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SOME ASPECTS OF THE DEMOCRATIZATION
OF POLITICAL LIFE IN CONGRESS POLAND
AT THE BEGINNING OF THE 20TH CENTURY

The 19th c., with its national uprising and conspiracy brought some new traits into the political culture of Polish society, a culture shaped in pre-partition Poland, and dominated by gentry traditions. One of the main elements of this pre-partition heritage — the elitism of political life, remained as a permanent feature of the political culture of society in Congress Poland almost up till the 1870s–1880s. The traditional norms of political culture, “worked out in the milieu of the landed gentry, and later intelligentsia”¹, largely accepted by opinion-making élites, were firmly rooted in the political life of Polish lands in the 19th c. Years ago they already aroused the interest of Polish historians²; however, it took years before the field of historical observation of Polish political culture started to embrace also the 20th c. and the behaviour of the masses. (Moreover, the purposefulness of conducting research into the political culture of workers has been subject to doubt.)³

¹ Stefan Kieniewicz, *Polska kultura polityczna w XIX wieku (Polish Political Culture in the 19th c.)*, in: *Dzieje kultury politycznej w Polsce*, ed. J. A. Gierowski, Warszawa 1977, p. 149.

² This perspective has long dominated historical reflection upon the genesis and specificity of Polish political culture. See the approach to this problem in the papers delivered at the 11th General Congress of Polish Historians in 1974. (*Dzieje kultury politycznej w Polsce*, as above).

³ Only research developed at the turn of the 1970s and discussions of the history of working class culture in Poland, as well as the transformations of collective political life in the Polish lands during the 1905 Revolution and in the inter-war period gave more insight to the historical reflection upon the transformations of political culture in Poland of the first half of the 20th. c. as culture typical not only of the élites but also of the wide ranks of population. (See e.g. W. L. Karwacki, *Kultura i obyczaje robotników — kultura polityczna proletariatu (The Culture and Customs of Workers — the Political Culture of the*

Only in the second half of the 19th c. and the beginning of the 20th c. — in the era of enfranchising reforms and intensive urbanization — there emerged some stimuli for social transformations favouring democratization. The circles of those who were interested in the surrounding world and also — the world of politics — gradually widened to embrace the rural peasant population as well as workers in towns. This finally helped to break down the elitism of political life and was a primary condition of the rise of modern political culture.

The democratization of political culture in its first stages depended strictly on the rise of the social consciousness and the sense of national identity of the working classes⁴. The political postures of the widening social circles reflected mainly their attitude to state authorities and the élites of power. Under the peculiar circumstances of a Poland divided between three partitioning powers this was the attitude to the invader. This favoured the formation of an attitude of resentment or hostility towards state power, and in a further perspective — could contribute to the consolidation of the sense of alienation from state power in general, also in independent Poland.

The fact that Polish lands were divided into three parts, as well as the different pace and extent of the modernization of the social structure and political system in Austria, Germany and Russia, resulted in the different rhythm of transformation of the

Proletariat), in: *Polska klasa robotnicza. Zarys dziejów*, vol. I, part 3, ed. S. Kalabiński, Warszawa 1978, pp. 847–884; *Wokół tradycji kultury robotniczej w Polsce (Around the Tradition of Workers' Culture in Poland)*, [a collection of studies], ed. A. Żarnowska, Warszawa 1986; *Spółczesność i polityka — dorastanie do demokracji. Kultura polityczna w Królestwie Polskim na początku XX wieku (Society and Politics — Growing Up to Democracy. Political Culture in Congress Poland at the Beginning of the 20th c.)*, [a collection of studies], ed. A. Żarnowska and T. Wojsza, Warszawa 1993; R. Wapiński, *Doświadczenia rewolucji [1905 r.] w polskiej kulturze politycznej pierwszych trzech dziesięcioleci XX wieku (The Experience of the [1905] Revolution in the Polish Political Culture of the First Three Decades of the 20th c.)*, *ibid.*, pp. 189–203.)

⁴ Cf. e.g. Helena Brodowska, *Chłopi o sobie i Polsce. Rozwój świadomości społeczno-narodowej (Peasants of Themselves and Poland. The Development of Socio-national Consciousness)*, Warszawa 1984, and Jan Molenda, *Chłopi-naród-niepodległość. Kształtowanie się postaw narodowych i obywatelskich chłopów w Galicji i Królestwie Polskim w przededniu odrodzenia Polski (Peasants-Nation-National Independence. The Formation of the National and Civil Postures of Peasants in Galicia and Congress Poland on the Eve of Poland's Revival)*, Warszawa 1999. These phenomena found much less reflection in Polish historical research as compared to the profusion of historical studies devoted to the 19th c. political activity of the élites.

political attitudes and behaviour that could be observed in particular Polish partitions⁵.

This article does not aim to report the endless debates on the definition of the notion "political culture" or the usefulness of this category for historical research⁶. Nevertheless I think that if a researcher studying political history does not confine his work to the history of institutions and the forms of state power, if his interests do not stop with the actions of rulers and political leaders, but extend to embrace the questions concerning the circle of participants in political life, their attitude towards state power and its institutions, the forms of the organization of collective political life, the norms that it is directed by, etc. — then the field of his research is precisely that of political culture. This is the framework of my observations presented in this article.

The democratic transformations of society, the rise of a sense of social and national ties among the wide circles of urban and rural population, and what follows — the development of their political culture — were delayed in the Russian partition above all due to two factors. First — the absolutist system of power with its repression of any impulses of social emancipation and association, with its extreme brutality towards the Polish and other conquered nationalities. Second — the underdevelopment of the network of educational institutions, especially at the level of elementary schools as well as the Russianization of the school system at all levels: beginning with primary schools up to the University.

