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THE POLISH INTELLIGENTSIA IN THE YEARS 1864–1918

The middle 1860s were an important turning-point in the history of the Polish nation, especially that of its educated elites. The tragic defeat of the January Uprising (1863–4) was followed by a period of heavy political repressions, profound social changes, economic challenges and intellectual revaluations. This period faced the Polish intellectual elites with the greatest challenges in their history and at the same time it began the decades when this stratum enjoyed a hitherto unknown social prestige. This was a time when the intelligentsia set itself tasks to which it could not aspire ever after.

The people in the area within Russian partition underwent brutal repressions that affected not only the intellectual elite, but society as a whole. The human losses suffered in insurgent battles and summary executions were augmented by ensuing deportations to Siberia, the Caucasus and into the Russian Empire, which embraced about 40,000 insurgents and members of their families, eliminating them for many years, sometimes for ever, from the country's life. Arrests and deportations were accompanied by confiscations of property. It is very hard to establish the percentage of the intelligentsia among the deportees (the Russian sources did not distinguish this social category), but certainly they included the most active individuals, those most conscious of and dedicated to the idea of a prompt reconstruction of independent Poland.

Soon after the downfall of the January Uprising the Russians started a process of the liquidation of the separate character of Congress Poland. They abolished the institutions of central

administration, assimilating them into the structures of the Russian Empire, and slowly eliminated the Polish language from public life and education. In 1869 they closed down the Main School and replaced it by the Imperial Warsaw University with Russian as the language of instruction; at the same time their language was introduced to high schools, and after 1871 also to elementary schools. The very name 'Polish Kingdom' was avoided, and was replaced by 'The Vistula Country'.

The lands directly incorporated into Russia after 1795 did not experience such structural changes, for they were already an integral part of the Russian state; however, the post-uprising repressions concerned here the Polish language, which was henceforward completely eliminated from all spheres of public life.

At the same time the Austrian partition underwent an equally important process, but going in a reverse direction. As a result of far-reaching reforms of the whole Habsburg Monarchy at the turn of the 1860s Polish Galicia gained an autonomy of its provincial administration, and the public offices found themselves mainly in Polish hands. The situation in the Prussian partition was determined by the rise of the Hohenzollern German Empire in 1871, whose constitution transformed the Reich into a union country with the King of Prussia as the German Emperor. The Polish lands, however, were still governed by the Prussian Constitution of 1848.

The different legal status and possibilities of development of those four sectors entailed a different situation of the professional intelligentsia. Especially strong differences could be observed in the access of educated Poles to the organs of state administration of Russia, Austro-Hungary and Prussia. In the Russian partition these possibilities were gradually limited by the above-mentioned institutional changes, elimination of the Polish language and a tendency to replace Polish officials by Russians. However, the civil services in Congress Poland had never been de-Polonized completely. Generally Poles held lower-level offices and their promotion was retarded.

They also faced little chance for making a career in public educational and learned institutes. The closing of Warsaw's Main School signified a loss of many chairs that provided the basic means of living for a considerable group of scholars and scientists; it also considerably impeded the education of their subsequent

generations. Only a small group of Polish professors could continue their work in the Russian University. With time, and the natural departure of the older generation of scholars, the number of chairs held by Poles was continually diminishing. Those who departed were generally replaced by Russians, there were only few cases where Poles held independent posts, for to obtain them one had to provide a certificate of political loyalty, use the influence of high-placed persons and also accept the principles imposed by the system. The latter were loathed by many scholars, especially representatives of the humanities, who worked in Polish.

As a result the university saw a speedy and almost dramatic shrinking of the Polish staff: in 1870 there were thirty six Polish scholars in independent posts, twenty years later — fourteen, and in 1910 — only one.¹ The chances for gaining a post in state secondary schools were not better, firstly because there the language of instruction was also Russian, secondly because such schools were few (they could be found only in larger urban centres and *guberniya* towns). In this situation many scholars and pedagogues in Congress Poland found the basis of living mainly in private educational institutions and schools, learned journals and social institutions extending patronage over science, which will be discussed later on.

In the western *guberniyas* of the Russian Empire almost all the possibilities of a public career were (at least until 1905) closed to the Poles. Their access to higher public offices became extremely difficult, and there were no Polish centres that could accept academics or teachers. The career of the intelligentsia was additionally undermined by the elimination of Polish from public life since — in contrast to Polish Kingdom — all the Polish publishing houses, newspapers and theatres were closed down, and there was a strict prohibition of Polish books and pamphlets.

In the Prussian partition, the access of Poles to state posts was also very difficult, and largely depended on the policy of the state (especially during the *Kulturkampf* many Polish teachers and officials were removed or left their posts of their free will). There was no institution of higher education in this region. The influx of Polish teachers (limited as it was) to secondary and

¹ Cf. Bohdan Suchodolski (ed.), *Historia nauki polskiej, iv: 1863–1918*, ed. Zofia Skubała-Tokarska, pt. 1 (Wrocław, 1987).

elementary schools almost completely stopped after 1888 when they were forced to take an oath they would educate children in the spirit of German ideals and especially those of loyalty to their German Emperor and fatherland. Throughout this period the Poles were represented in the Landtag, however, in the competition for parliamentary career the representatives of the intelligentsia usually lost to the Catholic landlords and clergy.² Finally, Poznań and the Prussian partition — the scene of continual legal and economic strife between the Polish and German elements — in the second half of the 19th and at the beginning of the 20th centuries ceased to be an important centre on the intellectual map of divided Poland. In Greater Poland — and only there within the whole Prussian partition — an effective struggle was carried on for the state of Polish possessions and the right of using national symbols,³ but this was done at the cost of scholarly and literary work.

In this context, the situation of autonomous Galicia was especially advantageous. With time, the institutions of public life underwent there an increasing Polonization. Here, opportunities of advancement were open to Poles both in politics, the army, self-government, science and education. Polish politicians and civil servants could count on a career both in Galician organs, with the Home Parliament at the head, and in the all-country institutions of the Habsburg Monarchy. While the top posts were mainly reserved for the politicians derived from the aristocratic, most influential families of Galicia, the Polish officials in the ministries, the members of the officers' staff and diplomatic corps were recruited from various, generally petty gentry and intelligentsia milieus. In Galicia itself, the career of a civil servant was most desirable and willingly chosen by the majority of

² I consciously avoid answering the question whether the Catholic clergy as well as the Poles—officers of the partitioners' armies and male and female teachers of elementary schools should be treated as the 19th century Polish intelligentsia. Catholic priests were well-educated and in their parishes they frequently assumed the role of leaders of the local community. Generally, however (especially in the Prussian and Russian partitions), they were distinguished by their anti-intellectual posture and identified the characteristics of the intelligentsia with menace to the faith which they treated as the mainstay of true Polishness.

³ Cf. e.g. Ewa Skorupa, *Polskie symbole kulturowe przed sądem pruskim 1817–1914* (Kraków, 2004).

young, educated people, for it guaranteed a stable, though not very high income.

Also the teaching personnel of Galicia, who remained under the control of the Home School Council established in 1867, was mostly composed of Polish intellectuals and representatives of the Polish intelligentsia. The period of autonomy saw a considerable growth both of the numbers and standard of state secondary schools. The professorial staff, compared with other partitions, was here the best, of a European standard. High schools in larger cities, especially Lwów and Cracow, were frequently important scientific centres, and their teachers, due to their interests, remained in close contact with the university staff.

Cracow and Lwów were also the only centres in the Polish lands which could boast of Polish universities. The second half of the 19th century saw their dynamic development as well as an increasing autonomy and Polonization. From 1870 onwards Polish was the only language used at the Jagiellonian University, and next year in Lwów lectures started to be delivered in two languages: Polish and Ukrainian. The regulation of 1873, concerning the organization of the academic system, confirmed the extensive power of University Senates and Rectors; this was followed by the growth of the number of departments, students and professors.

The influence of both the learned institutes extended over all the three partitions, from which they recruited both students and professors. At the turn of the 19th and the 20th centuries nearly one third of the professors of the Jagiellonian University came from the Russian and Prussian partitions. Among the full, associate and assistant professors of the Philosophical Department of Lwów University, twenty three came from Galicia (61.5 per cent), ten (25.5 per cent) from the Russian partition, four (10 per cent) from the Prussian partition and two from the Habsburg Empire outside of Galicia.⁴ Consequently, the Galician universities not only provided education to young people and chairs to professors from all of Poland, but also largely helped to sustain the contacts and unity of the Polish learned milieus above partition divisions.

