



KRZYSZTOF ŚWIREK
UNIVERSITY OF WARSAW

GETTING HANDS DIRTY: ON ADAM SCHAFF'S POLITICAL WRITINGS

The case of Adam Schaff brings together several interesting aspects of Polish Marxism. First of all, his position was that of a theoretician actively involved in political life – not only in the sense of discussing the problems of political practice (which is not unusual for a Marxist), but in the sense of an active participation in the political struggle within the Party and in building state institutions. This obviously characterizes the situation of Marxism in all Soviet Bloc, as opposed to the position of some brands of Western Marxism, that could concentrate solely on social critique. What is less obvious, are the consequences of this situation in terms of specific 'stakes' of theoretical work, and their almost immediate political effect. Consequently the thinking itself must take into consideration its functioning, and reflect it in a series of textual strategies.

It is clearly discernible in the way by which Schaff constantly underlines the compatibility of his position not only with Marx and Engels' classic texts, but also with vital interests of the communist movement and Soviet Bloc, up until the severe crisis of the former and dissolution of the latter. On the other side, though Schaff was probably the most prominent philosopher in Poland, with connections in the highest ranks of Party officials and enormous influence on the organization of philosophy as a discipline in postwar Poland of the 1940's and 1950's, his influence became considerably smaller in the following decades, as Schaff's political connections became weaker and theoretical positions became more and more controversial within party circles. The turning point took place in the years 1967-1968, which marked a sort of generational exchange within the Party. It was paired politically with an anti-Semitic purge and a nationalistic shift in the Party's rhetoric. The fate of Schaff's position was inextricably linked

with those developments, as he was of Jewish descent, and a representative of a generation dominant during the Stalinist period, that was losing its influence in the next decades. What is paradoxical, the political form of developments in question was in accordance with the most controversial elements of Schaff's position in this period, namely his statement, that socialist countries are politically alienated and are still at risk of landsliding into nationalism and racism (I will expand on this point in subsequent sections of this text).

The second aspect of Polish Marxism that is reflected in Schaff's work is its relatively open and anti-dogmatic character. Marxism was, in a way, the official philosophy in postwar Poland, but it was not the only philosophy. Poland had strong traditions of analytical philosophy, phenomenology and Christian philosophy (esp. Thomism). Even during Stalinism, the persecution of philosophers of non-Marxist orientations had not exceeded restrictions in public teaching (for instance, most of them kept their university positions and salaries, but were held on forced leave from work). Poland even had a catholic university, which was exceptional for the Soviet Bloc. This produced special conditions for the development of Marxism in Poland (more on this problem, see Siemek 2002: 307-323, Skolimowski 2002), that had to take into account other philosophical schools, if only to criticize them as ideologically suspicious (see also: Skolimowski 1969: 37-42). Those characteristics of Polish Marxism are clearly visible in Schaff's preoccupation with expanding the scope of Marxist theory, and taking into account problems that were 'specialties' of other philosophical traditions. This is the background of his polemics with existentialism (Schaff 1961), and his takes on the philosophy of truth (Schaff 1951) philosophy of language (Schaff 1967), epistemology (Schaff 1970), semantics (Schaff 1960) and philosophy of man (Schaff 1965).

At the same time, this relative openness brought specific political tensions, as Marxism was still expected to legitimize Party politics and the system in general. In effect, a growing number of Marxist-oriented thinkers, Schaff among them, was labeled 'revisionists', as their theoretical positions were increasingly becoming hard to coordinate with the Party's political practice. Another issue is the volatility of the label 'revisionist', that could be easily used to discredit political opponents regardless of their theoretical position. Situation is clearer in the case of such Marxist thinkers, that over the years were becoming

more and more distanced towards the theory as such, as was the case with Leszek Kołakowski. But Schaff remained a theoretically convinced Marxist thinker even after the dissolution of the Soviet Bloc. Labeling him as a revisionist had more to do with the limits of freedom of thought within Marxism, as well as with tactical and personal games within the Party, than with his actual political stance. This ambiguity was clearly visible at the time and was reflected in the ironic qualification of Schaff as an 'orthodox revisionist' (see Skolimowski 2002: 190).

All of this constitutes a very complex plexus of political, theoretical and historical problems, the proper analysis of which largely exceeds the scope of this text. In the following pages, I will rather try to highlight only selected fragments of Schaff's work, which in my opinion accurately reflect his political position. Those freeze-frames, taken from the rich and complex body of work, can be an interesting point of departure for reflection on the link between theory and political practice, as well as on the ability of Marxist thought to properly analyze the problems of *actually existing socialism* – social formation obviously unknown to the founders of Marxism and posing new and urgent theoretical problems for the doctrine itself.

Late 1950's: avoiding extremes

The first freeze-frame is connected to what is one of the greatest political crises in the history of the communist movement – the 20th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union and Khrushchev's 'secret speech' (1956), in which the party leader denounced the practices of Stalinism. Settling accounts with the period of the so-called 'cult of the individual', opened up debate on the political practice of Party leadership, and the status of Marxism as a theory and scientific method. During the years of 1956-57, Schaff published a series of articles, gathered in a volume called *Spór o zagadnienie moralności* ('Controversy over the issue of morality') (Schaff 1958). Schaff tried to intervene in what he perceived as a grave ideological crisis of socialism and the way he describes the conflicted parties, as well as what he envisions as the right answer to the problems of the day, speaks a lot on his political position at the time.

