

Szymon Rudnicki

THE POLISH CONSERVATIVE IDEA AFTER 1918

For a long time, conservatism as a political trend with its own doctrine was treated off-handedly by Polish historiographers. There was little writing on conservative doctrine, both on the part of its supporters and opponents.¹ It is a characteristic feature of a considerable number of Polish political movements, not only conservative, that the ideological and doctrinal questions played a relatively minor role in them.

The conservatives paid comparatively little attention to doctrine. Only some of them thought conservatism a doctrine "of all the political doctrines the most complex theoretically" or said that "the conservative doctrine differs from all others in that it takes into account the largest possible number of opposing interests in order to amalgamate them into one strong uniform movement from the past to the future."² Others treated conservatism primarily as a method of action. S. Starowieyski

¹ Among works written by authors outside the conservative camp of great interest is the book by R. Dmowski: *Upadek myśli konserwatywnej w Polsce* [*The Decline of the Conservative Thought in Poland*], published in 1914. After the war, the first to take up studies on this question was H. Jabłoński, *Piłsudski a konserwatyści krakowscy* [*Piłsudski and the Cracow Conservatists*], in: *Studia historyczne. Księga jubileuszowa z okazji 70 rocznicy urodzin Stanisława Arnolda*, Warszawa 1965; idem, *Konserwatyści przed przewrotem majowym* [*The Conservatists before the Coup d'Etat of May 1926*], "Przegląd Historyczny", 1966, No 4.

² efpe [F. Potocki], *O przyszłości konserwatyizmu angielskiego* [*The Future of English Conservatism*], "Czas," 6 April, 1924; T. Brzeski, *O konserwatyzmie w Polsce* [*Conservatism in Poland*], part III. His work was printed in 1921 in "Polska." Part I: *Obowiązki polityczne inteligencji* [*Political Duties of the Intelligentsia*], 15 June; part II: *Co to jest polityka* [*What is Politics*], 22 June; part III: *Nauka i praktyka polityczna* [*Science and Practice of Politics*], 6 July; part IV: *Kierunki polityczne po rozbiorach* [*Political Trends after the Partitions*], 13 July; part V: *Polska w Europie* [*Poland in Europe*], 3 Aug.; part VI: *Zagadnienie ustroju państwowego* [*Political System of a State*]; 10 Aug.; part VII: *Polityka gospodarczo-społeczna* [*Economic and Social Policy*], 17 Aug.; further quoted as T. Brzeski with the number of the part).

wrote outright that it was unpractical to try and evolve a "scholastic definition of conservatism" since it could just as well be done through an analysis of methods.³ The difference between ideologues, and members and leaders of the conservative movement was glaring. The theoretical considerations had little in common with the way of thinking of the rank and file of the movement. The leaders, on the other hand, considered the doctrine an instrument in so far as it was needed in struggle, but preferred methods which they described as conservative.

We know of two efforts to formulate the conservative ideology as a whole undertaken by conservatives: before World War I, by W. Kosiakiewicz, and in the 1920s by Dzieduszycki (T.D.). Both were criticised by their contemporaries. Both, at the very moment of their publication, seemed obsolete even to a considerable number of conservatives. J. Woroniecki said of Kosiakiewicz's book that "it did a disservice to the conservative idea." K. Grzybowski wrote in respect of *Polityka konserwatywna* [*Conservative Politics*] that T.D.'s method was not modern (he started from metaphysical premises), that an 18th-century book refuting Rousseau would have probably much in common with it. He pointed out glaring "scientific naiveties."⁴

From time to time the conservative press took up the subject. We have also two unpublished papers by authors connected with the conservative movement. Listed chronologically they are by A. Górski and A. Bocheński,⁵ and both are critical of the conservative parties active at the time.

³ S. Starowieyski, *Metoda konserwatywna* [*Conservative Method*], "Czas," 12-15 Oct., 1924, and as a brochure.

⁴ W. Kosiakiewicz, *Idea konserwatywna* [*The Conservative Idea*], Warszawa 1913; T. D. [Dzieduszycki], *Polityka konserwatywna* [*Conservative Policy*], Warszawa 1929; J. Woroniecki, *O przyszłość konserwatyzmu* [*For the Future of Conservatism*], "Kurier Poznański," 22, 24, 27, 29 Oct., 1916; K. G., *Konserwatyzm metafizyczny* [*Metaphysical Conservatism*], "Czas," 18 Jan., 1929.

⁵ A. Górski, *Polityka czy politycy. Pamiętnik polityczny* [*Politics or Politicians. A Political Memoir*]. National Library, akc. 8252 MS.; (No author) *Doktryna konserwatywna* [*Conservative Doctrine*], K. Grzybowski's papers MS. On the file, in Grzybowski's hand, are the dates 1926-1928. According to W. Władyka, it is the first version of the article by Adolf Bocheński, published under the pseudonym of F. Landsdorff in "Droga" of 1932.

Judging from publications then widely accessible, the opinions on conservatism were autonomous, that is neither referred to any other, they did not even mention the existence of other points of view on the questions of interest to the authors. Even Polish writings on the subject were often not known to conservative activists. Even less did they know about West-European writings. Only those grouped around the *Czas* newspaper (St. Estreicher, W. L. Jaworski, F. Potocki) were versed in them.

We use the term conservatism routinely. It has, however, various meanings. On the one hand, P. Popiel wrote: "Conservatism is a general term, even more so with us who for 180 years were and had to be in constant opposition. What was to be conserved, what was to be defended, when everything was disturbed, when there was no freedom nor strength for anything?" On the other, some conservatives distinguished its many connotations. S. Tarnowski wrote that "besides those difficulties which besiege conservatism throughout the world, the Polish conservatism has the biggest and the most harmful of them in the vagueness of its connotations and instability of opinions."⁶ I. Rosner pointed to the same phenomenon in one of the first articles on conservatism which appeared in independent Poland.⁷

We shall not discuss conservatism as a dogma that is as a stubborn and irrational hanging on to foreordained principles. This type of conservatism exists in all parties. Neither shall we consider conservatism as an activity conducted in accordance with stereotypes and patterns, and as a state of mind.⁸

The conservatives themselves were not sure what conservatism was. Some wrote about it as a state of mind difficult of definition, others treated it as a temperament. *Czas* said that "conservative ideas stemmed from instinct." W. L. Jaworski

⁶ P. Popiel, *To St. Koźmian*, in: *Pisma*, vol. I, Kraków 1893, p. 131. S. Tarnowski, *Skutki rozstroju* [Effects of Disintegration], Kraków 1898, p. 46.

⁷ "The main cause of the impossibility of forming a conservative party is the vagueness of the political thought in those people who ought to form it". Z. m.: *Zagubione tradycje* [The Lost Traditions], "Kurier Polski," 21 Oct., 1920).

⁸ This question was extensively treated by Cz. Znamierowski, *O konserwatyzmie i konserwatystach* [Conservatism and Conservatists], "Przegląd Współczesny," vols VI - VII, 1927.

wrote about the conservative kind of thinking which favoured "thinking in wholes" and was inimical to "atomistic and mechanical thinking." He thought that persons with a conservative turn of mind could be found in any party.⁹

Mostly, conservatism was considered either as a doctrine or a method of action, often linking those two elements without defining the phenomenon itself. The most advanced was M. Król who wrote outright that "it is doubtful whether the definition of certain ideas emerging in 19th-century Poland as conservative has any sense at all."¹⁰ On the other hand, the authors who take up the systematics of political parties and treat the notion of conservatism too broadly go to the other extreme.¹¹

In the opinion of the author of this article, the notion of conservatism is indefinable and we can only define the features to which the programme of the political movement so called should conform. As an anonymous author belonging to conservative circles has rightly said, the word "conservatism" has a different connotation in every country.¹² The definition of conservatism has always depended on the time and place, sometimes also on the author's own ideas.