⁴ Cf. Ludwik Finkel, Stanisław Starzyński, *Historia Uniwersytetu Lwowskiego* (Lwów, 1894).

The Academy of Learning, inaugurated in 1873 on the basis of the Cracow Learned Society, also extended its influence over all of Poland. Apart from the encouragement of research, it set itself the aim of representing Polish science and scholarship abroad, hence one of its chief tasks was organizing congresses in Galicia and research expeditions abroad, and maintaining its scientific stations in Rome and Paris. In these actions it found the support of the Ossoliński National Institute, called into being in Lwów in 1827; in the second half of the 19th century, Ossolineum library and publishing houses were important centres of the all-Polish scientific movement.

The tendency to restrain the access of Poles to state posts, visible everywhere outside Galicia, did not find a counterbalance in the chances created for the Polish intelligentsia by the developing industry and private banking. The second half of the 19th century was a period of industrialization, but this process never embraced the whole country, or even the majority of the Polish lands, but only some enclaves. Many factors contributed to this situation. In the first place, in a poor and backward country investments were made mostly with the use of foreign capital which, together with the indispensable funds brought to Poland foreign professionals, far better educated and, from the point of view of their employers, more trustworthy than the local technical intelligentsia. Secondly, the conditions of social development in the Polish lands and those that aspired to be Polish meant that the demand for professionals found no equivalent in their supply. In the most industrialized areas — such as Lodz and its satellite towns, or Prussian Silesia — the Polish intelligentsia did not exist at all, or it was very weak and not interested in strictly industrial activity. On the other hand, in the areas where the intelligentsia was strong both in influence and numbers — such as Galicia — the underdeveloped industry could not provide them with a good labour market.

The only centre where demand could, at least partly, find sufficient supply was Warsaw, however, here the chances for professional careers in private enterprises could not recompense the lack of access to state posts. About 1870 only 15 per cent of the intelligentsia found employment in communication, industry, commerce and private banks. Even several decades later this

proportion did not radically change, since banks and private enterprises were not able to provide jobs for thousands of professionals who could not find them or means of living in the state institutions that either did not exist, or were closed to the Poles. At the beginning of the 20th century, the eastern borderland of the old Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth was its only part where considerable numbers of the professional intelligentsia could use their talents and work in the productive sphere — industry, building and communication. The only chance of finding employment and source of income within the Russian Empire was provided there to the Polish engineers, architects, technicians, commercial dealers and bank clerks by capitalist enterprises — whether dominated by corporate, individual private, or Russian state capital. The contribution of Polish professionals to the development of civilization in the Russian Empire was often appreciated by their compatriots (and sometimes also foreigners), but part of the opinion accused them of serving the foreign Power.

The differences between the three partitions presented above concerned doctors, lawyers, publishers, journalists or artists to a lesser extent. Of course, the possibility of performing professions that required the use of the native language was affected by the extent of liberalization of the partitioners' policy concerning the Polish language and culture. However, in all the three partitions the labour market and the necessity to gain clients were the main factors that shaped the numbers and the material status of the representatives of those professions.

Nearly all the commentators of the Polish social life of the second half of the 19th century observed the phenomenon of 'overproduction' of the intelligentsia in relation to the needs of society; this especially affected the professionals whose survival depended on competition and skill of finding clients. Artists, men of letters, publishers, art gallery owners, even scholars, deprived of state support, devoted much of their time and energy to finding patrons that could finance their projects. In the Polish society, whose means were small, but aesthetic and spiritual aspirations high, these attempts were seldom crowned with success. The phenomenon of private patronage was most developed in Galicia and Congress Poland, especially Warsaw; the situation was the worst in the Prussian partition, and as a result Polish artists were

few. Similar difficulties in finding employers were encountered by male and female private teachers, and even physicians, who traditionally enjoyed high social prestige. As a result of the growing numbers of qualified doctors on the one hand, and low hygienic expectations and civilization needs of society on the other, at the turn of the 20th century we could face a paradox: nearly all the observers unanimously noted a catastrophic state of health, especially among the peasants, nevertheless, the doctors were not able to strike gold. The rural population had more confidence in cheap medical assistants, midwives and quack doctors, while in big towns better practices were reserved for the well-known professors who frequently belonged to the financial — and intellectual — elite of their town and the whole country. Even a small increase in the numbers of doctors, as well as the representatives of the young generation of the intelligentsia, could not find an outlet in satisfying the needs which, although apparently obvious, were not realized by the uneducated and poor population. Throughout the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century the Polish intelligentsia was grappling with the problem of 'the surplus of educated people in a country of illiterates'.⁵ The 'overproduction' of the intelligentsia was characteristic not only of Poland; the phenomenon had an all-European extent and affected especially the societies of central and eastern part of the Continent, that were generally at a similar stage of development.⁶

This question was especially important in the face of three phenomena of social life that were gathering strength towards the end of the 19th century — the pauperization of the gentry, and emancipation of women and Jews. All the three groups enriched the ranks of the professional intelligentsia, a fact which to a large extent exacerbated the tensions indicated above; the influx of people from these groups faced the milieu of the intelligentsia with a necessity of solving new questions, both of material and intellectual nature. This challenge was taken up by the generation who reached maturity after the downfall of the January Uprising, and above all by two very active communities: the Warsaw

⁵ Jerzy Jedlicki, 'Kwestia nadprodukcji inteligencji w Królestwie Polskim po powstaniu styczniowym', in Ryszarda Czepulis-Rastenis (ed.), *Inteligencja polska pod zaborami. Studia* (Warszawa, 1978), 22.

⁶ Cf. Tibor Hajdu, 'Konsekwencje wzrostu liczbowego inteligencji przed i po pierwszej wojnie światowej', *Kwartalnik Historyczny*, xcv, 4 (1988), 155–78.

positivists and a group of scholars and politicians from the so-called Cracow historical school.

The experience of the downfall of the January Uprising was one of the thresholds in the history of the Polish nation, and especially of its intellectual elites. For them the trauma of 1863 was almost paralyzing. This experience gave rise to many formulations, many words, many well thought-out programmes, sensible warnings and even more cool, common-sense recommendations. However, this experience, deeply affecting the sensitivity of individuals and embracing at least one generation, in fact boiled down to one crucial, painful and concrete question: what can a small nation, which had recently been made aware of its unimportance by its larger neighbours, do in order to survive physically and retain its small, individual identity? Can this identity be retained in face of the actions of efficient state apparatuses of partitioning powers? Is the fight for retaining it worth the cost of repressions that the Poles had suffered as a reprisal for the January Uprising?

The Polish intelligentsia was not prepared for this question either by the experience of partitions, or the lessons gained from the earlier failed 19th century risings in search of the country's independence. What testifies best to the dimensions of this trauma and the sense of its power is the fact that those who felt it most acutely spoke out about it most loudly: let us mention the writer and publicist Aleksander Głowacki (pseudonym Bolesław Prus), novelist Eliza Orzeszkowa, literary critic Piotr Chmielowski or publicist Aleksander Świętochowski, later called the pope of Polish positivism. The brutality of this question posed to everybody by history — or painfully realized by everybody himself — meant that the answers to it were vague, unconvincing, and frequently inconsistent. And yet all those people not only tried to rationalize the reality in which they had to live, but also to build a positive programme, a scenario of going out of the darkness towards the future; in spite of the existing conditions, and in spite of themselves, of the shocking pictures of the defeat that they could not forget.

The first voices calling for settling accounts with the past came from Galicia, which, although not the scene of insurgent battles, was nevertheless an important political, material and human hinterland for this movement. In 1866 a group of the ex-activists of the

insurgent Right — the historian Józef Szujski, publicists Ludwik Wodzicki and Stanisław Koźmian, and art historian Stanisław Tarnowski — founded a periodical *Przegląd Polski* in Cracow. Five years later they authored the pamphlet *Teka Stańczyka*, aimed against the traditional way of thinking of Poland, her past and future, now, in their opinion, useless. Their most important message was condemnation of the traditionally understood gentry liberty as a factor that had led to the catastrophe of the partitions, and in the 19th century pushed the Poles to unreasonable and hopeless armed risings. The most renowned achievement of the Cracow school was the book *Dzieje Polski w zarysie* [An Outline of Polish History] by Michał Bobrzyński (1879). Its theses (which became the subject of violent polemics) were the bravest attempt in Polish historiography at fighting against its stereotypes that encouraged the Poles by seeking in their past causes for pride and an easy justification of defeats.

