

## NO-CHOICE ELECTIONS

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THIS PAPER presents and discusses the evolution of the Polish electoral system over the years 1950-1979. The basis of our analysis will be local elections and elections inside the Polish United Workers' Party. First, we shall show the role of elections in the general mechanism of the blocking of free articulation of interests in the political system of real socialism. Next, we shall put forward a general thesis concerning the direction of the evolution of the Polish electoral system and, after discussing the Polish literature on this subject, we shall try to substantiate our thesis by using the available data. Finally, we shall suggest a certain explanation of the changes described in the electoral system.

The political system of real socialism developed in the USSR and imitated in several East European countries after World War II was deprived of formal democratic institutions serving to negotiate the contradictory interests of different social groups and to reach a political compromise among them. The only organisation having the right to formulate the general will was the Communist Party, and the range of economic, political and social issues under its control was extremely broad as well as detailed. The conclusions which follow from these simple statements are of basic importance to the understanding of the nature of political processes in real socialism. Free articulation in this system would be bound to uncover interests incompatible with the will of the party, and thus conflicts between the party and groups representing these interests. These conflicts would be very numerous, owing to the broad range and detailed nature of party supervision. Free articulation would thus reveal conflicts which could be neither institutionalised nor solved without a general shake-up in the political system. Such a situation would catalyse sharp social tensions. Strong pressure for democratic restructuring of the system would arise and be articulated, and would encounter determined state and party apparatus resistance. As Hungarian (1956), Czechoslovak (1968) and Polish (1981) experience shows, this triggers off a swift process of spontaneous destabilisation of the political system. This scenario seems to apply especially to those socialist countries which experienced a sudden explosion of free articulation (regardless of the reasons) for the first time, and where a significant reduction of the scope of party control had not occurred. The latter process did not happen until the 1980s.

To prevent the system from following that dangerous path a very sophisticated

mechanism for blocking free articulation had been developed. This mechanism played a key role since the suppressing of free articulation became a precondition of the survival of the Soviet-type system (Drygalski & Kwaśniewski, 1988).

The suppression of free articulation did not consist in doing away with the articulation channels (such as Parliament, local councils, workers' self-management, trade unions, etc.) but in keeping them under strict control from above. In practice, this meant that orders were given from above concerning such issues as what, when and how interests should or should not be articulated. This system for subordinating the articulation channels to the party's will had to be accompanied by an institutional guarantee that the people operating these channels would repeat the orders coming to them instead of articulating the real interests and opinions of the social groups that they were supposed to represent. Where such articulation channels were elective bodies, the election of the right people relied heavily on the electoral procedures adopted.

The blockage of free articulation in any channel other than the Communist Party did not mean that there were prospects for free articulation in the party itself. The condition for effective coordination of the whole blockage mechanism was unity and cohesion of party activities with regard to the outside world, although a natural divergence of interests flourished within the party. Such unity and cohesion in turn received homogeneous approval, manifested in actions and declarations by local party organisations, of each task formulated by the party leadership. This kind of unity could not be coupled with any free articulation of interests inside the party. The reason was that free articulation inside the party, while it was blocked everywhere else in the system, would have made the party a substitute organisation, articulating interests that could not be articulated in other parts of the system because of the blockage mechanism there.

Those interests were, by their very nature, different, often incompatible with one another or with the official party line. In any real multi-party system their articulation would be dispersed among many competitive parties. Differentiated ideological options of such parties would permit a natural selection of interests articulated by them, and these selected interests could be more or less homogeneous. On the other hand, articulation of all interests inside a single party, if possible at all, makes it extremely hard for a satisfactory compromise to be reached within that party. The evidence for this thesis was the experience of the All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks) in 1921, before its 10th Congress.

There was also one more factor that hindered the reaching of compromise in the party. This was the fact that the Communist Party, like the whole system, lacked formalised procedures to settle conflicts between the party leadership and freely articulating local party organisations.

Thus, free articulation in the party could produce the same situation there as in the whole system. Sharp internal conflicts would become visible and be openly discussed, but the lack of any formalised conflict-resolving procedures inside the party would make it extremely hard, or even impossible, to settle the conflicts by compromise, or—as Dahrendorf puts it—to regulate them. In effect, the party would face a process of destabilisation, the same process which free articulation could produce in the rest of the political system. To avoid all these dangers, the

party apparatus had also created a mechanism to block free articulation inside the party itself. The electoral procedures designed for use inside the party were an important party of this mechanism.

## II

The common feature of the alterations in the formal rules for the election of party officials and councillors was their general restructuring in the period from the end of 1956 to September 1961. The beginning of this period was the acme of the de-Stalinisation wave in Poland, and its end was the start of the epoch of stabilisation, after social pressure for further changes had been suppressed and after the new leadership of the party and government had consolidated its position. The alterations to the formal electoral rules made at that time consisted in a significant reduction of electors' rights to determine lists of candidates and in limiting voters' influence on the result of elections. Thus, the Polish political system entered the post-Stalinist era with a more restrictive electoral system than the previous one. This evolution needs to be explained, for in other spheres the mid-1950s process of de-Stalinisation tended towards granting citizens greater freedom than they had until then. Not only were fewer and fewer repressive measures taken in the 1956-80 period against attitudes and actions contesting the political *status quo*, but the authorities also relaxed control of some spheres of life (private life, culture). An attempt to explain this slightly paradoxical evolution of the electoral system will be made in the latter part of the paper.

