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## *The parties on the political scene of Poland in the interwar period, 1918–1939*

### Abstract

The article contains a brief overview of the main political parties of the Second Republic of Poland. It outlines the genesis of the most important groups operating in each of the partitions, showing the impact of the political activity of Poles in the occupant countries on the shape of Polish political scene in later years. A particular emphasis is placed on presenting the groups active during the “sovereignty of the Parliament,” i.e. in the years 1919–1926. The Polish Socialist Party (PPS) and National Democracy (ND), portrayed as the main political antagonists, are discussed, as well as the peasants’ parties, acting as the political centre. In addition, the author presents the main political currents representing the Jewish and Ukrainian minorities, and describes the special place of the Polish Communist Party in the political system of that time.

**Key words:** history of Poland, interwar period, political parties, Parliament, Socialists, People’s Party, National Party, Communists, national minorities, legal history

**Słowa kluczowe:** historia Polski, okres międzywojenny, partie polityczne, sejm, socjaliści, partia ludowa, partia narodowa, komuniści, mniejszości narodowe, historia prawa

The so-called “interwar” or simply “20 years” period between 1918 and 1939 was a brief (and single) episode of modern democracy in the entire history of Poland before 1991. And even those 20 years cannot be treated as a truly democratic era, since the coup of 1926 introduced the political system tending strongly towards authoritarianism (while preserving several basic features of democracy, such as general election with a contest between major political opponents). Thus, Polish democracy passed away in 1926; soon the same applied to the country’s independence, which was crushed in the disaster of the World War II, and in a subsequent incorporation into Soviet influence sphere. Both the democracy and the independence have been regained no sooner than in 1991, when the first free parliamentary election was held. Many regarded the regaining of independence not as the regaining of democracy. The politicians and the researchers treated the democracy as something what was rather gained and not regained. Thus they con-

sidered the democracy to be a newly established feature of the Polish political system, not a continuation of something that already existed before. Scarce attempts to recall the party names or partisan issues from the interwar period were mostly void and unsuccessful.<sup>1</sup> The problems around which Polish politics was organized after 1989 seemed incomparable to the debates and issues that were the *spiritus movens* of the Second Polish Republic. Consequently, in the research not much attention was paid to the political parties of interwar era. Historians focused rather on the eminent personages and on the social and economic struggle of those years, not on parliamentary life. Political scientists saw neither parallels nor continuity between the parties active in 1918–1926 and those that emerged after 1989. The 20 years' period was stigmatised in its nature of being an unique episode.

The present paper adopts a different position to this question. The short period of party life in Poland before the World War II **was** important for our present experience and **is** worthy of notice and deserves a detailed exploration. Several striking parallels can be observed between both 20 years-periods of Polish democracy and certain conclusions could be drawn from that observation.

## 1. Political parties of Polish territories before and during the Great War<sup>2</sup>

Polish parties did not emerge in 1918 out of nowhere. They were the results of gradual political evolution of the so-called “Polish question” as roaming around the partitioned Polish territories, incorporated into Russia, Austria and Germany. Each of these states had its own attitude towards Polish society and its political emanations, each of these states was undergoing a specific evolution of its own political institutions. This was formative of the experience of Polish people participating (or trying to participate) in the political life of their occupiers. A brief outline of the prewar situation in Germany, Austria and Russia is thus necessary to understand the origins of Polish interwar parties.

### 1.1. Austro-Hungarian Monarchy

The former Polish territories under the name of *Königreich Galizien und Lodomerien*, commonly known as Galicia were incorporated directly into Cisleithanien (the Austrian part of Austria-Hungary) and did not enjoy the status comparable to that granted in the Ausgleich of 1867 to the Lands of the Crown of Saint Stephen. However, a *de facto* autonomous status was created in Galicia in 1867, and in 1873 it was transformed into formal autonomy, with local parliamentary representation and local government inte-

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<sup>1</sup> With the notorious exception of *Polskie Stronnictwo Ludowe* (Polish People's Party), a party created on the basis of quickly renamed communist agrarian party.