In the same 1866 in Warsaw, where the trials of the participants in the January Uprising were still going on, *Przegląd Tygodniowy* was established, a periodical bringing together a group of young people, called ‘Warsaw positivists’. The journal was meant to be a severe judge of national vices, a diagnostician of Polish backwardness and obscurantism, a critic of the thoughtless, self-satisfied journalistic milieu; it published the most important positivist manifestoes, generally formulated by Aleksander Świętochowski. *Przegląd* turned out to be the most important organ of the so-called ‘young Warsaw press’ of the turn of the 1860s and the beginning of the 1870s, but the positivist programme also inspired editors of other journals.

The diagnosis given by the young positivists to their nation about 1870 almost called into question the very sense of going through a treatment. Poles in the Russian partition, that is the largest and most populous part of the Polish lands, had suffered a painful military and political defeat in their last battle for independence; opinion sometimes was held that this was also a moral defeat, and only the later appearance of some historical and literary texts, with Eliza Orzeszkowa’s *Gloria victis* at the head, was to change this conviction. The sense of a total defeat was deepened by the liquidation of the structures of Congress Kingdom, the elimination of the Polish element from public life,

as well as the violent reconstruction of the social system of the country. The enfranchisement reform in the Russian partition changed ownership relations in the country almost overnight, infringing the material basis of existence of the landlords, and introducing equal rights for them and the peasants who were now told to decide the fate of the rural community at the level of the commune; it did not, however, remove the age-long arrears in the sphere of enlightenment, or the sense of the upper classes' responsibility for their country.

At the same time the Polish lands — especially the territory of the ex-Congress Kingdom — saw a dynamic and expanding development of modern economic relations. Great capital (mostly of non-Polish origin) dictated the pace and standard of existence of crowds of its employees, within one generation there arose and developed not only factories or industrial districts, but also big cities (such as Lodz, Białystok or Częstochowa). Simultaneously on the western and eastern fringes of the Polish cultural community, Polishness was withdrawing under the pressure of the German and Russian elements, augmented by the actions of the partitioners. In respect of its level of civilization the distance between Poland and the most developed nations of Western Europe was growing. The Polish intellectual elites, however, seemed not to notice this state of affairs, immersed in thoughtless self-satisfaction and the illusive sense of security. Traditionally thinking (or — in the opinion of Świętochowski and some others — thoughtless) people strove to retain the outlived patterns of social structure, family, educational methods, literature or religiousness in an era where social phenomena of a new quality were bound to blow up the old scheme of things.

The young positivists enriched these observations by thoughts found in the writings of Western scholars and philosophers, especially English. Above all they appreciated the works of the historian of culture and sociologist Henry Thomas Buckle and Herbert Spencer. West-European positivism was never transplanted onto the Polish ground in its pure form; Warsaw thinkers confronted the ideas borrowed from the West with Polish realities, and modified them for Polish needs. However, the conviction borrowed from Spencer that 'society, or in fact a nation, is a living

organism' (Prus), lay at the foundations of the programme of reforms they proposed.

Its first point was the statement that the Polish nation had no adequate physical, material and moral power to hope for a speedy reconstruction of its own state. Even if the positivists did not eliminate the hope for independence completely, they at least removed it to the distant future; the present was to be filled by work on strengthening the forces of the nation in all domains of material and spiritual life. Only such sustained, collective work could remove from the Poles the threat of their disintegration, of being irreversibly dissolved in the communities of the partitioning powers.

One can easily understand — wrote Bolesław Prus — that one of the causes of the defeats we had suffered was a lack of harmony between our powers and our designs, and it is a terrible error not to realize one's own weakness, and our penance is very severe. So today, taught by experience, let us change our system and limit our plans and works to the small circle of everyday relations. According to the general order of Nature only the strong ones have a right to speak and a right of influence, and those who do not understand this rule and aspire to high positions without suitable qualifications may only arouse laughter and contempt, while if we reconcile ourselves to our fate with manliness, we may at least save our dignity.⁷

The main advice derived from this statement was the watchword of 'organic work'. Such advice had certainly been considered many times before and realized in various districts of divided Poland, especially its Prussian partition. However, the Warsaw positivists derived it from careful observation and a coherent intellectual programme. Poland of the second half of the 19th century was a country of great civilization arrears, which resulted not only and not mainly from her political situation but from the heritage of the past and the indifference of the Polish elites. The positivists appealed for continuous, everyday deliberate effort aimed on the one hand at the development of Polish industry and agriculture, at increasing savings and accumulating capital, and on the other they called for spreading enlightenment among the poorest strata, for the moral education of society, for propagating hygienic

⁷ Bolesław Prus, 'Nasze grzechy', *Opiekun Domowy*, 22 (1872).

principles, including the organization of children's summer camps, financing free milk for infants, or even inculcating the habit of washing hands before meals and taking a weekly bath. In order to take up such an effort and to sustain it, the Polish intelligentsia should reconstruct the set of its own needs, priorities and habits, concentrating themselves on the tasks that were traditionally regarded as less important and giving less satisfaction. For it was so that the Polish patriot — like the Prince in Prus's *Lalka* [The Doll], one of the most important novels of its time — had always 'felt, thought, yearned and grieved for millions. He had never done anything useful. He thought that continual fretting about the whole country was far more valuable than wiping the nose of a grubby child'.⁸

The old system of values was the cause of the civilizational gap that throughout the 19th century was continually growing and divided Poland from Western Europe. The Poles, having found an easy way of improving their self-image by trivial romantic and Messianic concepts, were falling more and more behind the achievements of the 19th century, an era elsewhere of unprecedented social changes, technological progress and development of science. The positivists proposed their diagnosis without any anaesthetics; they were also the first to formulate the postulate — frequently taken up later on — of breaking down the doors to Europe and thus increasing the mental and creative powers of the nation so as to remove the existing disproportions.

The Warsaw positivists, in contrast to the conservatives of Galician origin, considered the inequality in social relations as the heaviest burden of the Polish past and present. From the beginning of the 19th century, the crucial question for the self-determination of the intelligentsia was their attitude to the gentry and the gentry tradition; they determined their own system of values by accepting or rejecting various elements of the historical heritage. This was also the area where the differences in their world outlook appeared most distinctly. For the representatives of the moderate wing, such as writer Henryk Sienkiewicz, the tradition of the Polish gentry, their sense of responsibility for their country and readiness to sacrifice a lot for the common weal was the basic element of national identity; Sienkiewicz gave

⁸ *Idem*, *The Doll*, tr. David Welsh (New York, 1993), 161.

best expression to this conviction in his extremely popular novel *Ogniem i mieczem* [With Fire and Sword] (1883–4). The most radical positivists, on the other hand, such as Aleksander Świętochowski, treated the ‘caste prejudice’ inherited from the Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth as a painful limitation, which should be completely rejected so as to build on the Vistula a modern, equitable and enlightened society.

The critical reflection of the Warsaw positivists also focussed on the significance of the Catholic Church for the history of Poland, and generally, the role of religion in the reality of the second half of the 19th century. People of their mental formation, who gained their education from Western scholars (and especially Ernest Renan’s *The Life of Jesus* of 1863), had no doubts about the possibility of a scientific description of the world; science was for them not only a guarantee of the development of societies’ civilization, but also a key to satisfying all the metaphysical yearnings and fears of human individuals. Science was not to be restrained or stopped by any taboos imposed by institutionalized religion.

