

# The Polish People's Movement from the Late Nineteenth Century to the Beginning of the Second Polish Republic (1918): The Outline of Issue

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**Abstract:** Nowadays, peasant parties do not enjoy much popularity in Poland. Polish People's Party owns 7% of public support [Rośnie poparcie dla Ludowców. PSL przeskoczyło Nowoczesną, [in:] Official website of Polskie Stronnictwo Ludowe/ the Polish People's Party: <http://www.psl.pl/nowy-sondaz-psl-przeskoczylo-nowoczesna/> (access: 03.09.17)]. Similarly, at the moment of the formation of the people's movement, the peasants who remained in conflict with the landowners were not involved in politics; they focused mainly on their work. Over the years, however, this group has become increasingly aware of its rights and its social position, which has been reflected in setting up new political parties and playing an increasingly important role in, striving to independence, Poland.

**Keywords:** peasants, Poland, the Polish People's Party.

At the end of the 19th century, at the time of the birth of mass society in Europe and the emergence of, typical for this society, collectivist, nationalist and socialist ideologies, a young generation of creators of political thought appeared in the political life of Poland [R. Wapiński, *Historia polskiej myśli politycznej XIX i XX wieku*, Wydawnictwo ARCHE, Gdańsk 1997, p.97]. They linked belief in progress with the conviction that it would be achieved only in the situation of increased participation of "people" in public life. Much of the young thinkers identified an increase in the share of "the people" in public life, with hopes for progress in solving the national cause and gaining independence [Ibidem, s.98].

The Polish people's movement was formed at the earliest in the area of Galicia, which resulted among others from the sharp, social, conflicts between villages and manors in this area, based on the peasant uprisings from 1846-1848 [J. Buszko, *Historia Polski 1864-1948*, Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, Warszawa 1984, p. 96]. Since the mid-1870s, priest Stanisław Stojalowski was an effective activist among the Galician peasants [K. Przybyś, *Polskie partie i ruchy społeczno- polityczne pierwszej połowy XX wieku*, Oficyna Wydawnicza ASPRA, Warszawa 2010, p. 107]. He was interested in the ideas of the social-Christian movement, which was popular at the time in the West and which advocated the need to bring Church teaching closer to the working-class [B. Jakubowska, *Ruch ludowy wobec przeszłości narodowej (do 1938 r.)*, Wydawnictwo TRIO, Warszawa 1995, p. 12]. He wished to implement this postulate to the Polish peasantry, believing that the Church, who supervised peasant awareness, would create the best guarantee of the harmony of progression paths with the principles of faith [Ibidem]. Stojalowski proclaimed that the duty of the "new" Galician peasant is to be a bright citizen, publicly present under the patronage of the Church and the nobility. In 1875, he purchased two magazines: *Wieniec/Wreath* and *Pszczółka/Bee* from their editor Czesław Pieniążek [R.R. Ludwikowski, *Historia polskiej myśli politycznej*, Wolters Kluwer Polska, Warszawa 2012, p.126]. They have, since then, formed a background for popularizing the idea of peasant democratism and national solidarity [Ibidem]. The *Wieniec* dealt with social, political and economic issues, the *Bee* focused on religious, moral

and educational topics [Ibidem]. In 1878 priest Stojalowski contributed to the founding of the Society for Education and Aid, which sought to activate peasant self-help. It was also preceded by the task of transforming the action of creating the rural cash registers in the process of preparing the agricultural circles [Ibidem]. On May 3, 1882, the name of the Society was changed to the Association of Agricultural Circles; its president was B. Augustinovich, who opted for close cooperation with the land companies [Ibidem].

Priest Stojalowski's activity has been developing by peasant intellectual Bolesław Wysłouch, in *Przegląd Społeczny / Social Review*, published since 1886 [K. Przybyś, *op. cit.*, s. 108]. Wysłouch advocated the struggle for independence and the creation of the Polish People's Republic. He was of the opinion that the Polish people had the right to own a sovereign state [Ibidem]. He proclaimed that the reconstruction of the state would come about through the efforts of the most valuable part of the nation- peasants [R.R. Ludwikowski, *op.cit.*, s.127]. In his view, proper development and strengthening of peasants' democratization process by creating, at the request of radical bourgeoisie and intelligentsia, independent peasant movement should be guaranteed to the peasants [Ibidem]. Wysłouch wanted Poland in ethnographic boundaries, because only this, in his opinion, could fulfilled the demands of twelve million Poles for free development. The implementation of this dream was to take place through the work of the working classes of the nation, which was its majority, and the implementation of the democratic program [Ibidem].