Before embarking on the analysis of the electoral system, we shall mention the relevant Polish literature. No scientific studies of the elections in the Polish United Workers' Party (PZPR) have been published as yet. Therefore our analysis of these elections is based upon electoral statutes and scanty publicistic materials. On the other hand, local elections have been the subject of scientific, mainly legal and sociological, discussion. The value of this literature, however, is small and does not go beyond the information level, for its authors set themselves very narrowly limited research goals. With one exception (Bereza, 1959), no comprehensive studies covering all stages of the electoral campaign and using simultaneously many sources of information were conducted. Empirical research on these problems was very rare (Bereza, 1959; Gostkowski, 1959, 1961; Wesolowska, 1978; Kosel, 1985), and devoted exclusively to the examination of electors' attitudes and their knowledge of facts connected with elections. These works are of worth, for they show a different picture of elections than the one disseminated by party propaganda—the latter picture being uncritically accepted by most researchers. Other interesting works based on empirical research are concerned with criteria for selecting candidates to become councillors (Surmaczynski, 1966; Zawadzka, 1974; Dzieciotowska, 1979).

The works on the electoral law are, for the most part, detailed commentaries on particular regulations, and quite detached from electoral practice in Poland. These commentaries accept in advance the solutions adopted by the legislator and they deal mainly with mechanical comparison of successive versions of the electoral law or with secondary obscurities in the law.

Descriptions of successive election campaigns constitute a large part of publications (Patrzalek, 1966, 1979; Gebert, 1966, 1976; Skrzydło, 1966; Wiatr, 1958, 1959a, 1959b). They contain a lot of information, not infrequently interesting, obtained from organisers of elections. Except for a few cases (Wiatr, 1958, 1959a, 1959b; Bereza, 1959), that information, however, is not used for a more penetrating analysis. This is a result of the character of these works, which are simple illustrations of election campaigns, whose description is subordinated to three clearly formulated rules. The rules are as follows:

- (1) The basic function of elections is to obtain mass acceptance of the electoral programme and policy pursued by the authorities (e.g. Gebert, 1976).
- (2) Electors seldom question the candidates selected by local party committees because those candidates suit them (e.g. Patrzalek, 1979).
- (3) A very high voter turnout and a small number of cross-outs on ballot-papers attest to great interest in elections and to general acceptance of the electoral programme and candidates (e.g. Wiatr, 1958, 1959a, 1959b).

Over the years 1957-85 only one Polish sociologist openly questioned interpretation rules 2 and 3; Lutyński stated that those rules were based upon the faulty methodological assumption that electors are 'fully rational'. The assumption says that electors' behaviour and decisions reflect exclusively their attitudes towards the electoral programme and towards candidates, and that there is no other motivation behind their behaviour and decisions. One such other motive may be, for example, fear (Lutyński, 1960; Wiatr's response in Wiatr, 1961; Lutyński's reply in Lutyński, 1962).

In addition to works concerned directly with elections, it is necessary to mention publications using questionnaire research and interviews to compare the political consciousness of councillors and electors (Harz & Jasińska, 1964; Dzięciółowska, 1969, 1979; Tarkowski, 1972). These works allow a rather fragmentary evaluation of the effectiveness of the electoral system in breaking the ties between electors and councillors.

Zawadzka's book (1976) deserves separate treatment. It discusses local elections in Poland from 1954 to 1973 comprehensively and—compared with other works—exhaustively. It is the only Polish work in which almost all the Polish literature on this subject was considered. It thus, in a sense sums up all that was done in this field. Furthermore, the recapitulation is conscientious and not infrequently critical of various elements of the Polish electoral system, though Zawadzka does not directly question the interpretation rules set out above.

### III

Full control by local party committees over elections to municipal councils was a major task of the election system. The system, however, retained a vast majority of the normal election procedures: establishment of lists of candidates, balloting, public presentation of the outcome of the election, etc. The local party committee's control, however, ensured that newly elected members of councils always displayed certain characteristic traits. Each of them had to be able not only to

accept the party's orders but also to articulate them as the alleged interests of the electorate. Thus, the conflict between the official function of representing the local community's interests and the real function of representing the party line could remain undisclosed.

The election system consisted of the Electoral Rules Act and a special institution created by the party specifically for the election process, called up to 1956 the National Front (NF) and subsequently—up to 1983—the National Unity Front (NUF). The various functions of both these elements of the election system included that of camouflage. Up to 1973 the Electoral Rules Act hid the real role of the party committees in the election campaign. The National Front (and later the NUF), in turn, simulated the role of an autonomous organiser of the campaign.

The party control over the National (Unity) Front can be seen in how local branches of these institutions were established. The decision was made by the Mutual Consultation Committees consisting of the PZPR and the two satellite parties (the Democratic Party and the United Peasants' Party). Those committees nominated people to posts in local branches of the NUF without any fixed term of office. The only NUF branches created through elections were those at the lowest level. This deviation from the rule was addressed to the man in the street—who had a chance to be in contact, if at all, only with those lowest level branches—to convince him that the NUF was a democratic institution.

In practice, the party's free decision on who was to work in the NUF resulted in complete subordination of the NUF branches to the party. The NUF did not conduct any independent activity. This activity even frequently appeared unnecessary, which caused local party organisations to bypass the NUF when organising the election campaign. The top party authorities, however, were eager to keep up appearances. Instructions were, thus, sent to local party committees reminding them that officially the election campaign was organised and controlled by the NUF and not by the party organisations, and that the NUF branches' activity must be increased and the branches strengthened ('Instrukcja...', 1959', p. 525).