Above all things you worship — wrote Świętochowski — hold truth, regardless of its source and of the habits it may violate in you. Knowledge is the greatest power, the highest dignity, it will make you happy, give satisfaction, prosperity and make you great, famous, wise and honest.⁹

Religion was the area where the differences between various partitions, especially the dichotomy between Galicia — with Cracow at the head — and Congress Poland — with Warsaw, appeared most strongly. Until the beginning of the 20th century the Galician intellectual elites never proposed a programme that would be as openly critical of the Polish model of religiousness, or religion as such. The reason was the power and stability of the ecclesiastical structures of Cracow, the social structure of this city, where the aristocracy and Catholic clergy traditionally held a high position, and finally the relatively high intellectual standards of the latter, testified by their participation in the majority of intellectual debates held in Galicia. This was manifested in the monthly *Przegląd Powszechny*, published by the Jesuits since

⁹ Aleksander Świętochowski, ‘Katechizm rodzinny’, *Przegląd Tygodniowy*, 40 (1873).

1884, which did not avoid controversial subjects and opened its columns to authors of various world outlooks and from various paths of life.

In the Russian partition the situation of the Catholic clergy was quite different, for here, in view of the repressive policy of the state, the Church had to fight strongly for retaining the area of its power; as a result it saw as its real threat not only the actions of the Russian authorities and the Orthodox religion supported by them, but also the laicized intelligentsia, and in the later period all formations of a leftist character.

The kind of Church — uneducated, obscurant, parochial, which sanctioned with its authority practices and beliefs that verged on superstition and witchcraft — became an obvious target of attack of the Warsaw positivists, who propagated the liquidation of age-long backwardness and a necessity of Poland's joining the 19th century family of enlightened nations. Even in this sphere, however, the differences between the programme declared and the choices of the leading representatives of the trend were large. A steadfast consistency was exhibited by the 'pope of positivism', Świętochowski, who kept repeating the same anticlerical, sometimes very emotional arguments both in *Przegląd Tygodniowy* and as a columnist of *Prawda* (established in 1881). His contemporaries criticized not so much the Church itself and the actions of its priests, as the form of Polish religiousness, shaped — as many other domains of collective life — in the shade of the catastrophe of the state and the prolonged bondage of the country.

People went to church as if to a spectacle — wrote Bolesław Prus at the beginning of the 20th century — they prayed like Tibetan prayer-wheels, consoling themselves that confession would settle all the informalities of life; they hated heretics and sceptics, and demanded from God settling all their needs: family, hygienic, economic and political. The Lord God was obliged to give them health and property, they hoped that the Lord God would try and win the freedom for their *chosen* nation [emphasized by Prus].¹⁰

It can be treated as the paradox of Polish positivism that the readers of the most popular series of novels of the era, Sienkiewicz's

¹⁰ Bolesław Prus, 'Kronika tygodniowa', *Tygodnik Ilustrowany*, 44 (1906).

Trilogy, could find there the affirmation of this model, which aroused so much criticism. The stereotype of a Catholic Pole owes as much to Sienkiewicz's creation as to the experiences of wars and political vicissitudes of the 17th and 18th centuries, while the credit for the attempts at breaking this stereotype goes to the radical Warsaw intelligentsia of the positivist era who questioned the established models of public, family and finally sexual life and who gave rise to the lay, left-minded or openly leftist intelligentsia who were present in the intellectual life of Poland for the next century.

The members of the generation which entered the scene of public life after 1863 represented various ideological options, reacted in various ways to the defeat of the January Uprising and the challenges of the following years, and in different ways found for themselves a place in the reality of the period; with time these ways diverged more and more. And yet despite those differences and as if above them the people of the post-January generation joined their efforts in their reflection upon the future of their country and were able not only to create a theoretical programme of its rescue and improvement, but also, despite the external and internal limitations — to implement their own general instructions. The positivist generation was many times despondent about the future and the sense of their efforts, nevertheless — to use the pathos-filled phrase of historian Władysław Smoleński — 'they showed a bold front despite the flogging of the Russian revenge for the January Uprising'.¹¹ They not only turned out to be capable of passive defence of the heritage of Polish culture and science, but also created a network of mutual contacts, unions and social institutions, stable and elastic enough to be adapted for the new needs and purposes by the next generation.

Beginning with the 1870s, the generation of the 'young' (also called the 'generation of the Main School') consciously took up — generally in co-operation with the representatives of the older generation — the mission of replacing the lost state agencies by a collective effort and social work which could only arouse admiration. Polish political life, forbidden by the Russians 'struck its

¹¹ Władysław Smoleński, 'Fragment pamiętnika', in *idem, Monteskiusz w Polsce wieku XVIII* (Warszawa, 1927), 31.

rich roots in private homes, in the salons, which though called “literary”, bore a strongly political character’.¹²

Although the Polish administration, institutes of higher education and societies ceased to exist, in the last decades of the 19th century Warsaw was covered by a thick network of private or semi-private centres: salons, editorial offices and social institutions with names that concealed their real role, restaurants, coffee-houses, private libraries, and finally second-hand book shops and public parks. All of them, apart from their obvious function of providing a rendezvous for people, a background for flirtations, dances, entertainment or snobbish fashion shows, also played the role of vicarious university seminars, parliamentary tribunes, and to a certain extent centres of executive power. It might seem that the people who created this network had led a more intensive life than anybody before them or after.

In the years 1870–90 Warsaw — a city numbering a little over 500 thousand inhabitants — was a scene of activity of more than fifty salons of various character. Its intellectual elite, which reached (with their families) several thousand people, every week took part in some private parties or entertained guests. All salons — whether literary, musical, run by publishers, editors of journals or scholars who invited representatives of their own professions — performed (apart from social) also some additional role of centres where thoughts were exchanged, social initiatives taken, and collective attitudes and behaviour in face of the current challenges established, with a view to even very distant purposes, that were never mentioned aloud. Moreover, the Warsaw of that era had also salons that with general consent played the role of *sui generis* public meetings — in fact their participants influenced the political options of Poles, they designated the boundaries of the compromise in relations with the partitioning powers, dictated the code of behaviour of the Polish intelligentsia, writers and scholars. This was the role of meetings organized by two outstanding physicians, Ignacy Baranowski and Karol Benni, as well as the ‘Tuesdays’ of Aleksander Kraushar and his wife Jadwiga née Bersohn, and ‘teas’ of the journalist Dionizy Henkiel. In those salons, and especially at the ‘Fridays’ organized over

¹² Ferdynand Hoesick, *Powieść mojego życia (Dom rodzicielski). Pamiętnik* (Wrocław and Kraków, 1959), 12.

forty years by Benni, many initiatives of an educational, cultural and political character were taken and then realized, from the construction of the buildings of the Society for the Encouragement of the Fine Arts, Society of Folk Industry, the monument to Adam Mickiewicz, up to the decision of boycotting persons and attitudes acknowledged as unworthy of a Pole of the era of captivity.

The end of the 18th century and the whole of the 19th century can for many reasons be regarded as the era of salons; collective manifestation and experiencing of the most important intellectual and artistic trends of the era was characteristic of many European nations and cultures beginning with pre-Revolutionary France. In the Polish lands the institution of salon was equally stable and important. The salons of the Warsaw intelligentsia of the second half of the 19th century drew on the tradition of the era of King Stanislas Augustus and the 1840s, and at the same time found their imitators in the provincial towns of Congress Poland, wherever the stratum of the intelligentsia was developed well enough to create a network of mutual relations, mutual understanding and intellectual stimulation. Salons were also important in the life of the elites of Cracow and Lwów; however, the distinctive feature of the social life of the Warsaw intelligentsia of that time was its public dimension, its conscious striving to transpose a phenomenon, which was of its very nature private, or even intimate — a meeting of friends — to the sphere of collective life. The public life of Russian Poles after 1863 had to be private; the boundary between what was private and public was the more blurred in proportion to the stronger boundary between what was Polish and foreign, one's own and hostile.

The same milieu of the Warsaw intelligentsia also took up the task of defending Polish learning in the extremely difficult conditions of almost forty years between the closing down of the Main School and establishing the Warsaw Learned Society (1907).

In 1869 in the milieu of intelligentsia, bourgeoisie and landlords arose an idea to establish a centre that could substantially influence scientific life in the next decades — a Museum of Industry and Agriculture. Re-activated after a few years' break in 1875, apart from its educational functions it was to organize experimental and observation studies, scientific courses, exhibitions and lectures. Its financial basis was to be ensured by the contributions

of the Foundation Committee members — individual sponsors and institutions; they included aristocrats and landowners, Warsaw financiers and industrialists. From the 1890s onwards the maintenance of the Museum was mainly ensured by the intelligentsia, in the first place professionals. The problems of the Museum's functioning and financing were regularly discussed at the 'Fridays' organized by Karol Benni.