⁹ J. Bobrzyński, *Z ideologii konserwatyzmu* [On Ideology of Conservatism], "Nasza Przyszłość," vol. VII, 1930, No. 3, p. 7; *Zapomniani ludzie* [Forgotten People], "Czas," 13 Sept., 1938; W. L. Jaworski, *Myślenie konserwatywne* [Conservative Thinking], "Czas," 5 Sept., 1929.

¹⁰ M. Król, *Szlachta jako warstwa historyczna w polskiej myśli historycznej* [Gentry as a Historical Class in Polish Historical Thought], in: *Tradycje szlacheckie w kulturze polskiej*, Warszawa 1976, p. 79. It has not prevented Król to take up the idea of the nation in Polish conservative thinking, without defining whom he considers conservatist (*Idee i koncepcje narodu w polskiej myśli politycznej czasów porozbiorowych* [Ideas and Conceptions of Nation in Polish Political Thinking in Post-Partition Times], Wrocław 1977).

¹¹ M. Skrzydło has defined the conservative parties as "political groupings which want to preserve the existing political, social and economic system. It is not very important what social class forms the majority of the rank and file nor the nature of the differences of opinion among its members" (*O partiach i systemach politycznych* [Parties and Political Systems], Warszawa 1975). Starting from the same assumptions, M. Sobolewski has reckoned among the conservative parties the majority of Christian-democratic parties, conservative and liberal parties, the two American parties and the Gaullist UDR (*Partie i systemy partyjne świata kapitalistycznego* [Parties and Party Systems in the Capitalist World], Warszawa 1974, p. 224).

¹² Stańczyk, *Polska szkoła konserwatywna* [Polish Conservative School], "Nasza Przyszłość," vol. IV, 1930, No. 1, p. 8.

On the whole, when speaking of conservatism people referred to English conservatism as a gauge. But here, too, changes did occur. In the early 20th century Cecil Hugh, in his book considered a classic of conservative literature, distinguished three "elements," as he put it, of which conservatism was composed: (i) distrust of things unknown and attachment to those well-tried; (ii) defence of religion and the monarchy; (iii) imperialism or "attachment to the importance and power of the state and to its integrity." Fifty years later, among the basic features of conservatism were listed: "reverence for the past, the organic conceptions of society, communal unity, continuity of the political and social system, opposition to revolution, continuity of evolutionary reforms, the religious basis of the state, divine source of legitimate authority, the priority of duties to right, the prime importance of individual and communal character, loyalty, common sense, realism and practicality."¹⁸ In comparison with the former definition, this is an evidently milder form of conservatism.

Both in the 19th and 20th centuries Polish writers tried to list the features of conservatism. In 1921, after independence had been regained, Mackiewicz considered the following as the main foundations of conservatism: support of the idea of a strong supreme state authority, adaptation to the Polish conditions of the structure of the legislature by introducing two houses of parliament and changing the electoral law, introduction of broad regional self-government, economic liberalism with the respect of the principle of private property as its main axiom, respect of the rights of other nationalities. Mackiewicz treated these demands as a programme for the conservative party. They lack several usual elements such as e.g. the question of religion. The principles evolved by the Union of Conservative State Work [Związek Zachowawczej Pracy Państwowej], a conservative organisation founded in Warsaw after the *coup d'état* in May 1926, are fuller in this respect, though they, too are a mixture of doctrine and programme. The authors put forward, as item one, the idea of a powerful state which was linked to the idea of na-

¹⁸ C. Hugh, *Konserwatyzm [Conservatism]*, Warszawa 1915, p. 204; Hearnshaw, *Conservatism in England*, New York 1967, p. 22.

tional expansion. Then they went on to the defence of civilisation and progress in the sense of development "by way of natural evolution." They were against the egalitarian sharing in government of all the citizens. While proffering the idea of the authority of the government and the head of state, they supported individual freedoms and opposed state management. The role of the state was to be limited to the necessary regulation of relations. They defended the unlimited right to property. In the case of exceptions provided for by law, the owners must receive full compensation. The state should also "protect the labour contract" which meant anti-strike legislation. It is only after all these principles that came the role of religion and family in society. Then current political demands.¹⁴ Like in Mackiewicz, these principles favoured the political goal rather than ideological reflexion. This was the result of the summary character of both declarations.

Conservatives always had troubles with defining what they had to fight for. Even A. Z. Helcel wrote that "the chief character of conservative activity should be seen in the definition of what should be preserved, that is in the notion of what should be truly considered constant, untouchable and fundamental in the given circumstances."¹⁵ In 1920, one of the young conservative journalists, thinking the problem over, distinguished three forms of conservatism: (i) absolute conservatism, opposing any changes, which, in the author's opinion, leads to stagnation in all spheres, to the overthrow of the government representing such a trend; (ii) conservatism consisting in delaying changes, which, as the author remarks, cannot, however, even think of taking over power; (iii) evolutionary conservatism which, while firmly defending the existence of several institutions, proclaims the

¹⁴ Cat [S. Mackiewicz], *Artykuł programowy "Czasu"* ["Czas" *Programme Article*], "Dziennik Poznański," 25 Jan., 1921; *Zasady programu Polskiego Obozu Zachowawczego* [*Principles of the Programme of the Polish Conservative Camp*], no date, no place of publication, Voivodship State Archives in Cracow, Archiwum Dzikowskie Tarnowskich—Tarnowski Archives at Dzików (hereafter referred to as ADzT), 697, typescript.

¹⁵ A. Z. Helcel, *Aforyzmy o prawdziwym i fałszywym konserwatyzmie* [*Aphorisms on True and False Conservatism*], in: H. Lisicki, *Antoni Zygmunt Helcel*, vol. II, Lwów 1822, p. 33.

need of broad reforms as deeply going as those advocated by other social trends.¹⁶

In Poland, most of the conservative writers declared themselves in favour of evolutionary conservatism. In contrast to the other conservatives, they knew that putting off reforms, the negation of their need, cause them to become more radical the more they are delayed.¹⁷ Conservatives often emphasized that they were all for progress. One of the newspapers even said that "conservatism as an opposite and negation of progress never and nowhere did exist as a political programme."¹⁸ On the contrary, it was often underlined that conservatives support "sound progress," by which they meant the evolutionary development of society.¹⁹ "Should they defend the present chaos, the political and social system or the prewar state?", asked one of the speakers on the subject. And he answered: "The Polish conservatives are no retrogrades, they are just as progressive as all of us who here in Poland work for the future."²⁰ The opposition against concrete reforms was usually explained by their, according to the conservatives, one-sidedness.