Social transformations occurring in the last decades of the 19th c., among them primarily the formation of urban workers' agglomerations, favoured the emergence of new elements in political culture. This concerned the political customs as well as the new forms of manifestation of political attitudes and actions. These new patterns, such as e.g. political demonstrations in the streets, were a result of the development of massive workers'

⁵ S. K i e n i e w i c z, as above, as well as the included in this publication, by Józef B u s z k o (*Kultura polityczna Galicji [Galicia's Political Culture]*), and Anna Ż a r n o w s k a *O kulturze politycznej klasy robotniczej w Królestwie Polskim na przełomie XIX i XX wieku [On the Political Culture of the Working Class in Congress Poland at the Turn of the 19th s.]*. Cf. R. W a p i ń s k i, *Doświadczenia rewolucji [1905 r.] w polskiej kulturze politycznej*, as above.

⁶ The 11th General Congress of Polish Historians in 1974 was an important point at the initial stage of those discussions.

actions which gained popularity and were taken up by other social milieus. This is why the researcher into the transformations of political culture at the turn of the 19th c. is justified in focussing, primarily, on the transformations of the workers' culture.

It is worth while drawing attention to the fact that at that time both in workers' and in peasants' communities one can certainly trace the influence of traditional norms of political life, born in the gentry-intelligentsia milieus in the first half of the 19th c. This is testified e.g. by adoption of the principle of solidarity in resistance to the invader, formed in the era of uprising and conspiracy, a solidarity maintained despite the antagonistic political and ideological orientations of workers' organizations. This principle was followed e.g. in the mutual aid to the defence of persons and organizations against arrests and "give-aways" while smuggling illegal publications, etc.

At the end of the 19th c. and the beginning of the 20th c. the workers' collective actions contributed in an increasing degree to the formation of the political culture of Polish society, especially in the Russian partition. Although such collective actions developed most intensively in Congress Poland, yet the Tsar's regime effectively hampered the spread of the social scope of political life. Of greatest importance here was not only the efficiency and brutality of the Russian politico-bureaucratic system of central and local authorities, but to an equal extent — the lack of Polish self-governing institutions or the possibility of legal action of Polish public organizations and associations, as well as the all-powerful censorship of the press and publications.

All this determined the fact that the inhabitants of Congress Poland — in contrast to those of Galicia or the Prussian partition — could not develop the habit of everyday contact with institutionalized public life. The lack of such experience, the fact that all collective actions were burdened by the habit of conspiracy, bore strongly on the shape of the political culture of the whole society in Congress Poland. While relegating all political life in the Russian partition to the level of illegality and conspiracy, the Tsar's regime threatened especially the development of the political culture of "uneducated", illiterate classes (according to the census of 1897 almost 70% of the inhabitants of Congress Poland

were illiterate, and even in towns, among the stable working staff in industry this index amounted to 54–55%)⁷.

In the Russian partition both the rural population and the majority of the inhabitants of towns, especially the lower classes, came into contact with the authorities almost exclusively as represented by the partitioner's coercive apparatus. The identification of the imperial system of power with the apparatus of repression aroused distrust and a tendency to by-pass or outright to boycott official institutions (such as e.g. Russian schools or courts of justice).

As there was no open confrontation of various political programmes either in direct form or in print, the average inhabitant of Congress Poland found it hard, or outright impossible to orientate himself in political programmes, and political knowledge could not spread on a mass scale. This also set serious limitations to the conscious choice of a political direction or organization by the individuals with some orientation in political life. This is testified by many cases, recorded in reminiscences and testimonies made during investigation, of the allegiance not only of workers but also of the young members of the intelligentsia (secondary school pupils and university students) to one of a few active socialist parties or national democratic organizations. It was not the conscious choice of a definite political direction, but an accidental contact with publications, or sympathizers with a secret organization, that determined this allegiance.

The natural outcome of this state of affairs was a relatively large fluctuation of political influence, additionally aggravated by repressions applied by the apparatus of power. Massive arrests, deportations etc., often crushed the whole of local, especially socialist, organizations. In this situation those left free frequently joined the existing structures of another socialist party. This behaviour was characteristic not only of the formative period of political programmes and structures, i.e. the end of the 19th c.

The necessity for most symptoms of political life to develop in conspiracy gave rise to an almost unlimited possibility to disinform public opinion through the official channels of the invader's power, as well as through the progovernmental, conciliatory press. In a large degree this contributed to the lack of clarity

⁷ A. Żarnowska, *Klasa robotnicza Królestwa Polskiego (1870–1914) (The Working Class of Congress Poland, 1870–1914)*, Warszawa 1974, pp. 248–249.

of political divisions in society, divisions that took shape at the end of the 19th c. Undoubtedly, the lack of the possibility to develop a legal political life favoured the maintenance of its elitist character; the parties did not have a chance to be established on democratic principles; this also strengthened the infrangibility of the authority of leaders, whose individual ambitions could not be separated from the interests of their parties.

One can hardly overestimate the influence exerted by habits, consolidated under the conditions of conspiratorial activity, on the shape of the political culture of Polish society throughout the 20th c., and especially before 1918. The years 1905–1907 were merely a brief episode of a partial “liberation” of political life from conspiracy in central Polish territories.

Massive revolutionary actions, developing like an avalanche in the Russian partition of Poland in 1905–1907, embraced wide circles of inhabitants of towns and the countryside. To a considerable extent they took the form of political struggle with a strong anti-Russian edge, aimed at national liberation.

This essay in the first place tries to answer the questions: how did the revolutionary years influence the political behaviour of workers? What new elements entered the political culture as a result of the rapid extension of the social background of political life at that time?