It was the intelligentsia of the Main School generation who initiated the most important institution of patronage of learning, the Mianowski Fund (the term 'learned society' could not be used because of censorship). Its idea was put forward in 1879 by a group of ex-students and lecturers of the School. They wanted to establish a centre that would support learning, and at the same time help realize some other, earlier ideas, such as the foundation of a scientific publishing firm, a physiographic museum or financing awards for the best published works. It was also meant to honour the name of Józef Mianowski, a highly respected Rector of the Main School. After two years' endeavours to legalize the new institution, the Fund started its activity in 1881.

Among its board were found representatives of various domains of knowledge, personages of high standing in the history of Polish culture and science. The Fund was maintained by the contributions of its members, sometimes their whole families, as well as of smaller donators, both individual and institutions (in the years 1881–1906 they were about a thousand), grants and bequests. Those who sat on board had to have a degree. Among the thirty five members of the Committee (until 1906) as many as thirty two were members of the intelligentsia.¹³

The Fund financed the publication of learned books (especially text-books), subsidized studies at home and abroad, as well as field-studies, and also offered allowances for scholars, scientists, teachers and men of letters who were in straitened circumstances. At the turn of the 20th century it became the main centre that supported Polish learning in the Russian partition; one author of memoirs called it even 'a Ministry of Polish Learning of the time of captivity'.¹⁴ Even if such assessments go a little too far,

¹³ Cf. Jan Piskurewicz, *Warszawskie instytucje społecznego mecenatu nauki w latach 1869–1906* (Wrocław, 1990).

¹⁴ Ludwik Krzywicki, *Wspomnienia*, 3 vols. (Warszawa, 1957–9), ii, 546–51.

the very fact that the Museum and the Fund existed, certainly helped the popularization of patronage of learning among society and integrated it around the goals set by both the institutions. Their fortunes may also be a testimony to the development of the intelligentsia. Our contemporary researcher is right in saying that the rise and the later evolution of the Fund and the Museum over several decades reflect 'the process of taking over from the aristocracy and landlords the responsibility for the development of Polish learning by the bourgeoisie, and especially by the growing numbers of the intelligentsia, who were conscious of their role'.¹⁵

All the endeavours in the social, economic, cultural and scientific domain taken up by the positivists of Warsaw or Poznań over the two decades after the downfall of the January Uprising were marked by immaculate legalism. A lot of their energy went into strenuous multi-directional efforts to gain the acceptance of the authorities for their initiatives, frequently through intricate legal manoeuvres and at the cost of concessions. However, they soon realized, and with the passage of time this feeling grew stronger, that the legal activity that had a limited scope, would not suffice to stimulate the development of Polish culture and science, or at least sustain its identity and integrity under the reign of the Romanovs and Hohenzollerns.

This was connected with deep changes in consciousness, which towards the end of the 19th century undermined the relative unity of attitudes represented by the Poles, and at the beginning of the next century had led to the polarization of postures of the Polish intelligentsia. This was, at any rate, a critical period not only for Poland and the Polish intelligentsia *en masse*, but for the whole of Europe, which was then going through an anti-positivist, anti-scientific reversal. It questioned the 19th century vision of the world and affected nearly all the domains of social life, giving rise to a new attitude to the human person and human groups, to nations and social classes, to religion, the past and the future towards which humanity should direct its march. This change gave rise to new ideological trends, striving for a comprehensive description of man and the world, and to new, mass political movements, especially socialism and nationalism. In the Polish

¹⁵ Piskurewicz, *Warszawskie instytucje*, 203.

lands the intensity of those changes was augmented by the fact that in the middle 1880s political activity was taken over by a new generation of the intelligentsia, which was not burdened by the memory of the downfall of the January Uprising, and was especially sensitive to the inconsistencies of the positivist programme that arose in its shade.

Socialism and nationalism saw as the subject of history two collectivities, described in a modern way: one consisted of the people, so far deprived of the right of expressing their views, and the other was made up by the nation understood as a *sui generis* ethnic community. However, the first ideologues and pioneers of the party activity of both sides were the representatives of the intelligentsia, that is a stratum which in the modern description of the world was either assigned a subordinate role, or its role was altogether negated. It is symptomatic that the positions of the grand old men of Polish socialist and nationalist movement were held by two outstanding intellectuals of the second half of the 19th century: Bolesław Limanowski, sociologist, historian, prolific publicist, creator of the first socialist organizations and patron of the Foundation Congress of the Polish Socialist Party (PPS), and Zygmunt Miłkowski, author of popular historical novels, a great authority for several generations of fighters for independence, co-creator and President of the Polish League. In the generation of these founding fathers, ideological differences, though important, were not so great as not to be overcome, and receded in the face of the generally acknowledged principal aim of regaining Poland's independence. However, the next decades saw a significant re-arrangement of these priorities.

This change had the most profound and dramatic form in the Russian partition, due to several factors. The stratum of the intelligentsia was here — as I have mentioned — not only the most numerous, but also endowed with the most lively sense of its identity and separateness; besides, at least for two generations it had been realizing a more or less consistent social programme. Secondly — despite the obvious provincialism of Warsaw in comparison to the main, and perhaps even secondary centres of European thought, in spite of the difficult political situation, material poverty and internal divisions among the educated elites of the city — the latest intellectual, scientific and cultural

trends of the West reached it relatively soon and had relatively wide repercussions.

Finally, and this was probably the most significant factor, in the second half of the 19th century the young Poles from the Russian partition remained in increasingly frequent and intensive contacts with their Russian peers, both at the University of Warsaw and in the first place in the universities of Russia, from where they brought and transplanted onto the Polish ground the Russian slogans of the Narodniks and the underground socialist circles. It is one of the paradoxes of the post-partition history of Poland and its intelligentsia that in the period when the chief postulates of Polish national policy were to fight Russification and to be shut to the influence of Russian culture, the young generation of Poles was especially receptive to the ideas and methods of action coming from the East.

The 1880s were a period of an extremely vivid intellectual ferment among the young people in the Russian partition. This was certainly a generation phenomenon that affected young professionals, students and pupils of secondary schools, including — perhaps for the first time on such a scale — female members of the intelligentsia and schoolgirls. This generation, which at that time reached its maturity, is sometimes called by modern writers the ‘generation of the defiant’ (after the title of Bohdan Cywiński’s book *Rodowody niepokornych* [The Ancestry of the Defiant] of 1971), or the *Głos* generation, after the title of the leading journal dealing with social, cultural and scientific matters that was then issued in Warsaw.

The weekly *Głos* appeared (with intervals, caused by the interference of censorship) in the years 1886–1905, but its influence was most important in the first period, before its suspension in 1894, that is under the editorship of Józef Karol Potocki (pseudonym Marian Bohusz) and Jan Ludwik Popławski. The editorial board and the group of authors attached to it declared in their programme — incoherent and inconsistent as it was, but in the 1880s arresting by its fresh approach and modernity — the necessity of emancipation of the Polish common people (especially those in the countryside), who were treated by them as the core of the nation, the ground of real, unique, irrepressible Polishness, the chief springboard of history and a hope for the future.

This mythicized 'People' was presented in contrast to the upper classes, shaky, weak, who had forsaken their tasks and yielded to foreign (especially Jewish) influences, who were alien to the people and condemned to inevitable failure. *Głos* postulated the education of a new generation of mental workers who would be engaged in social service and would replace the previous educated elites — the landlords and members of the intelligentsia who served them, especially manorial officials. The result of the service of this new generation would be the cultural domination of country people, and subsequent national revival. In harmony with the glorification of the people there appeared criticism of 'organic work' and of the positivist tactics of passive defence, which could not protect the oppressed nation.

These radical slogans attracted to *Głos* the publicists representing various political options who were sensitive to the burning social problems and to intellectual trends which were then shaping the consciousness of ideologues, men of letters and party activists all over Europe. The creators and collaborators of the weekly included members of the secret National League (founded in 1893) and later leaders of the National Democracy — Jan Ludwik Popławski, Zygmunt Balicki and the young (born in 1864) Roman Dmowski — but also persons of socialist orientation. At the same time the very atmosphere of the editorial office, generated above all by the unusual personality of Marian Bohusz, co-created the legend of *Głos*, which became an element of the experience of the generation of its creators and readers, regardless of how far their political paths were later to diverge.

