will want and be able to involve himself actively in the managing of an enterprise.

The concept of democratic reform based on the idea of socialization, which has been accepted in Poland, has been an object of critique all the time. It is argued, and justly so, that within the science of business management the controversy between supproters of democratic and autocratic solutions has not been closed. There is quite popular an argument, making reference to the Yugoslavian experience, that in the modern economy any examples are missing of enterprises that would be autonomous and fully effective.

Accoringly, a statement that so far we do not have at our disposal in the socialist economy any examples of fully effective autonomous enterprises is, in fact, true. But in the reforming of the traditional system, the element of uncertainty is created rather by an inevitable phenomenon. And moreover, an alternative of a managerial enterprise cannot provide such examples so far neither. Its supporters usually refer to the capitalist enterprise. This can hardly be treated as a convincing argument, anyway, not until we are speaking about socialist reforms. With this assumption, the managerial /technocratic/ variant seems to be suffering from deep contradictions, which was indicated above. I think that these remarks afford a conclusion that it is necessary to focus scientific and designig efforts on solutions carrying hopes for removal or at least considerable mitigation of weaknesses of the self-managing enterprise in promotion of higher effectiveness.

##### 5. The Polish concept of socialization of the economy

It is worth outlining here the "philosophy" and general framework of the Polish solutions as relatively more mature among socialist countries. By the Polish solutions I mean concepts and programme of the reform created in the years 1980-1981 and accepted by the authorities.

In line with the programme of the Polish reform from 1981, socialization of economic management was to encompass, in fact, all levels of management and all groups of economic units.

At the macroeconomic level, it was to find its expression in unrestrained development of independent and self-managing social organizations representing the working people and different environments, and in creation of national structures by them. First of all, these were to be mass trade unions, integrated or pluralistic according to the will of the working people. And, moreover, the cooperative movement, different kinds of environmental associations and all forms of economic self-management with employees' self-management as a leading link. It was to the last-mentioned factor i.e. horizontal and vertical development of self-management structures, the ultimate form of which might be the other, self-management House of the Parliament that some supporters of the democratic reform were attaching special importance. The above changes were to be complemented by consolidation of economic, decision-making, and control functions of the highest representative organ - the Parliament combined with its expanded representativeness within its attainable limits.

At the microeconomic level, democratization was to be realized by four processes: /a/ activity of trade unions organized in the way described above; /b/ development of employees' self-management and recognition of self-managing enterprises, in which the self-management is a superior organ of management, as a dominating type of the enterprise in the national sector and, thus, in the entire economy; /c/ socialization of the state supervision over national enterprises, and not only self-managing enterprises, thorough development of supervisory boards composed both from representatives of the state organs and the bank, and representatives of the main buyers and suppliers; /d/ restoration of social relations, first of all - self-management relations appropriate for the groups property in economically autonomous cooperatives.

And finally, at the territorial level, the reform programme envisaged that self-management should be fully representative of local communities and made an organ superior in relation to the local administration in local affairs. It was to be accompanied by a reallocation of functions between the central administration and the local administration, and by creating

foundations for economic independence of self-management system and its executive bodies.

In the "philosophy" of democratization of the economy in the Polish edition from 1981, a crucial role was to be played undoubtedly by trade unions, which was dictated, in my opinion, by a desire to ensure its effectiveness and realism. This direction was considered to be effective as mass, autonomous trade unions, which are organized on the national scale and not controlled by the authorities may become a foundation both for authentic socialization of decision-making processes and for autonomy of enterprises. Such socialization based on trade unions is a realistic concept in this sense that in its assumptions it does not oppose the existing structures of the political power and its essential characteristics i.e. the leading role of the communist party in legislative and government organs of the state, which is guaranteed by the constitution. In the concrete Polish conditions, this realism had an additional dimension, which was represented by the fact that the democratic renewal, including the reform, were a consequence of the working class protest from July-August 1980, and they were being developed in close relationship with the new trade union movement, that emerged from this protest.

The Polish reform programme from 1981 did not provide explicitly for democratization of the lowest links in organization of work and of the direct self-management. It probably assumed and rightly so that in the reforming of the traditional system, it was basically a secondary process in relation to socialization of the macroeconomic level and the level of enterprises.

## 6. Practice of socialization of the economy

That much about the programme of the latest Polish reform. In turn, it is worth discussing briefly now the practical aspects of socialization of the economy during the first two years of its introduction i.e. in the 1982-1983 system.<sup>12</sup> It appears that in spite of numerous political declarations and a number of official documents the process of socialization encounters some obstacles. There have appeared strong techno-

cratic trends moving the practice of the socio-economic system from the model outlined in the reform programme.

Trade unions. After passing a bill on trade unions in October 1982<sup>13</sup> and delegatization of the former trade unions, new and different trade unions are in the process of their organization. For the time being, it is known that they have been formed in a vast majority of enterprises but the position held by them is quite differentiated. In some enterprises, they group over a half of professionally active employees, while in others they group their minority. In most economic branches, there have been set up national federations or national trade unions but so far there has not been established an inter-trade-union organ representing the entire movement, which hampers, of course, its influence on the socio-economic policy. Pluralistic trade unions in work establishments will be established if nothing changes eventually after 1985, and this is subject to recognition of the advisability of such modification by the Council of State after consulting the existing trade unions.<sup>14</sup> Consequently, the crucial role of trade unions in socialization of the economy continues to be an open issue. In the optimal scenario it will be gradually maturing over a period of a few years. In a less favourable scenario - it will begin to drift towards a traditional "transmission" model.