Already in the first great wave of strikes in January 1905 the workers appeared as initiators of the struggle in all the major and many minor industrial centres of Congress Poland and the Białystok region. Moreover — these strikes developed spontaneously, from the very beginning taking on a political character: they were protests against the ruthlessness of the Tsarist, Russian apparatus towards peaceful demonstrations of the workers, as well as a manifestation of solidarity with workers of a different nationality, massacred in far-off Saint Petersburg.

In the years 1905–1907 Congress Poland saw many similar situations. In those years about ten massive political strikes broke out in the major workers' agglomerations. These strikes generally gained the support of a considerable part of working population. It is noteworthy that this support was also given by the families of the workers, who frequently preceded their participation in a political strike with a protest against being exploited as employees.

For the communities of workers in Congress Poland political strikes were at the same time the principal means of demonstrating their hostility towards the invader, who realized his policy of Russification and repression even when the workers called for some improvement in working conditions. A detailed analysis of the development of successive waves of strikes shows that all these motives constituted an indissoluble whole. They determined the political attitudes of a considerable part of workers' communities, leading to their spontaneous and massive engagement in revolutionary actions directed in the first place against the invader's power. In this way a new element of political culture came to light in Congress Poland at the beginning of the 20th c. — the pressure of the workers in the street as one of the principal means of political struggle.

The massive political strikes (some arising clearly in solidarity with others), recurring in the years of the Revolution and supported by wide circles of workers, suggest that the sense of the mutual tie and community of spirit of those struggling against the authorities of the Tsarist state (above all seen as the invader) considerably widened in the working class. This, however, does not mean that the opposite attitudes were eliminated from this community, or that there were no conflicts on the grounds of national differences⁸. Even in the revolutionary years of 1905–1907, in many working class centres Polish–German and Polish–Jewish antagonisms occurred. A number of episodes in Łódź of 1905–1907 testify that there were not only conflicts between Polish workers and a Germany foreman or a Jewish shopkeeper, but also in the mutual relations between the workers of those three nationalities⁹.

It is obvious that even at the climax of the Revolution only a small minority of workers in Congress Poland identified with the

⁸ See e.g. Bronisława Kopczyńska–Jaworska, *Swój czy obcy — rodzaje dystansu kulturowego (Our People or Strangers — Types of Cultural Distance)*, in: *Polacy — Niemcy — Żydzi w Łodzi*, ed. Paweł Samuś, Łódź 1997, pp. 349–358.

⁹ This was reported not only by imperial officials, who deliberately exaggerated these conflicts. This is also confirmed by the accounts of correspondents of the journal "Z pola walki" ("From the Battlefield"), which was the organ of agitation of the SDKPiL (Social–Democracy of Congress Poland and Lithuania). E.g. № 8 of May 6, 1905, p. 59. It is noteworthy that the forms of expression of those antagonisms in the workers' communities of Congress Poland were not as extreme as in the then Russian Empire. The 1906 pogrom of Jews in Siedlce was an exception in Polish lands.

larger working class community. A preponderant majority identified with the local community of their place of work or with those who performed the same trade. However, here also — even within the framework of the staff of one factory or mine — the ties of solidarity were many times broken.

Some massive political strikes testified to the tie of solidarity linking the totality of workers in Congress Poland. Among them was above all the strike of solidarity with the workers fighting on the barricades of Łódź in June 1905, or the strike of protest against the project of the so-called Bulygin's Duma, declared by the Tsar in August 1905. Both strikes were initiated and developed exclusively by the workers of Congress Poland, without any support from other parts of the empire. Thus one can suppose that in this way national impulses contributed to the political character of massive working class actions in the Polish lands included in the Russian empire. A considerable part of workers in Congress Poland went repeatedly on strike during one year of the Revolution, initiating not only economic but also political protests¹⁰. In the first year of the Revolution the need for a political protest even seemed to dominate the strivings to improve the everyday, local conditions of work and life of those who went on strike.

Accessible sources allow us to say that regardless of regional differences the scope of support for many political strikes in the days of the Revolution (especially at its first stage) was in Congress Poland wider than in central Russia¹¹. This phenomenon, in my opinion, proves indirectly that the need for protest against national oppression played here a significant role. (It is interes-

¹⁰ The general number of worker-participants in strikes in Congress Poland in 1905, i.e. only in one year of the Revolution, can be estimated at 1.5 million (with the exclusion of agricultural workers). This number surpassed almost twice the general number of workers employed in industry, mining and on the railway. In Warsaw Industrial Region, (for which the factory inspections have left us closer statistical data) about 2/3 of the total number of workers in this region took part in the political strikes of 1905, and only a little over 40% took part in economic strikes. See A. Żarńowska, *Próba analizy ruchu strajkowego w Królestwie Polskim w dobie rewolucji 1905–1907 (An Attempt at an Analysis of the Strike Movement in Congress Poland During the Revolution of 1905–1907)*, "Przegląd Historyczny" 1965, № 3, pp. 432–458.

¹¹ Thus e.g. in 1905 in Congress Poland over 93% of industrial workers went on strike, while in the European part of Russia — 60%; in 1906: in Congress Poland — over 77%, in Russia — only about 38%; in 1907 respectively: about 48% and 32%. (My own calculations on the basis of the data of the factory inspection: see A. Żarńowska, *Próba analizy ruchu strajkowego*, as above, tab. 4, p. 435).

ting that a similar phenomenon took place at that time in Georgia, Latvia and other Baltic countries).