The beginning of the 20th century soon brought an ossification of standpoints. A symbolic harbinger of this change was the closing of *Głos* by the Russian authorities in 1894, as a reply to the preparation of illegal celebrations of the hundredth anniversary of Kościuszko Uprising, in which the members of the editorial board took part. Some of them were sentenced to deportation. The rest, including Popławski, Balicki and Dmowski, went to Lwów where they soon (1895) established *Przegląd Wszechpolski*, the principal transmitter of national ideas in all the three partitions (in Congress Poland and the Poznań Province it was distributed illegally), the organ of the National-Democratic Party established in 1897, and the tribune which for the next several

decades provided Polish nationalism with arguments, epithets and slogans.

At the same time the organizational framework of the socialist movement was also getting consolidated. In 1892 at the Congress in Paris the Polish Socialist Party was established (operating illegally at home), as well as the Foreign Union of Polish Socialists; almost simultaneously their open structures were created in Galicia and the Poznań Province. The discussion of their programme, methods of action or later splits within those organizations would go far beyond the scope of an article devoted to the history of the Polish intelligentsia. It should be stressed, however, that its representatives took a direct and frequently leading part in creating the ideological programme and shaping the organization of both those camps, which by their very definition were non-intellectual, or even anti-intellectual. And it was in the programmes of the ideology they proclaimed that the most far-reaching criticism of the intelligentsia was born, a condemnation not only of the errors, shortcomings, sins, ridiculous foibles and weaknesses of the Polish enlightened stratum, but a veritable attack against the intelligentsia as an integral part of the social organism, an attack that undermined the reason of its existence and foretold its atrophy in the near future.

For Marxists, the intelligentsia was merely a tool necessary for the emancipation of the working class; during this process — one of the leading ideologues of this camp wrote in 1894 — the proletariat ‘absorbs, assimilates, and gives a class aspect to every demand that was earlier not voiced by the working class, but agrees with the trend of social development’.¹⁶ The cult of the masses and the negation of the role of outstanding individuals in the history of mankind struck at the very foundations of the ethos cherished by the intelligentsia, questioned the uniqueness of an individual person, individual abilities, education and the requirement of using these resources for the common weal. And yet it was socialism — or, more broadly, and less precisely speaking — the leftist attitude, that turned out to be an intellectual and moral magnet that attracted large groups of the Polish intelligentsia of the 19th-20th centuries, especially the elites of Congress Poland

¹⁶ Kazimierz Kelles-Krauz, *Klasowość naszego programu*, cit. from: *idem, Naród i historia. Wybór pism*, ed. Stanisław Ciesielski (Warszawa, 1989), 49.

and Warsaw. This leftist-oriented intelligentsia — despite their many stumbles and hesitations — appeared to be a formation that decided the shape of Polish intellectual life of the turn of the 20th century. Their mishaps, hesitations, dilemmas, inconsistencies, sacrifices and successes have been registered by two very important contemporary works devoted to this ideological formation — the above-mentioned *Rodowody niepokornych* by Bohdan Cywiński (1971) and *Przedwiośnie czy potop*¹⁷ [Coming Spring or Deluge] by Andrzej Mencwel (1997).

For nationalists the Polish intelligentsia of the turn of the century was one of the authentic threats on the road to unrestrained development of the nation. The democratic heritage of the first half of the 19th century, the tradition of national and religious tolerance, a secular view of the world, Occidentalism and opening to the liberal ideas coming from the West, and finally, impregnation with Russian nihilism, especially condemned by nationalists — these features willingly attributed above all to the intelligentsia of Warsaw and Congress Poland, to which most of them admitted themselves — now became the main accusations levelled at them by *Przegląd Polski* and programmatic nationalist publications. All those threads were codified by Zygmunt Balicki in his work *Egoizm narodowy wobec etyki* [National Egoism versus Ethics] (1902), and especially by Roman Dmowski in one of his principal and most weighty books of those times, *Myśli nowoczesnego Polaka* [Thoughts of a Modern Pole], (first edition 1903).

The principal and most serious charge raised by Dmowski against the Polish intelligentsia was ‘their un-national way of thinking’ and lack of understanding for the real needs of their nation. This state of affairs was caused by their strong gentry and romantic traditions, ‘the foreign elements’ that infiltrated them after 1863 (especially the Jews), and ideological imports from West and East that threatened the traditions that constituted Polishness from its birth. As a result, a member of the Polish intelligentsia was not able to understand a Polish peasant or worker, preferred false humanitarianism and destructive tolerance to the Polish national interest, was passive, unable to reflect and

¹⁷ The title directly alluding to *Przedwiośnie* by Stefan Żeromski and *Potop*, part of Henryk Sienkiewicz’s *Trylogia*.

act, spiritually and actually alien to his nation, at the same time usurping a right of its spiritual leadership.

Not really attached to their society, not developed morally to the extent that they could recognize the public interest, the interest of their society, as their own and defend it as such ... instead of the near, concrete society they raise to their altars some detached humanity with its intangible laws and interests, instead of a real value — they place some fiction that creates no hindrance in their life for it does not oblige them to anything ... Their instinct of self-preservation, that has nothing to do with the instinct of their nation, rebels against the line of conduct that imposes obligations towards a living organism — the society, and not towards some abstraction — that is humanity.¹⁸

The term 'half-Poles', coined by Dmowski, excluded a considerable section of the Polish intelligentsia from the national collectivity. It should be stressed that the criticism launched by National Democrats had little in common with its contemporary campaigns of French (and also Italian, Austrian and Spanish) nationalists, which were waged against leftist intellectuals in connection with the Dreyfus case. The defenders of Dreyfus were accused of lack of understanding of the values essential to the French nation, of cosmopolitanism, of belief in the abstract and in fact destructive idea of humanity at the cost of a real interest of their own society. In the Polish realities, the force of arguments was augmented by the fact that the intelligentsia was accused of betraying an enslaved nation, deprived of its own state, disrupted and seized by three incomparably stronger powers. In an era when the service to this collectivity was a primary imperative of their ethos, this accusation was especially painful and unfair to the intelligentsia.

The domain where the chasm between the generations of the Main School and *Głos* was the deepest, was the matter of dissemination of enlightenment in Polish. There was an urgent need for it in the Prussian and Russian partitions, where even lessons of religion were conducted in the language of the state. At the same time the question of teaching Polish and in Polish, with the passage of time became more burning when it turned

¹⁸ Roman Dmowski, *Myśli nowoczesnego Polaka* (Lwów, 1904), 168.

out that all the legal actions — popular lectures, educational publications allowed by censorship, and the press directed to the common people — were not able to counterbalance the influence of the official school system which for many years subjected the pupils to a consistent regime and tried to turn them not only into loyal subjects, but — at the time of triumphing nationalist slogans — into authentic Germans and Russians. The young, radical Polish intelligentsia of both the partitions tried to counterbalance this influence by illegal actions, both self-educational and aimed at disseminating enlightenment among the uneducated strata of society, by spreading new ideas at the secret courses or through pamphlets.

Various forms of secret education, organized both by the nationalists and socialists, were meant to reach both the uneducated strata and the young people. In the Prussian partition, the Union of Polish Youth 'Zet', an organization established in 1886 by Zygmunt Balicki, and connected with the National League, was from the end of the 1880s onwards very popular with the young people from intelligentsia circles. Under its influence, but in some places also quite spontaneously, there emerged a network of patriotic and self-educational circles in the secondary schools of Greater Poland and Pomerania. Although these unions were discovered after barely two or three years, and their members sentenced to jail, the idea of the Philomathian movement in the secondary schools of the Prussian partition — enjoying there a long tradition of both Polish and German secret youth unions of the first half of the 19th century — did not die down and before the First World War in many schools the secret associations of Polish pupils were active again.

Also in the Russian partition the educated elite faced a great challenge: the Russification of elementary schools faced thousands of children in villages, country towns and large urban centres with the real threat of denationalization. The same threat concerned an equally great population of grown-up illiterates and semi-illiterates. Here again activity went in two directions: on the one hand by self-education, on the other by organizing a network of secret courses which was meant to embrace villages and working class districts of big cities. It was characteristic of that period that those engaged in active educational work were — at the beginning

together, and later in opposition to one another — both activists holding nationalist and socialist views; it was their common effort that decided the authentic success of this action.