In the 19th century Popiel saw "real progress" in the maintenance of social hierarchy, property, family and prestige of the authority. St. Estreicher's approach to the subject was different, for him a positive programme meant the removal of everything that prevents an individual from improving himself that is opposed to ethics, the sense of justice and equality in the face of the ultimate goal. In his opinion, conservatism was an earnest sup-

¹⁶ Z. R., *O konserwatyzmie słów kilkoro* [A Few Words on Conservatism], "Miesięcznik akademicki," vol. III, 1920; K. Epstein distinguishes three types of conservatives: (i) defenders of *status quo*, (ii) supporters of slow changes, (iii) reactionaries supporters of return to *status quo ante* (*The Genesis of German Conservatism*, Princeton 1966, p. 7). His typology covers the 18th century.

¹⁷ A. Górski, *Polityka czy politycy...*, p. 11.

¹⁸ *Stronnictwo Budowy Zjednoczonej Polski (SBZP)* [The Party of Building of United Poland], "Biuletyn," 27 Dec., 1918, ADzT 661.

¹⁹ Statement by the representative of conservatives in the Council of State, "Kronika Polska," August 1918; Departament of the Cracow—Lvov Section to the Main Board of the Party of Constitutional Work, 21 Sept., 1919, ADzT 663.

²⁰ J., *Arystokratyzm i konserwatyzm* [Aristocratism and Conservatism], *konserwatystą* [How Can a Contemporary Pole Be a Conservative], „Słowo”, 19 Aug., 1922.

porter of social reforms. But they must be evolutionary. They must flow from the natural development of society, because all reforms attained through abstract speculations had always turned out premature and ineffective. Here Estreicher alluded obviously to socialist theories. T. Brzeski defined evolution as a "uniform, progressive movement from the past to the future."²¹ But the majority saw the tasks of conservatism primarily in putting a brake on the more daring reforms, in watching that the state be spared big upheavals.²² Mackiewicz chose a somewhat different path to the same conclusion; he wrote that "conservatism should not mean the opposite of progress but a tendency to see to it that the institution still lively and socially useful be not wantonly destroyed."²³ Any changes should, in the opinion of those commentators, be adapted to natural changes, be caused by real needs and introduced by law. A positive example of such a procedure was provided for them by the Catholic Church. F. Potocki was very much against such a notion of the role of conservatism; he protested that "too often (conservatism) is to be just a brake or is narrowed down to the role of negation."²⁴

The identification of conservatism with evolution presumed the conservative goals to be the same as those of progress only the methods differed. Unfortunately, conservatism has never formulated its ultimate goal. In their drive to identify it with progress some conservatives accepted even the ideas of the Great French Revolution.²⁵ The mere mention that some gains of that revolution were acceptable meant heresy when one considered the origins of conservatism which emerged as a reaction to its gains.

²¹ P. Popiel, *Do wyborców* [To the Electors] (1873), in: *Pisma*, vol. II, p. 127; S. Estreicher, *Istota konserwatyzmu* [Essence of Conservatism], "Czas," 25 Dec., 1926, and also as a brochure, Kraków 1928; T. Brzeski, part III.

²² W. Wydźga, *Cel i zadania stronnictw zachowawczych* [The Goal and Tasks of Conservative Parties], "Polska," 18 May, 1921; J. Bobrzyński, *Na przełomie* [At the Turning Point], "Czas," 7 May, 1922.

²³ Cat, *Konserwatyzm* [Conservatism], "Dziennik Poznański," 8 June, 1920.

²⁴ efpe, *O przyszłość konserwatyzmu angielskiego* [For the Future of English Conservatism].

²⁵ T. Brzeski, part III; Mackiewicz explained such an attitude by the fact that a hostile attitude towards the idea of the French revolution "leaves the conservative only the passive opposition to progress, because

There were others who saw a positive role of conservatism in its opposition to some of the slogans of the French revolution.²⁶ There were also those who protested against all those attempts at replacing revolution with evolution, against the assertion that the goals of conservatism and progress were the same. While protesting they admitted that this was the only way and that conservatism must be guided by opportunism, "must try to achieve what is, at the time, possible to achieve at minimum cost and keeping calm."²⁷

The weakness of the conservative doctrine was due to the fact that conservatism is always a reaction to the events happening outside it: the French revolution, national uprisings, social transformations. It is always on the defensive, condemned to it by its very principles due to its class conditioning.

Conservatives used to defend themselves from the charge of reactionary attitudes. Helcel, quoted above, wrote: "The idea of conserving, of preserving not necessarily refers to the preservation of everything; likewise, thriftiness does not mean that nothing must be spent, only that spending must be supervised by reason. The attitude to miserliness is the same as that of conservatism to political stagnation."²⁸ As Helcel qualified the reactionary variety of conservatism in mid-19th century, so did Czas in respect of the Podole conservatives calling them retrogrades in the early 20th century. Journalists in the twenty years between the two world wars behaved similarly, cutting themselves away from the trend to return to the past.²⁹

The commentator of *Nowa Reforma*, a newspaper with democratic leanings, saw the differences between reactionism and conservatism in that "reaction is the negation of things newly done and wants to restore or resuscitate things rejected and of the past. Conservatism, on the other hand, is a recognition of the existing state as a basis for activity and defence of that state

every idea of progress and democratism can be associated with some principle expressed in the 'Human Rights'." (*Role of Conservatism in Poland*, "Polska," 16 Nov., 1921).

²⁶ J. Woroniecki, *op. cit.*, 22 Oct., 1916.

²⁷ T. D., *Polityka konserwatywna*, p. 13.

²⁸ A. Z. Helcel, *Aforyzmy* ..., p. 34.

²⁹ W. Wydzga, *Cel i zadania stronnictwa konserwatywnego w Polsce*.

until it has become quite certain that it can be replaced with a better one without trouble and at no great risk." He also pointed out that reactionism was always romantic because it stemmed from the hatred of some institutions and idealisation of other. Conservatism is positive and critical because it accepts and assesses facts irrespective of the feelings they arouse in its advocates.³⁰ It is obvious that this statement was inspired by the model of conservatism promoted by the Cracow group which was best known to the author.

K. Grzybowski spoke twice on the matter after World War II. He saw the difference between conservatism and reactionism in that a conservative treated history as evolution, not as petrification and abiding by the past without change. Two years later he put it slightly differently: a conservative wants to maintain the conditions existing in the present, a reactionary wants to restore non-existent relations.³¹ The notion of reaction was defined in the same way in the two statements but not that of conservatism. In the first case, the conservative was a supporter of evolution, in the other he favoured the *status quo*.

In his assessment of reactionism Grzybowski's attitude was that of *Czas* which said: "A reactionary dislikes the present because he discerns in it a tendency towards reforms and improvements while he himself does not want any change." "A reactionary would like to torture life in order to press it into the frame of the past." Others went even further when they described reactionism as being attached to what is.³² Criticism of reactionism went very far. W. Noskowski wrote about it as the "conservatism of backwardness." Estreicher said: "When reason, talent and the sense of political honesty fail, conservatism turns into reaction, becomes the plague and ruin of society." He saw

³⁰ (s-i) [K. Srokowski], *Nieco o konserwatyzmie* [A Few Words on Conservatism], "Nowa Reforma," 25 Nov., 1926.

³¹ K. Grzybowski, *Nie wiedzą co to kontrrewolucja* [They Do not Know What Counterrevolution Is], (1965), in: *Refleksje sceptyczne*, Warszawa 1972, vol. I, p. 164; idem, *W czym współczesny Polak może być konserwatystą* [How Can a Contemporary Pole Be a Conservative], "Więź," 1967, No. 1.