<sup>2</sup> The presentation of pre-war political movements is based on J. Holzer, *Mozaika polityczna II Rzeczypospolitej*, Warszawa 1974.

grated into the general administrative structure of the K. u. K. Monarchie.<sup>3</sup> In *Reichsrat*, the parliamentary body for the Austrian part of the monarchy, Galicia enjoyed the share of 63 out of total 353 seats, having the most favorable position among Austrian lands. The imperial minister of Galicia was always a Pole and Polish politicians were not uncommonly nominated for the ministerial posts in the imperial government, including the post of prime minister.<sup>4</sup> Polish political life was thus developing along that of Austria-Hungary, producing political movements, which could be grouped into 6 categories: conservative, liberal, Christian-social, agrarian (peasant), nationalist and socialist.<sup>5</sup>

**Conservatives** were barely organized groups of campaigners against agrarian reforms. Anti-Ukrainian context of the agrarian question in Eastern Galicia<sup>6</sup> was gradually shifting them towards nationalist position.

The **liberal** (or democratic) movement was grouped around its representatives elected to the Galician *Landtag* (local parliament) and the imperial *Reichsrat* and had a dynamic press. Its organizational framework manifested itself through publishing houses, meetings and electoral events. Its program was pro-Polish, i.e. aimed at widening the scope of autonomy. At the eve of the new century, two major liberal parties were formed: loyalist PSD<sup>7</sup>, which stressed the necessity to conform with the legal framework of the Habsburg Monarchy and cooperated with the conservatives, and radical PSP,<sup>8</sup> which did not challenge the Austrian state as such, but supported illegal and violent actions undertaken by the socialists under Piłsudski in the Russian partition, Austria officially tried to keep distance of these activities.

Several **Christian** associations were formed at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the most prominent among them were the groups organized by Stanisław Stojanowski. Their influence in political life of that time was weak, and their supporters were gradually overtaken by the agrarian and nationalist movement.

**Agrarian** movement partially evolved from various groupings, among them from those organized by Stojanowski. Its main aim was to “citizenize” the peasants whose both legal and real ability to participate in the politics was seriously restricted. Two main directions in that movement were represented respectively by PSL-Lewica<sup>9</sup> (radical and supporting Piłsudski) and PSL-Piast (more nationalist and more conservative).

**Nationalist** movement originated as a continuation of insurgent tradition and was strongly influenced by the Polish-Ukrainian conflict in Eastern Galicia, which gave the SDN,<sup>10</sup> founded in 1905, its important feature: struggle for independence was for

<sup>3</sup> For more detailed information on the political structure of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy and the autonomy of Galicia cf: H. Binder, *Galizien in Wien: Parteien, Wahlen, Fraktionen und Abgeordnete im Übergang zur Massenpolitik*. Wien 2005; *Galizien um die Jahrhundertwende. Politische, soziale und kulturelle Verbindungen mit Österreich*, ed. K. Mack, Wien 1990; I. Röskau-Rydel, *Deutsche Geschichte im Osten Europas Galizien, Bukowina, Moldau*. Verlag Siedler-Verlag, Berlin 2002.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. *Meyers Konversations-Lexikon*, 5. Auflage, 7. Band, Bibliographisches Institut, Leipzig und Wien 1895, p. 19.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. J. Holzer, *Mozaika...*, p. 49.

<sup>6</sup> Where the majority of the peasants was Ukrainian or Ruthenic and in both economic and ethnic opposition to the dominantly Polish landowners.

<sup>7</sup> Polskie Stronnictwo Demokratyczne, Polish Democratic Alliance.

<sup>8</sup> Polskie Stronnictwo Postępowe, Polish Progressive Alliance.

<sup>9</sup> Polskie Stronnictwo Ludowe, Polish People's Party – the Left.

<sup>10</sup> Stronnictwo Demokratyczno-Narodowe, National-Democratic Alliance.

nationalists, a struggle both against formal oppressors and against other nations within the multi-ethnic Austria-Hungary.