Employees self-management. Towards the end of 1983, employees' councils - the main organ of the self-management system - were operating in a large majority of enterprises, in which the self-management system is allowed to exist and should exist by virtue of the law.<sup>15</sup> They were usually reactivated in the second half of 1982 or elected in the present period of introduction of the reform. The available and still scarce research findings and other information indicate that - similarly to the situation with trade unions - the situation in this area is differentiated in particular centres and enterprises. Nonetheless, it seems that operational activity of the self-management is quite weak in many enterprises, involvement of employees and persons having big influence is insignificant, while supremacy of the administration is rather distinct. A common opinion is that

abolition of the martial law supplemented by a unique legal regulation in the period of overcoming the crisis<sup>16</sup> have not produced any breakthrough in this field. The main sources of weakness of the self-management include: /a/ a general climate of distrust and dejection, as well as the weakness of new trade unions and sometimes their prejudice against the self-management; /b/ excessively big rights of the administration in relation to the self-management; /c/ excessive elongation of the list of enterprises of the so-called basic importance for the national economy in which the powers of the self-management have been reduced; /d/ excessive number and principles of operation of public utilities, in which the powers of the self-management are reduced as well; /e/ frequent instances in which the administration fails to observe fundamental laws of the reform from 1981 about state enterprises and employees' self-management, and a general over-regulation of the economic system in enterprises; /f/ lack of progress in creation of higher structures integrating self-management organs in particular plants. These phenomena, if they are maintained, may bring employees' self-management down to the role of a sham comanager of the kind of Conferences of Workers' Self-Management known from the sixties and the seventies.

Socialization of the state supervision. To equip this direction with a concrete form, the law on state enterprises from 1981 envisaged the establishment of supervisory boards with mixed composition. So far, there have not been created any major initiatives or executive regulations, and the entire idea has not found any practical application worth speaking of. I believe that causes of such situation should be sought in administrative inertia and resistance of the administration to restricting its interference rights.

Other forms. Due to socio-political tensions and restrictions imposed by the martial law as well as later restrictions, associations of different kinds and the cooperative movement have not fulfilled their expected role in socialization of the economy. Both representativeness of these associations and their influence on the central decision-making processes proved to be limited. Similarly, the cooperative movement or at least its



considerable part has not been able to overcome radically its traditional weakness despite the reformed legislation.<sup>17</sup>

In the hitherto practice, socialization has become one of weaker spheres of the reform. This does not mean that nothing has been done. It should be noted that at the central level there has been observed provision of more extensive information /than in the tradition system/ for the society about projects of plans and decisions, as well as about performance of the national economy, preparation of some plans and decisions in several variants accompanied by consultations and discussions concerning them held in places of work, interplant meetings, other professional institutions, and in the press. The self-management equipped with formally quite big although differentiated rights operates in a vast majority of state enterprises, and in many of these enterprises its activity is quite animated and significant. The number of new trade union members has exceeded 4 million. Certain democratic transformations can be observed in the functioning of cooperatives, local organs or associations. The scope of this socialization continues to be quite removed, however, from its model outlined in the reform programme.

Empirical studies conducted from the very beginning of the reform introduction by faculty members in the Institute of Political Economy at the University of Lodz, as well as studies carried out in other research centres seem to be confirming quite explicitly the justness of prerequisites on which the principle of socialization of the economy in the Polish concept of the reform has been based. These studies confirm the justness of a thesis about the so-called integrity of the socialization process. They provide evidence that slips and errors in the economic policy concerning both its real and regulatory spheres seem highly probable as a result of obstacles encountered by the socialization process. In such a situation, there emerge impediments and inconsistencies in implementation of the programme of reforms well known in the history of changes in the socio-economic system in Poland.

The studies also provide confirmation for arguments concerning the functioning of enterprises. Any impediments in

socialization processes remain in a rather undoubtful relationship with numerous and excessive constraints on the autonomy of enterprises and their self-financing being the main idea of the reform in the field of the enterprise's economic system. Finally, the studies provide a number of arguments confirming a thesis that democratic shape of the reform corresponds to the aspirations of the contemporary Polish society and constitutes a condition of its support for reforms and for oftentime difficult socio-economic policy necessitated by the reform.

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Technokratyzm i uspołecznienie w polskiej reformie gospodarczej  
w świetle studiów i obserwacji empirycznych

W opracowaniu analizowane są dwa warianty reformy gospodarczej - technokratyczny i demokratyczny. Analiza wykazuje główne słabości wariantu technokratycznego, które w konsekwencji nie gwarantują osiągnięcia tych efektów ekonomicznych i poza ekonomicznych, jakich oczekuje się od reformy. Autor jednoznacznie opowiada się za wariantem demokratycznym. Wykazuje On, że wariant ten stwarza możliwości usunięcia słabości i zagrożeń tkwiących w reformie typu technokratycznego. Analiza wykazuje też słabości i niedopracowanie szeregu elementów wariantu demokratycznego, których usunięcie wymaga wzmożonego wysiłku intelektualnego. Wywody teoretyczne Autor konfrontuje w opracowaniu z wynikami badań empirycznych.