In the next phase of the election campaign, all local NUF committees proclaimed their election programmes. To prepare them was a major function of the local NUF committees until 1973. The task of programme formulation was accomplished by special teams appointed by the NUF. The basic guidelines for their work were resolutions adopted by party congresses and party conferences, national economic plans and instructions of the All-Poland NUF Committee. The activity of these teams was under the day-to-day control of the local party organisations. The latter received, through the parallel party channels, instructions from the Secretary of the PZPR Central Committee on the desirable contents of the programmes ('Instrukcja...', 1965, pp. 266-268). Officially, opinions and proposals of the electorate should have been taken into consideration as guidelines. The last element, however, was neutralised. As Redelbach puts it,

... to coordinate programmes and to avoid divergences between nationwide and sectional interests, the election programmes were resolved in the following sequence: (1) the

resolving of the nationwide election programme, (2) the resolving of provincial and district programmes, (3) the resolving of rural, town-district and township programmes. (Redelbach, 1978, p. 250).

So the higher level programmes were guidelines for the lower level. The routine described resulted in the fact that teams located at a lower level never wrote their own programmes before they got a complete one from a higher level.

Now we can summarise the guarantees for the congruence of election programmes with the party will. They run as follows:

- (1) the composition of the NUF committees,
- (2) the higher level priority in preparation of programmes.
- (3) the rule determining the source documents used in the preparation of programmes,
- (4) the continuous control maintained by local party committees over the local NUF committees.

Although preparation of hundreds of programmes in this way involved some thousands of people, the whole effort served only propaganda goals and was used to camouflage the real, dummy nature of the NUF. In the subsequent years that camouflage was gradually removed, to the point of non-existence. After 1973 no local programmes were written by the NUF branches, and all branches proclaimed the same nationwide party programme as their own.

The next important link in the election process chain was the election itself. There are several milestones in the evolution of the Polish electoral law. The first version of the law was that of 1954. In 1957 several serious changes were carried out and another general reconstruction was passed in 1973.

The Municipal Councils Act of 1950 proclaimed the elective nature of these local authority institutions. Nevertheless, up to 1954 councillors were appointed, never elected. That deviation from the law was closely related to the ongoing campaign of 'cleansing the composition of the councils' pursued since 1948. The campaign was triggered by a nationwide conference of the Polish Workers' Party (the previous name of the PZPR) held after the Party's Central Committee plenary meeting in August 1948, which adopted Stalin's idea of the 'sharpening class struggle along with the development of socialism'.

Even from the fragmented figures available it can be concluded that the purge in municipal councils was enormous. Between 1948 and 1950, 70% to 100% of the councils' composition was changed. Sometimes the same council seat was held by several people in succession within one year (Zawadzka, 1976, pp. 106-111, 163-173). Although the cleansing lost some of its vigour after 1950, it was still strong. In such circumstances elections were neither desirable nor possible.

An important trait of the 1954 election system was the deep camouflage of the role of the party in the election campaign. Formally, lists of candidates were composed by the National Front committees, which supposedly took proposals from the electorate as guidelines. Candidates were put forward at special pre-election meetings. In reality, lists were established by local party committees, though not directly, however. The party committees informed the National Front

of their personal preferences and sent their men to pre-election meetings where they proposed these candidates (Redelbach, 1978, p. 258). All candidates also had to have a stamp of approval from the Security Police Bureau. In this way that institution became an important, although hidden, candidate selector (Swiatko, 1981).

The 1954 electoral law did not rule out the possibility of drawing up many competing lists of candidates. Because such a possibility formally existed, the number of candidates on the list equalled the number of seats in a given constituency. In practice, the party, via the National Front, implemented the rule of a single list for every constituency. That solution made elections completely illusory. During the 1956 political thaw the mass media complained that the process of political revival had not had any influence on the municipal councils, which had not joined it (Świadectwo, 1956; Matuszewski, 1956). Exactly the same evaluation was given by the press during the next short-lived thaw in 1971 (Kołodziejczyk, 1971). The reason for the municipal councils' behaviour was widely seen to lie in the way elections were conducted. In 1956 reports of the National Front being forced to accept candidates picked by the party apparatus were pervasive. In effect—as was stated in a parliamentary debate in 1956—councillors did not feel themselves to be real representatives of local communities and municipal councils were not trusted by the electorate.

The 1956 thaw produced a true political fever. The abandoning of forced collectivisation of the agricultural sector and a significant reduction of security police activities were accompanied by a severe fractional struggle inside the party, a substantial outflow of members from the party, and general hope for further and still deeper changes in the economic and political spheres. All that meant a great increase in social involvement. Party leaders therefore feared that the National Front committees, which had wide powers to draw up lists of candidates and were, at the time, under strong social pressure, might begin to act independently of the will of local party committees by confirming candidates put forward at pre-election meetings who had no support from the PZPR (Narada, 1986). Nor was it unlikely that the National Front committees might confirm competing lists of candidates. This possibility existed in the electoral law then in force and even in the Stalinist period attempts had been made to use it (Gebert, 1976, p. 195). At the peak of social activity, in October 1956, the party authorities, which were confronted by an imminent general election (16 December 1956) and slightly more distant local elections, faced a very serious dilemma. The old electoral system had already been completely discredited. However, if its regulations were to operate in fundamentally new conditions of independent social activity and lack of terror, this very system created a number of threats to the party's control over the election process, which the press and parliamentary critics had apparently not yet realised. Thus, the problem was that the undemocratic features which had been criticised had to be removed from the electoral system and simultaneously the party's control over it had to be maintained.

The democratisation operation, which was given wide publicity, was carried out on the much-criticised parliamentary election law. The tightening of party control was achieved by a fundamental change, made without much publicity, in the rules

of operation of the National Front, which was renamed the National Unity Front on the occasion (November 1956).