The **socialists** were divided with respect to two different issues: attitude towards Polish independence as political aim and the rejection of legal and political order of the Austrian state. Thus, they formed four main groups: two radical ones, that accepted the use of violence and two loyalist ones, that wanted to participate in the political system of the Habsburg Monarchy (in each category there were supporters of Polish independence and those indifferent towards it shortly before 1914). The most eminent party among them was PPSD. It was pro-independent and accepting the leadership of Józef Piłsudski who coordinated the illegal socialist movement in the Russian partition.

The heritage brought to the Second Polish Republic by the parties that acted legally in the Austrian partition was not ideological. In the latter aspect, they were merely reflections of ideological debate and of the struggle against occupier in the German and Russian partitions. It was rather the experience of participating in a normal parliamentary life with democratic (by the standard of the time) rules governing election, representation and parliamentary work that mattered for the future organization of the party system in Poland after 1918.

## 1.2. The Vistula Land and other Polish territories in Russia

The former Polish territories incorporated into Russia in three subsequent partitions at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century varied with regard to their ethnic and social structure, formal status within the Russian Empire and their history during the period of partition. Polish party life originated mainly on the territories of the so-called Vistula Land (Priwislanskiy Kraj), a term half-officially used to describe the 10 *gubernias* of the former Kingdom of Poland dissolved after the defeat of the January Uprising in 1866.

Russian monarchy did not know any kind of nation-wide parliamentary representation until the revolution of 1905. Therefore, no party life in modern sense could appear until the creation of *Duma* in 1906. However, “parties” in the sense of illegal groupings of revolutionary origin were frequent in Russia. They were also frequent in the Polish territories where their anti-tsarist activity combined with the political aim of national independence. The major “political force” of Vistula Land was undoubtedly Polish Socialist Party (PPS) with its charismatic leader, Józef Piłsudski. PPS was the *spiritus movens* of the 1905 revolution on the territory of Russian partition. Being in total and violent opposition to the tsarist regime, it remained illegal in Russia and was treated as a terrorist organization (which in fact it was). Though verbally a socialist party, PPS was not particularly interested in the socialist ideological program but, above all, was involved in preparing a total mobilization of Polish society for the armed struggle for independence.<sup>11</sup>

The parties comparable to the political organizations of the Austrian partition hardly existed in the Vistula Land, since any urge for autonomy (not to mention independence)

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<sup>11</sup> Of course, ideological debates took place within the party, and controversies between its members led eventually to a split between the Marxist fraction, so called PPS-Lewica and the independence fraction (PPS-Frakcja Rewolucyjna). But it was the latter that remained the effective organization and its program of independence found wide support during the war years.

was treated as illegal even in the short period of quasi-constitutional monarchy in Russia. After the creation of *Duma*, both conservative and liberal movements were created, with little impact on the society. The true political life in Russian partition was in the underground.

The main opponent of the PPS was the nationalist movement, acting half-legally, i.e. keeping its structure in conspiracy but organizing legal events and supporting its candidates to *Duma*.

### 1.3. German Empire

Polish territories incorporated into Prussia enjoyed a certain degree of autonomy with regard to the so called Grand Dukedom of Posen (whereas the other part of dissolved Poland was integrated directly into Prussian Kingdom as Provinz Westpreußen). This autonomy ended, however, in 1848, when the Dukedom was transformed into Provinz Posen. From this time on, both Polish speaking lands became simply Prussian provinces.

The Imperial Constitution of 1871 (the so-called Bismarck Constitution), provided for bicameral parliamentary body (*Reichstag* and *Bundesrat*) with universal suffrage for all male citizens over 25. Party system was thus developing in the *Kaiserreich*, though Polish strive for autonomy was suppressed since the Bismarck's *Kulturkampf*. Brutal and ongoing attempts to Germanize Poles brought as a result the relative strength of the Polish nationalist movement which had to act in conspiracy until 1909, but managed to gain wide support among the Poles and dominated the originally strong (and also nationally oriented) conservatives. The PPS acted legally in the Prussian partition (initially as part of *Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands*) but was mostly an „imported” party, i.e. its local leaders were delegated from the illegal party structures of the Russian partition.