During the election campaign of the Austrian Parliament in 1889, the newspaper *Przyjaciel Ludu/ Friend of the People* was established and the first peasant committees were prepared. In the parliamentary elections four peasants were elected [A. Chwalba, *Historia Polski 1864-2001*, Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich, Wrocław 2002, p. 27]. In 1891, Jan Potoczek became the first Polish national MP in the parliament of the Austrian monarchy in Vienna. In 1893, Jan and Stanisław Potoczek set up a regional political party – Związek Stronnictwa Chłopskiego/ the Union of Peasant Party - at Novosodskate. [K. Przybyś, *op.cit.*, p.108] On July 3, 1893, the Union presented its program, which highlighted the importance of peasants to society and

demanded the abolition of feudal privileges, equal treatment for peasants and the development of education in the municipality [R.R. Ludwikowski, *op.cit.*, p. 126]. The Peasant Party, established by the authors of newspaper *Głos Ludu Śląskiego/Voice of the Silesian People* (published in the Cieszyn Silesia) played a similar role as the Union. [Ibidem] It gathered in its ranks the peasants and the workers, worked with peasant groups in Galicia. It was aiming to preserve the Polish language and national culture [Ibidem]. In 1894 lawyer Karol Eugeniusz Lewakowski, founded the Polish Democratic Society in Lviv [Ibidem].

As a political party, the popular movement appeared in the Galician partition at the end of the 19th century. Formally it was assumed, that it was July 1895, when the peasants and the intelligentsia of peasant origin, who participated in the pre-election peasant assembly in Rzeszów, founded the People's Party. [K. Przybysz, *op.cit.*, p. 106] Its president was Karol Lewakowski, the functions of the vice presidents were performed by journalist Henryk Rewakowicz and farmer Jakub Bojko [Ibidem].

The first program document of the peasants- *Centralny Komitet Przedwyborczy Stronnictwa Ludowego. Do Wyborców w całym kraju/ the Central Pre-election Committee of the Peasant Party. For the Electors across the country*- have stressed the need to eliminate the political and social inequalities, that occurred in Galicia [R. Wapiński, *op.cit.*, p. 102]. *Program Stronnictwa Ludowego/the Program of the Peasant Party of 1903* contained postulates, "[...] the people's selflessness in principle: every person from the nation is a citizen, every citizen is equal in law and authority [...]" and, "[...] the independence of Galicia with the Grand Duchy of Kraków and the Polish part of Silesia to that extent, which the Kingdom of Hungary has been entitled since 1867 [...]" [Ibidem, p. 102-103].

The members of the People's Party sought to rebuild an independent and united Poland, perceived through the prism of their call, "[...] Allow the slogan 'homeland for Poles' to fly over our land from the edge to the end and allow it to awaken the sense of national unity [...]" [Ibidem, p. 103]. This intention did not contradict the socio-political order introduced in the Habsburg monarchy, so that in the short or long term it was possible to count on its implementation [Ibidem]. The slow democratization of the areas belonging to the Habsburg monarchy could have contributed to raising national awareness and facilitating the future struggle for independence [Ibidem]. The development of peasant participation in public life and their nationality also did not remain irrelevant to the sovereignty of the state, especially since the representatives of the people's parties believed that power in a future, independent, Poland should be based on layers of working people [K. Przybysz, *op.cit.*, p. 106].

They promoted their postulates in *Przyjaciel Ludu./the Friend of the People*, which was spreading out in over 10 thousand prints. [Ibidem, p. 107]

The Galician people's movement entered the twentieth century with great political influence in the autonomous institutions of Galicia and in the Austrian State Council in

Vienna. [Ibidem] In 1907 it was successful in the elections to the aforementioned Council, gaining 17 seats and, by doing so, creating the strongest Polish force [Ibidem]. In 1908, it won 19 seats in the elections to the National Parliament in Lvov [Ibidem].

