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CONSERVATIVE IDEAS AS THE SOURCE OF ACTIVITY OF THE POLISH WHITE CROSS IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

S u m m a r y : The purpose of this article is to analyze the conservative ideas that are the source of the work of the Polish White Cross in the United States of America. Consideration of this issue is desirable for several reasons. First, today's resurgent radicalisms are causing the world that we have known for the past quarter of a century to cease to exist right before our eyes. At the same time, the European *status quo* has been challenged by the war steered by Putin. In this context, a question arises: *Does Europe, which is in the process of "change", still need a conservative voice?* To answer this, it is worth recalling not only non-ideological ideas attempting to define the reality of the future, but also practical ones, including those from the early 20th century initiated in the U.S., which played a historical role in the building of Polish statehood, and are now a testimony to joint-Polish-American initiatives that support democratic changes in the world. The reference to these examples is all the more justified because they are based on American conservative thought, which was the source of American human rights policy in the early 20th century. Representatives of the so-called idealist trend (also called Wilsonism), proclaimed that the United States could effectively exercise its function as a world leader if its policies promoted the traditional values of protecting individual rights and freedoms.

Of breakthrough importance for the Polish cause was President Thomas Woodrow Wilson's speech of January 18, 1918, in which, defining America's war aims, he declared that an inde-

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pendent Polish state must be established as a result of the war. President Wilson also authorized the recruitment of volunteers for the Polish army and their training.

Since every national army has its own humanitarian unit called the Red Cross, it was felt that the Polish Army should also have one. Unfortunately, as Poland was non-existent on the map of Europe at the time, it did not participate in the founding deliberations of the international Red Cross association established in 1864 in Switzerland, and therefore did not have the right to establish its own organization under this name. For this reason, Ignacy Jan Paderewski suggested the idea of establishing the Polish White Cross (PBK), which was grounded in conservative ideas. In addition, the tradition of the Polish White Cross is worth discussing because of some opinions that volunteering in Poland was less common than in other Western countries and that Poland has no tradition of it. Meanwhile, the work of White Cross is a spectacular undertaking, unprecedented in the history of Poland, based on the principles of volunteerism, and is comparable to Poland's current provision of relief action to hundreds of thousands of Ukrainian migrants due to Russia's ruthless invasion. This, therefore, is another reason to recall the work of the White Cross.

Unfortunately, despite the fact that almost every soldier in the Second Republic and in the Polish Armed Forces in the West came into contact with the Polish White Cross, the awareness of its existence and commitment to the cause is still limited. This is probably due to the fact that the so-called People's Polish Army grew out of other ideological aspirations detached from the traditions of the military formations of the interwar period and organizations cooperating with it. The authorities of People's Poland supported only socio-political associations associated with "real socialism".

Key words: Polish White Cross, USA, conservatism, volunteerism

Introduction

The purpose of this article is to analyze the conservative ideas that were the source of the work of the Polish White Cross in the United States of America. The issue is worthy of consideration for several reasons. First, today's resurgent radicalism is causing the world "that has surrounded us for the last quarter of a century to cease to exist right before our eyes [...]. The European *status quo* has been challenged by the war initiated by Putin."² In this context, the question arises: Does Europe "which is in a process of change [...] still need a conservative, prudent and moderate voice?"³ The question is legitimate, insofar as, according to Tomasz P. Terlikowski, one can find a historical analogy between our times and the breakthrough that took place in Europe in the late 18th and the 19th centuries. According to Marek Cichocki, this period should be thought of as one of the most "turbulent periods of history, which completely reshaped Europe, giving it a new form and setting in

² Tomasz P. Terlikowski, *Konserwatyzm ma przyszłość? Koniec Europy, jaką znamy* [Does conservatism have a future? The end of Europe as we know it], (Kraków: WAM, 2023), 7. All quotes from the texts by Polish authors have been translated for the purposes of this article by Marta Robson.