### 1.4. The Great War, the Polish question and the formation of Polish political scene in 1918

Outbreak of the war put the question of Polish independence on the agenda. Supporting the future winners of the conflict could bring political advantages to the Poles. Only two political leaders had a sufficient organizational structure at their disposal and a sufficient potential for mobilizing masses to a war effort: Piłsudski, the leader of the PPS and Roman Dmowski, the leader of nationalist movement in all partitions. This led to marginalisation of the conservative, agrarian and liberal groupings. Both politicians managed to remain independent of Central Powers when Austria and Germany occupied the Vistula Land after the 1916 offensive and in the aftermath of Russian revolution in 1917 and the following Armistice. The Poles led by the socialist and nationalist orientations took control over parts of all of the partitioned territories.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> For clear and in-depth overview of the process of regaining independence during the Great War cf. A. Chwalba, *Historia Polski 1795–1918*, Kraków 2005.

The first free election after the recreation of the Polish state took place on 26 January 1919.<sup>13</sup> The gradually forming *Sejm* was, at first, dominated by the right wing deputies from the nationalist movement, who however did not command the majority (34% of the seats).<sup>14</sup> Also, the representation of the PPS was relatively weak. Other parties elected to the first *Sejm* included organizations which were either direct or mutated continuation of formations active in the Prussian and Austrian partition: the agrarians with their prominent party PSL-Piast under the leadership of Wincenty Witos represented the centrist tendencies. Thus, apart from the Piłsudski PPS, the socialist ideas were detectable in the PSL-Lewica (Left) and the PSL-Wyzwolenie (Liberation), both parties being ‘splitters’ from bigger movement.

The war hostilities, during which the fate of new state was to be decided, led to a paradoxical situation: though dominated by the political opponents of Piłsudski, the parliament in its first act decided to entrust the temporary function of the Chef Commander of the State to this very man,<sup>15</sup> thus opening the “founding conflict” of the Second Republic: the national movement versus the socialists of the PPS.

The so-called March Constitution of 1921, drafted under the influence of right wing parties, was the first result of this conflict. It provided for parliamentary system with an extremely weak executive power and a president with strictly representative prerogatives. This was due to the joint fear of the centrists and nationalists that Piłsudski, after his victory over Soviet Russia, might win the presidential election if the latter was held as a popular vote. A proportional electoral system, adopted in 1922 with party lists and multi-seat constituencies and the seat allocation according to d’Hondt proportional formula<sup>16</sup> provided for an extremely scattered political scene and unstable governments in the next 7 years to come.

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<sup>13</sup> Voting was possible only in some territories of *Vistula Land* and Western Galicia, since other lands already claimed as Polish by the newly created II Republic were controlled by German military, national insurgents of various ethnic groups or Russian revolutionaries (deputies from these areas were temporarily substituted for with representatives elected to the German *Reichstag* and Austrian *Reichsrat* before the war). With further territorial acquisitions, additional election for the new districts were held and the number of deputies to the first *Sejm* grew between its first and last session from 335 to 432; cf. Cz. Brzoza, L. Sowa, *Historia Polski 1918–1945*, Kraków 2006, p. 61.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. *Encyklopedia Historii Drugiej Rzeczypospolitej*, red. A. Garlicki, Z. Landau, W. Roszkowski, P. Stawecki, J. Tomaszewski, Warszawa 1999, p. 402.

<sup>15</sup> The military-sounding title was not accidental. Polish state was, at that moment, participating in 4 military conflicts, one of which – the war with the *bolsheviks* – was endangering its existence. Piłsudski as the commander of the Polish Army was the only person able to handle the crisis.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. *Encyklopedia...*, p. 270 [supra, fn. 13].