As to the electoral law, the only significant change consisted in the introduction of a rule that the number of parliamentary candidates on the list in each constituency should exceed by two thirds the number of seats to be filled. Electors could thus not only vote but also choose those from among many candidates whom they considered the best. However, much was done so that this new rule—publicised by the authorities as a democratic breakthrough—should not constitute a real breakthrough. To begin with, the electors—while being granted the right to choose—were persistently encouraged not to use it. The dropping of a ballot-paper in the ballot-box without crossing out any names was recognised as voting for the first candidates on the list. Candidates were placed on the list not in alphabetical order but in accordance with the party preferences. The first places were occupied by those whom the party particularly wanted to be elected. According to Gomulka, balloting without crossing out was to be an expression of confidence in the new leadership of the party and in the candidates whom the party specially recommended by putting their names first. On the other hand, the crossing out of candidates, especially members of the party—according to Gomulka—might bring about incalculable consequences, including the loss of sovereignty by Poland. This was a clear reference to the recent Soviet invasion of Hungary. At any rate—as Gomulka made clear—what mattered in the election was not whether the party stayed in power, for the PZPR would never surrender it to the 'revivers of capitalism' (Tarniewski, 1981, pp. 115-118).

In order to eliminate the danger that, in the feverish atmosphere of the thaw, the NUF committees might nominate candidates not supported by the PZPR, they were stripped of all their former powers. What used to be hidden practice became open and formal. The right to establish lists of candidates was formally given to the Mutual Consultation Committees of Political Parties, dominated by the PZPR. They compiled the lists presented at pre-election meetings, and then made a final decision on the composition of the lists. The NUF retained only one prerogative—presentation of the candidates selected in this way to the public (Redelbach, 1978, p. 259). This solution has been operative up to now, though the National Unity Front was replaced in 1983 by a new institution—the Patriotic National Revival Movement (PRON).

The experience of the general election, which was ultimately put off from December 1956 to January 1957, and the persistent fears that the party might lose its control over the election process, brought about some further changes in the electoral system before the local elections scheduled for the following year. The new local election law of 1957 contained four important novelties when compared with the general election law of the previous year and with the old local election law of 1954. First, while retaining the formal possibility for several competing lists of candidates to be submitted, the new law said that 'if the leadership of these organisations [organisations authorised to propose candidates] decided that their local cells should compile one common list of candidates, any other list proposed against this decision would be invalid'. This regulation remained in effect until 1973, when a new version of the election law unambiguously ruled out the



possibility that there might be several competing lists of candidates. In the 1973 electoral law, the National Unity Front was for the first time said to be the organiser of election campaigns. Until then the National Unity Front had been an institution of extra-legal status. The decisive role of the PZPR in drawing up lists of candidates was also clearly stated, so the principle of the 'leading role of the Party' was thereby spelled out in the electoral law for the first time (Electoral Law, 1976, Redelbach, 1978, pp. 259-260).

Second, the fact that many of the pre-election meetings held in 1956 had been stormy caused the regulations concerning the organisation of these meetings and their powers to be excluded from the new law. From then until 1973, these meetings, though they were still organised, ceased to be legally regulated, which deprived them of any legally determined powers and left their organisation to the PZPR local committees.

Third, the growing disappointment in 1957 with the policy of the new party and governmental leadership gave rise to fears that the voter turnout at the local elections might be very low. This could produce very serious consequences, for the law in effect until then said that in order that a candidate might be elected member of parliament or councillor, he (or she) had to gain an absolute majority of a turnout of at least 50%. By way of precaution the new regulations removed the threat which a wide boycott of the election might create by eliminating both the requirement of an absolute majority and that of the 50% turnout. Some believed this change was fundamental because it made it possible, as Zawadzka put it, 'to nominate to office persons whom a majority of the electorate had rejected by voting against them or by not attending the election at all' (Zawadzka, 1976, p. 122). The rule that only if at least 50% of the electorate voted could the election be valid was not reintroduced until 1973. The principle of an absolute majority of votes for one candidate was, however, not restored.

Fourth, a new regulation was introduced which allowed the local mutual consultation committees of political parties to delete names of candidates already on the list almost at the last moment before polling day. A year before, during the parliamentary election campaign, the Central Mutual Consultation Committee of Political Parties had ordered the deletion of some candidates who 'had not obeyed the NUF's election programme and the discipline binding on members of the Party'. At the time these candidates' names had indeed been deleted, but it was an illegal action as the electoral law did not then provide for such a possibility. The new law filled the gap and the new regulation allowing candidates' names to be deleted up to the 10th day before balloting day remained operative till 1988.

The reconstruction of the electoral system carried out over the years 1956-57 proved durable. This system survived in basically unchanged form until 1973, and the changes made after that year had no influence whatever on electoral practice. On the basis of the experience gathered during the period 1957-79, it is thus possible to reconstruct the local election mechanisms which were in force over those years.

The rules governing selection of candidates for councillors were one of the basic mechanisms. This selection was under the complete control of the party. The important element was the application of the so-called 'key', a normative pattern

predetermining the makeup of councils at each level. The key specified the percentage of councillors to be recruited from members of the Communist Party, the satellite parties, different social groups (manual workers, farmers, handicraftsmen, white-collar workers) and from various organisations (youth organisations, women's organisations, co-operatives, etc.). It also defined the makeup of councils in terms of councillors' age, sex and level of education (Zawadzka, 1976, pp. 180-181). The decision on the percentage of various elements of the key was made by the Central Mutual Consultation Committee of Political Parties, which was dominated by persons from the apparatus of the PZPR Central Committee. These decisions constituted obligatory guidelines for mutual consultation committees at the provincial level (Gebert, 1966, p. 55; Patrzalek, 1979, p. 114).