The workers' community was as a rule marked by a certain helplessness in articulating their strivings. Under the conditions of the Russian partition, in a despotically ruled state, the arising sense of national identity was signalled by them primarily through various forms of collective protest against national oppression, against Russian schools, against Russian officials and policemen, against the brutal charges of Cossacks at the demonstrating workers, etc. One might think that these impulse also played a part in the workers' protests at their workplaces: in factories, mines or on the railway, where they most frequently met with the attitude of scorn for their maternal tongue on the part of foremen or entrepreneurs who often did not know Polish.

The sense of national identity of the wide ranks of the urban population can also be assessed by analysing their hostile attitude towards the imperial power. This is confirmed e.g. by many cases of boycotting such institutions as law courts or the factory inspection, with which this population was in direct contact. Of similar character were the attempts, made during the Revolution, to call into being the local organs of workers' self-government, such as e.g. courts of conciliation in working class districts in Warsaw, the workers' militia in the Dąbrowa Basin etc.

However, the general political strike was in Congress Poland (and in Russia) characteristic of those revolutionary days and new to the whole of Europe as a form of manifesting the political attitudes of the wide ranks of inhabitants of industrial towns and settlements. It was accompanied by massive street demonstrations, meetings in public places and workplaces, etc. Their tenor was supported by songs, sung collectively on those occasions. Their repertoire was diversified, ranging from revolutionary to patriotic pieces. National symbols frequently accompanied the red flag during multitudinous street demonstrations in those years. This mainly took place during many-thousand-strong workers' marches at the beginning of November 1905 after the Tsar declared the *Manifesto*, during the so-called "days of freedom" (finished as soon as November 10 by the introduction of martial law in Congress Poland). Such cases were witnessed not only in Warsaw (e.g. on November 5, 1905, during the famous

200 thous. strong march), but also in the Dąbrowa Basin and Łódź¹².

These signs of the accelerated awakening of the working population's national consciousness undoubtedly reflected the significant transformations of political culture in this central Polish district. To a large extent this was a result of repressions intensified by the invader's power in the years of the Revolution. The more so because the sense of national identity was felt not only among the active participants in collective actions, but also among the members of their families, their neighbours, etc. These transformations of consciousness could not but be stimulated by the mass arrests of participants in strikes and fighters, the constant presence of Russian armed forces in workers' agglomerations, the militarization of the railways and some factories, ironworks and mines. The Russianization of schools was also an important factor. Proof of that is e.g. the active support given by the majority of working class families to the boycott of Russian schools at the beginning of 1906 in face of the threat of reintroducing the Russian language in elementary schools and removing the Polish teachers¹³.

It is interesting that in this milieu national tradition was then understood mainly as an armed conflict; perhaps this proves how strong was the influence of the traditional pattern of gentry culture, which was cultivated, although certainly transformed here. This influence could be seen in the spontaneous attempts of workers to arm themselves on their own and to put up an armed resistance to the Russian police and army. Memoirs suggest that in many urban workers' families the memory was cultivated of participants in the January Uprising of 1863, and there was a cult of its mementoes¹⁴. L. W. Karwacki maintains that in the

¹² "Z pola walki" (*SDKPiL*) N^o 1, Jan. 25, 1905, p. 5 and N^o 8, May 6, 1905, pp. 55-56.

¹³ This is also confirmed by the postulates to organize a Polish factory school for children, voiced by factory workers within the framework of local strike demands. (The Archives of Modern Records in Warsaw [AAN], Dossiers N^{os} 9046 and 10295).

¹⁴ Thus e.g. many autobiographies and memoirs of workers active in the Revolution of 1905-1907 — from Warsaw, Dąbrowa Basin, Częstochowa and other places bear evidence to the high prestige enjoyed in the workers' milieu by activists who in the years of the Revolution returned home from Russian exile. (AAN, Dossiers N^{os} 4386, 7195, as well as Michał Ostrowski, *Mój pamiętnik [My Memoirs]* fasc. 1, *ibid.* N^o 102295; see also Jakub Dąbski, *70 lat pod czerwonym sztandarem. Wspomnienia [70 Years Under the Red Flag. Memoirs]*, Katowice 1974.

working class milieu its "own" national tradition was born, handed down from one generation to another¹⁵.

The inadequate political information, the lack of a tradition of organized political life, the prevalence of emotional motivations, favoured the spontaneous behaviour of new participants in the political life of Congress Poland. Thus, e.g. the workers' communities were unable to assess their enemies politically, only emotionally, and exclusively in moral terms. This concerned both the authority of the Tsar and of the entrepreneurs.

However, the years of the Revolution revealed among the wide ranks of workers an unprecedented acceleration in the development not only of a social consciousness, but the capacity for political action as well. This is shown, e.g. by the frequent interlocking of economic and political motives in collective actions. This was tellingly presented in the memoirs of a Warsaw railway worker, who emphasized that the victory of a many-week strike for a pay-rise in 1905 caused a breakthrough in "the collective psyche" of the workers and this was "the political sense of the strike. The workers found that their adversary was not as powerful as he seemed to be..."¹⁶

Thus the road led here from the realization of a need for collective action in order to better the conditions of work and life, to discovering the indispensability of democratic freedoms and institutional guarantees such as legal parties, trade unions, cultural-educational organizations and the like, as well as parliament. However, the prevailing attitudes and mentality did not as a rule follow such a model of transformation either among the blue collar or white collar workers in Congress Poland at that time. Most often they tried to extend the catalogue of demands: from the pay-rise and shorter working day, to the battle for strike-pay, for the release of those arrested as well as for stopping persecu-

p. 28; Ludwik Śledziński, *Jak to było w latach 1905–1908 [As it Was in 1905–1908]*, Warszawa 1931, p. 28).