Before the outbreak of World War I two parties emerged of the Galician peasant movement: *Polskie Stronnictwo Ludowe, Piast*/'the Polish People's Party, Piast' and *Polskie Stronnictwo Ludowe, Lewica*/'the Polish People's Party, Lewica' [Ibidem, p. 107]. *Polskie Stronnictwo Ludowe, Piast*/'the Polish People's Party, Piast' published its weekly "Piast". Among the members of the party were Jakub Bojko, Andrzej Averagewski, Władysław Kiernik, Maciej Rataj, Stanisław Osiecki, Jan Dąbski and Jan Dębski [J.R. Szaflik, *Ruch ludowy w okresie Drugiej Rzeczypospolitej, [w:] Wł. Michajło, E. Haloń (red.), Życie polityczne w Polsce 1918-1939, Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich, Wrocław 1985, s. 89*]. In *Polskie Stronnictwo Ludowe "Lewica"*/'the Polish People's Party "Left: were: Jan Stapiński, Józef Putka, Franciszek Wójcik and Józef Sanojec. This grouping was published the magazine *Przyjaciel Lewicy/ the Friend of the Left* [Ibidem].

In Cieszyn Silesia, the popular movement was widespread in the 1870s. It focused on the newspaper *Gwiazdka Cieszyńska/the Cieszyńska Star*, published by Paweł Stalmach. The Agricultural Society was also established. The first, peasant, deputies sat in the national parliament in Opava in 1872 [Ibidem]. The Cieszyn National Council, which was in power in the Bialskie, Cieszyn and Frysztaek districts, was founded on October 30, 1918. It was headed by reverend Józef Londzin, her presidium represented, among others, famous activist of the popular movement- Paweł Bobek [Ibidem].

In Upper Silesia, on behalf of the peasants was Karol Miarka, from 1869 the publisher of magazine *Katolik/ the Catholic* in Królewska Huta. In 1879 he formed *Poradnik Gospodarczy/ the Economic Guide* and developed education in the national and Catholic spirit. [A. Chwałba, *op.cit.*, s. 27]

In Wielkopolska, agricultural groups, run by Maximilian Jackowski, and Towarzystwa Czytelni Ludowych/the People's Reading Societies were working [Ibidem]. In the Pomerania Wiktor Kulerski initiated the newspaper *Gazeta Grudziądzka* in 1894. Within four years of its founding, it has produced over 7, 000 copies, finding readers in many rural centers in the Prussian partition and among Polish centers in Germany [Ibidem, s. 28]. The peasants did not succeed in gaining significant influence in the Prussian partition. Although before the start of World War I, parties in the area identified as political peasant movement, such as *Mazurska Partia Ludowa/ the Mazurian People's Party* and *Polsko- Katolicka Partia Ludowa/ the Polish-Catholic People's Party*, were working on the area, they did not show any greater similarity with the Galician people's movement at the programmatic level [Ibidem]. In the face of the Germanization of the Prussian partition, they devoted themselves mainly to the defense of the Polish state of possession, the conviction of the peasants to join economic organizations, local government's activity and the need to

develop the peasant education [Ibidem]. The task of *Gazeta Grudziądzka/ the Grudziądz's Newspaper*, published by Wiktor Kurelski, since 1894, was to develop among the rural population of the Pomerania, a sense of national and social awareness [Ibidem]. It informed the peasants about their political rights, taught how to vote in the elections and about the possibilities of confronting the abuse of state officials [B. Jakubowska, *op.cit.*, s. 45]. Direct references to the readers – *Bracia Wiarusy/ the Brothers Wickers* or *Bracia Chłopi/ the Brothers Peasants* - used in the articles of the journal, highlighted a considerable Polish people as the basis of the nation [Ibidem].