First of all, Schaff distinguishes two conflicted parties, each of them equally dangerous. Schaff presents them as positions, sets of

views, and names no concrete people involved in each of the camps. The first one are 'the dogmatists', unable to admit that the crisis is real and that it is something more than a mere provocation. The second are the 'revisionists' or, how Schaff prefers to name them, 'the liquidators'. And here we should stop for a moment, to explain why Schaff is reluctant to use the term 'revisionists' and why he wants to replace it.

In Schaff's view, the term 'revisionism' is used in a misleading way, because it suggests that any theoretical creativity in the field of theory is something dangerous. This suggestion, Schaff argues, is false, as every theory needs to be confronted with new problems, and in consequence developed. The problem is different: that so called 'revisionists' are claiming to be Marxists, where in fact they already left the Marxist position and use arguments that lead to a liquidation of the socialist project altogether (see Schaff 1958: 31-32).

Though Schaff uses only general arguments, it is sometimes possible to see which theorists, and even texts, he has in mind. One of the most prominent philosophers connected to Marxism, and one of those most frequently deemed 'revisionist', was Leszek Kołakowski. In one of his famous essays of the period, 1957's *Aktualne i nieaktualne pojęcie marksizmu* ('Up-to-date and not up-to-date conception of Marxism') (Kołakowski 1989), Kołakowski claimed, that what is true in Marxism is already absorbed by human sciences, and what doesn't stand to the test of empirical knowledge of those sciences should be abandoned. Kołakowski's argument is simple: he claims, that Marxism shouldn't be treated as a dogmatic set of sanctified statements on social reality. What strikes someone with even vague knowledge of Marxism is the way in which Kołakowski oversees, that Marxism was never simply 'one of the sciences', but was always connected to political stance. Schaff doesn't mention Kołakowski's name, but sums up his position and precisely names its weakness, namely that Kołakowski 'forgot' about class struggle: there is no neutral science, that could absorb the rational core of Marxism, because what is 'true' and 'rational' about society can be defined only from two incompatible points of view, determined by class position of one or another way of thinking (see Schaff 1958: 62). Schaff names those two positions as 'idealist' and 'materialist'. Those named 'revisionist' simply left the position which every Marxist is supposed to take. They are formulating demands, that make sense only from the 'other side' of the class struggle.

Schaff's position is a fairly uncontroversial one among some Marxists even to this day. It is pretty obvious, even among some sociologists, that human sciences are 'overdetermined' by class struggle, that there exist different perspectives on politics and social processes in general, according to different positions in class conflicts. It was stated in several ways through the years among Western Marxists – here it will be sufficient to recall Louis Althusser's famous claim, that 'philosophy is a class struggle represented in theory', which meant, similarly, that there are only two fundamental positions within philosophy, that represent, in the domain of theory, two basic positions in class antagonism (Althusser 1971: 18).

Here we find the key to Schaff's position, this paradoxical 'orthodox-revisionism'. Schaff tried to propose a way of developing Marxist theory, but at the same time to stay faithful to 'the right position' in the class struggle. His consequent way of applying rules of Marxist theory to the problems of socialist reality led to conflict with the Party establishment, because it was far from the ritual way of iterating the same set of ossified formulas from Marx and Lenin, as we will see in the next section of this text. But, at the same time, Schaff remained loyal to the case of 'actually existing socialism' even after he was expelled from the Party (in 1984), because he stuck to the 'right position' in the class struggle, as he understood it – and of course, he understood class struggle in a very specific way.

Schaff conceives class struggle globally, and from a historical perspective, not as the struggle of social classes in every society, but as a struggle of blocs: Soviet Bloc is, as a whole, on the side of the proletariat and socialism, the capitalist countries – on the side of the bourgeoisie (capital). Schaff sees the interest of the Soviet Bloc as convergent with the historical interest of proletariat, as the interests of the proletariat are convergent with the interests of the Revolution and, in a long-term perspective, the 'transition to communism'. This consequently held position marked out Schaff's work among other revisionisms – Schaff voiced some 'inconvenient truths' but from the point of view of someone loyal to the general interests of the 'Marxist Bloc', understood not only as a doctrine, but also as a political entity (on this point, see also Somerville 1973: 322, 327-328).

This also brings to mind, why Schaff could state during late 1940's, that Stalinism was a 'dictatorship of the proletariat' – a

statement impossible to make, unless we remember, that in Soviet Marxism the Party was the 'real proletariat' – the avant-garde, the bearer of the historical interests of the proletariat, and not the contingent interests of actual industrial or agricultural workers. This theoretical move to distinguish between 'proletariat' and empirical 'working classes' was vital for the Bolsheviks, who had to strengthen their rule by fighting popular resistance (on this point see Staniszkis 2006: 232-235 and Staniszkis 2010: 274-275), but rather controversial for those who would like to follow Marx on this point.