¹⁵ L. W. Karwacki, *Wiedza historyczna robotników polskich w latach zaborów (Przyczynek do badań) (The Historical Knowledge of Polish Workers Under the Partitions. A Contribution to Research)*, in: *Polska klasa robotnicza. Studia historyczne*, vol. IX, Warszawa 1980, p. 188.

¹⁶ Franciszek Sternet, *Współdział robotników i pracowników kolejowych w rewolucji 1905–1907 (The Participation of Railway Workers and Employees in the Revolution of 1905–1907)*, AAN, Dossier № 433/3, p. 23.

tion for participation in the strike, in short — they fought for the right to strike.

However, frequently it was the other way round. Especially at the first stage of revolutionary developments and in the autumn of 1905. Although generally conceived and formulated imprecisely, and simplistically, political aspirations were uppermost and dominated the goals relating to better working conditions. Proof of this is the behaviour of the majority of workers' staffs above all in Warsaw and Łódź, where they initiated great political strikes in January 1905. At this point the foremost enemy was tsarism: the despotic invader's regime. Only later on did the political impulse exacerbate social conflicts in the workplace. Under the conditions of Congress Poland this "internal" battlefield turned out to be continually and inseparably linked to the former, anti-tsarist movement. The entrepreneurs themselves frequently resorted to the assistance of the imperial repressive apparatus against the workers. It was the employers who broke the principle of solidarity in the face of the invader, a principle so characteristic of the political culture of Polish society until the middle of the 19th c.¹⁷

The downfall of the authority of imperial power and of the faith in its inflexibility was in the years of the Revolution one of the most essential changes that occurred in the collective psyche of the wide ranks of new participants in the political life of Congress Poland. This authority collapsed in urban milieus much sooner than in rural areas. Moreover — in contrast to central Russia, workers in the Polish lands were deprived of any illusions concerning the person of the Tsar; the concept to refer to him as the highest instance must be counted among absolute exceptions. Of great significance is the fact that in comparison to the pre-revolutionary period, these changes embraced very wide ranks of the population, above all in the towns.

In the years of the Revolution in Congress Poland, new forms of the workers' collective behaviour took shape and later became a permanent element of the political culture of society as a whole. A massive political strike initiated by the workers at the threshold of the Revolution became popular as a form of collective political

¹⁷ S. Kłeniewicz, *Polska kultura polityczna w XIX wieku*, as above, pp. 150–151.

pressure, gaining support also in other social milieus (among the intelligentsia, petty-bourgeoisie and peasantry). It was already the first "general" strike in January 1905 which led political life out of the underground and widened the ranks of its participants. This strike saw the spontaneous birth of new half and fully open forms of collective political action (often initiated by the striking crowds) in the streets and squares of industrial and mining towns and settlements. Under this pressure the political life gained the characteristics of openness. A comparison suggests itself here with street demonstrations constituting the main form of the pressure "from below" in the countries of Western Europe during 19th c. democratic revolutions in France or Germany, or during the fight for the democratization of the right of vote in England in the first half of the 19th c. In the years 1905–1907 political pressure from the street in Congress Poland (and in Russia) frequently took similar forms, but the general political strike was an exception. This new form of pressure from the street reflected a new, in comparison to West-European revolutions, correlation of social forces, the decisive, massive participation of workers, who clearly demonstrated their sense of separate class identity and determination in their fight against the despotic power.

This signified a far-reaching democratization of political life. One can associate with it the rise of further new elements of political culture that developed in the Polish lands of the Russian partition at the threshold of the 20th c. Among them one should mention in the first place the speeded up polarization of political attitudes in the socially widened circles of participants in political life as well as the growing authority of the socialist party among them, and finally — the very rapid growth of the social role of the mass transmission of political information, both printed and oral.

As political life entered the streets, there emerged politico-organizational divisions which in the previous conspiratorial atmosphere could not have been clear to the average inhabitants even of big cities and industrial centres. This accelerated the differentiation of political attitudes, especially among the striking workers, and made them take open and immediate decisions, e.g. during street demonstrations and meetings, so numerous in the years of the Revolution.

The openness of the political options of the crowds gathering in the streets and squares was supported by adequate symbols.

Socialist demonstrations and meetings were accompanied by red flags, usually of small size, prepared by home methods by the inhabitants of working class districts. They often manifested also the name of the respective party, although all the socialist parties were still illegal. The demonstrators sometime waved also the Polish national flag: red with a white eagle; sometimes also religious emblems, mainly Catholic¹⁸.

The political differences between the demonstrators were manifested not only by the flags they carried, but also by collective revolutionary or religious songs and by political prints distributed in the streets, above all the press and leaflets issued by various parties and organizations. The need for an open manifestation of one's political beliefs became almost universal. It should be added that there was frequently a competition between the symbols of various political orientations among the demonstrators. However, despite sharp polemics between the representatives of various socialist parties in print and at mass meetings, in the streets under the red flag the workers generally demonstrated in unison, regardless of what party adherents succeeded — even for a while — in unfurling their flag. The rivalry between the flags became more frequent during the so-called "days of freedom" in the autumn of 1905, when the streets of cities and working class settlements saw — side by side with the red flags — the flags with a white eagle, hastily annexed by the National Workers' Union (NZR), called into existence in the summer of 1905 by the rightist National Democracy. The demonstrators tried to oppose them to the red flags.