The self-educational organizations made their first steps in Congress Poland in the late 1870s. The above-mentioned Union of Polish Youth 'Zet' (1886) played a principal role in their unification. Apart from this conspiratorial organization there were also some half-legal associations, registered as self-aid circles, which developed some non-statutory educational activity. At the same time there were various forms of open, half-open and secret courses for workers, craftsmen and peasants. Popular press, lives of the saints, calendars, popular stories, hygienic recommendations, Sunday courses, and finally the everyday routine of illegal lessons and secret publications distributed confidentially among friends — all those methods were used by educators both of Right and Left. An attempt to codify them — at least in the territory of Warsaw — was made by Cecylia Śniegocka, who established a Society of Secret Education in 1894, which with time gained the name of a 'bare-foot University'.

The work of enlightenment was carried out by hundreds, and even thousands of people, town and village teachers, priests, educated landlords, publishers of the press for the common people, but in the first place simply members of the intelligentsia, people of various education, of both the sexes and various world outlooks. This, very numerous group included Jadwiga Szczawińska-Dawidowa, the creator of the so-called Flying University, a most unusual phenomenon in the field of illegal education that had no precedence or counterpart either in the Russian partition or elsewhere.

The secret self-educational courses for girls had been organized in Warsaw since 1881-2; this initiative was taken by the students of the Imperial Russian University in Warsaw. Soon after, the idea was resumed; apart from students, this time the initiative was taken by young women. Due to the endeavours of Jadwiga Szczawińska, in the academic year 1885-6 the illegal lectures were transformed into steady, secret courses, well hidden from the eye of the police.

'In the first place,' wrote an author of memoirs, 'Szczawińska had ensured for herself accommodation in about a dozen apartments

owned by people of high social standing whose political loyalty could not be questioned'. Among those first conspiratorial 'lecture rooms' were flats of the representatives of the financial elite of Warsaw, such as, for example, the Director of the Commercial Bank or President of Credit Society. Classes were also held in the flats of male and female students and professors, in private educational institutions (especially girls' boarding schools), and finally in the openly active private or social centres of a scientific character (for example experiments indispensable for the illustration of lectures in chemistry and physics were carried out in the laboratories of the Museum of Industry and Agriculture). The place of lectures was frequently changed, students and their mentors coursed around the whole city; hence the colloquial name — the Flying University.

The structure of this amazing institution was based mainly on the organization of the female students (professors usually confined themselves to delivering lectures). It was headed by a board of a few persons, lectures were organized and money collected by the cashiers of individual circles. The voluntary contributions of participants were in the main assigned for lecturers' fees, less frequently for financing the accommodation, which was generally offered free of charge. All this extended machinery worked in complete secrecy; 'Szczenińska managed the affairs of secret lectures with a firm hand, boldly and even audaciously ignoring all the police regulations'.¹⁹

At the same time the basis was created of the collection of learned books that was to serve the female students of this university. It consisted of private collections handed over by several persons from the strict intellectual elite of Warsaw, as well as those presented by the Students' Aid of the Imperial Warsaw University, and a few smaller, earlier existing reading libraries for women. In 1894 due to the endeavours of Szczenińska–Dawidowa this centre was finally organized as the Reading Room of Learned Works and Journals (colloquially called 'Learned Library'), the board of which included donors and students.

Due to such a hinterland the numbers of students of the 'Flying University' were systematically growing. At the beginning of the 1890s they were estimated at about two hundred, while in

¹⁹ Krzywicki, *Wspomnienia*, ii, 365.

the middle of the decade they reached five hundred, and in one year surpassed a thousand, which meant that at least a hundred lectures were delivered a week; for comparison, there were about a thousand and five hundred students at the Imperial Warsaw University at that time.

Initially most of the audience of the 'Flying University' consisted of women. From the 1890s onwards its courses were also attended by male students from the legal Russianized university. In all, several thousand women went through those studies, including the chemist Maria Skłodowska (later Curie), the historian Natalia Gąsiorowska, Stefania Sempołowska (educationist and publicist), Helena Radlińska — the creator of the Polish school of pedagogy and history of enlightenment, or Jadwiga Sikorska, Jadwiga Kowalczykówna and Jadwiga Jawurkówna — years later headmistresses of the best girls' boarding schools in Warsaw. During all the period of the University's work, many poorer students could listen to the lectures free of charge.

The significance of the 'Flying University' was decided not only by a social need for that type of centre and not only by the efficiency of its female organizers. Szczawińska and her associates managed to gain the co-operation of the most outstanding Polish scholars and scientists who worked in Warsaw. Their major participation in illegal lectures was on the one hand an obvious result of the great energy, enterprising spirit and power of conviction represented by Jadwiga Szczawińska and her associates. On the other hand, however, it derived from the more general posture of the Polish intelligentsia of the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century, for whom social and educational activity — even that menaced by Russian repressions — was a natural *modus operandi* at the time when Polish society was deprived of its own state. And last but not least — an important factor was a steady and quite decent income assured by those lectures. Before Poland regained her independence, any kind of scientific study in Warsaw was in desperate want of investment, for it was financed — as I had said above — solely due to a social effort, by voluntary contributions and private bequests, coming from all over the divided country. As a result, the search for earnings, and especially a steady source of support, consumed a lot of the energy even of the most outstanding scholars. The

honoraria collected from students were for the lecturers of the 'Flying University' a considerable contribution to their domestic and professional budgets.

In 1894 Szczawińska–Dawidowa was arrested and placed in the Warsaw Citadel; during her absence a split took place in the University, which was transformed into a number of associated or detached circles. They survived in conspiracy until the Revolution of 1905.²⁰

The solidification of the nationalist and socialist camps at the turn of the century — and the consequent polarization of the postures of intellectuals — determined not only a change in the methods of action, but also inevitably led to the growing conflicts within the educated stratum. The most conspicuous was connected with revolutionary events that swept over the Russian partition in the years 1905–7.

Revolution first broke out in Russia, weakened by her disgraceful defeat in the war with Japan. As early as January 1905, however, in Warsaw and then in other Polish towns, a general strike and a school strike were proclaimed. Workers, railwaymen, students, and secondary school pupils closed ranks in a general enthusiasm: it seemed that the reactionary and stuffy Russian Empire was on the verge of catastrophe, and the national and social postulates of the Poles could be satisfied any day. Aleksander Świętochowski presents this spasm symbolically in the following way:

— Freedom — freeedom — freedoom! — cried a workman at a meeting like mad. He drawled out this single word for several minutes in a moan. It was not a thought, not the voice of reason or even feeling, this was the first, almost inarticulate outbreak of a need that had been long violated and finally found an outlet in a cry.²¹

Regardless of whether this quotation is a record of a real event or the product of literary fantasy, it renders perfectly the feelings of Poles at the threshold of events that over a few years harrowed

²⁰ The experience of secret education of the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th centuries was also put to use later, at the moments of special political oppression: during the German occupation of World War II (1939–45), and at the end of the communist power in Poland, in the 1970s and 1980s.

²¹ Aleksander Świętochowski, 'Liberum veto', *Prawda*, 43-4 (1905).

the Polish political scene and changed the sensitivity of society, especially its intellectual elites.

A large section of the cultural circles in the Russian partition (especially people with leftist views or leftist leanings) welcomed the events of January 1905 with sympathy, hope, and often with enthusiasm. In Warsaw, in the atmosphere of general elation, they signed memoranda, organized manifestations and meetings. In the first months people gasped with the breath of freedom, and the conviction prevailed that the whole Polish society would soon unite and reach with a firm hand for what had been denied to it for over a century. Most observers treated the striking students and workers, this 'people', mythicized and idealized at least since Adam Mickiewicz — as a link in the chain of battles for independence, stronger and more healthy than the previous ones, a real guarantee of victory. In 1905 the 'people', to the applause of the intelligentsia, as if by storm broke into the pages of novels, stanzas of pathetic poems, canvasses of pictures, matrixes of graphics and the boards of the stage.