At the end of the 19th century, the peasant movement in the Kingdom of Poland was, most frequently, economic movement, with elements of national consciousness beginning to appear in it as well [K. Przybysz, *op. cit.*, s. 105]. During the fight with the police the peasants shouted *Jeszcze Polskanieźginęła/ Poland has not died yet*. The residents of the village, through decreased attendance of children in schools and the spread of illegal education in the nurseries and private schools, opposed the Russification of elementary schools, sabotaged official public libraries, established by order of the Russian authorities, and read magazines, developed by Polish educational activists such as *Zorza* and *Gazeta Świąteczna*. The first party group, that was born in the Russian partition, of the progressive educational movement was *Polski Związek Ludowy/ the Polish People's Union*, which was functioning in 1904-1907. It led underground activities, reflecting, inter alia, in dissemination of pamphlets and leaflets [Ibidem, s.108]. It also published the press *Zycie Gromadzkie, Snop*, and later *Wieś Polska* and *Zagonin* which wrote, among others. Edward Abramowski, Maria Konopnicka, Ludwik Krzywicki, Władysław Reymont, Stefania Sempołowska and Stefan Żeromski [Ibidem, s. 108]. The mentioned movement also prepared peasant rallies and anti-Russian demonstrations; it attended in preparation for the school strike [Ibidem]. It criticized tsarist imperialism, arguing for cooperation with the workers and negating the alliance with the possessing classes [B. Jakubowska, *op.cit.*, s.37]. It stressed the need for local self-government, freedom of association and fair courts [Ibidem]. As a result of the arrests that took place in the spring of 1907 among the representatives of the leadership of *Polski Związek Ludowy/ the Polish People's Union*, the activities of this grouping were supported by *Związek Młodej Polski/ the Association of Young Poland*, which, led among others. by Jan Kielak, Jan Adamowicz-Piliński and Father Izydor Kajetan Poczouch, functioned secretly, in the area of Radzymin and Tłuszcz. It also published a newspaper *Siewba* [Ibidem]. The movement of *Zaranie*, centered around sympathizers of weekly *Zaranie*, published since 1907, disseminated in the villages of the Kingdom of Poland social and educational issues, economic progress and growth of agricultural production. Its program, promoted in *Zaranie* by Tomasz Nocznicki, Piotr Koczara, Irena Kosmowska and Stanisław Osiecki, referred to the slogan "themselves", meaning the social and economic independence of peasants [Ibidem]. *Zaranie* promoted the idea of democratization of education, opposed the Endec program of the sovereignty of the court and the rectory over the countryside, emphasized the necessity of development of the peasant economy through

cooperatives [J. Buszko, *op. cit.*, s.144]. The members of the movement established various types of cooperatives – for example food, loan, savings' and dairy cooperatives [Ibidem]. They prepared agricultural schools and agricultural circles, gathered in *Towarzystwo Kółek Rolniczymienia Stanisława Staszica / the Stanisław Staszic's Society of Agricultural Groups*. Since the beginning of World War I, they have been conducting independent activity, taking part in a rural environment, in *Polska Organizacja Wojskowa/ the Polish Military Organization*, whereby a significant group of movement activists were deported deep into Russia by the tsarist authorities. [Ibidem]

By the end of 1915, the representatives of the movement of *Zaranie*, among others. Tadeusz Nocznicki and Stanisław Osiecki, set up *Stronnictwo Ludowe/ the People's Party*. Together with *Związek Chłopski/ the Peasants' Union* (founded by *Polska Partia Socjalistyczna/ the Polish Socialist Party*) and *Związek Ludu Polskiego/ the Union of the Polish People* (a fraction of *Narodowy Związek Chłopski/ the National Peasants' Union*) took part in the creation of *Polskie Stronnictwo Ludowe, Wyzwolenie' / the Polish People's Party "Liberation"* led by Tomasz Nocznicki [Ibidem, s.110].

The *Polish People's Party, "Wyzwolenie' /, "Liberation"* was headed by Tomasz Nocznicki, Błażej Stolarski, Maksymilian Malinowski, Stanisław Thugutt, Juliusz Poniatowski and Irena Kosmowska. It enjoyed greatest esteem in the villages of the former Russian partition. The group's activities were spreading by the magazine *Wyzwolenie/ Liberation* [Ibidem]. In February 1917 the landowners and clerical circles decided to found *Zjednoczenie Ludowe/ the People's Union*, which advocated for social solidarity. In this grouping acted, among others, priest Waclaw Blizinski, Henryk Wyrzykowski and Jan Sadlak. The party expressed its views in *Gazeta Ludowa* and *Zorza* [Ibidem]. At the end of 1918 the secession occurred in the Union - some members, including Henryk Wyrzykowski, went to *Polskie Stronnictwo Ludowe "Piaśt" / the People's Party "Piaśt"*, others, under the direction of reverend Waclaw Blizinski, appointed *Polskie Zjednoczenie Ludowe/ the Polish People's Union*. The peasant movement in Wielkopolska, at the end of 1918, was represented by the unions of small farmers [Ibidem].