Characteristic of the behaviour of workers' collectivities, apart from their attachment to symbols, was the great appeal of their catchy slogans and phrases, and their susceptibility to demagogy. This was a result of their small political knowledge and inability to think in political terms; this also favoured their mainly emotional and frequently superficial political commitment. Only mass meetings in factories, whose legalization was forced by the workers on the Tsarist authorities already at the beginning of the Revolution, provided occasion for more conscious and deliberate political options. Then various political

¹⁸ Thus e.g. on Dec. 10, 1905, in Pabianice during a workers' demonstration the flag of the 1863 uprising was carried ("Robotnik polski" № 2 — Feb. 8, 1906, p. 6).

programmes were confronted with one another and immediately it turned out that the workers did not show even a minimum tolerance of a different political programme. Political polemics at the meetings, even between socialists from different organizations, were treated by those gathered more like a sports contest than a discussion of programmes. Of more significance than the programme itself was frequently the speaker's authority and skill. This is testified by many recollections¹⁹.

Symptoms of intolerance and obduracy were very frequent: at workers' mass meetings in big factories and mines the representatives of parties whose sympathizers were in the minority were most often not allowed to take the floor²⁰. Attempts to introduce the custom of an open and free political polemics, made by some local socialist activists, seldom gained the support of wider ranks of workers. All the more so because the propaganda of the National Democracy, the National Workers' Union and Christian Workers' Associations declared point blank that public dispute was futile as a form of political struggle. Attempts were made to ruthlessly discriminate against socialists in workers' eyes and — up till the end of 1906, i.e. the "outbreak" of fratricidal fights in Łódź — it was openly postulated not to tolerate them at all.

There was a very strong inclination among workers in Congress Poland to apply fist law in political strife, although it varied from centre to centre (it was the strongest in Łódź and the Dąbrowa Basin). This kind of behaviour was especially manifest in cases of confrontation between workers-socialists and "nationalists" (those connected with the National Democracy, or the NZR) and it gathered strength since the late autumn of 1905.

The political struggle took very violent forms at mass meetings, factory rallies and street gatherings. Various forms of physical violence were resorted to, up to throwing political enemies by force out of factories, as well as many cases of beating.

¹⁹ E.g. AAN, Dossier № 4386/2/4 (Michał Ostrowski, *Mój pamiętnik*, fasc. III).

²⁰ Especially violent were polemics on the party or non-party character of trade unions, which arose at that time at the initiative of socialist parties, as well as on the workers' boycott of the elections to the Duma. At the turn of 1906 especially violent was the competition between socialist and the so-called "Polish" trade unions, organized by the NZR. See e.g. the supplement to "Górnik" № 26 of Jan. 12, 1906, as well as "Górnik" № 27 — Feb. 15, 1906.

They culminated in bloody fratricidal fights between the workers of various political orientations (Łódź at the turn of 1906).

Such behaviour was probably connected with the conscious adoption of the ruthlessness experienced in contacts with the Tsarist power. This, to a certain extent, also explains the motives of collective violence and ruthlessness towards the persecutors, e.g. the recurring cases of beating and disarming the specially zealous policemen, assaults on gendarmes, bloody settlements of accounts with factory informers ("spies"), summary judgement of thieves etc.²¹

The prevalence of the violent and spontaneous behaviour of new participants in the political life of Congress Poland was due not only to the emotional character of their commitment to public life, but foremostly to their lack of experience in organized and legal activity and the low level of their political knowledge. The road from the postulates to improve the conditions of work and existence to the discovery of a need for democratic freedoms and their constitutional guarantees was long and by no means straight.

It should also be added that the persecution by the Russian imperial apparatus, which gathered strength following 1906, was a serious threat to the openness of the activity of political parties and to the confrontation of various orientations, which achievements were won almost in the first days of the Revolution. Political disputes and inter-party strife gradually moved into the "vicarious" plane of educational organizations, some of which could continue their open, even legal, activity. In such conditions it became increasingly difficult for the average inhabitant of Congress Poland to decipher the actual political divisions.

The connection of the majority of Polish population with the Catholic Church was an essential factor that imprinted itself on

²¹ "Z pola walki" № 11 — Aug. 28, 1905; "Do walki" № 2 — Feb. 25, 1906, p. 7; see also: S. Pe s t k o w s k i, *Wspomnienia rewolucjonisty (A Revolutionary's Memoirs)*, Łódź 1963, p. 86. It is noteworthy that to these forms of action the workers were frequently encouraged by the local bodies such as the PPS (Polish Socialist Party) and the SDKPiL ("Do walki" № 2 — Feb. 25, 1906; "Górnik" № 27 — June 15, 1906, and № 28 — June 22, 1906; "Łódzianin" № 28 — Nov. 26, 1906). These phenomena have long been omitted by Polish historiography devoted to the 1905 Revolution in Congress Poland. At the beginning of the 1980s attention was drawn to them by Elżbieta Kaczyńska in her essays on the actions of "the crowd" in the years of the Revolution (e.g. *Nad historią masowych ruchów społecznych w Królestwie Polskim [On the History of Massive Social Movements in Congress Poland]*, "Więź" Y. XXVI 1983 №№ 301 and 302).

the shape of the political culture of Polish society, especially in the Russian and Prussian partitions. On the one hand — the involvement of the Catholic clergy in political life complicated the orientation of “the-man-in-the-street” in the different political currents and parties and made his conscious political options difficult. In Congress Poland, especially during the Revolution and in post-revolutionary years, it was the order of the day to use the church pulpit for various political interventions (e.g. attacking local socialists or peasant party members)²².

On the other hand — one can hardly overestimate the influence of the sense of national and religious identity, generally shared by the wide ranks of Polish population, on the shape of the political culture of the inhabitants of Congress Poland. And about 80% of the working population and even a larger percentage of peasants declared their allegiance to Catholicism²³.

The religious allegiance of those social milieus could not but leave its imprint on their political culture. One should not forget that in the pre-revolutionary period the main forms of expressing the impulse of protest — national, political, as well as social — were the rituals of collective religious life, above all connected to the Catholic tradition.