³ *Ibid.*, 10.

motion processes that continued uninterrupted throughout the two centuries to follow, until the beginning of the 21st century.”⁴ One of the responses to the 19th century transformation was conservatism, which became an important political voice in the decades to follow of the 19th and 20th centuries. Now that the era created by Napoleon’s Revolution is coming to an end, with profound changes taking place will a conservative voice be heard at all? At the same time, this is not about conservatism, which would be a repetition, so to speak, of what has already been, for it is well known that in social life few things start anew, but, as T. P. Terlikowski claims, it is about the fact that in order to “preserve things that are really important, it is sometimes necessary to agree to reform social life, so as to avoid, as far as possible, building a belief in the immutability of a regime or custom.”⁵ This assumption is correct, provided that, while allowing for a change in custom, one should maintain an awareness of the sense of obligation both to our ancestors and descendants, so as not to lose generational continuity and preserve our identity, so that the whole social “process of volcanic activity”, is not a modern-day Vesuvius, which “wiped out the nearby Torre del Greco.”⁶

Conservatism is a concept that eludes attempts at a clear definition. In fact, a single, definition of what conservatism is even avoided. For example, according to Bogdan Szlachta “it is rather a style of thinking about politics, with its own structure of course, but allowing for various elements, depending on the philosophical tradition that a conservative reaches for, as well as the political heritage and systemic forms inherent in the community in which his identity is formed.”⁷ Also, as Roger Scruton has it, conservatism (from Latin *conservatus* – preserved) is an attitude characterized by attachment to the existing, tradition-rooted state of affairs (values, customs, laws, political system, etc.). Scruton adds that “traditions are not projected, they are done, and not formulating reasons does not mean being unaware of them.”⁸ Somehow complementing these definitions is Konstantyn Grzybowski’s observation that: “A conservative is a patriot, but is not a nationalist, [...] a supporter of authority and respect for authority, but an enemy of despotism [...], he values freedom, but hates anarchy [...], is religious, but avoids fanaticism.”⁹

⁴ Marek Cichoński, *Początek końca historii. Tradycje polityczne w XIX wieku* [The beginning of the end of history. Political traditions in the nineteenth century] (Warszawa: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, 2021), 49.

⁵ Terlikowski, *Konserwatyzm*, 10–11.

⁶ Cichoński, *Początek*, 50.

⁷ Bogdan Szlachta, “O potrzebie refleksji konserwatywnej” [On the need for conservative reflection], in *Szkie o konserwatyzmie* [Sketches on conservatism], ed. idem (Kraków: Ośrodek Myśli Politycznej, 2008), 13.

⁸ Roger Scruton, *Co znaczy konserwatyzm* [The meaning of conservatism], transl. Tomasz Bieroń (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Zysk i S-ka, 2002), 57.

⁹ Konstanty Grzybowski, *Galicja 1848–1914. Historia ustroju politycznego na tle ustroju Austrii* [Galicia 1848–1914. History of the political system against the background of the political system of Austria] (Wrocław: Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich, 1959), 67; idem, *Ojczyzna – naród – państwo* [Homeland – nation – state] (Warszawa: PIW, 1970), 76.

Since the modern world is moving away from grand narratives,¹⁰ in place of which “there appear ‘small’ stories-micronarratives that have a local dimension and lack universalist ambitions, [which] causes [...] certain perturbations in all social practices, a crisis of existing values and forms of life,”¹¹ it is worth recalling not the ideological ideas attempting to define the future reality, but the practical ones, including those of the early 20th century initiated in the United States of America, which played a historical role in the construction of Polish statehood, and are now a testimony to joint Polish-American initiatives supporting democratic changes in the world. The reference to these patterns of conduct is all the more justified because they are based on American conservative thought. This is because the sources of American human rights policy at the beginning of the 20th century can be traced to Wilsonian idealism (also known as Wilsonism),¹² whose representatives proclaimed that the United States could effectively exercise its function as the world leader if its policies promoted the traditional values of protecting individual rights and freedoms.¹³ Thomas Woodrow Wilson, the twenty-eighth president of the United States, who was a leading implementer of the idea of individual rights and freedoms, rejected the logic of dividing the world into spheres of influence as a matter of policy. He advocated the pursuit of legitimacy of the “natural goodness of man” in the world order. The realization of this vision, as Marta du Vall rightly notes, meant “agreeing to the compulsory defense, as well as the cultivation of democracy throughout the world,”¹⁴ through the creation of a democratic society “based on the rights of the individual, derived [...] from natural law itself, founded most deeply in God. [...] the rights of man and his natural need: to secure property, freedom, speech and religion.”¹⁵