³² *Dwa konserwatyzmy* [Two Conservatisms], "Czas," 5 Jan., 1909, quoted after J. Buszko, *Sejmowa reforma wyborcza w Galicji 1905 - 1914* [The Sejm Election Reform in Galicia 1905 - 1914], Warszawa 1965, p. 136; T. Brzeski, part IV.

the danger of reactionism threatening the conservative movement in that "then the antithesis: radicalism and revolution, appears." In his criticism of reactionism among conservatives Estreicher said: "Conservatism does not grant anybody the privilege of reason, will and talent."³³

These two opposing trends within the conservative parties made themselves felt in various times and various parties with varying strength. It depended, among other things, on the extent to which the propertied classes felt their authority threatened and the degree of development of democratic institutions. The struggle between these two trends found its expression also in their attitude towards liberalism.

While defending itself from the charge of reactionism, conservatism also opposed liberalism. Brzeski wrote that a conservative looks at reactionism as critically as he does at liberalism. But there was a considerable difference between Brzeski's own attitude to the question and that of Woroniecki. The latter considered the opposition to the ideas of the French revolution as the greatest achievement of conservatism in the 19th century, while Brzeski thought such an attitude anachronistic.³⁴

The differences between conservatism and liberalism consisted, first and foremost, in the relationship man—society. Liberals thought the good of the individual the supreme goal, conservatives considered the individual only an element whose interests must be subordinated to those of the state and society. They thought the liberal attitude an excessive exaltation of the individual. This led to differences in the state legal system they stipulated. Liberalism favoured a balance of power, conservatism was for the supremacy of the executive. The conservatives criticised the attitude of liberalism towards religion because they considered it the moral foundation of society. The doctrines were on common ground when they denounced the omnipotence of the state. This referred in particular to the sphere of economic relations where the conservatives proclaimed the very slogans

³³ W. Noskowski, *Jedna dźwignia z wielu [One of Many Levers]*, "Polska," 8 June, 1921; S. Estreicher, *Istota konserwatyzmu . . .*

³⁴ J. Woroniecki, *op. cit.*, 22 Oct., 1916; T. Brzeski, part. III.

of liberalism.³⁵ In this sphere, their attitude to liberalism underwent many changes in the course of time, in step with the growing role of the state and its intervention into the economic and social life; under the pressure of the masses it would attempt to restrict the freedom of disposing of one's estate, and introduce various economic forms of redistribution of income. Also, the state's becoming an investor as well as the general complexity of economic life made their impact.

Together with the development of totalitarian systems we observe certain factions of conservatives coming closer to liberalism on the platform of defence of the basic freedoms of bourgeois democracy. Conservatives did not call it the defence of the gains of the French revolution but of the fundamental principles of Christian ethics. This process could also be observed in Poland, beginning with the reaction of Cracow conservatives to the treatment meted out to the prisoners at Brześć. The protest against the growing totalitarian tendencies was most vividly expressed by J. Radziwiłł. In replying to the charge of "rotten liberalism" proffered by one of the senators, he wrote: "This accusation must be taken also in relation to us because conservatism has been and continues to be a liberal current." He protested against the deformation of the state concept, pointing out that in that case the model was that of Nazi Germany. Such an attitude was then typical of the conservatives grouped around *Czas*.³⁶ It does not mean that conservatives considered themselves democrats. They were very far from that. In the same article J. Radziwiłł wrote about the declaration of the National Unity Camp as being based on purely conservative principles, and he only attacked the methods of its putting into practice.

In coming closer to liberalism, the conservatives proclaimed the need to consolidate the conservative elements in order to cre-

³⁵ T. Brzeski, part III; S. Estreicher, *Istota konserwatyzmu...*, S. Mackiewicz, *Rola konserwatyzmu w Polsce...*; E. Faquet, *Liberalizm [Liberalism]* [1902], Lwów, undated; M. Sobolewski, *Historia współczesnych doktryn [History of Contemporary Doctrines]*, "Czasopismo Prawno-Historyczne," 1973, No. 1, p. 142.

³⁶ J. Radziwiłł, *Kilka uwag o konserwatyzmie [A Few Remarks on Conservatism]*, in: *Księga pamiątkowa na 90-lecie "Czasu" Warszawa 1938*; the editorial board defined the attitude of their paper as liberal conservatism, *ibidem* introduction.

ate an equilibrium against radicalism and nationalism.³⁷ Both class interests and political wisdom prompted such an attitude. This does not, of course, mean that they treated the two trends on equal footing. They fought socialism for class reasons. In the articles quoted earlier, Mackiewicz considered the conservative doctrine the opposite of socialism. Also Zdziechowski attacked socialism much more forcefully than nationalism. It was obvious. Socialism as a doctrine and practice struck at the very foundations of the political and social system. "Revolution," wrote Jaworski, "is the destruction of those institutions which are rooted in society, which make its organic form."³⁸ The conservatives devoted much space and money to propaganda against socialism or against what they considered socialism, though these things differed. It came to the point, where F. Potocki protested against conservatism being reduced to opposition to socialism.³⁹

The attitude towards nationalism was less emotional; it was attacked primarily for its methods of action and in this all the factions of conservatism were at one. They also resented the attitude of National Democrats towards the agrarian reform. But otherwise there were differences. For instance, the Poznań conservatives did not attack nationalism as an ideology, differing in this basically from the Cracow group. Mackiewicz blamed the national democrats for yet other reasons than those mentioned before. Himself a nationalist, he charged that because of their ethnic exclusivity they narrowed the possibility of the expansion of Poland by repelling those elements which, in his opinion, could be gained for the Polish state. Mackiewicz's attitude was the result of his imperial idea which consisted in proclaiming the necessity of Poland's expansion eastwards if she was to become a power. Such an expansion would be possible, if Poland managed to gain the favour of the local population. He also ridiculed Dmowski for his idea that "the historic mission of

³⁷ *Cat, Rola jednostki [The Role of the Individual]*, "Słowo," 23 Dec., 1922; *M. Zdziechowski, Konserwatyzm a demokracja [Conservatism and Democracy]*, "Czas," 15 July, 1926; *Organizacja żywiołów zachowawczych [Organisation of Conservative Groups]*, "Czas," 29 Oct., 1926; *W. Rostworowski, Listy o człowieku idei [Letters about a Man of Ideas]*, Warszawa 1927, p. 49.

³⁸ *W. L. Jaworski, Diariusz, [Diary]*, 12 April, 1928.

³⁹ *efpe, O przyszość konserwatyzmu angielskiego . . .*

the Polish nation consisted in fighting the Jewish element."⁴⁰ Mackiewicz as the advocate of this form of imperialism was alone among the conservatives.⁴¹ It does not mean that there were no people in the conservative circles, particularly in the eastern borderlands, who did not want a shift eastwards of the Polish frontier.

Despite those differences, many elements of the national democratic ideology found a response among the conservatives. The two trends had some social aims in common, e.g. class solidarity and struggle with the left movement. Finally, in the concrete situation existing in Poland, the two groups needed one another.

A. Bocheński in *Doktryna konserwatywna* [*Conservative Doctrine*] tried to answer the question: are there any dogmas in which every conservative must believe in all countries, at all times and in all circumstances? Let us follow him and try to answer this question also in relation to the Polish conservatives during the 1918 - 1939 period.

