

Social rehabilitation and politics

Almost thirty years have passed since the beginning of a thorough reconstruction of the Polish political and civilization system. As part of this reconstruction, the Polish social rehabilitation system has also changed.

At that time, to put it in general terms, it was possible to notice at least three politically outlined currents directly influencing social attitudes towards deviation, pathologies and criminal behaviors, and thus also the concepts and methods of social rehabilitation of individuals and socially maladjusted groups.

I mean the political conservative current, the liberal and left-wing current. The exercise of power by the representatives of each of the above mentioned trends resulted in changes in the way of interpreting abnormal behaviors and legal and rehabilitation measures applied to these persons.

I will try to present in a nutshell how political preferences influence the attitude of the authorities and society towards deviation, pathology and social rehabilitation activities.

Conservatives, called right-wingers in our country, generally consider the deviant or pathological functioning of humans as an evil in itself, attributing to them anti-normative, anti-axiological connotations. Representatives of these attitudes make references to the historical and traditional rules that are in force in our cultural circle, the code provisions and valuing sources (moral and ethical norms, provisions of the statutory law, religious recommendations and indications, customs and habits, etc.). They believe that the most effective way to improve the situation is to increase moral and legal-penal and criminal repression.

Left-wing politicians tend to treat deviant and pathological behaviors, including the phenomenon of crime, as a natural and inevitable process caused by modern, rapid and uncontrolled economic transformations, including economic, educational and cultural stratification, progressive processes of social disadvantage and processes of social and economic exclusion, which pathologize human relations.

In turn, liberals who are in favor of the so-called “free market”, both in economic and social terms, treat the behaviors that do not comply with the standards in force as a “by-product” of the economic and social development of society and try to limit its effects. In this respect, their way of thinking about pathologies and social deviations is similar to that of conservatives, with the difference that they do not pay so much attention to the axiological and worldview sphere.

Liberals, like right-wing people, think rather about applying repressive and punitive measures to deviant and pathological behaviors.

Conservatives create the face of rehabilitation activity that can be called a hard “*juridical face*”. In practice, the “*juridical face*” is characterized by excessive use of isolation and punishment measures, disproportionate to the needs and circumstances, and the conviction that such action has in itself reparatory and pedagogical qualities.

For most conservatives, the mere fact of being placed in an isolation institution means starting the process of changing behaviors and attitudes, assuming that the stricter the law and the resulting behavior, the more effective the social rehabilitation.

Liberals think in a similar way, with the difference that they attach more importance to prophylactic and preventive measures and treat isolation penalties as a last resort.

The theoretical rationale for right-wing thinking concerning social rehabilitation are the *behavioral concepts* that present deviations and pathologies as socially undesirable, disturbed forms of behavior that are averse and troublesome for the social environment.

Behavioral theories recognize that a human being in the course of his/her personal and social development learns forms of behavior and reactions. This learning is subject to a process of psychological enhancement, which means that the more frequent or stronger the psychological rewarding of these behaviors is, the more likely they are to occur and persist.

Therefore, according to conservatives, social rehabilitation should consist of the use of a repertoire of stimuli that can extinguish pathological forms of behavior. Social rehabilitation presented in this way is mainly based on the use of isolative measures and subjecting the wards to regulatory restrictions.

Therefore, left-wing politicians are generally opposed to increasing the repressiveness and severity of the actions of the judiciary system with respect to those who violate moral and legal norms, and the solutions proposed by them are therapeutic and educational in nature.

They see the isolation penalty as an example of a repressive legal system designed to maintain social order by all means. They also claim that social stigma and social isolation, which are supposed to stop people from criminal activities, are usually a natural part of the social life of many countries in the world, creating “ghettos” of poverty and humiliation.

Left-wing politicians see the imperfections of the conservative and liberal strategies to prevent social pathologies and the traditional formulas of rehabilitation based on the assumptions of behaviorism, and in their search for more effective solutions, they draw upon the achievements of psychiatry and humanistic psychology.

The theoretical basis for left-wing politicians’ views on deviant and pathological phenomena and on rehabilitation are psychodynamic concepts, as well as the concepts contained in the current of humanistic psychology and pedagogy.

Their common feature is the perception of human behavior primarily from the perspective of their social rehabilitation experiences from childhood and youth.

These trends have introduced various forms of psychotherapy into the practice of social rehabilitation, such as individual, group, psychodrama or sociodrama psychotherapy, as well as the notions of human rights and children’s rights, which have been instrumented by law.

Over the last thirty years, we have had to deal with each of the three political options in power, each of which has left its mark on the system of social rehabilitation. Maybe that is why there is no coherent system of social rehabilitation in our country so far and the one that exists is susceptible to modifications and changes?

Therefore, in order to obtain a substantive basis for effective and modern social rehabilitation measures, it is necessary to reach a political agreement “beyond political divisions”, which will guarantee stability and apoliticality of the Polish social rehabilitation system.

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