The position taken by Schaff has serious shortcomings. For instance, as it makes it impossible to theorize class relations within socialism. It makes Schaff to state, in a manner rather shocking for today's reader, that the 'Great Famine' in Ukraine was a question of choice between the 'tough answer' of the Party and, possible breakdown of the revolutionary cause (see Schaff 1958: 146) – with a clear suggestion that terror of this magnitude could be rationally justified. Schaff raises the question about the dosage of terror, that is inevitable, and the moment in which terror becomes an independent means of its own (Schaff 1958: 141), but rather in connection with the show trials than with terror used as a means of disciplining the masses (Schaff 1958: 147). His take on the meaning of terror will change only gradually, as we will see in the case of his writings from the 1980's and 90's, but certain elements of his thinking will still bear resemblance to the late 50's position.

1965: alienation in Socialism

In 1965 Schaff published one of his most important works, both in terms of science and politics. In earlier years, Schaff opposed the attempts of 'supplementing' the blank spots in Marxism with other philosophical theories. One of those blank spots, generally neglected as less important, was the theory of the human individual. In *Marxism and the Human Individual*, Schaff argues that there is a strong and coherent outline of this theory in the classic texts of Marx and Engels – it only needs to be extracted and made agreeable with other elements of the theory. Schaff acknowledged, that the works of 'young Marx' are of great importance here, but at the same time, contrary to some (notably Louis Althusser and his school), argued that they are coherent with Marx's latter works. There is no need to create any new theories, like the

theory of human personality and creativity, or to borrow from other theoretical schools (like existentialism) – it is rather that one has to fit the theory of alienation and individual creativity with the general laws of human society elaborated in the later works of Marx.

This theoretic goal leads Schaff to more general question of laboring untheorized (or insufficiently theorized) questions. One of those questions is the problem of alienation in socialism – obviously not tackled by Marx, who not only couldn't witness the political practice of actually existing socialism, but who imagined even the conditions necessary for proletarian revolution differently. The end of capitalism, according to Marx, was to be initiated by most developed countries and in the entire developed world, as Schaff accurately reconstructs (Schaff 1965: 268-270). The reality of the 1917 revolution was different, and it produced prolonged, complex problems, which have to be theorized. This elaboration of the issue of alienation in socialism is the second political 'freeze-frame' I would like to propose.

Schaff sees the reality of socialist countries as a prolonged interim period – significantly different from the reality of capitalist countries, but not yet a completion of the Marxist ideal of social emancipation. Stating differently, writes Schaff, would be not only naïve, but also incoherent with Marx' vision of communism as a process and not a state of things (Schaff 1965: 276-277)¹. This long process will not resolve itself automatically according to changes in the economic base, but needs active reflection and action in several spheres of social life, that are vital for individuals' wellbeing. Not only does this prolonged interim period not liquidate the problems of alienation, but in some aspects even exacerbates them. For instance, socialism doesn't liquidate the division of labour – on the contrary, by enabling accelerated industrialization and urbanization in underdeveloped countries, it deepens certain forms of alienation related to progress as its dark side (Schaff 1967: 274). Even the success of modernization has its price: the advent of leisure brings about the risk of using it the wrong way, in the absence of genuinely socially-oriented attitudes. Moreover, as socialism was introduced in countries with a specific historical burden, there are

¹The same point Schaff will make in his later remarks on alienation in socialism, notably in his 1977' book (published abroad, as at the time Schaff was unable to find a publisher in Poland) *Entfremdung als Soziales Phänomen* (Schaff 1977: 344).

forms of, so to speak, site-specific political alienation, such as nationalism and antisemitism, that have to be controlled and counteracted by promoting an internationalist approach (Schaff 1965: 312-313). Generally speaking, as the interests of the individual must be agreed with the interests of the collective, socialism as a political process needs certain educational measures introduced to fight with unwanted tendencies towards egoism and the risk of a return of nationalist passions (see: Schaff 1965: 281).

Schaff's text was, to some extent, prophetic, as subsequent years of political history of the Polish People's Republic would show. In 1967 something that was officially named an 'anti-Zionist campaign' had begun, prolonged political action of purging the party and ranks of professionals of 'Israel-friendly' (read: of Jewish origin) people. Thousands of people left Poland, supplied with a one-way document, which allowed them to go abroad without the return option. The action though was different from pogrom-like outburst of dark passions of uneducated masses (which Schaff could probably have in mind in 1965) – it was orchestrated by Party structures (with ritual acts of condemnation during Party meetings and with rallies with checked attendance). The inspirators of those events were interested in opening the opportunities for promotion in several spheres of social life and using the anti-Semitic arguments as a weapon in faction fights within Party leadership (more on the motives behind those events, see Stola 2000: 196-199)

Most important processes of 1970's could also be seen as announced in Schaff's text, as the decade brought important shifts in Party orientations. New Party leadership pushed for a more intense economic cooperation with the West, as it focused on loans enabling investments in technological development, and boast in infrastructural investments and consumption. The official language of Marxism was even more fossilized in the form of meaningless doublespeak (for analysis of political language of the 1970's see: Bralczyk 2007: 18-225), which was a cover up for largely pragmatist worldview of Party officials, interested in technocratic management. The new legitimization of the system was largely consumerist in social practices, and supplemented at the symbolic level with certain nationalist overtones, used intensively by the circle of so-called 'Partisans' in Party leadership. The system was normalized when the Party took on a more pragmatic approach, and

resorted to nationalist sentiments, but a certain kind of political alienation deepened, as the still dominant, nominally socialist, official language became more and more devoid of meaning.