One of the fundamental philosophies of life, in Poland often placed first, is the theistic philosophy, the respect of the religious principles. Most of the conservatives assumed, as Estreicher put it, that "human societies are the creation of the supreme will ruling the world, and their purpose is metaphysical." He considered that societies were organisations for the improvement of the human soul, and the state an auxiliary in relation to the religious and ethical ideal.⁴² In such a formulation the state does not rest on contract, as proclaimed by liberalism, but exists by the will of God and should rest on the foundations of religious ethics.

Doubtless, the majority of conservative movement by recognising religion as the foundation of their own philosophy of life, used it as a conservative factor. Naturally, it was not always

⁴⁰ Cat, *Na prawo...* [*To the Right...*], "Słowo," 14 Oct., 1922; Cat, *Wyznanie wiary* [*Confession of Faith*], *ibidem*, 19 April, 1922.

⁴¹ Brzeski wrote that conservatism has no nationalist and imperialist overtones. (T. Brzeski, part IV).

⁴² S. Estreicher, *Istota konserwatyzmu...*; "Man as part of the world is subordinated to the moral order which the Creator has established for the world." (T. D., *Polityka konserwatywna...*, p. 116).

the Roman-Catholic religion. Suffice it to quote as an example Great Britain, the cradle of modern conservatism. What is more, there is no unavoidable connection between conservatism and a religious philosophy of life. Many were the conservative leaders in the West whose attitude to religion was one of indifference or who were even non-believers. This possibility was perceived by Archbishop E. Ropp when he wrote that "wise conservatism must be based on a theistic philosophy of life."⁴³

Most of the conservatives in Poland were deeply religious ultramontane and clerical. They were also extraordinarily intolerant. Koźmian wrote that "legislation not based on religion must ultimately lead either to legal murder or to impunity, while manking deprived of religion ends in bestiality."⁴⁴ In independent Poland, too, conservatives fought for the fundamental place of religion in social life not only for its own sake but also for its role which it could play in the struggle with trends hostile to conservatism.⁴⁵

Deep religiousness did not save many conservatives from conflicts with the church, as for instance in the case of the conflict between the Cracow conservatives and the church hierarchy in the matter of amendments to the electoral law for the elections to the Galician Sejm. It is from that time that the anticlericalism of the Cracow conservative group became noticeable; its leaders often repeated that they considered "putting the servants of the Church to the fore in political life a grave mistake in our circumstances, for they must become party men, fight some people violently, support others, and lose their prestige of religious champions and impartiality which becomes a representative of the Church."⁴⁶ In this case, it is impossible to suspect the ideologues of the Cracow group of having immediate

⁴³ *Z ideologii konserwatywnej* [Of the Conservative Ideology], "Nasza Przyszłość," July 1930, No. III, p. 2.

⁴⁴ E. Koźmian, *Bezkarność* [Impunity], in: *Pisma polityczne*, Kraków 1903, pp. 12, 14.

⁴⁵ "The democratic idea, which today is rooted in bolshevism, can be opposed only by a religious idea which elevates us above the dust of the things of this world, the idea of man created in the semblance of God..." [M. Dzieduchowski, *Konserwatyzm i demokracja*. . .].

⁴⁶ *Pierwiastek religijny w życiu społecznym* [The Religious Element in Social Life], "Czas," 16 April, 1922.

political goals in mind, of coming out against the church hierarchy because it was a different political camp. Everything points to the fact that as believers, which they frequently stated in their writings, they really wanted to protect it from measures which could compromise it or lower its prestige in society.

Besides respect of religion, another element of the conservative ideology is respect of tradition. The difficulties in determining what was tradition were indicated by Szacki.⁴⁷ When speaking about tradition, it is possible to describe it as reference to the past, to political traditions, to institutions of social life, as an aspiration, a need for continuity and development, as an idealisation of the past. In writing about tradition as an idealisation of the past, Krzywicki recognised that it was typical of the classes to which changes meant ruin and deprivation of their social status.⁴⁸ This is true with a few exceptions as for instance when in order to keep or consolidate their power the conservatives accept reforms. This is what happened in the case of the electoral reform in Galicia, the need of which the Cracow conservatives perceived before other rightist groups did, and wanted to introduce it in opposition to them. This is also what happened in Germany, where Bismarck, in order to strengthen his authority, launched a campaign against the Church, and where in the general German interest he would break local traditions for the sake of unification.

In Poland the question of tradition was more involved than elsewhere. As Dmowski pointed out in his book, belief in political experience in contrast to reasoned out theories, simply did not function in Poland. Direct reference to traditional political institutions in Poland was impossible. It would be difficult to refer to those from before the partitions. First, the social relations had changed too much. Secondly, they did not pass the test of history. It would also be difficult to refer to social traditions, both before the partitions and prior to the enfranchisement of the peasants. Apart from many relics from the times of the

⁴⁷ J. Szacki, *Tradycja. Przegląd problematyki* [*Tradition. A Survey of Pertinent Questions*], Warszawa 1971.

⁴⁸ K. L. [Krzywicki], an article in *Wielka Encyklopedia Ilustrowana*, vol. XXXVII, Warszawa 1904, pp. 678 - 680.

feudal class system, even in the 19th century the conditions had altered basically, elements of capitalist society prevailed and no party could refer to the earlier state. That is why attempts were made to introduce social hierarchy in a different way, by proclaiming the need of differentiating society according to the level of education or other criteria for creating élites.

In Poland, in contrast to France, the tendency towards a return to the political *status quo ante* did not exist. This was impossible in view of the criticism of the pre-partition relations voiced as early as in the 19th c. For understandable reasons, it was out of the question to advocate a return to relations under partitions, although there were in Poland in 1918-1939 some embittered landowners who maintained that the times had been better under the partitioning powers. So the defence of the relics of the past was made immensely difficult.

As early as in the 19th century, the conservatives were up against big difficulties. Conservatism was, in line with its programme, against conspiracies and uprisings. Also the uprisings would lead to more and more radical ideas. In such circumstances, the conservatives found natural class allies in the partitioning powers which, however, did not wish any cooperation for a long time. The uprisings made the attempts at cooperation more difficult and even, at certain times, simply made it impossible. This was the reason why the conservative movement became organised much later than other political trends, although informal groups did as early as the thirties of the 19th c. It is only after the 1905 revolution, in the face of the threat on the part of the revolutionary movement, that a conservative party was formed in the territory annexed by Russia. Here, the permission for the activity of legal political parties, granted by the tsarist authorities under the pressure of the masses, had had its impact. Still later, conservative parties were formed in the Austrian and Prussian partitions. They emerged as parties cooperating with the occupying powers, which compromised them in the eyes of the public. For twenty years between the two world wars they had to bear the blame of having been the proponents of conciliation. That is why they could not, then, refer to their pre-war activity.

Yet, all the conservative programmes proclaimed the cult of tradition. Nowhere has it been said what kind of tradition; in the mid-19th century L. Górski saw a job for the conservatives in the preservation and development of national traditions, and the preservation and development of the organic forces of the nation. But the carrying out of these tasks would entail conflict with the partitioning powers, and that would negate the very foundations of the conservative movements before independence. So L. Górski, in defining tradition as “the preservation of a great idea which gave the nation its origin, and of great and salutary truths which it represented and defended,” stipulated that one of such “great truths” was “the defence of Christianity, defence of all the teachings and faith of the Catholic Church against the Teutonic Order’s hypocrisy, against Swedish heresy, against the barbarity of the heathen and against the Greek schism.”⁴⁹ Both he and other 19th-century ideologues of conservatism thought the gentry was the carrier of this tradition. Restricting tradition to such a concept was doomed to failure.