During World War I, the representatives of the popular movement supported the independence camp, associated with Józef Piłsudski. They participated in various, armed, organizations (mostly in the *Polish Military Organization*) and in the first, local, independent, centers of Polish authority [K. Przybysz, *op.cit.*, p. 110]. On October 28, 1918, in Cracow, *Polska Komisja Likwidacyjna/ the Polish Liquidation Commission* was established. It exercised sovereignty on the still functioning Austrian authorities and territorial supervision, extending from San to Cieszyn until the establishment of the Polish government [R. Kaczmarek, *Historia Polski 1914-1989*, Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, Warszawa 2010, s. 59]. Although the representatives of all Galician factions were involved in this institution, the most important role was played by members of the *People's Party "Piaśt"*. The chairman of this party, Wincenty Witos, became the head of the Commission [Ibidem]. After the abolition of

the Austrian military and administrative authorities, Polska Komisja Likwidacyjna / the Polish Liquidation Commission took control of Western Galicia, appointing its officials [Ibidem].

On the night of 6 to 7 November 1918, a decision was made to establish Tymczasowy Rząd Ludowy Republiki Polskiej /a Provisional Government of the People's Republic of Poland in Lublin. In Manifest/the Manifesto, issued on this occasion, elected representatives of the authorities committed themselves to the establishment of a parliamentary republic, with guaranteed civil liberties, and to implement the agricultural reform and nationalization of the most important industries [Ibidem, p. 60]. The government in Lublin, led by Ignacy Daszyński, consisted of representatives of socialists and peasant activists, including Stanisław Thugutta, Juliusz Poniatowski, Tomasz Nocznicki and Błażej Stolarski from the People's Party "Wyzwolenie" and Wincenty Witos and Gabriel Dubiel from the People's Party "Piast" [Ibidem]. Stanisław Thugutta took the post of Minister of the Interior, Gabriel Dubiel became the Minister of Education, Tomasz Nocznicki, and Błażej Stolarski were ministers without a portfolio [K. Przybysz, *op. cit.*, p. 110]. Wincenty Witos and Gabriel Dubiel soon left the ranks of the government, recognizing that it had no chance of uniting the Polish lands into a single state organism [J.R.Szaflik, *op. cit.*, p. 89]. Their views proved to be correct. On November 12, 1918 Ignacy Daszyński, under the demands of the supporters of Józef Piłsudski, dissolved his cabinet [R. Kaczmarek, *op. cit.*, p.60].

The characteristic of all parties in the peasant movement was to appeal to the general population of the countryside, emphasizing the peasants' separateness from other social groups [J. Buszko, *op.cit.*, p. 219]. They aimed to change ownership in agriculture, including the allocation of land to peasants, and also focused on agricultural policy issues, including land reclamation, mortgage and credit issues, farmers' insurance schemes [Ibidem]. In internal policy, they endorsed the developed system of democratic parliamentarism with the unicameral parliament as a sovereign authority, properly selected with five-adjectives' (public, direct, equal, proportional, classified) electoral law [Ibidem]. They sought to incorporate full civil liberties in the constitution, demanded the expansion of self-government, and a small number of them – the election of officials. They have opted for greater or less nationalization / socialization of selected areas of economic life [Ibidem]. In cultural and educational matters, they pointed out the necessity of introducing a compulsory and free universal school, with a unified program for the city and the countryside and the development of the scholarship system in secondary and tertiary education, which would allow for a better start for the peasant youth [Ibidem, p.220].

In the nineteenth century the peasant population was thinking of Poland with fear before the restoration of the serfdom and the possibility of withdrawing the rule of emancipation issued by foreign governments [B. Jakubowska, *op. cit.*, p. 9]. Acquiring land from the invaders did not bring the peasants closer to the ideas of independence, but that does not mean that they did not rebellion against Germanization and Russification policy

[Ibidem]. By opting for the persecution, by defending the profession of religion, taking care of family customs, the villagers initially did not feel the need to live in an independent state, and these feelings changed over time with the fall of the myth of "righteous emperor" and the actions of individual armies [Ibidem]. The first years of independence of the Polish state were for the peasants the time of rivalry between several political parties; the struggle for power, the land and education for people [J. R. Szaflik, *op.cit.*, p.88]. A large part of the people's parties (apart from the organizations, which cooperated with the communist movement) wanted to accomplish their intentions through parliamentary democracy, perceiving it as the most favorable kind of political system for peasants [Ibidem]. Beginning the period of national independence, the representatives of the people's movement were convinced, that a free country would offer the peasants the rights they deserve and the opportunity to participate at the table with representatives of other social classes. [Ibidem]

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