Yet another prophetic aspect of Schaff's political argumentation was the theme of a 'new industrial revolution' – automation, new advances in technology (computers and information processing), that will free large groups of people from unwanted labor but also, cut them away from the satisfaction and social bonds that come with work (Schaff 1965: 330-332). It is clear for Schaff that alienation is not a problem of the middle classes (or intelligentsia) – it pervades the whole of the social body, only manifesting itself differently in different social milieus. From this point of view, the problems of a superstructure, such as popular culture and new forms of education, gain new urgency (Schaff 1965: 321-330). New industrial revolution will be a recurring theme for Schaff till his very last books, gradually becoming one of the most important problems (as in Schaff 1990). It is always seen as the danger of new forms of alienation of the individual, and, at the same time, as a point of political hope, as this new world of automated labour and saved human energy makes some kind of socialism inevitable (I will discuss this vision more closely in the next section of this text). In 1965 Schaff anticipated this change as a challenge and a chance for socialism, as socialist countries are, according to him, more efficient in the task of social planning.

What is also a recurrent motif on the politically-oriented pages of *Marxism and Human Individual*, is the insight that changes in social circumstances don't produce automatic advancements on the side of attitudes. The problems of the future will also have a lot to do with the aforementioned theme of 'aligning interests of the individual with social interests'. Schaff sees clearly that the task is impossible to achieve solely by means of propaganda, which differentiates this position from his earlier appeals to 'faith in socialism' (Schaff 1958: 83-91) as a way of restoring deteriorating political enthusiasm. What is indispensable in creating this kind of alignment is a certain sense of responsibility which is, in turn, impossible without a certain dose of independence and democratic freedoms (Schaff 1965: 296-302).

At a certain point in his argumentation, Schaff recalls a well-known apologetic motive of 'special circumstances', which made terror an inevitable element of socialism survival in the hostile international

environment. Democracy had to be sacrificed in the process, as socialism was built in one country, and furthermore – a country that had neither strong parliamentary traditions nor material conditions to make real democracy possible. Schaff includes in this argument not only the Russian Empire during the 1917 Revolution but the whole of what was to become the Eastern Bloc after the Second World War. All those countries, according to Schaff, were going in the late 40's and early 50's through a period of intensified modernization and class struggle, and, as such, were unfit to put authentic socialist democracy into practice. His argumentation, nonetheless, doesn't come down to this. In surprisingly frank pages, Schaff admits that parliamentary democracy with certain freedoms, snubbed in some brands of Marxist literature as 'merely formal', has its actual merits as a centuries-long training, which produces habits of social responsibility, such as abiding by the rule of law (Schaff 1965: 294-295). And above all, though some freedoms of parliamentary democracy are 'formal', one shouldn't be proud that those freedoms are limited in socialist countries (Schaff 1965: 299). As Slavoj Žižek observed in recent years, formal freedoms are important exactly on their 'formal' level – that purely formal regulations open up a blank space of possibility, and as such are indispensable in making possible political creativity (see Žižek 2008: 147-152). Schaff, in a more modest way but obviously risking more in the context of the time, made similar point on the advantages of what is 'merely formal': it is not enough – and indispensable all the same.

This is maybe the most interesting point he makes in terms of political thinking. Admitting that formal democracy actually had some value, needed a certain dose of courage to step outside easily repeated pseudo-Marxist cliché, which was proven false by the experiences of Stalinism and political practice of what Schaff termed in his earlier works as the 'dictatorship of the proletariat'. Formal freedoms may not be the same as actual freedoms but most probably the latter are impossible without the former.

Interesting as it was, this argument was not expanded by Schaff, which only proves that he struggled with the idea of democracy as something that is not only verbally encouraged but also guaranteed on the level of law and social practice. In his earlier work, Schaff also advocated taking individual responsibility and thinking independently (Schaff 1958: 95), but at the time he didn't propose any means to

guarantee those freedoms – the sole guarantee for them had to be the Party's political will to promote democracy among its members, as it would bring them closer to the role model of a 'communist man'. But without certain guarantees exceeding the will of political circles, responsibility and independence will always fall prey to appeals to 'strategic interests of Socialism' – interests always defined by the highest ranks of the Party officials. Schaff gradually became conscious of this problem but apparently couldn't find solution to it in his 1965's work and became entrapped between two opposing types of argumentation: one of them advocating democratization, the second one – formulated along the known 'strategic' lines – from the point of view of historical interest of actually existing socialism.