Another question was coming to the fore, that of the defence of social institutions, meaning the defence of the existing social system, of political institutions meaning the defence not of concrete institutions existing in Poland but of a certain idea of a political system. Here, the reference made most frequently was to the English system. Another motif was the defence of culture. Mackiewicz even wrote that “the protection of culture forms the content of its (conservatism’s) historical significance.”⁵⁰ But nobody defined the kind of culture that was to be defended. On the basis of the social composition of the conservative groups it is permissible to assume that they meant culture formed by the gentry tradition. Journalists expressing the views of the landed gentry often referred to its historic role before and during the partitions. Its merits in all spheres—political, economic and social—were extolled, as well as its role in the defence of Polishness, in culture and its popularisation, and, finally, its

⁴⁹ L. Górski, *O konserwatorstwie w Polsce* [Conservatism in Poland], (1853), in: L. Górski, *Wybór pism*, Warszawa 1908, p. 165.

⁵⁰ S. Mackiewicz, *Rola konserwatyzmu w Polsce...*; he also wrote about *Wzmacnianie i ochrona kultury* [Growth and Protection of Culture], “Dziennik Poznański.” 8 June, 1920.

role in restoring Poland's independence and its defence after the formation of the state.

In all the programmes and declarations the concern of the conservatives for the prestige of the authority and the need to keep up trust in the government were emphasized. A strong stable executive was supported. The main duty of the state was to be the maintenance of order. "Conservatism wishes for a form of state," wrote St. Estreicher, "which would feature order, stability and security from anarchy." A. Górski, a much earlier supporter of conservatism, wrote about the love of law and order among the conservatives much more realistically: "Conservatism, like a modern Vestal, wants only to be the guardian of purely formal order although substantially this order is undermined by many social wrongs and human frailties."⁵¹ On the one hand, such an attitude was explained by "the awareness of the harmfulness of struggle as a programme and tactics,"⁵² on the other, it resulted from the theory of state, from the supremacy of the community over the individual. At the same time, the conservatives often emphasized their protest against the omnipotence of the state. This was expressed both in the struggle for regional self-government and in the frequent emphasis put on the role of the individual. All this was apparent in the discussions on economic matters of which more later. Mackiewicz wrote that "to the conservatives freedom of work is a means, the state one of its goals." According to him, conservatism recognises individualism as the sole method of work.⁵³ Working towards what was described as law and order the conservatives proclaimed themselves champions of the rule of law. "Aspiration to the rule of law is the first task of conservatism, the first page of its doctrine."⁵⁴ Reading various statements by

⁵¹ A. Górski, *Polityka czy politycy...*, p. 11; S. Estreicher, *Istota konserwatyzmu...*

⁵² T. Brzeski, part IV.

⁵³ Cat, *Rola jednostki...*; Mackiewicz entrenched the freedom of the individual in the following reservations: "The conservative theory means the individual freedom of man within the limits of the duties imposed by religion and morality, and the duties imposed by the idea of the nation and state", (*Deklaracja Stronnictwa Zachowawczego* [Declaration of the Conservative Party] "Słowo," 19 Oct., 1922).

⁵⁴ S. Mackiewicz, *Rola konserwatyzmu w Polsce...*

the conservatives, particularly by the members of the Cracow group, one gets the impression that they were imbued with the belief that legislation could solve all the social and political problems.

In practice, however, conservatives did not always favour strong government or subordination to the provisions of law. In the United States they fiercely defend state autonomy because it gives them the opportunity to keep certain, often reactionary, regulations. Conservatives have often taken part in *coups* or supported the access to power of antidemocratic elements against the legal government, as happened in Italy and Germany. In Poland, at the very inception of independence, the attacks on J. Moraczewski's government showed that they were not willing to support any government. In 1919, in order to win a two-house parliament, they were ready to support Piłsudski in case he tried to reach for dictatorship.⁵⁵ When they considered that the government did not sufficiently guarantee them the fulfilment of their interests, they were ready to use any method to abolish it. They also supported the *coup d'état* in Poland in May 1926; those who did not, were not guided by moral scruples or legal aspects. W. L. Jaworski was an exception, but the Cracow group, too, soon supported Piłsudski.

As with the attitude towards the government so with the attitude towards law and order. To wit, the sabotaging of the law on agrarian reform voted in accordance with all the rules of the parliamentary game. In the fight against the left, W. Wydzga was willing "to declare even a bloody struggle against the prophets of chaos."⁵⁶ His was not a solitary voice. S. Wańkiewicz and others called for the introduction of a state of emergency in order to fight the strikes. And Mackiewicz, immediately after the May *coup* pledged himself to Piłsudski: "For a strong authority, for a life-giving strong government, we are willing to pay with dozens of corpses, if Poland should need such a tribute, but you, Marshal, do give us this strong government."⁵⁷

⁵⁵ Statement by S. Tarnowski, 9 Oct., 1919, ADzT 661, MS.

⁵⁶ W. Wydzga, *Stronictwo ładu* [Party of Order], Archiwum Akt Nowych, Archives of Now Acts, 91/II/1 K. 209-2-2, MS, undated.

⁵⁷ Cat, *Panie Marszałku* (Marshal), "Słowo," 17 March, 1926.

To some people conservatism was "not only tactics but also an idea ; an idea deeply grounded in philosophy,"⁵⁸ but to others it was, first and foremost, a method of political action. In the formulation of conservative tactics the Cracow activists were in the lead. S. Tarnowski was the first to formulate it in his argument with S. Stadnicki at the conference of the Polish Circle in the Austrian Parliament in January 1912. He considered it a rule of conservative activity "not to declare war where there was no chance of winning, not to bow to secret authority, not to threaten demonstration, not to mistake words for deeds, to know the given situation and the forces involved, to be loyal to the state, to know the limits of the opposition to the government, but not to the state and the dynasty, to invest society with the character of a stable organism of which the communal reform was a symptom ; finally, to pay no attention to one's own or the party's popularity and to put the interest of the community above it." He also considered compromise a factor of the conservative method because no one is capable to fulfil his stipulations in their entirety.⁵⁹ Every politician whose party acknowledges the system of the state in general would subscribe to such a programme. In this particular case, those principles were applied by the Cracow conservatives in their dealings with the government of the occupying power.

Pragmatism as a method of action, which was what Tarnowski advocated in the first part of his statement, was recognised as one of the fundamental methods of operation by the Cracovians also in later times.⁶⁰ S. Starowieyski gave the fullest exposition of the conservative method. He tried to present it as a method to which all demagogy was alien. He saw the purpose of conservatism in the criticism of the activity of the radical parties and in the exposition of their formulas, "simple but shallow," from the angle of "the real interests of the state and

⁵⁸ J. Woroniecki, *op. cit.*, 27 Oct., 1916.

⁵⁹ Quoted after M. Bobrzyński, *Z moich pamiętników* [From my *Memoirs*], Wrocław 1957, p. 257.