## 2. Political parties during the “Sejm omnipotence” period, 1918–1926

### 2.1. Major political forces

#### 2.1.1. The socialists

At the beginning of 1919, the socialist parties deriving from three partitions integrated into PPS relatively easily. This was due to the fact that their leaders formed temporary government on the first liberated territories. This government was subsequently transformed into the first government of Poland.<sup>17</sup> Until 1922, the PPS absorbed independent socialist organizations from the Eastern Marches and from Silesia.<sup>18</sup> The PPS exerted a wide and established influence on the society, especially among the working class thanks to well-developed structure of intermediary organizations – trade unions. Likewise, it attracted the population by educational activities, by founding sport establishments and youth organizations. In the pursuance of these goals, the PPS was flanked by the widely distributed party press (“Robotnik” and “Naprzód”).

Until 1918, the program of the PPS was concentrated on the regaining of independence. After this was done, the party leaders became state-builders, creating the first governmental institutions of the Second Republic. The major viewpoints contested by their opponents was the governmental control over economy, separation of the Church from the State and the degree of acceptable autonomy as granted to the national minorities. The PPS supported the centrist governments of the early twenties until May 1923. They withdrew their support when the cabinet of Witos was formed.

#### 2.1.2. The agrarian parties<sup>19</sup>

Contrary to the socialists, the agrarian movement members did not unite after 1918. For the entire interwar period the movement remained to be a mosaic of many parties. Some of them were of ephemeral nature and were rather representations of personal ambitions of the individuals, who dominated them, than of political will. The main agrarian force was the centrist PSL-Piast. It was of Galician origin and was supported by the population of south-western Poland. Due to its centrist position and stable constituency, it remained a key formation of the Polish political scene. Leader of PSL-Piast, Wincenty Witos was prime minister at a critical phase of the Bolshevik War and had a personal impact on the final shape of the March Constitution of 1921. In the area of the peasant movement, the second important party was the more radical and left-oriented PSL-Wyzwolenie, supported mostly by the population of central and eastern Poland.

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<sup>17</sup> The so-called Moraczewski-cabinet, cf. Cz. Brzoza et al., *Historia...*, p. 234 [supra, fn. 12].

<sup>18</sup> These lands have not been incorporated into Poland until the end of war with Russia and the final settling of borders with Germany, which (in case of Upper Silesia) also provoked military conflicts.

<sup>19</sup> I use the term “agrarian parties” to describe parties that evolved from the many peasants movements in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and which put the question of agrarian reform as the central matter to their program.

It initially cooperated with PPS<sup>20</sup> and supported the moves initiated by Piłsudski, including May Coup. The latter led to the existential crisis of the party which split between the supporters of a “new order” and its opponents and, as a consequence, the party gradually disintegrated.

Irrespective of their ideological differences, the peasant parties were jointly promoting the village cooperatives and credit institutions financing agricultural production. The key point of their program was, however, the agrarian reform, i.e. land redistribution.

### 2.1.3. The National Democrats

At the eve of Polish independence the movement of National Democracy was represented by several organizations formally subordinated to the Liga Narodowa, a secret coordination institution established by Roman Dmowski in 1893.<sup>21</sup> After the 1919 election, these organisations united first into joint parliamentary fraction and subsequently – into the Związek Ludowo-Narodowy (ZLN), in 1928 transformed into the Stronnictwo Narodowe (SN, National Party). Since all national organizations active during the partition time were using attribute *demokratyczno-narodowy* (national-democratic), the ZLN and later the SN were usually called “national democrats”, abbreviated in common tongue to the word *Endecja*. Roman Dmowski, supported by Stanisław Grabski<sup>22</sup> remained the key figure in the ZLN.

In most aspects the program of National-Democrats could be regarded as liberal (economically) and conservative (socially). The Nationalists stressed the importance of private property and national solidarity, they felt bound to Catholicism and traditional values. They opposed the idea of equal rights as granted to numerous national minorities and in foreign policy they regarded Germany as the major threat to Poland.