1990's: explaining catastrophe

The decade of the 1980's was the time of the prolonged crisis and dissolution of actually existing socialism in Poland. First years of that time saw unprecedented outburst of mass protest with the 'Solidarity' movement, last years – the Round Table negotiations and the first elections in which the representatives of the opposition could take part. Schaff wasn't a supporter of Solidarity. He backed the imposition of Martial Law by the general Wojciech Jaruzelski, aimed at strengthening of the state control over the course of the events. Supporting the system against the protest movements didn't save Schaff from expulsion from the Party (1984). Since then, Schaff was politically a complete outsider: still supportive of socialism, though not aligned with the opposition.

Schaff's political writings form the 1980's and 1990's can be summed up into three major threads of thought: one is an analysis of causes and repercussions of the crisis of the communist movement and existing socialism in general; another is devoted to perspectives of future socialism; the third one is an attempt on autobiography of Schaff himself and his generation. During those years Schaff modifies his opinions on actually existing socialism – he becomes more critical of it, though he tries to justify the political engagement of those who participated in constructing the system. At the same time, Schaff still identifies himself as a Marxist, convinced that the theory of the author of *Capital* provides the key to understanding the present and future tendencies of developed societies. Schaff achieves more critical distance towards the political practice of the existing socialism, but without

modifying the theoretical frame of Marxism. And he does that in a way that has a peculiar effect: in a way, he moves backwards in the history of Marxist thought and in his last works his position becomes very similar to those held by German social democrats (notably, Karl Kautsky and other ideologues of the Second International).

There are three main similarities between his position and the social democratic one. First of all, he stresses that political shortcomings of actually existing socialism were the effects of the conditions in which it came to power in the first place. The same argument that Schaff used in 1958 to criticise those who demanded 'premature democratization', in 1980 takes on a different meaning: the initial conditions in which the Communist Party came to power continued to weigh on the political practice and had devastating effects on the legitimization of the existing regimes and the communist movement in general. In the absence of proper conditions enabling transition to socialism (economic development, international solidarity, democratic traditions, to name a few), the system was caught in a spiral of violence: circumstances of internal poverty and external hostility demanded strict organisation ('military communism'), and gradually violence became the basic instrument of exercising power. It was clear to Schaff as we can see in his works from the 1980's, such as the book titled *Perspektywy współczesnego socjalizmu* ('Perspectives of Modern Socialism') (Schaff, 1990). Gradually, Schaff came even to the conclusion that Bolsheviks shouldn't take power in 1917 and instead should support accelerated democratic development modelled on countries with parliamentary democracy (Schaff 1999: 30-31). The taking of power in 1917 for Schaff is the 'original sin' of the revolution: in the circumstances of the time it had to end in political repressions and a prolonged deficit of democracy. No wonder that a book from 1999, in which he presents his criticism, Schaff defends Karl Kautsky claiming that he was not a 'renegade' (as in the famous Lenin's anathema) but a 'defender' of proper Marxism (Schaff 1999: 31). As we can see, Schaff still formulated his position from the point of view of 'true Marxism', but since 1958 this Marxism in question changed – from that of Lenin's to that of social democrats'.

The second major similarity is Schaff's view on political superstructure. As I have already mentioned, in his works from 1958 and 1965 Schaff used particular interpretation of the notion of 'class

struggle' to justify limits imposed on democracy in the socialist states: in given conditions there was no chance to install in Poland and elsewhere in the Soviet Bloc a 'parliamentary rule' of a British type. In his later works this argument disappears as it became clear for Schaff that democracy is indispensable in any future realization of socialism (see Schaff 1995: 76-78, Schaff 1999: 32), which also is a point made by social democrats.

The third similarity is evident in the way in which Schaff tried to envision the future of developed countries as some new kind of socialism. The basic argument was unchanged since 1965: automatization of work would make large portions of workforce redundant. As societies would face the problem of structural unemployment, it would become necessary to provide a growing part of the population with socially useful jobs, not bound to the labour market. This makes some kind of socialism indispensable in the forms of universal redistribution of wealth (an idea discussed today as 'universal income'), education, and social planning. Transition to this new society could be peaceful, as it would become evident for politicians and policy makers that modern technology demanded new forms of social organisation (see Schaff 1990: 60-72, Schaff 1999: 71-79, 82-83).

Similarly to social democrats and reformists of the past years, Schaff saw this major social shift as a possibly gradual change, made inevitable by the changes in the social 'base'. In those circumstances, it would be possible to achieve decisive steps by social engineering and political leadership of some 'New Left' of the future. For Schaff there was no necessity of new violent revolutions and struggle for new forms of redistribution, though in his later works he warned in passing about the risk of some new forms of fascism becoming the superstructure of this new social formation. What changed greatly during the years is the role he saw for the existing socialism in this process: in 1965 he thought that the socialist countries had valuable experiences to share with their capitalist counterparts, in the late 1980's it was clear to him that actually existing socialism failed in competition with Western countries in terms of organisation of production processes, technological and scientific development, and personal freedoms, which severely limited its attractiveness as a model for future social experiments (see Schaff 1990: 78-95, 200-207).