The application of the key was a measure designed to prevent a spontaneous process of nomination of candidates and consequently to prevent a council from emerging as the representation of various interests of a given local community. Councillors were to be not a representation of interests but a group reflecting, fairly mechanically, the makeup of a local community (age, sex, education, etc.) and guaranteeing the political domination of the Communist Party, thanks to a large number of party members in the council. Full implementation of the key was impossible in practice, for it was difficult to fulfil all of its requirements and—to the same time—to observe the primacy of political criteria, i.e. the decisions on the number of party members (Zawadzka, 1976, p. 188). It should also be borne in mind that political criteria were often very detailed and they were conveyed through various channels. In addition to obligatory general directives issued by the mutual consultation committee at a superior level, local party committees also received special instructions directly from the Secretariat of the Central Committee of the PZPR. For instance, the 1957 *Instrukcja* made it clear which party apparatus office-holders were to stand for councils. It named, first of all, first secretaries of local party committees; in the case of councils at the provincial level it was to be the party secretaries for economic affairs.

The necessity of fulfilling the requirements of the key caused a number of negative consequences. In order to adjust the list of candidates in a given electoral district to the stipulations of the key, it was often necessary to include persons not residing in it or even in the entire area covered by the operation of a given council (Patrzalek, 1979, p. 117). They sometimes accounted for as many as 66% of the total number of candidates (Bereza, 1959, pp. 162-164). Thus, they were persons unknown to their constituents, and they were not very conversant with the problems of the electors. This fact usually provoked a lot of critical remarks at pre-election meetings (Patrzalek, 1979, p. 117; Bereza, 1959, p. 162).

The search for persons politically reliable and fulfilling the criteria of the key displaced other important qualities which a councillor should have. For instance, only 20-30% of the candidates were conversant with the basic rules of the local council's operation (Dzięciołowska, 1979). The haste in picking candidates meant that some were not even asked in advance whether they agreed to the inclusion of their names on the list. In the late 1970s such cases amounted to 13% of all candidates (Dzięciołowska, 1979). Local party committees even included persons

who turned out to be sub-literate and frightened at their selection (Zawadzka, 1976, p. 181).

The application of the key, most importantly, prevented the origination of strong ties between electors and councillors. The findings of research conducted in the 1960s (Harz & Jasińska, 1964) showed that councillors did not display any obvious consciousness that they represented the interests of their own socio-occupational group, or any awareness of the specific nature of those interests, or any wish to defend them. And even if some of the councillors were conscious of such a tie, this was not reflected in their activities in the capacity of councillors.

Having discussed the criteria of selection, we shall now present the procedures used for nominating council candidates in local party committees. The first step was to evaluate the performance of candidates already in office. These evaluations were the basis for deciding which of them were to stand again. The Secretariat of the Central Committee ordered that councillors on the presidia of local councils should be especially thoroughly evaluated ('Instrukcja...', 1957). The number of councillors who stood for a second term of office tended to grow in each election campaign. After the 1954 election the figure was 17.6%, after the 1958 campaign—31.3%, after 1961—42.6% and after 1966—44.6% (Gebert, 1966, p. 70). In the 1970s the proportion sometimes exceeded 50% (Patrzalek, 1979, p. 114).

After having picked candidates from among current councillors, the local party committee received further proposals. In 1957 the candidatures put forward by enterprises and social organisations were examined by the mutual consultation committees of political parties (Bereza, 1959, pp. 161-162). On the other hand, the description of the 1978 election campaign contains no mention of these committees, although formally they still existed. Candidates then were picked by the lowest level party organisations, which submitted their proposals directly to local party committees (Patrzalek, 1979, p. 114).

At the beginning of the 1960s, the rule was introduced that candidates standing for the PZPR were to be picked not by local party committees, as had been the case until then, but by specially held conferences of delegates from all party organisations in a given area. The role of these meetings, however, was minimized very quickly. This became apparent in the small changes which they made in the proposals put up by the local party committee (Gebert, 1960, p. 55).

The party committee which was to compile the list of candidates applied the 'key' to all the candidatures submitted, and in the event of difficulties in adjusting the list of candidates the party authorities at a higher level were consulted (Patrzalek, 1979, p. 114), since the local party committee was not authorised to decide on even partial non-compliance with the requirements of the key. In addition to the difficulty in adjusting the list to the key, another difficulty consisted in finding persons willing to run in the last places on the list of candidates. As electors seldom crossed any names out, in accordance with the law those candidates who were placed in the upper part of the list were elected. The remaining candidates, in the lower places, in practice played the role of decoration, and few persons were willing to play it (Gebert, 1976, p. 201). This difficulty was widespread, and in order to do something about it the Secretariat of the Central Committee recommended in 1965 that the lower places of the list of

candidates should be filled with the names of persons who were simultaneously standing for another, lower level council in one of the higher places (*Instrukcja...*, 1965, p. 315). That idea caught on and was universally applied at the next election campaigns (Gebert, 1976, p. 197).

The PZPR local committee submitted the fixed list of candidates to the National Unity Front local committee, which regarded it as binding and could not on its own introduce any changes. For this reason, that committee rejected any additional candidatures, in the main of non-party members, submitted to it directly (Gebert, 1966, p. 56).

After the lists of candidates were given to the National Unity Front, the next phase of the election campaign began; it consisted in organising meetings with electors. This phase was not covered by law in the period 1957-73 and these meetings never (even after 1973) had any authority to make changes in lists of candidates. During the meetings—in accordance with what the propaganda said—electors were to evaluate candidates and programmes. This was to attest to society's wide participation in the election campaign.

Formally, this phase of the campaign was carried out by the National Unity Front. However, research conducted in 1957 demonstrated that organisation of meetings had been completely taken over by local committees of the PZPR (Bereza, 1959, p. 170). This phenomenon recurred in all the subsequent campaigns. It could not be otherwise, for the NUF committees were not at all prepared to play the part with which they were charged. The committees in question were groups, deprived of any consequence and means, of persons displaying no visible activity in the inter-election period in the region of their operation. For this reason, the NUF propaganda commissions came to be subordinated for the period of the election campaign to the propaganda secretary of the PZPR local committee. Thanks to this arrangement the Secretary—by replacing the NUF but acting under its name—could freely organise this phase of the campaign.