Initially the benefits drawn from it by national culture were quick and substantial. The Polish language became the language of instruction at school. On 7 November 1905 preventive censorship was abolished — the press could at last write openly about the Polish past and — in a slightly camouflaged way — about Polish future aspirations. A chance was achieved for the legalization of scores of cultural, educational, scientific, economic, co-operative, professional and other associations and organizations, such as the Society for the Protection of Relics of the Past, Association of Courses for Illiterates, Open University, Society of Polish Culture, Polish Sightseeing Society, Warsaw Learned Society, Society of Public Library, Society of History Lovers, societies of lawyers, biologists, psychologists, Polish Teachers' Union and many others. Among the most important we must rank the Polish School Family that organized chiefly elementary education. Of equal importance was the Society for Educational Courses, a kind of institution of higher learning that arose from the illegal 'Flying University' and was open both to males and females. At any rate, it seems that precisely women were the greatest beneficiaries of those events, forming a common front with males during strikes and manifestations.

A characteristic thing about revolutions is, however, that they have their own life, their own internal pace and regardless of the expectations of their leaders they have their own feedback. The years 1905–7 are an excellent illustration of this well-known truth. After the first period of enthusiasm and unity that wiped out all the social differences as well as those in the world outlook of participants, the divisions in the Polish (just like in the Russian) political scene were growing with a logarithmical power, like successive degrees in the Richter scale.

It is impossible and pointless to present all those divisions in an article devoted to the history of the intelligentsia. However, the most essential split — a faultline (if we reach for the poetics of earthquakes again), that was then the most dramatic and was not eliminated to this day — was that between the Right and the Left. It finally struck out all the 19th century ideas of the solidarity of the enslaved nation and the common goals of all Polish men and women. The 1905–7 Revolution was the first so manifest symptom of modernity in the Polish lands. The mass parties that had been taking shape since the end of the 19th century — socialists and national democrats — all of a sudden gained an excellent laboratory where they could test their most courageous concepts.

During the subsequent weeks, months and even years of Revolution the initial enthusiasm was dying down, and people started losing faith in the final victory. Intellectuals continued calling for moderation and reason, until these words became 'empty sounds, resembling the swish of autumnal wind' (Świętochowski). Publicists and men of letters who placed revolutionaries and revolutions on a pedestal in 1905, now either took part in exchanges of epithets, charges and libels, or watched them with embarrassment, or, for a change, repeated other reasonable and commonplace warnings that nobody wanted to listen to any more.

Two events in particular made the Polish intelligentsia realize that the national unity of January 1905 was only apparent and all the actors of the political scene were striving for their own aims, none of them signifying the independence of Poland. The first was an incident in the Czemierniki village in the Lublin *guberniya*, where on 5 August 1906 the local peasants, inspired by the priests, attacked and beat to death with clubs the PPS messengers who came there in connection with the strike. Another,

even more renowned and painful experience was that of summoning Russian troops by many factory-owners (especially in Lodz to fight the demonstrating workers, and in particular the lock-out of Lodz — the sacking of several thousand workers who went on strike at the end of 1906 and the beginning of 1907. This was the end of the dream of any common front of the Poles against the partitioner.

A year after his above-mentioned apostrophe to the Sacred Freedom, Świętochowski resumed this subject: 'I always treated Freedom as a Goddess', wrote the patron of progressive journalism, 'and here she appeared as a drunken, vulgar slut who lashed every passer-by with a raw-hide whip...'.²² The same label of a public prostitute was used against the Polish intelligentsia by the publicists of both Right and Left.

The events of Revolution were a moment of great and extremely long inspiration to the Polish literature. The tide of works that gasped with enthusiasm at the Revolution was followed by those settling accounts with it; though bitter, very painful and sometimes full of insightful wisdom, they were not always the best artistic achievements of their authors. The most pertinent and concise description of the experience of Revolution came from the literary critic Karol Irzykowski, who said in 1908: 'The Young Poland had gone grey overnight; a hangover all along the line'.²³ To paraphrase these words we may say that the whole Polish intelligentsia had gone grey.

This post-revolutionary hangover was even augmented by later events: the withdrawal of the Russian authorities from many concessions granted to Poles in the years 1905–7, the election struggle, the growing anti-Semitism.²⁴ After the spasm of Revolution it was difficult to come back to the old ruts of life, and the awakened hopes and emotions did not disappear. The growing frustration was bitterly crowned by the case of Stanislaw Brzozowski, the then guru of the young leftist intelligentsia. His name was found on the list of the agents of the *Okhrana*, published by the socialist press in 1908. Brzozowski denied these accusations and effected the convocation of three successive tribunals of public opinion

²² *Idem*, 'Liberum veto', *Prawda*, 45 (1906).

²³ Karol Irzykowski, 'Dwie rewolucje', *Nasz Kraj* (1908), cit. from: *idem*, *Czyn i słowo. Glossy sceptyka* (Kraków, 1980), 183.

²⁴ See the article by Grzegorz Krzywiec above.

in Cracow in 1909, however none of them could either confirm or refute the charges. The problem of Brzozowski's guilt divided the Polish intelligentsia, aroused strong emotions and mutual hostility within the party, among friends and even inside the families. In the midst of those disputes Brzozowski, then severely afflicted by tuberculosis, died in exile in Florence in 1911.

'Brzozowski's case' that was not solved at that time became a painful experience for everybody, both his accusers and defenders, and muddled — according to the opinion of one author of memoirs — 'not only the whole revolutionary movement, but even the strivings for the revival of independent Poland'.²⁵ From the perspective of a hundred years that have since elapsed and the discoveries of researchers, his innocence has been finally confirmed, and his 'Case' appears as a tragic example of a vile campaign unleashed on the basis of libel, ill will and a junction of political interests in which Polish history abounded not only at the time of partitions.

Among the further consequences of 1905 we should mention the state of disappointment and apathy characteristic of Polish society in the Russian partition in the last years before the outbreak of the First World War, its indifference to the slogans of struggle for independence in 1914, and above all the sense of mutual rancour, estrangement and hostility that prevailed among the Polish intellectuals both of Right and Left.

In the last years before the outbreak of the First World War, Europe was finally divided between the Triple Alliance and the Triple Entente, an arrangement that decided the outbreak and the course taken by the world conflict. At the same time in Polish society — and above all in the circles of its intelligentsia — the strivings for its autonomy or even future independence were crystallizing into orientations that sought support either in one or another partitioning Power. When the War broke out and in the course of it, it was impossible to speak of any consensus to which everybody, or at least the majority of the Polish intellectual elites would agree. The question of the boundaries of loyalty towards the monarchies were they had to live, the hopes attached to the world conflict, the choice of a strategic ally, the scope of Polish national postulates and methods of their realization, and finally

²⁵ Michał Sokolnicki, *Czternaście lat* (Warszawa, 1936), 355.

the geographical and systemic shape of future Poland — all these questions caused dramatic splits among the Poles. Nevertheless the representatives of the intelligentsia took part in many armed formations that fought on all the fronts of the War, frequently one against the other. The Polish Legions created by Józef Piłsudski at the side of Austro-Hungary was the largest of these formations, dominated by the members of the intelligentsia — they constituted 53 per cent of its volunteer staff (either coming from Galicia or from the Russian partition), and treated the Legions ‘as a symbol of the idea of action, a call for a free Poland’.²⁶

However, the year 1918, that of the defeat of all the partitioning Powers and a reconstruction of the independent Polish state, restored — though for a very short time — general concord and enthusiasm. For the Polish intelligentsia this was a moment of triumph: the great ideal that they had propagated for over a century now came true, and it happened in a large measure due to their own efforts. So they expected that in the new Poland they would play the most important role, the role of the leader of the nation, the supreme power that would not only serve but also rule, would fuel enthusiasm and settle controversies, would persistently work for the good of a regained homeland, but would also live to see the recognition it deserved. The intelligentsia, having put her dream of Poland into practice, now started ‘dreaming of power’²⁷ in their own independent state, that is of something they had not experienced during all of their history.

(transl. Agnieszka Kreczmar)

²⁶ Jan Skotnicki, *Przy sztalugach i przy biurku* (Warszawa, 1957). The author of these words, painter and graphic artist born in 1876, enlisted in the Legions himself, treating it as ‘the imperative of the moment’.

²⁷ Cf. Daria Nałęcz, *Sen o władzy. Inteligencja wobec niepodległości* (Warszawa, 1994).