¹⁰ In their reflections on the state of contemporary culture, they operate with the concept of grand narrative; for example see *Jean-François Lyotard, Kondycja ponowoczesna. Raport o stanie wiedzy*, [The postmodern condition. A report on the state of knowledge], transl. Małgorzata Kowalska, Jacek Migasiński, (Warszawa: Aletheia Foundation, 1997); Jay M. Bernstein, “Grand narratives”. In: *On Paul Ricoeur: Narrative and Interpretation*, ed. David Wood (London-New York: Routledge, 1991), 102–123.

¹¹ Andrzej Radomski, *Wielkie narracje a mikronarracje – etyczne dylematy współczesnego pisarstwa historycznego* [Grand narratives versus micro narratives-ethical dilemmas of contemporary historical writing], <https://depot.ceon.pl/bitstream/handle/123456789/2174/32448048-Wielkie-narracje-a-mikro-narracje-etyczne-dylematy-wspo%C5%82czesnego-pisarstwa-historycznego.pdf?sequence=1> [accessed: 21.02.2023].

¹² Marta du Vall, *Neokonserwatyzm w Stanach Zjednoczonych. Od Żywoтного Centrum do epoki Reagana* [Neoconservatism in the United States. From the vibrant center to the Reagan era], (Kraków: Andrzej Frycz Modrzewski Kraków Academy, 2011), 57.

¹³ Bogusława Bednarczyk, “Prawa człowieka za prezydentury Jimmy’ego Cartera i Ronalda Reagana [Human rights under the presidencies of Jimmy Carter and Ronald Reagan]. In: *Ronald Reagan a wyzwania* [Ronald Reagan and the challenges of the era], eds. Andrzej Bryk, Andrzej Kapiszewski (Kraków: Oficyna Wydawnicza AFM, 2005), 256.

¹⁴ Marta du Vall, *Neokonserwatyzm*, 27.

¹⁵ Andrzej Nowak, “Skąd się wzięło ‘imperium zła’? Historyczna geneza formuły Ronalda Reagana” [Where did the ‘evil empire’ come from? The historical genesis of Ronald Reagan’s formula]. In: *Ronald*

This state of mind and spirit, based on transcendent principles of order, morality and virtue, was the foundation of American conservative thought. In particular, traditionalists opposed so-called “ordered liberty”. Indeed, it was a diverse movement, including “admirers of the 18th-century philosophy of Edmund Burke, so-called Southern Agrarians (e.g., John Randolph, John Calhoun), European émigrés, refugees from fascism and communism (e.g., Leo Strauss, Eric Voeglin, Thomas Monar), referring to the traditional themes of European conservative thought, or political philosophers of natural law.”¹⁶ Hence, traditionalists denied liberalism, as it was a form of relativism, and defended natural law. They advocated a binding hierarchy of values and emphasized the inalienable role of religion and customs as a condition for a civilized and free society. This new conservatism shared with European conservatism both an ideological pedigree and a condemnation of liberalism, understood as a form of utilitarianism, relativism and atheism, which, together with fascism and communism, led to a crisis of civilization.”¹⁷