### 2.1.4. Satellites

Three small movements, much less influential but still playing their own role on the political scene accompanied the major parties described above. These were: Christian Democrats,<sup>23</sup> National Working Class Party and the conservatives. Christian Democrats were ideologically close to the ZLN, but stressed Christian values and based their program on the encyclical *Rerum Novarum*. This made them also a tactical ally of the ZLN with which they formed a government in 1926. The National Working Class Party (*Narodowa Partia Robotnicza*), in spite of striking resemblance of its name to the German NSDAP had nothing in common with fascism-inspired ideologies. It was a socialist party which stressed the priority of national interest over the social one, thereby forming a strange combination of sympathizers of national democracy and those of Piłsudski.

<sup>20</sup> As a matter of fact, the foundation of PSL-Wyzwolenie was inspired directly by PPS in 1915 in order to expand the influence of PPS among peasants, cf. J. Holzer, *Mozaika...* p. 156 [supra, fn. 2].

<sup>21</sup> Cf. *Encyklopedia...*, p. 191 [supra, fn. 13].

<sup>22</sup> Not to mistake for Władysław Grabski, author of the Polish monetary reform, *nb.* also a national-democrat, cf. *Encyklopedia...*, p. 113 [supra, fn. 13].

<sup>23</sup> The full name of the party was *Polskie Stronnictwo Chrześcijańskiej Demokracji* (Polish Alliance of Christian Democrats) and was abbreviated here to Christian Democrats for the purpose of clarity.



Conservative groups never created a party but were rather a mosaic of partly informal clubs and societies representing landowners and industrial aristocracy, and trying to influence the most important political players. Conservatives were divided according to their interests and regional affiliation, some of them supporting Piłsudski, while others (especially from central and western Poland) cooperating with national democrats.

## 2.2. The parties and political movements of national minorities

Interwar Poland was a multi-national country, in which Poles represented the population that varied – according to various estimations – between 65% and 69%.<sup>24</sup> The most numerous minorities were Ukrainians (ca 14%) and Jews (ca 9%), dominating in the Eastern Marches where, in many places, Poles were a minority in local communities.<sup>25</sup> The attitude of the minorities toward Poles and toward Polish state was diverse and evolved in time – from acceptance and loyal behavior to open hostility and terrorist acts.<sup>26</sup> The attitude towards minorities, the scope of autonomy and the rules of their participation in public and economic life was one of the most important issues of Polish politics in the twenties. All minorities participated in the public life through a number of political, educational, social and other parties and groupings.

### 2.2.1. Jewish political organizations

Jewish minority in Poland was the second-biggest and the least homogenous one. Jewish citizens belonged to all social classes, and varied in their attitude towards political questions more than any other group in Poland. Main divisions between Jewish parties ran along general ideological debates of the time on one hand and along assimilation question and attitude toward Zionist ideology on the other. Usually, Jewish organizations were also integrated into wider international structures, which were also active within the boundaries of Poland.<sup>27</sup>

Conservative Jews were grouped in the orthodox Union of Israel (*Związek Izraela*) and were – from its Hebrew name *Agudat Israel* – commonly called Aguda. They contested Zionist movement, stressing the importance of religious piety for the living in diaspora and irrespective of their political tint promoted the idea of remaining loyal to the state authorities. Aguda supported Piłsudski's efforts after the May Coup, and when compared with other Jewish organizations it was treated favorably by the ruling establishment.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> There were only two census conducted in the '20 years' period, the first one conducted in 1921 was hardly reliable, as the state borders were not established yet, and the second one was partly rigged in order to reduce the total number of minority citizens, cf. J. Tomaszewski, *Ojczyzna nie tylko Polaków. Mniejszości narodowe w Polsce w latach 1918–1939*, Warszawa 1985, p. 34.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>26</sup> The latter was representative in particular of the Ukrainians, who established OUN (Organization of the Ukrainian Nationalists) as a clandestine terrorist structure practising armed violence.

<sup>27</sup> Cf. Cz. Brzoza *et al.*, *Historia...*, p. 247 [supra, fn. 12].

<sup>28</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 248.