In spite of the fact that pre-election meetings were devoid of any rights, the party attached much importance to their organisation. For there was a danger that electors' opposition to the candidates presented to them might be uncovered during the meetings. This could easily happen, for the criteria of evaluation of candidates used by voters were entirely different from the criteria employed by those who put forward and nominated candidates. As the research conducted in 1960 shows, electors most valued moral qualities such as honesty, reliability and readiness to defend their own opinions, as well as the trait distinguishing a good activist—knowledge of his area (Dzieciołowska, 1969, p. 71, Zawadzka, 1976, p. 184). On the other hand, the organisations putting forward and nominating candidates regarded their moral features as the least important ones. They also set a low value on organising ability, initiative, independence and energy, and the highest value on the qualities of a good worker (diligence, discipline, professional competence) and lack of conflicts with people from the candidate's environment (Surmaczyński, 1966, pp. 81-82).

These two contradictory models of a councillor could trigger sharp clashes during the confrontation of the candidates with the electors. A number of

measures were used to prevent any such clashes and to ensure that meetings went without conflict and in a nice atmosphere.

First, the number of meetings was reduced. In all, from 8% to 10% of the electors took part in them (Zawadzka, 1976, p. 137). The dispersion of the rural population and the rule that one pre-election meeting should be held in each local community meant that 90% of all meetings took place in villages. In towns, the organising of meetings was treated in a formal way. This is proved, among other things, by the fact that the number of meetings held in towns was not related to the number of constituents in a given electoral district (Bereza, 1959, p. 170).

Second, in order to avoid disputes about the candidates themselves, the main accent of the election campaign was shifted onto programme issues. Little was said about candidates. Their presentation was treated marginally (Bereza, 1959, p. 170).

Third, importance was attached to the fact that meetings should run 'properly'. Pre-election instructions issued by the Secretariat of the Central Committee reminded organisers that any attempts to object to candidates evaluated positively by the party, and any 'spontaneous putting forward of candidates at pre-election meetings' should be decisively countered ('Instrukcja...', 1957'). In the party jargon, 'spontaneous' stood for 'uncontrolled by the Party'. Cases of arrests of persons who expressed especially critical opinions on election programmes and candidates were recorded in the province of Katowice in the 1970s.

A separate issue was the control of the course of pre-election meetings in the country. They were most numerous there and it was there that controversies about candidates nominated by the party arose most frequently. Instructions issued by the Central Committee Secretariat ordered that special groups consisting of higher-ranking party apparatus officials be set up and sent to the country to give assistance to the local party men who were not capable of 'ensuring the political leadership of the electoral campaign' ('Instrukcja...', 1957, p. 528). Generally, all meetings were to be prepared by the best apparatus men. They were to discuss, before the meeting, how to secure the 'appropriate attendance and appropriate atmosphere of the meetings' ('Instrukcja...', 1965', p. 268).

The above measures designed to preclude the eruption of controversies about candidates at pre-election meetings fulfilled this task effectively. In the country as a whole, electors objected to only 4% of the candidates presented to them during the meetings (Zawadzka, 1976, pp. 136-137; Patrzalek, 1966, p. 97-98; Skrzydło, 1966, p. 114; Gebert, 1966, p. 57).

#### IV

This system of party control over elections deprived electors of a fair chance of exerting significant influence on the selection of councillors. Knowing this from experience, electors showed much indifference to electoral campaigns. This indifference was additionally enhanced by the carefully selected information on the election provided by the mass media. The shift of stress onto programme issues treated very generally was accompanied by lack of information helpful to the citizen in the act of choosing: information about candidates and electoral

principles. This resulted in astounding ignorance on the part of electors. In 1958 only 4% knew exactly the procedure of the ballot. The nationwide research conducted after the 1973 election (Wesołowska, 1978, p. 64; Zawadzka, 1976, p. 132) showed that nearly 20% of the electorate had no idea of whom they had elected to what bodies. Only 36% knew this exactly. The rest showed a partial knowledge of the subject. The most recent research into these problems was conducted before the 1984 election (Kosel, 1985). At the time, 67% of the electors did not know any candidate's name. One third did not know that councillors would be chosen at the election. A mere 10% read or heard about electoral programmes. As few as 12% knew what the ballot paper which they would be given at the polling station looked like.

This poor knowledge may explain voters' lack of involvement, as measured by the number of names crossed out. Very few cases of candidates in the upper places on the ballot papers being eliminated in elections have been recorded, and only in rural areas. In the 1958 election, 1% to 1-5% of all candidates from the lower places on the ballot papers were elected. In the 1961 and 1965 elections there were even fewer, and not a single case was recorded in the 1973 election (Zawadzka, 1976, p. 133).

The last problem which we want to discuss here is that of the high, almost universal voter turnout in local elections. The poor knowledge of the electorate about election issues and voters' indifference contradict the official statement that the high voter turnout was a manifestation of mass support for the NUF programmes and, consequently, for the party which had inspired them. These official statements were also contradicted by the social upheavals of 1956, 1970 and 1980, which took place soon after elections (in 1954, 1969 and 1980) when almost universal turnout had been recorded.

A great deal of social concern is devoted to electoral fraud. It would be an oversimplification to explain so high an attendance by electoral fraud, though, no doubt, it has always occurred. Its scale, however, is unknown. The only independent check on the voter turnout at local elections, that conducted by Solidarity in 1984 in some large towns, showed that the authorities' announced average attendance of 66% falsified the figure by 6-13%. The 1984 election was, however, unrepresentative, owing to the broad boycott, and overstatement of the attendance to exceed 50% was often necessary to satisfy this legal requirement for recognising the election as valid. It is difficult to say whether the scale of electoral fraud and of result fraud was equally large in the earlier elections, which were held in a much more peaceful atmosphere.