The campaign for human rights and President Wilson’s vision of creating a new democratic “order” after the Great War were ethical and moral elements extremely important to the Polish cause, for which luminaries of Polish culture lobbied in the West. Ignacy Jan Paderewski was a particularly ardent advocate of the idea of Polish independence.¹⁸ He devoted his entire life, sacrificing his musical talent, his fortune and his extensive social contacts to the cause of Poland. He arrived in New York with his wife Helena¹⁹ on April 15, 1915, having suspended his performances and musical work for 5 years. He became a diplomat and politician, a delegate in the U.S. of the *Komitet Narodowy Polski* [Polish National Committee], which was headed in Paris by Roman Dmowski. Paderewski, was friends with president Wilson and, like Zbigniew Brzezinski many years later, influenced at times “key, strategic decisions of the U.S. in the world, as about ‘independent Poland’ in 1917.”²⁰

Reagan a wyzwania epoki [Ronald Reagan and the Challenges of the Era], eds. Andrzej Bryk, Andrzej Kapiszewski (Kraków: Oficyna Wydawnicza AFM 2005), 242.

¹⁶ Marta du Vall, *Neokonserwatyzm*, 28.

¹⁷ Andrzej Bryk, “Źródła intelektualne rewolucji konserwatywnej Ronalda Reagana” [Intellectual sources of Ronald Reagan’s conservative revolution]. In: *Ronald Reagan i wyzwania epoki* [Ronald Reagan and the challenges of the era], eds. Andrzej Bryk, Andrzej Kapiszewski, (Kraków: Oficyna Wydawnicza AFM, 2005), 173–174.

¹⁸ Andrzej Piber, *Droga do sławy, Ignacy Paderewski w latach 1860–1902* [The road to fame, Ignacy Paderewski 1860–1902] (Warszawa: PIW, 1982); Marian M. Drozdowski, *Ignacy Jan Paderewski. Zarys biografii politycznej* [Ignacy Jan Paderewski. An outline of political biography] (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Interpress, 1986).

¹⁹ Andrew Piber, *Droga*, 357–358, 36.

²⁰ Dariusz Terlecki, *Po dolary i wolność* [For dollars and freedom], (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Muza, 2019), 28.

President Wilson was greatly impressed by Paderewski's patriotism and shared his opinion of the historical injustice that had befallen Poland, becoming a great advocate of the independence of the Republic of Poland.²¹

Of breakthrough significance for the Polish cause was President Wilson's January 18, 1918 speech, in which, of the fourteen points outlining America's war aims, the thirteenth, devoted to Poland, stated that the war must result in the establishment of an independent Polish state, encompassing lands with an indisputably Polish population and with "assured free and safe access to the sea." The declaration dictated to the Western Allies a new position towards Poland, formulated on June 3, 1918, in a joint statement by the prime ministers of France, Britain and Italy, proclaiming that the creation of a Poland "united and independent with access to the sea is one of the conditions for a lasting and just peace and the restoration of the rule of law in Europe."²²

Without the express will of the United States and also partly of Ignacy Jan Paderewski, the miracle of Poland's restoration to independence in the fifth generation after 123 years of partition would not have been possible. France and England - the other two powers - did not come to the decision to create a new order in Europe and a new demarcation of borders for a free and reborn Poland [...]. As Lord Arthur Balfour, Foreign Minister of England, declared to Paderewski: "100 years have passed, and the world has forgotten about Poland."²³

President Wilson also authorized the recruitment of volunteers for the Polish army and their training at Fort Niagara near the Canadian border with the United States and, located opposite the Canadian camp. This permission was granted after Paderewski's arduous efforts and his talks with French Ambassador Jean-Andre Jusserand. After a number of conferences with President Wilson, Colonel Edward M. House²⁴ and Secretary of War Newton D. Baker, the War Department on October 6, 1917 issued a recruitment permit for the Polish army.²⁵ The very next

²¹ Richard M. Watt, *Gorzka chwala. Polska i jej los 1918-1939* [Bitter glory. Poland and its fate 1918-1939] (Warszawa: Wydawnicwo A.M.F. Plus Group, 2005), 50.

²² Władysław Pobóg-Malinowski, *Najnowsza historia polityczna Polski. Period 1914-1939* [The latest political history of Poland 1914-1939] (Gdańsk: Oficyna Wydawnicza GRAF, 1990), 127.