Zionists were represented by a conglomerate of various autonomous groups, some of them formally registered as parties and some existing only as loose ‘societies’ grouped around press titles or cultural clubs. Certain degree of coordination was provided by a structure called Zionist Organization which formally acted as a party but *de facto* was divided into three territorial fractions (according to the former partitioned territories).<sup>29</sup> Zionists supported the idea of creating independent Jewish state in the Palestine, though single parties varied in their concepts and assumed different attitude toward tactical questions. They tried to keep distance from internal Polish politics and – mainly because of their dispersion – never formed a separate fraction in the Sejm. Interesting is the co-operation of radical fractions among Zionists with Polish government in the late 1930s: the international leader of revisionists in the Zionist movement, Zeev Żabotyński persuaded Polish authorities not only to support illegal immigration of Polish Jews to Palestine, but to combine it with organized smuggling of ammunition and weapons. Within this agreement, Jewish combatants were also trained by the Polish military in conspiratorial tactics and in the use of terrorist methods, in order to join such organizations as *Irgun* and *Lehi* in the Palestine.<sup>30</sup> Politically, the most influential with regard to Polish domestic matters, were Jewish socialists, grouped in so called “Bund”.<sup>31</sup> Bund was a Jewish-socialist party which rejected Zionism and was based on Jewish trade unions. Apart from typical socialist postulates, they concentrated on minority issues, aiming at improvement of the position of the Jews in public life (e.g. through recognition of Yiddish in the public sphere). Popularity of Bund increased, as the tensions between Poles and Jewish minority grew in the 1930s.

### 2.2.2. Ukrainian political organizations

Political life of the Ukrainian minority in the interwar Poland was characterised by general rejection by the Ukrainian elites of the Polish state and of its rights to the territories of Eastern Galicia and Wołyn. The Ukrainians had their own experience of struggle for independence at the end of Great War: in this struggle, they sometimes fought directly against Polish troops. When defeated, they felt they lost at the cost of Polish success.<sup>32</sup> Polish efforts to manage the multinational state failed, partly because of the inappropriate policy towards this minority but above all – because of the hostile attitude that was adopted towards Poland by this minority. This tragic conflict escalated during the 1930s and found its genocidal culmination in early 1940s, when the Ukrainian resistance movement murdered approximately 100 000 Polish citizens during violent ethnic cleansings.<sup>33</sup>

<sup>29</sup> Cf. *Encyklopedia...*, p. 272 [supra, fn. 13].

<sup>30</sup> Cf. J. Mielnik, *Jak Polacy stworzyli państwo Izrael*, “Focus Historia” 05.05.2008. Controversial, as *Irgun* and its leaders were even among the Jewish population in the Palestine, this episode clearly demonstrates Polish pro-Israel sympathies.

<sup>31</sup> *Powszechny Żydowski Związek Robotniczy „Bund”*.

<sup>32</sup> Polish-Ukrainian relations in 1918–1921 were extremely intertwined, since the Poles fought off the Ukrainian claims to Eastern Galicia, but almost at the same time undertook an attempt to create Ukrainian state with Kiev as a capital during the Polish-Bolshevik war. Thus, for the Ukrainians, Poles were both oppressors and supporters.

<sup>33</sup> Cf. extensive summary in: E. Siemaszko, W. Siemaszko, *Ludobójstwo dokonane przez nacjonalistów ukraińskich na ludności polskiej Wołynia 1939–1945*, Warszawa 2008.

The main division between the Ukrainian political groupings was thus their attitude towards legal vs. illegal methods of activity aimed at the creation of an independent Ukrainian state. Two most prominent organizations were formed in the 1920s: UNDO<sup>34</sup> which opted for legal methods and participated in the general parliamentary elections and UWO<sup>35</sup> which acted in conspiracy and used terror – both against Poles and against the moderate Ukrainian politicians. In 1929, the UWO, after incorporation of several radical groups, changed its name to OUN – *Organizacja Ukraińskich Nacjonalistów*. The OUN proclaimed officially terror as their main method of action, and escalated conflict, organizing attacks and assassinations both of Poles and of their political opponents among the Ukrainian population.