The factor which undoubtedly exerted a large influence on the high voter turnout was the false conviction held by many electors that elections were obligatory. In 1984 (Kosel, 1985, p. 80) only 53% of the voters knew that it was not so. It can be assumed that in the preceding electoral campaigns, during which the authorities did not face such strong and organised counter-propaganda, there were still more electors misinformed about this. So low a percentage of persons knowing this fundamental electoral principle was caused, at least partly, by deliberately ambiguous propaganda, continually repeating and emphasising the civic duty of attending the election. The word 'duty' used here had the meaning of

moral duty, but persons without much schooling were frequently unable to discern this nuance of meaning and they treated it literally.

Because of the markedly lower level of education in this group of electors it can be assumed that their interest in public affairs was small and that they had no serious thought of contesting the political system—which is how non-attendance at elections was always interpreted—especially in the face of their belief that legal sanctions would follow this 'offence'.

Thus, in the elections conducted before 1984, at best, half of the voters knew that they could take no part in elections. A certain part of those electors accepted the political system, or supported the authorities, or thought that they exerted a real influence on the makeup of municipal councils.

It is difficult to estimate the percentage of such electors. However, we do not think that it ever exceeded 20% of all eligible voters. The remaining electors who went to the polls although they knew that it was not illegal for them not to vote were actuated by other reasons. For some of them, the fear of trouble in case of non-attendance certainly played a serious role. This was a real threat in the Stalinist period. Later on, though that threat diminished and became more hazy and indefinite, it was still felt. The sources of those fears were as follows. The pre-election propaganda gave people to understand that the authorities wished to see everybody at the polling stations. Non-attendance was thus perceived as going against the will of the authorities, and familiarity with socialist realities not infrequently prompted a wrong conviction that it might entail punishment. An elector who resolved not to vote felt isolated because of this decision, for almost everybody else voted. Thus, he could not count on getting rid of at least some of his fears through a sense of being one of a large group proceeding similarly ('since there are many of us what can they do to us?'). The sense of isolation was also strengthened by the conviction that individual boycott of elections would be a gesture devoid of any practical importance but which could nevertheless lead to unpleasant consequences. However, many voters, both those who mistakenly thought that elections were compulsory and those who knew that there was no such obligation, went to the polls not out of fear but out of habit, not thinking at all why they were doing so.

## V

An important characteristic of the evolution of formal electoral rules in the Polish United Workers' Party was their increasing precision. The aim of this continual process of making the formal rules more precise was to adjust them gradually to the electoral reality. The best way to see this formalisation is to compare the electoral rules of the 1950s and 1960s. Up to 1961 the rules never delimited the number of candidates on the list. Part of the list was established by a special team appointed by the presidium of the local party organisation conference. The number of these candidates equalled the number of seats. Other candidates might be proposed by all delegates to the conference. ('Instrukcja...', 1955). If the number of candidates was less than the number of seats, not all the seats would have been filled in the first ballot. The same result would have occurred when

passive voters crossed out the majority of candidates proposed by a special team but did not propose new candidates in their place. The electoral rules of the 1950s did not provide for by-elections. This shortcoming, however, was not a major obstacle in practice and all candidates proposed by the special teams were elected (Waclawek, 1956). Delegates to the conferences were passive.

This shortcoming became visible and troublesome only in the 1956-58 period when the party faced a considerable increase in the activity of its members. The existing rules did not guarantee control over the process and outcomes of elections in the face of increased activity by party rank and file. There was a significant increase in the number of candidates proposed and great dispersion of votes ('W sprawie ...', 1958'). Candidates proposed by the special teams were not always elected. The problem was that proposals made by the special team used to be proposals of the outgoing party committee executive, accepted by higher level committees ('W sprawie ...', 1958').

To retain control over elections, the central party apparatus made some moves including changes in the formal electoral procedures. A very synthetic description of the changes made in 1956-58 can be found in the instruction of the Secretary of the PZPR Central Committee of May 1958. The instruction was in force until 1961, when further changes were carried out. The state of the art in electoral procedures achieved then was maintained in substance until 1980.

The 1958 instruction did not include any remarks on the special team. In the mid-1950s this body was replaced by the so called 'mother committee'. The task of that committee was the same as that of the special team. It was to establish the core of the list of candidates, equal in number to the number of seats. The mother committee, however, was to guarantee stricter control over the list compiled. The committee was less numerous, and was composed, first of all, of members of the outgoing executive and representatives of the higher level party authorities. The fact that the mother committee proved more controllable by the higher party levels is confirmed in the letter of the Secretary of the PZPR Central Committee of 1967, which extended the right to assemble mother committees to major basic party cells. The decision was explained by the necessity of 'more considered elaboration of candidates lists' and a desire for 'smoother running of the meetings' ('W sprawie...', 1969).