²³ Waław Orzechowski, "Kim był pułkownik House?" [Who was Colonel House?]. *Sieci Historii* 11 (66) (2018): 21.

²⁴ Edward House was Thomas Woodrow Wilson's closest advisor on international policy, the son of a Texas millionaire and a well-educated expert on European problems. Infatuated with the art of Ignacy Jan Paderewski, he became Poland's greatest ally in America, and it was he who arranged the diplomatic meeting between Paderewski and Wilson. According to Witold Orzechowski, the meeting took place on a golf course in Washington. The President, delighted to meet the famous artist, invited him to perform at the White House. Paderewski played Chopin for the President's immediate family, and then talked about the victory at Vienna of John III Sobieski and his hussars, who stopped the Turks' invasion of Christian Europe in 1683. Orzechowski, *Kim był*, 21.

²⁵ President Wilson authorized recruitment for the Polish army on the condition that it not include men subject to conscription into the United States army. Thus, in practice, volunteers between the ages of 20 and 30 were excluded. Volunteers in their teens or older than thirty could be recruited for the

day, on October 7, the active recruitment campaign for the Polish Army in France began. The influx of volunteers was so great that Camp Niagara ran out of places.²⁶

Since every national army has its own auxiliary sanitary unit called the Red Cross, it was felt that the Polish Army should also have one. The American Red Cross, which was the highest authority, was approached but it did not agree to the establishment of the Polish Red Cross.²⁷ Therefore, the newly established organization was given the name of the “White Cross”, since the term Red Cross was reserved for countries that were members of the international Red Cross association established in 1864 in Switzerland. Poland, as a non-existent state on the map of Europe, did not participate in the founding deliberations of this international organization and therefore had no right to create its own organization under this name. For this reason, Paderewski suggested the idea of creating the Polish White Cross.²⁸ It is worth referring to the tradition of the Polish White Cross, especially since some opinions are expressed internationally to the effect that volunteering in Poland is less common than in the Western countries, because Poland has no tradition of volunteering passed from one generation to another. Meanwhile, the work of the Polish White Cross is a spectacular undertaking in the history of Poland based on the principles of volunteerism, comparable to Poland’s relief campaign currently being provided to thousands of Ukrainian refugees from Russia’s ruthless invasion. Another reason for recalling the work of the Polish White Cross in the U.S. is that its sources can be traced back to conservative ideas. Because of the limited framework of this publication, I shall focus on the activity and ideological work of this organization in the early period of its existence in the US. Besides, after Poland regained its independence, in early 1919 the Polish White Cross was relocated. Paderewski and his wife arrived in Poland at that time to head the government of a reborn Poland on January 16, 1919. It was almost on the next day that his wife Helena made efforts to launch the White Cross organization in Poland to help Polish soldiers, so that their patriotic fervor would find support in ardent, reliable

Polish army in France. Marek Zgórnjak, “Rola Polonii w walce zbrojnej o niepodległość Polski w latach 1914–1918” [The role of Polonia in the military fight for Poland’s independence in 1914–1918]. In: *Polonia wobec niepodległości Polski w czasie I wojny światowej* [Polonia’s role in Poland’s independence in World War I], eds. Halina Florkowska-Francić, Mirosław Francić, Hieronim Kubiak (Wrocław: Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich 1979), 42.

²⁶ At that time, the U.S. government agreed to place Fort Niagara, located opposite the Canadian camp on the American bank of the river, at the disposal of the Poles. The first transport, consisting of 1,000 Polish volunteers, sailed for Europe on December 16, 1917. It was followed by subsequent transports to France. By May 23, 1918, 15 ships had arrived in France, carrying some 15,000 Polish volunteers. *Ibid.*, 43.

²⁷ *Mowa programowa Paderewskiego. Czyn zbrojny wychodźstwa polskiego w Ameryce. Zbiór dokumentów i materiałów historycznych* [Paderewski’s program speech, armed deed of the Polish exile in America. Collection of documents and historical materials]. 1st domestic edition, eds., revised and amended by Zbigniew B. Kumoś, Jacek Praga (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Comandor, 2000), 346.