### 2.3. The Communist party

Polish communists will be discussed separately, since in the interwar time their organization did not constitute a “political party” in the usual meaning of this word. The Communist Party of Poland (KPP) not only was a political group that contested the very existence of the Second Republic (this is what happens to many political organizations), but it was hierarchically, structurally and financially incorporated into the *Komintern* which at that time was nothing else but an offensive intelligence structure of Soviet Russia. As such, the KPP was fought off by the Polish state not as much as a terrorist organization (which it was) but mainly as a branch of foreign intelligence.

Formally, the KPP (initially named KPRP: *Komunistyczna Partia Robotnicza Polski*) was created in 1918, when 2 Marxist parties of the partition period united: *Socjaldemokracja Królestwa Polskiego i Litwy* (SDKPiL, Social Democracy of the Kingdom of Poland and Lithuania), linked directly to the Bolsheviks<sup>36</sup>, and *PPS-Lewica*, Marxist dissidents from Piłsudski’s Socialist Party. The membership of this new Polish party was automatically combined with the membership in the communist Bolshevik party. The KPRP rejected Polish independence and supported the Soviet army in its invasion of Poland in 1920, forming *Polrewkom* (Temporary Polish Revolutionary Committee), a nucleus of the potential Soviet government for Poland. After Polish victory, the delegatized KPRP integrated into Comintern, the Communist International subordinated directly to Kremlin. In 1925, the party changed its name to KPP.

The activities of KPP could be divided into operations of intelligence and influence-holding type. The first one concentrated on sabotage and espionage, performed in close cooperation (and subordination) with the Soviet intelligence agencies. Other, “legal” methods of action were designated to create crypto-communist organizations, infiltrating the existing parties in order to shift them to more radical positions. The infamous participation of the KPRP in the Soviet invasion had a great impact on its very limited influence on the Polish society, the minorities being more responsive to its ideology. Its role in the politics was also reduced by the deep infiltration of the Communist move-

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<sup>34</sup> Ukraińskie Zjednoczenie Narodowo-Demokratyczne.

<sup>35</sup> Ukraińska Organizacja Wojskowa.

<sup>36</sup> Before outbreak of the World War I, SDKPiL was a territorial branch of the Social-Democratic Russian Workers’ Party (SDPRR) which since 1903 was dominated by Bolsheviks under leadership of Lenin.

ment by the Polish counterintelligence. This fact, combined with the large number of “old Bolsheviks” among the KPP members, had probably a major impact on Stalin’s decision to dissolve KPP. The leaders of the party were called off to Moscow, where they were either immediately executed or sentenced to long imprisonment in the Gulag. The irony of history is that the only communists that survived the dissolution of the KPP were those who, at that time, were in Polish prisons.

### 3. Summary

Both biggest mass parties of the interwar-time, i.e. the National Democrats and the Polish Socialist Party, had built up their ideology and social impact before Poland became an independent state. The personal experience of both eminent figures of the fight for independence (and, at the same time, great authorities of the two competing political movements), Dmowski and Piłsudski, strongly influenced the politics of the independent state. Both politicians mistrusted each other, and their supporters were fanatically contesting the opponents. The first free election resulted in a relative ‘balance of power’, and the two politicians had to arrive at a compromise. The Constitution of 1921, with its emphasis laid on the role of parliament and with a feeble presidency, was responsible for freezing the aforementioned balance between the two major party movements. The proportional electoral system guaranteed that none of the opponents could prevail in the future, at least not in the electoral contest. The next five years brought a permanent cabinet crisis which was finally solved by a May coup. However, even gaining the autocratic power did not give the *Sanacja* enough political strength to put forward any constructive program. After the death of its leader, the political movement of Piłsudski’s followers even had to harden its original line of policy pursued toward minorities, in order to satisfy the supporters of National Democrats.

Until 1926, the political structure of the Second Republic was highly inefficient. It paralyzed most efforts to undertake effective public policies. In a long run, the Republic was incapable of finding remedies for acute social problems. After 1926, with the reduced role of the Parliament, the State became more steerable. Yet the new political establishment was also unable to offer any clear solution that would neutralize the threats that the Second Republic faced.