His most critical take on actually existing socialism was

elaborated during the 1990's, most notably in works *Notaki kłopotnika* ('Notes of a Bothered Man', 1995) and *Próba podsumownia* ('To Sum Up', 1999), in which he claims that countries of the Soviet Bloc combined 'socialist base' with a 'fascist superstructure': there was collective ownership of the means of production and a political rule based on organised violence (see Schaff 1995: 51-53 and Schaff 1999: 45-47, 124-125). What Schaff still left untheorized were the specific workings of actually existing socialism. For instance, his critique was concentrated almost solely on political violence and not on specific forms of social power and class struggle produced in socialism of the Soviet type. Another problem is the way in which socialism reproduced itself as a specific mode of production, with certain ways of organising the process of production, and with political and cultural superstructures. Schaff always linked problems of socialism with historical circumstances of the October Revolution (or, in the case of USSR satellite states, with circumstances of imposition of socialism by the hegemonic Soviet empire after the Second World War). The architecture of the system, combining socialist and fascist elements, once set is simply producing the same effects – there is no place here for any historical dynamics, let alone dialectics of social processes.

The questions of class conflict and the problem posed by the reproduction of the system seem to be impossible to deal with unless we are able to modify Marx's theory – not to abandon it, but to modify its terms in order to save its potential. We have to resort to some modification of class theory if we want to interpret social conflicts in socialism as class struggles. For instance, Polish workers repeatedly clashed with the state power as they fought with oppression in the workplace, demanded better life conditions, and tried to register trade unions independent of the Party's control. In an attempt to understand those dynamics, Leszek Nowak proposed during the 1980's a scheme of 'triple class power', which includes economic (control over the means of production), political (control over the state) and ideological power (control over the language providing meaning to social actions) (see Nowak 2011 57-58, 135-136). In his analysis, actually existing socialism was a social formation in which those three sources of power, normally divided between different fractions of the dominant classes, were accumulated by the Party officials. This triple domination was also a climactic form of class domination in history.

Nowak's claim should be critically assessed, as it simplifies the dynamics of social power in the socialist Poland – for instance by ascribing too easily to the Party the whole ideological power, which seems doubtful in a country with a historically strong role of intelligentsia and the Catholic Church as symbolic elites. What is more important, though, is that his modification of class theory opens up the question of class dynamics in a way that is impossible to achieve when we stick to interpretation of Marx's theory, according to which there can be no classes in a social formation in which means of production are state-owned. That way, by modification, Nowak restores the explanatory potential of the class conflict theory for understanding the political dynamics of actually existing socialism.

Another question is the problem of the reproduction of the system. When Marx analysed the structures of capitalism, he showed how certain basic principles (as the accumulation of capital) set into motion an entire assemblage of interposed processes, which produced serious crises of the system and would eventually lead to its collapse in the future. In Schaff's attitude to actually existing socialism there is no such dynamics – it shows only an inertia of the 'original sin' (of the revolution exploding in the wrong place and time) producing mechanically its detrimental effects. Different approach is presented by Jadwiga Staniszkis in her late 1980's book *Ontologia socjalizmu* (*Ontology of Socialism*) (Staniszkis 2006). Staniszkis proposed an analysis of the 'socialist mode of production' inspired by an analogous model of capitalism made by Marx. Staniszkis claims that in economy with state ownership of the means of production there can be no articulated structure of interests. The only sphere in which conflicts can express themselves is the sphere of needs. This conflict, situated on the side of distribution and consumption, doesn't find analogous expression in the sphere of production. Decisions cannot be evaluated by some objective measure, there is also no way of assessing costs of production processes. In effect, the sole mode of regulation are repeated crises which lead to political corrections that always come too late and produce enormous costs.

Staniszkis' analysis can be disputed on several points, for instance as it overestimates the value of the market (especially the capital market) as a provider of objective information. But regardless of this, one can easily see the dialectical potential of an analysis of this

type which aims to grasp specific effects produced by certain basic traits of the system. This analysis, though far from Marxist orthodoxy, is true to the dialectical method. Schaff, on the contrary, is faithful to classic Marxist positions (only this time it's Kautsky's and not Lenin's, as in 1958), but doesn't provide any truly new insight into the dynamics of the system which he knew so well. His Marxism remains tied to a well-known type of arguments on 'historical necessity': even when Schaff drops the evidently lost case of actually existing socialism, he envisions some new, 'unnamed-yet' type of socialism in this place, as if to be able to replicate the same line of thought in new conditions.

One can easily see several traits of 'orthodox revisionism' in the position developed by Schaff during the last two decades of his theoretical work. He modifies only the source of 'orthodoxy', which, in turn, enables him to use the general theoretical frame of the development of social formations. Moreover, it justifies his political optimism, namely the conviction that Socialism, even if under different name, will revive itself in the future. Clearly, this 'refurbishing' of old arguments can be taken as a major weakness of his position and a sign of his inability to go outside a certain vision of Marxism that has its roots in theoretical disputes from the decades before World War II.

What are, then, the merits of Schaff's late works? One should be seen in the sole willingness to interpret actually existing socialism as a form of socialism after all. A form that resulted in a failure but demands interpretation. Schaff sees this analysis as something necessary, if the political left is to become capable of building some alternatives for the future, and he opposes those who claim that 'actually existing socialism' couldn't be a form of socialism by definition. This type of ideological 'purity' is for Schaff completely false, and it actually seems suspiciously simple – an explanation that magically saves the Left from arduous work of thinking over the 20th Century.