The instruction of 1958 was the first step towards formal limitation of the electoral rights of delegates to the conferences. The authors of the instructions complained that candidates had often been proposed by the conferences 'spontaneously'. The instruction said that at the previous conference there had been proposals 'without motivation and badly thought out'. The result, the instruction said, was 'an expansion of the number of candidates, dispersion of votes and not the best composition of the committees'. To avoid such cases the instruction obliged all chairmen of party conferences to warn the delegates against excessive expansion of the lists of candidates, because it led to dispersion of the eyes and noses. It instructed them to write on the ballot the candidates proposed by the mother committee and the candidates proposed on the spot by the delegates separately ('W sprawie...', 1969). Except for the replacing of the special team by the mother committee all the other changes soon proved to be temporary. The



next election instruction, issued in 1961, delimited the powers of the delegates still more closely. The rule was introduced that the number of candidates to be proposed by the delegates on the spot was to be strictly limited. In the conferences at the lowest level it could not exceed 50% of those proposed by the mother committee. The higher the level of conference the smaller the permitted percentage. At the highest level (provincial party conferences) it was only 25% ('Instrukcja...', 1961'). This rule was valid for more than 20 years. Later there were changes limiting the number proposed on the spot still further. In 1975 the limit at provincial conferences reached 15% ('W sprawie ...', 1975'). The 1961 instruction and all those following it stipulated that the vote was valid if the number of names crossed out at least equalled the number of candidates put forward on the spot. It also provided for by-elections.

The 1961 procedure was a long-lasting one because it guaranteed the election of the vast majority of candidates proposed by the mother committee. This guarantee was strengthened by the procedure of approval of both candidates for the position of first secretary and first secretaries already elected (Party Statute amendment of 1959) by the higher level committee.

All the changes described above were aimed at ensuring the so-called 'leadership continuity', which meant that the existing composition of the party apparatus would not be suddenly upset in the case of an unexpected animation of activity by party rank and file.

Between 1956 and 1961 the rules in accordance with which the higher level party authorities could intervene in the course of elections were also formalised. Until then electoral instructions had given the representatives of the higher level the role of advisor at the conference ('Uchwała...', 1950'). In practice their presence was of crucial importance for the conference and its results. Much can be read about this in the 1950 PZPR Central Committee resolution evaluating the party elections held after 3rd Central Committee plenary meeting in 1949 ('Uchwała...', 1950'). The resolution pointed out that some people approved by the higher authorities failed at the elections because the representatives of those authorities were not active enough to counter such events. The resolution proposed the following counteractions: continuous control by provincial and local party committees over the elections held at the lower levels, direct intervention with the first secretaries at lower levels in emergency, direct intervention in electoral meetings in case 'comrades devoted to our ideals are tripped up'. The resolution served also as a reminder that the higher authorities could resort to repression against insubordinate party organisations. They were authorised to carry out a comprehensive evaluation of an organisation in which 'unhealthy tendencies had been born' and to help a new party leadership in such organisations 'to cure the situation'. New elections might also be ordered. The threat of these measures made higher level organisations interfere freely in elections. They imposed their candidates on conferences (Waclawek, 1956), manipulated the presidium of the conference during the elections, and ordered some trusted delegates to propose 'spontaneously' the candidates who had been previously decided upon by the higher level committee (Waclawek, 1956). They took special precautions to avoid criticism of the outgoing committee. Persons who were

compromised were, for example, removed from office just before their term expired and sent to other jobs ('Instrukcja..1955').

It is important to remember that a number of positions in the party apparatus were on the *nomenklatura* list. It also was an important device of control of the party ranks, though it was always stressed that party personnel policy could by no means be limited to the *nomenklatura*.

After 1956 the practice of interference was formally accepted. The rule concerning the advisory role of higher level representatives remained valid and was supplemented with the order that they were to help to establish the most appropriate composition of candidates. It was openly stated that candidates for first secretaryships had to be approved by the higher level committee. The instruction of 1961 preserved all these powers of the higher authorities, adding only the provision that the higher level authority's representatives were to be incorporated into the mother committee.

## VI

A common characteristic of the evolution of the electoral principles employed in the elections to local councils and within the party was their general reshaping in the 1956-61 period. The paradox of this transformation is that the formal electoral rules of the Stalinist period were more 'democratic' than those of the later period, despite its significantly lesser scale of terror and more liberal cultural and economic policy.

The sense of this reshaping consisted in a change of methods of party control over the electoral process. Until 1956, the basic factors guaranteeing the maintenance of that control were not electoral rules restraining the voters but widespread intimidation with the threat of police repression. In this situation, the relatively democratic electoral law of the early 1950s could not be used by voters in a way that collided with the will of the party. When the police terror relaxed from 1956 onwards, there arose a dilemma—what could replace the previous key factor guaranteeing the party control over the electoral process. The solution turned out to be replacement of the threat of police repression with an equally restraining corset of formalised electoral rules. In abandoning the terror, the dictatorship had to formalise the desired rules of election play. This is a case of the widespread phenomenon in the history of the communist system where gradual formalisation of the party dictatorship is accompanied by a simultaneous decrease in the role of terror as the regulator of the political and economic system. This explains the paradox of the evolution of the Polish electoral system: from a relatively democratic one in the Stalinist period to a much more restrictive one in the later periods.

The constraints imposed by the rules would probably have been inefficient if the thaw of 1956 had created strong mass organisational forms independent of the system. After 17 years of continuous Nazi and later communist terror, however, society was not able to make that effort and the authorities were not yet weak enough to allow it. What we could observe then was perhaps an effect of the primary accumulation of docility. A strong, massive and long-lasting police terror

played the role of disintegrating force. It crushed the existing social structures, destroying formal and informal social bonds which might be a base for organised opposition in future. This destruction of the social tissue, independent of the system, deprived society of means of self-defence and the increase in social activity immediately after the drastic abatement of terror (during the political thaw in 1956) was rather chaotic, weakly organised and, what is equally important, self-limited because of the danger of Soviet invasion. Therefore, the authorities were able to pacify it quickly using, among other things, the previously neglected device of written rules precisely reflecting their will. It was necessary to wait about a quarter of a century for this way of wielding power to become ineffective in Poland and for the appearance of a climate favourable for revival of strong social bonds independent of the system. Not until then could August 1980 occur.

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