The revolutionary years did not carry in this respect any essential changes, despite the growing participation of ever wider social circles, and especially — the workers — in political life, despite the advancing degree of their organization as well as the growing prestige of socialist parties among them. Thus, e.g. the Mariawit movement (Catholic association, independent of Rome, established in 1893) and the creation of the Mariawit Church was a special kind of continuation of hitherto experiences in translating social and political protests and claims into the language of religion and in expressing collective strivings form. The social background of this movement consisted above all of the rural population, but to a large extent, also of workers²⁴.

²² “Kuznia” № 12, 1913, pp. 382–383. By the way the engagement of religious institutions in the shaping of the political opinion of wide circles of believers was not confined to the actions of the Catholic clergy. This factor also played an important role in the shaping of the political culture of Jewish communities.

²³ A. Żarnowska, *Religion and Politics: Polish Workers c. 1900*, “Social History” vol. 16 № 3 1991, pp. 302–303.

²⁴ Tadeusz Krawczak, *Revolucja 1905–1907 a życie społeczno-religijne. Ruch mariawitów (The 1905–1907 Revolution and Socio-Religious Life. The Mariawit*

In the years of the Revolution, and especially at the first stage of its development, during street demonstrations in the biggest cities, religious symbols and songs happened to be used — side by side with the generally dominating red flag and revolutionary songs. For the participants in demonstrations churches frequently became a shelter from the salvos and charges of Cossacks at the crowds.

In workers' agglomerations, especially in large cities, the authority of the priest was certainly not so unquestionable as in rural communities. At the turn of the 19th c., however, it was still quite strong, also in political respects — in accordance with the rural tradition to which a large part of urban working class population was still strongly attached. In the years 1905–1907 this authority was somewhat undermined, but beginning with 1907 the Church systematically and energetically restored its influence on the working population. She succeeded in this in the first place outside of Warsaw and other large towns.

Although in 1905 and the years that followed the Russian authorities tried to restrict the openness of political life, forced on them by the pressure of revolting crowds, the need for getting organized was growing almost in all social and occupational milieus, crossing the barriers of sex and age. This phenomenon was most widespread among the manual workers, assistants and lower white-collar workers in industry, crafts, commerce, transport and communication, services etc., as well as among university and secondary school students and professionals²⁵.

This very important, new element of political culture heralded the advancement of the democratization of political life. All the more so, because the strivings for getting organized were not confined to the male workers; although, beyond doubt, they were taken up sooner among males who showed a clearer tendency to be politically committed.

This rush to get organized soon helped to increase the authority of political parties. This concerned above all socialist parties, but also the National Democracy, the National Workers'

Movement), in: *Spółeczeństwo i polityka*, as above, pp. 115–136.

²⁵ The fragmentary character of accounts made by the then parties and occupational, educational and other organizations as well as the very bad condition of preservation of these sources makes it impossible to reconstruct precisely the degree of engagement of various social milieus in organizational and political structures.

Union (NZR) and the newly-arisen in revolutionary years — Christian Workers' Associations. The numerical strength of socialist parties in Congress Poland in the middle of 1906 can be estimated at about 100 thous. members (besides the male and female sympathizers, among the latter, many housewives). Previous historical research provides closer estimates and studies only of the extent of the organization of male-workers. So one can roughly assume that the above-mentioned numbers of members of socialist parties related to about 15% of the total of working people (outside of farming), the large majority of whom were working in industry, building, transport, services etc. Similarly, it can be estimated that at the same time the non-socialist organizations brought together respectively only 6% of the total of workers in these fields. At the turn of 1906 the NZR and Christian Associations brought together jointly less than 50 thous. people²⁶. One should also remember that both in Congress Poland and the whole of the Russian empire the socialist movement, even during the Revolution, could not operate legally. Yet it seems that the formal illegality of those parties had little influence on the workers' accession to them; even in the years of the Revolution they did not always realize that these parties were illegal.

There can be no doubt that during the Revolution, in comparison to other milieus of Congress Poland, the workers' community was politically the most organized. This phenomenon must certainly be acknowledged as an essential element of the modernization of political culture in the Russian partition.

However, a knowledge of the rules of legal political life and civil rights in the wide circles of society, even in towns, was still very small and superficial. The workers generally underestimated the significance of legal institutions and did not associate them with their own interests. Proof of this is the fact that in 1907, when the Revolution was breaking down, the wide ranks of workers promptly resigned from defending general civil rights and showed much more determination in their fight for maintaining

²⁶ A. Żarnowska, *Geneza rozłamu w Polskiej Partii Socjalistycznej (1904–1906)* (*The Origin of the Split of the Polish Socialist Party, 1904–1906*), Warszawa 1965, pp. 9–54; the same author, *Rewolucja 1905–1907 a kultura polityczna społeczeństwa Królestwa Polskiego* (*The 1905–1907 Revolution and the Political Culture of Society in Congress Poland*), in: *Spółczesność i polityka — dorastanie do demokracji*, as above, p. 2.

their economic achievements in factories and mines²⁷. This does not mean that they completely stopped striving to gain the legal possibilities of action. In local workers' communities such strivings were quite strong, and they often appeared spontaneously, not only in individual but also collective actions, and became consolidated towards the end of the Revolution and in post-revolutionary years²⁸.

The intensity of the strivings to keep up openness and legality can be treated as a symptom of the modernization of political culture in Congress Poland under the influence of revolutionary experiences of mass demonstrations in the years 1905, 1906 and the next. This, however, does not change the fact that the low level of political knowledge of most workers in Congress Poland led above all to the prevalence of their spontaneous armed reactions, and to their falling from extreme legalism to extreme terrorism.