Marek Waldenberg in a short but poignant critical essay on Schaff's position from that time points out an interesting contradiction in Schaff's thinking: he criticizes 'communism-fascism' and claims that the Soviet Bloc was a form of socialism at the same time (Waldenberg 1998: 44-45). For Waldenberg it's a sign that Schaff didn't define socialism properly, but a different interpretation seems to be more interesting: that Schaff expressed an actual political contradiction with which the Left must struggle if it wants to reinvent itself. Maybe the

worst part of actually existing socialism, from today's Left point of view is that it was, in fact, a form of socialism, that the political left must struggle with it (and its failure) as an important part of its own tradition. Schaff is willing to do this, although his account of the problem remains insufficient.

This brief overview of Schaff's political positions brings together several points that deserve to be stressed. Firstly, Schaff wants to deal with the problems of political practice. And as he wants to play a role in institutional politics, he is not free to take completely critical, 'pure' position. We see him as a thinker, who above all wants to influence Party's politics and is ready to 'get his hands dirty' with questions of strategy, ready to sacrifice part of intellectual elegance for political responsibilities – a trait evident in his 1950's and 1960's writings. Even in his last work from 1999 he doesn't pose as an outsider but speaks from the point of view of his generation, defending it and what he perceives as its political accomplishments.

This political ambition forces him to make concessions, to put things in euphemist or even ambiguous terms, as we have seen in his arguments for democracy or his first takes on the critique of the Stalinist period. In effect, Schaff's criticism of actually existing socialism is strikingly mild in comparison to, for example, the texts by Kołakowski. But what makes Schaff's texts interesting in this regard is his effort to modify Marxism according to its functioning in a political situation completely alien to circumstances in which the theory was born: namely in a situation when Marxism, though most often in a form of trivialized dogma, was nevertheless the official language of institutionalized power. Schaff tries to combine this position of political power with emancipatory vein of the original theory, sometimes with disputable outcomes. For years Schaff tried to secure for Marxism a place of intellectual dominance in conditions which he defined as those of socialism being realised in some political form. In contrast to those who saw socialism as an infinitely anticipated and postponed ideal, he saw it as a complex and highly troublesome, disappointing reality that had to be dealt with in given circumstances.

Schaff tries to argue from the same position even after the collapse of actually existing socialism (and 'official Marxism' with it): in

his writings from the 1990's he still asserts that he speaks from the point of view of historical necessity – again assuming a position infused with a certain kind of 'power', if only discursive one. His anticipation of New Socialism, which could be termed as 'automated and digitalised mode of production', echoes age-old arguments about the inevitability of historical changes, but is also an attempt to have the last word on political perspectives of emancipation.

What Schaff's arguments fall short of is the proper wording of problems with actually existing socialism, wording that would be really enlightening for a reader with today's knowledge. Although his later writings were full of critique aimed at political practice of the Party, his arguments remained predominantly general, resorting often to lines of thought developed decades before, for instance by theorists of social-democratic background. It is as if Schaff remained enclosed in the requirements of his role from the 1950's – a Party's philosopher, able and willing to play an active political part. Even in the 1990's Schaff felt in a way a responsibility of someone who had to take into account the strategic dimension of what he writes – as a representative of his political *milieu* and generation, as a representative of the interests of some imagined future political reality. Even in those weaknesses Schaff's writings are valuable as complex and contradictory documents in the annals of certain political experiment which ended so abruptly towards the end of the last century.

REFERENCES

- Althusser, L. (1971). *Lenin and Philosophy*, transl. by Ben Brewster. New York-London: Monthly Review Press
- Bralczyk, J. (2007). O języku polskiej propagandy politycznej lat siedemdziesiątych. In *O języku propagandy i polityki* (18-225). Warszawa: Trio.
- Schaff, A. (1977). *Entfremdung als Soziales Phänomen*. Wien: Europaverlag [Eng.: 1980, *Alienation as a Social Phenomenon*. Oxford, New York: Pergamon Press].
- Schaff, A. (1970). *Historia i prawda*. Warszawa: Książka i Wiedza [Eng.: 1976, *History and Truth*. Oxford, New York: Pergamon Press]
- Schaff, A. (1961). *Marksizm a egzystencjalizm*. Warszawa: Książka i Wiedza.
- Schaff, A. (1965). *Marksizm a jednostka ludzka*. Warszawa: PWN [Eng.: 1970, *Marxism and the Human Individual*, transl. by Olgierd Wojtasiewicz, ed. by Robert S. Cohen, New York: McGraw-Hill]
- Schaff, A. (1995). *Notatki Kłopotnika*. Warszawa: Polska Oficyna Wydawnicza BGW
- Schaff, A. (1990). *Perspektywy współczesnego socjalizmu*. Szczecin: Wywnictwo Glob
- Schaff, A. (1999). *Próba podsumowania*. Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Nukowe Scholar
- Schaff, A. (1958). *Spór o zagadnienie moralności*. Warszawa: Książka i Wiedza
- Schaff, A. (1967). *Szkice z filozofii języka*. Warszawa: Książka i Wiedza
- Schaff, A. (1960). *Wstęp do semantyki*. Warszawa: PWN [Eng.: 1962, *Introduction to Semantics*, transl. by Olgierd Wojtasiewicz, Oxford, New York: Pergamon Press]
- Schaff, A. (1951). *Z zagadnień marksistowskiej teorii prawdy*. Warszawa: Książka i Wiedza
- Kołakowski, L. (2002). Aktualne i nieaktulne pojęcie marksizmu, In *Pochwała niekonsekwencji. Pisma rozproszone sprzed roku 1968* (5-20), Vol. II, London: Puls Publications.
- Nowak, L. (2011). *Polska droga do socjalizmu. Pisma polityczne 1980-1989*. Poznań: Instytut Pamięci Narodowej, Oddział w Poznaniu
- Siemek, M. J. (2002). *Wolność, rozum, intersubiektywność*. Warszawa:

Oficyna Naukowa.

- Skolimowski, H. (2002). Filozofia analityczna a marksizm. Transl. by Krzysztof J. Kilian. *Sophia*, no. 2, 181-200.
- Skolimowski, H. (1969). *Polski marksizm*. Londyn: Odnova.
- Somerville, J. (1973). Schaff's Work on the Human Individual. In T. Borbé (ed.), *Der Mensch – Subjekt und Objekt. Festschrift für Adam Schaff* (321-329). Wien: Europaverlag.
- Staniszki, J. (2006). *Ontologia socjalizmu*. Kraków-Nowy Sącz: Ośrodek Myśli Politycznej, Wyższa Szkoła Biznesu-National Louis University w Nowym Sączu, Wydawnictwo DANTE
- Staniszki, J. (2010). *Samoograniczająca się rewolucja*. Transl. by Marek Szopski. Gdańsk: Europejskie Centrum Solidarności. [Staniszki, Jadwiga, 1984, *Poland's Self-Limiting Revolution*, New Jersey: Princeton University Press]
- Stola, D. (2000). *Kampania antysyjonistyczna*. Warszawa: Instytut Studiów Politycznych Polskiej Akademii Nauk.
- Waldenberg, M. (1998). Adama Schaffa optymistyczne wyznania wiary i niedobre rady. *Zeszyty Naukowe Instytutu Badań Społecznych i Międzynarodowych Fundacji im. Kazimierza Kelles-Krauza*, no. 1, 43-50.
- Žižek, S. (2008). *Violence. Six Sideways Reflections*. New York: Picador.

ABSTRACT

GETTING HANDS DIRTY: ON ADAM SCHAFF'S POLITICAL WRITINGS

Adam Schaff was one of the most important Marxist philosophers in Poland. His work well documents the time, when Marxism was an 'official philosophy', burdened with political responsibilities and problems of strategy. The text is a critical analysis of Schaff's political writings. It highlights the most specific traits of his often paradoxical position, that was termed in literature as 'orthodox-revisionism'. Schaff tried to meet double and often conflicting requirements: tried to develop Marxist theory by posing problems unforeseen by the classics, and to stay faithful to what he understood as strategic interests of socialist countries at the same time. It will be argued, that even in its theoretical shortcomings, his writings are still among the most important resources for reflection on complex and tragic history of the Left in 20th Century.

KEYWORDS: Marxism, socialism, Soviet Bloc, Adam Schaff, revisionism, alienation

NIE BAĆ SIĘ PRAKTYKI: O PISMACH POLITYCZNYCH

ADAMA SCHAFFA

Adam Schaff był jednym z najważniejszych filozofów marksistowskich w Polsce. Jego prace dobrze dokumentują czasy, kiedy marksizm był "oficjalną filozofią", obciążoną polityczną odpowiedzialnością i kwestiami strategii. Artykuł jest krytyczną analizą pism politycznych Schaffa. Zostały w nim zaakcentowane najbardziej charakterystyczne cechy jego często paradoksalnej pozycji, określonej niegdyś jako "ortodoksyjny rewizjonizm". Schaff próbował sprostać podwójnym, nierzadko sprzecznym, wymaganiom: rozwinąć teorię marksizmu, podejmując problemy nieobecne w pracach klasyków, a zarazem pozostać wiernym temu, co definiował jako strategiczne interesy bloku socjalistycznego. Celem artykułu jest pokazanie, że nawet w swoich teoretycznych słabościach, jego pisma pozostają jednymi z najważniejszych materiałów dla refleksji o złożonej i tragicznej historii lewicy w XX wieku.

SŁOWA KLUCZOWE: marksizm, socjalizm, realny socjalizm, blok wschodni, Adam Schaff, rewizjonizm, alienacja

ABOUT THE AUTHOR: Krzysztof Świrek – sociologist and publicist, adjunct at the Institute of Sociology, Warsaw University. Świrek wrote his doctoral thesis on theories of ideology inspired by Marxism and psychoanalysis. He teaches classic sociological theories, and is interested in political dimensions of psychoanalysis and Marxist theories of culture and social structure.