⁶⁰ "The essence of positive policy consists in acknowledging the existing facts as such, and in striving to create new facts on the basis and with the help of the already existing facts" (SBZP, "Biuletyn," 27 Dec., 1918, ADzT 665).

society, and to measure them up against the real forces of the people and the state.”⁶¹ Next, he saw the role of conservatism as a smoothing factor which by way of persuasion should lead the radical parties to compromise. Actually, in the Sejm, the Club of Constitutional Work (*Klub Pracy Konstytucyjnej* KPK) which was the parliamentary representation of the Galician Party of the National Right (*Stronnictwo Prawicy Narodowej*), acted several times as a mediator between the left and the right in the Sejm, and sometimes succeeded in reaching a compromise in critical situations. Because, according to Starowieyski, conservatism cannot in the long run achieve a permanent understanding with the radical parties, all it has left is the “method of the free hand” that is, depending on the matter under discussion, sometimes to join forces with the parliamentary left, another time with the right. That was KPK’s procedure in the Sejm: in social matters it went along with the national democrats, in foreign and nationality politics it often joined up with the Polish Socialist Party.

Some conservative journalists thought that the conservative method was, in contrast to the radical parties which are moved by feeling, marked by reason and common sense consisting in that it did not allow of experimenting. Others emphasized that conservatism did not agree to struggle as a method of action.⁶² This was obvious when at the same time ideas of class solidarity were proclaimed which always act in favour of the class or group currently in power. When saying that the existing questions should not provide slogans for agitation but become subjects for thinking over and keeping feelings and imagination in hand, the conservatives themselves cultivated demagoguery, both social and political. This was particularly glaring in popular newspapers. They dubbed demagogic all statements contrary to their own principles and all the demands of the left. In this case the slogan of demagoguery was simply self-defence because it was evi-

⁶¹ S. Starowieyski, *Metoda konserwatywna...*; Mackiewicz defined it as the “elimination of demagoguery and unrealistic things from programmes and agitation” (Cat, *Konserwatyzm...*).

⁶² S. Kochanowski, *O kierunek konserwatywny* [For a Conservative Trend], “Czas,” 13 Dec., 1926; T. Brzeski, part III.

dent that in this meaning of the term demagogy they would always be outbidden either from the left or from the right.

We have discussed certain features which indicate whether a given party represents the conservative doctrine and method of action. The lack of some factor does not exclude ranking it with the conservatives. Principles differed in various times, countries and parties. But certain elements were constant and requisite. Among them was, first and foremost, the defence of private property as the foundation of the existing social and political relations; in Poland it was the defence of large landed estates.

This does not mean, of course, that the defence of landed estates was the life goal of Estreicher or Jaworski. For them the conservative attitude resulted from philosophical ideas, from a conception of the path of social development, cult of law and the method of action. For them the words of S. Tarnowski about the *Undivine Comedy* by Zygmunt Krasiński are apposite: "An involuntary and fatal necessity which makes conservatives of people who would like to change, not to preserve, because they see that others want to tear out wheat together with the corn cockle, and so they defend the cockle to save the wheat—that is the core of Henryk's tragedy."⁶³

In June 1831, Wincenty Krasiński wrote to his son, Zygmunt: "Two colours rule the world: order and movement, their purpose being to take from those who have and to give to those who have not."⁶⁴ The defence of property became the basic aim of conservatives. In all their programmes and declarations they repeated the demand for the protection of private property. That was so, they explained, because of "the imperishable values which are instrumental in the preservation of the health of civilised societies"; the right to property was to be defended in the first place as the most threatened.⁶⁵

⁶³ S. Tarnowski, *Zygmunt Krasiński*, Kraków 1892, pp. 104-105, quoted after M. Król, *Krasiński i konserwatyzm* [*Krasiński and Conservatism*], "Więź," October, 1974.

⁶⁴ Quoted after M. Brandys, *Koniec świata szwoleżerów* [*End of the World of the Light Cavalry Officers*], vol. IV, Warszawa 1976, p. 297.

⁶⁵ S. Stablewski, *Fragment pamiętnika*, the Library of the Ossoliński family, typescript, p. 60.

The exploited classes were blamed for the existing state of affairs. There were many writings about the egoistic aspirations of the "class parties." Mackiewicz wrote that "no conservative party in Poland has ever shown class egoism in such a glaring and cynical form as the peasant party and workers' factions do now." W. Wydźga described the attitude of those parties as "a symptom of political and social churlishness" which boils down to the word "give." In this situation, he saw the conservative goal in "the restoration of the principle that a threat to other people's property is banditry or churlishness."⁶⁶

At the same time, as they understood that with the mood of vindication prevailing among the popular masses it was impossible to deny them for ever the fulfilment of their demands, some of their programmes admitted the possibility of infringing private property. In every case a legal act was requested and the observance of the principle of full compensation. One of the authors wrote that "the intervention of the state into the matter of the distribution of property and income may be justified at certain periods in history only by political motives, that is it can be effected in order to protect society from revolutionary upheavals." The same author wrote that reasons of justice or economy did not enter here.⁶⁷ But on the whole, efforts were made to convince public opinion that conservatives opposed social legislation only for economic reasons, for the common good, and that they did not defend the interests of any one class or social group.⁶⁸ Of such an attitude, J. Woroniecki, himself a follower of conservatism, wrote as early as 1916, that there is "an identification of the self-preservation goals of the propertied classes with the goals of the entire society."⁶⁹

As concerns the right to property and economic activity, conservatism did not emphasize the role of the state in public

⁶⁶ S. Mackiewicz, *Rola konserwatyzmu w Polsce...*; W. Wydźga, *Cel i zadania stronnictwa zachowawczego w Polsce...*

⁶⁷ T. D., *Polityka konserwatywna...*, p. 158.

⁶⁸ "Contemporary conservatism differs from other political currents in that it does not and cannot represent the interests of some social class". Cat, *No posterunku wileńskim* [*At the Post of Vilna*], "Słowo," 1 Aug., 1922.

⁶⁹ J. Woroniecki, *op. cit.*, 27 Nov., 1916.

life. On the contrary, it opposed all attempts at state intervention into the economy. Whole volumes were dedicated to fighting state management. Here the deviation from the fundamental principles was evident. Conservatism was born in England in the struggle with economic liberalism, as a supporter of protective policies. In the 20th century economic liberalism has become one of the canons of conservatism.

From its very inception, conservatism was an antidemocratic movement and opposed the share of the people in political life. In Galicia some conservatives proclaimed the opinion that "democracy means only equal right for all in the government and in the courts of law and nothing else; that we have already secured by law."⁷⁰ In the other zones of partition, it was often said that the conservative idea was not democratic, hence the opposition to equal rights for all.⁷¹ After independence, in conditions of a rather broad bourgeois democracy, and feeling threatened, the classes represented by the conservatives mitigated their attacks on state egalitarianism and concentrated on electoral law. They attacked it without respite, primarily the provision about universal suffrage. M. Zdziechowski assumed that the notion about the majority having the brains was fiction, but Estreicher pointed to the inexperience of the masses, their national and cultural variety, illiteracy, lack of parliamentary traditions, demagogy applied by political parties, finally, to the "contagious proximity of bolshevism."⁷² These elements were developed and multiplied in various ways by all the conservative journalists.

This attitude resulted from one other premise. Under universal suffrage the electoral masses were beginning to play the main role. The conservatives, with their programme, could not count on gaining much influence, particularly as Poland lacked a strong

⁷⁰ M. Drohojowski, *Pamiętnik* [Memoirs], private collection, typescript, p. 131.