The poor orientation of the average, also urban inhabitant of Congress Poland, in the problems of contemporary political life was closely connected to the backwardness of the mass media in the whole of the Russian empire. In comparison to other European countries, information in Congress Poland was impeded by systemic conditions, the lack of democratic freedoms and the policy of Russianization. This contributed to the widespread illiteracy and low level of education among wide ranks of population in towns, and still wider in the countryside.

As a consequence, the role of printed information in public life was very limited. The years of the Revolution brought about a considerable increase in the role of mass political information both printed and oral. This was a great breakthrough for the workers' milieu. It was determined both by the action, initiated by the leftist and liberal intelligentsia, of teaching adult illiterates, and by the workers' movement of self-education and readership, as well as — a short-lived possibility of open circulation of political prints. Of no less significance was a multiple increase of the publishing activity of parties and organizations²⁹.

²⁷ Tarski [Tadeusz Rechnewski], *Po wyborach w Wilnie i w Warszawie (After the Elections in Wilno and Warsaw)*, "Wiedza" 1907, vol. II, p. 515.

²⁸ Jarosław Paskudzik, *Postawy i zachowania polityczne robotników w Królestwie Polskim w latach 1908–1914 (Workers' Political Attitudes and Behaviour in Congress Poland in the Years 1908–1914)*, in: *Spółczesność i polityka — dorastanie do demokracji*, as above, p. 52.

Apart from the press, of great significance for the formation of political knowledge and models of political attitudes became in revolutionary years such forms of printed information and political propaganda as, in the first place, leaflets and appeals as well as slogans on the flags carried during street demonstrations, public gatherings etc.³⁰ Nevertheless, the oral transmission of information did not lose any of its significance.

This was favoured by the revolutionary atmosphere, the spontaneous development of a half-open, collective public life. As a result, among the political authorities valued by the widening circles of participants in political life, especially among the workers, the appeal was growing of the meeting orator, who overshadowed the hitherto authority of conspirators (with the exception of armed fighters).

Apart from the new political attitudes and new methods of action analysed above, the years of the 1905–1907 Revolution also gave rise to other new elements of political culture in Congress Poland: the new norms of collective life, new personal models. Many of them crystallized in the working class milieu.

It cannot be doubted that in the years of the Revolution, Congress Poland was the scene of a far-reaching democratization of political life, which was most intensive in working class circles. The rise of wide-spread public opinion as well as the spread, unusual in the then Europe, of the scope of organized political life (within parties, trade unions, associations, election campaigns, mass manifestations calling for political freedoms and national liberty etc.), all this happened mainly due to the massive commitment of working class population.

In the years of the Revolution the active participants in political life became a large stratum within the working class. Because of their outstanding standard of political awareness and

²⁹ A. Żarnowska, *Revolucja 1905–1907 a kultura polityczna robotników* (*The 1905–1907 Revolution and the Political Culture of Workers*), in: *Spółeczeństwo i polityka*, as above, p. 27.

³⁰ Jerzy Myśliński, *Rola prasy w kształtowaniu kultury politycznej na początku XX wieku* (*The Role of the Press in Shaping Political Culture at the Beginning of the 20th c.*), in: *Spółeczeństwo i polityka*, as above, pp. 137–146; Andrzej Chwałba, *Rola socjalistycznych druków ulotnych w kształtowaniu wiedzy i postaw politycznych robotników w dobie rewolucji 1905–1907* (*The Role of Socialist Leaflets in Shaping the Political Knowledge and Attitudes of Workers During the 1905–1907 Revolution*), *ibid.*, pp. 161–172; Andrzej Biernat, *U progu umasowienia obiegu informacji* (*On the Verge of Mass Circulation of Information*), *ibid.*, pp. 185–188.

knowledge, they sometimes called by their contemporaries "the working class intelligentsia"³¹.

However, an average male worker (and all the more a female) in Congress Poland still represented a low level of political knowledge and had no experience of institutionalized, open political life. The attitudes and behaviour of the majority of workers (regardless of sex) even in large centres, were above all shaped by emotions. They showed little discipline and their political options were frequently accidental. In workers' communities almost exclusively males were organized in political parties; females were rather "sympathizers", few of them ventured an accession to an organization, even if only connected to their trade.

It should be added that regardless of sex the commitment of the working class population to organized forms of political life as a rule fluctuated, depending on the economic situation and the intensity of repressions, and the affiliation to a political or trade organization was treated pragmatically³². Jan Władysław Dawid maintains that in the years of the Revolution only "the first obstacles" were broken and "the masses were awakened to the longing for a better life and developed a sense of will and stamina for this life"³³.

Nevertheless this was an enduring achievement. The fact was that the elitism of political life had been questioned. The hitherto social barriers that excluded "unenlightened strata" from political life had been definitely broken. On the other hand, the barriers of sex, consolidated by tradition, were infringed only to a minimal degree. Nevertheless, such forms of collective political life as e.g. spontaneous mass demonstrations which spread precisely due to the commitment of working class communities, helped to break those barriers more than other forms of political action.

(Translated by Agnieszka Kreczmar)

³¹ Tarski [Tadeusz Rechiniewski], *Ujemne i dodatnie objawy w ruchu zawodowym (Negative and Positive Symptoms of the Trade Union Movement)*, "Wiedza" 1907, vol. I, p. 261.

³² E.g. Tarski, as above, p. 261; see also: "Wiedza" 1907, vol. I, p. 207 as well as "Życie Robotnicze" № 37, Mar. 21, 1908.

³³ J. W. Dawid, *Najbliższe zadania (The Immediate Tasks)*, "Przegląd Społeczny" № 11, Mar. 16, 1907, pp. 158–159.