⁷¹ "The conservative doctrine is not a democratic doctrine and rejects as far possible the idea of Equality as a virulent falsity" (W. Kosia-kiewicz, *op. cit.*, p. 50); "The drive towards the equality of men is one of the most dangerous daydreams born in the fever of the French Revolution" (J. Woroniecki, *op. cit.*, 24 Oct., 1916).

⁷² M. Zdziechowski, *Konserwatyzm a demokracja...*; S. Estreicher, *Supremacja parlamentu* [Supremacy of Parliament], "Czas," 12 April, 1925.

middle class and bourgeoisie. What existed of those social strata was under the constant pressure of national minorities and that, among other things, was the reason for their susceptibility to nationalistic slogans.

There was also a lack of rich peasants. Great Poland was an exception and it is there that the only, rather successful, attempt was made to gain influence in the countryside. Similar attempts were made several times by conservatives in Western Galicia. Others gave up peasants as a conservative element, pointing out that in order to gain their support it would be necessary to proclaim radical ideas, namely those of the agrarian reform. Brzeski and Mackiewicz pointed to the intelligentsia as the potential mass basis of conservatism.⁷³ But the intelligentsia was under the impact of the same currents that influenced the middle class. So, despite the awareness of the fact that, as J. Bobrzyński wrote, "today it is the rule of the law of the activity of the masses," Mackiewicz, in acknowledging the existing state of affairs, declared: "Conservatism is a queer sort of party which resigns in advance from influencing the masses."⁷⁴ The conservatives then began to represent their failures as virtues.

In such circumstances conservatism, about which Mackiewicz himself wrote that it could be shaped only by the educated classes, was naturally becoming a movement of the landed gentry. The fact that conservatives came mainly from the sphere of big landowners was confirmed by *Dziennik Poznański*, an organ of Greater Poland landed gentry.⁷⁵ Backed by the landowners they were at once opposed by the peasantry. Thus conservatism became identified with landowners. F. Potocki deplored that "the false notion has taken root that only a landowner, a gentleman at that, can be a true conservative."⁷⁶ It came to the point when conservatism became limited to one social stratum which began to consider it their own. At the same time, in

⁷³ T. Brzeski, part I.

⁷⁴ Cat, *Program stronnictwa demokratycznego* [Programme of the Democratic Party], "Dziennik Poznański," 14 Dec., 1920; Cat, *Zmiany i zwroty* [Changes and Turnings], "Słowo," 11 Aug., 1922.

⁷⁵ *Organizacja zachowawców* [Organization of Conservatives], "Dziennik Poznański," 3 April, 1919.

⁷⁶ е f p e, *Wywalanie drzwi otwartych* [Attacking Open Doors], "Czas," 12 Feb., 1923.

spite of some conservative journalists trying to prove that "the task of conservatism cannot be just the keeping in power of certain social strata" or the protection of the interests of one class," conservatism became the defender of the landed gentry. Because of that its main goal was the defence against the agrarian reform. The final shallowness of such a conception of the conservative idea was the work of conservatives in Great Poland.

The weakness resulting from the lack of mass support led to the supremacy of backstage activity which in turn resulted in reducing the work of some conservative groups to the role of landowners' pressure group. On the other hand, in order not to be left completely outside parliamentary activity, they had to look for allies who, in turn, needed them only for their financial means. Such a situation made the conservatives agree to far-reaching programme and tactical compromises and even to their absorption by more dynamic movements. In Poland, before the May 1926 coup, the only possible ally was, in practice, the National Democrats, and, after the coup, the followers of the government system called *sanacja*.

Various conservative groups took up extremely different attitudes in respect of many fundamental questions.

In order to illustrate the differences, two parties in the mid-twenties could be compared: the Party of the National Right (*Stronnictwo Prawicy Narodowej*, SPN) and the Conservative Party (*Stronnictwo Zachowawcze*, SZ) both operating on the same territory.

SPN

SZ

- | | |
|---|--|
| (i) Awareness of the narrowness of the social basis and the resulting theory of the decisive role of the élite. Intelligentsia as a potential ally. | Conviction about peasants conservatism and the possibility of subordinating them to the party influence. |
| (ii) Recognition of religious ethics as the basis of social | Recognition of religion as the basis of the conservative doc- |

⁷⁷ W. Noskowski, *Jedna dźwignia z wielu [One of Many Levers]*, "Polska," 8 June, 1921; S. Mackiewicz, *Rola konserwatyzmu w Polsce*.

- | | |
|---|---|
| <p>life but also undeniable anticlericalism.</p> | <p>trine with emphasis on the position of the Church not being sufficiently protected by law.</p> |
| <p>(iii) Opinion about the need to subordinate national ambitions to the interests of the state. Declaration of cooperation with national minorities.</p> | <p>Stipulation about the need to adapt nationalism to the requirements of conservatism. Blaming SPN for "Jewish infiltration."</p> |
| <p>(iv) Hatred of the methods and fanaticism of the National Democrats. Conviction that anybody who collaborated with them, regretted it later.</p> | <p>Notion that conservatives can cooperate with only one party: the National Democrats.</p> |
| <p>(v) Consistent support and frequent opposition to dictatorship. Recognition that monarchy was an anachronism.</p> | <p>Cultivation of the monarchist idea, proclaiming that republicanism and conservatism cancel each other. <i>Action Française</i> as a model.</p> |
| <p>(vi) Great political flexibility, pragmatism. Efforts towards alliances with various parties.</p> | <p>Belief that the place of conservatism was in the "national camp"</p> |

A middle-of-the-road position was occupied by those conservatives of whom Mackiewicz was the spokesman. He shared with the SPN its attitude towards the state and Piłsudski, and represented a type of nationalism different from that of the National Democrats. He was one of the leading champions of the monarchist idea. Nor did he lack admiration for fascism. He was the only one to openly advocate imperialism as a feature of conservatism.

Thus, the members of the SPN had many liberal elements in their programme and practice. They also represented great general and political culture. But SZ's main feature was nationalism linked to a conservative social programme. What is more, the brand of nationalism advocated by SZ activists was a militant

nationalism looking up to Italian and French models. No wonder that with such big differences, despite the many attempts at the unification of the conservative movement, none of them was of a lasting character.

With all those differences dividing them, the conservative parties had in common :

(i) advocating class solidarity and the need to stop the class struggle. At the same time, constant demand for amendments in social legislation aimed at restricting the gains of the working masses ;

(ii) struggle for freedom of individual economic activity, that is struggle against all forms of state management. Struggle against compulsory agrarian reform ;

(iii) struggle for the amendment of electoral law by way of the abolition of universal suffrage, equal rights for the Sejm and the Senate, and increased rights of the head of state ;

(iv) emphasis on the natural rights and the role of religion in social life.

I have tried to present here some of the fundamental principles of the conservative doctrine and tactics, primarily on the basis of the Polish conservatives' own ideas, as well as certain elements of the realisation of those principles on the example of prewar Poland. Keeping in mind that conservatism as a doctrine is, in our opinion, an undefinable notion, we have presented some of its features, trying at the same time to show how they changed depending on the conditions in which the social class, represented in the conservative movement, found itself in ; how the differences within the same class caused different interpretations of the conservative doctrine. Because of the limited space of this article it has been impossible to develop many aspects of the matter. They require more comparative research in respect of their movements of their type, and more detailed research in respect of the Polish experience.

(Translated by Krystyna Kęplicz)