²⁸ *Rocznik polityczny i gospodarczy 1938* [Political and economic yearbook 1938], (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Polska Agencja Telegraficzna, 1938), 1082–1083.

care from the public. The Polish White Cross was headquartered in Warsaw, with the point of command organized in the “Bristol” Hotel, co-owned by Paderewski.²⁹

The Polish White Cross as a universal social institution with unlimited reach

The Polish White Cross was established in New York in May 1918 and operated until December 1961 in the UK, where it disbanded. The *White Cross* symbolized “suffering, an unblemished past and hope for the future”. The name was given to organizations established in America, as well as in France and other countries in which Polish emigrants were present. The organization was established to “provide assistance and give care to volunteers serving in the Polish Army in France, not only in the camps, but also on the battlefield, and mainly to care for the wounded and distribute gifts sent by relatives and friends of soldiers.”³⁰

On June 21, 1918, the Polish White Cross was recognized by Komitet Narodowy Polski [Polish National Committee].³¹ Paderewski’s work was vigorously supported by his wife, Helena Maria Paderewska,³² who was entrusted with the position of president of the Polish White Cross.

Helena Paderewska joined in social work for the benefit of independent Poland with great devotion. She began her independent philanthropic work by touring Polish centers in North America and activating Polish women, who began to organize themselves on the model of American women’s associations. The women’s movement was led by the Helena Paderewska Aid Society, based in New York.³³ The main goal of these Polish women’s associations was to establish a separate Polish institution to assist Polish war victims.

The first solidarity demonstration by Polish women, organized simultaneously in all major American cities under the aegis of the Polish White Cross, took place on July 4, 1918. The essential element of this demonstration was the march of Polish nurses along with Polish soldiers before President Wilson as “a military unit”. At that time, the Polish White Cross already had official sanction,³⁴ as well as the support

²⁹ Archiwum Akt Nowych [Archives of New Records] (hereinafter: AAN) in Warsaw, Arch. ensemble: I. J. Paderewski, signatures 2968 and 3206; Piber, *Droga*, 319–320.

³⁰ AAN, Arch: I. J. Paderewski, ref. 3860, PBK bill, k. 28.

³¹ Minutes of the meeting of the Executive Committee of the National Department on preparations for the Polish Sejm, establishment of the Polish White Cross, and recruitment action, May 25, 1918. *Archiwum polityczne Ignacego Paderewskiego* [Ignacy Paderewski’s political archive], compiled by Waław Stankiewicz, Andrzej Piber (Wrocław: Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich, 1973, vol. I), 490.

³² Elwira Kryńska, *Polski Biały Krzyż (1918–1961)* [Polish White Cross (1918–1961)] (Białystok: Trans Humana, 2012), 33.

³³ *Ibid.*, 35–36.

³⁴ *Archiwum polityczne*, 462.

of representatives of the Polish National Committee in Paris and Washington. The news of the establishment of the Polish White Cross spread very quickly and met with widespread approval in Polish circles.

The Ambassador of the French Republic to the United States received the information about the formation of White Cross as early as July 29, 1918. On the same day, the French government recognized the existence of the organization as established to provide social assistance to soldiers of the Polish Army in France.³⁵ It was to cooperate with the Komitet Pomocy Rannym Żołnierzom we Francji [Committee for Aid to Wounded Soldiers in France], headed by Count Mikołaj Potocki. The French exposition of La Croix Blanche Polonaise (PBK) was first located in the Ritz Hotel in Paris. On October 31, 1920, it was moved to Boulevard Lannes, Bastion 55, also in Paris.³⁶

A month later, on August 26, 1918, the protectorate of the Polish White Cross was accepted by the High Sejm of the Polish Exile in Detroit. Ignacy Jan Paderewski asked for recognition of the Polish White Cross by the High Sejm of the Polish Exile. He said:

In view of the needs of our soldiers, in view of the obligation to meet them, in view of the dignity of the Polish exile, in view of the fact that the KNP /Polish National Committee/ has recognized the Polish White Cross, while the French government has approved this recognition, in view of the fact, finally and momentously, that H.E. Rev. Bishop /Paweł Rhode/ has accepted the protectorate of the Polish White Cross, I beg the High Sejm of Exile to accept this Polish White Cross as its own and give it its heartfelt support.³⁷

In his speech, Paderewski emphasized that “The Polish White Cross against the background of the white eagle was created as a slogan for a sacrificial deed, as an emblem of the merciful efforts of the exiled on behalf of the wounded Polish knights.” He added that aid had already been provided as “Modest donations are pouring in, noble women in particular are rushing in with pennies and labor. Soon 40 Polish nurses, educated under the supervision of the noble Dr. B. Lapowski, will depart for the battlefield. Ambulances, automobiles have already been sent. Hundreds of packages with bandages, linen and modest gifts have gone. Letters of thanks have come, touching letters.” He also asked those gathered at the event not to interrupt this work and posed the question “Would it be wise, would it be fair to interrupt such work?”³⁸ Of course, this work was not interrupted, and the donations to the White Cross increased significantly. As a result, by October 1, 1918, more than \$139,000 had been collected, and spent on the purchase and

³⁵ Ibid., 490.

³⁶ AAN, zesp. I. J. Paderewskiego, sign. 3957, Letters for the period from September 8, 1920, to October 29, 1920, addressed to La Croix Blanche Polonaise [translated from French by E.J.K.].

³⁷ Ibid., 24.

³⁸ *Archiwum polityczne*, 463

transportation of essential materials useful to the Polish army. Services (sewing shops, hosiery shops, etc.) were put into operation, but could hardly keep up with supplying such a large crowd of volunteers, especially since each soldier departing for Bordeaux, France received at least two shirts, two pairs of socks, one sweater and 50 cigarettes. Volunteers of poorer health also received one warm scarf.³⁹ To meet the army's enormous needs, clothing was purchased with cash. In wartime, this was extremely difficult and involved considerable expense. In fact, some large and unexpected expenditure was covered by Helena Paderewska from her own pocket.⁴⁰ The Polish White Cross also took care to secure healthcare supplies. It sent medicines and bandages, medical equipment, stretchers and even horse-drawn sanitary carts on springs to the troops. It also organized field pharmacies.⁴¹

At the same time, the Polish White Cross carried out charitable work for the benefit of its homeland. At the end of 1918 many food and industrial products, medicines and money were shipped to the country. The shipments were then distributed in Poland according to the donor's intentions.⁴² The PBK ran and supplied field and civilian hospitals with medicines, bedding, blankets and dressing materials, as well as essential medical instruments.⁴³

Agnieszka Wiśla, one of the Polish White Cross nurses, after returning to the United States from France, where she organized aid for the soldiers of *Błękitna Armia* [the Blue Army], was involved in the campaign to relocate more than three hundred orphaned Polish children to Poland in 1922.

After the October Revolution of 1917 and during the Polish-Bolshevik war, the parents of these children had been considered bourgeois enemies of the state by the Bolsheviks and were deported to Siberia. Many children from these Polish families became orphans and lived in shelters and orphanages. The plan was to evacuate the children from Russia to Japan and then to Poland. 191 children arrived in Poland in the first transport and 199 in the second. Since 370 Polish children were still left in Japan, help was requested from the American Red Cross to transport them to the United States.⁴⁴

³⁹ Jozef Orłowski, *Helena Paderewska, na XV-lecie jej pracy narodowej i społecznej 1914–1929* [Helena Paderewska, on the fifteenth anniversary of her national and social work 1914–1929] (Chicago: Franciscan Fathers Publishing House, 1929), 114.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 114.

⁴¹ Tadeusz Radzik, "Działalność Polskiego Białego Krzyża i Sekcji ratunkowej Polek w Stanach Zjednoczonych Ameryki w latach 1918–1920" [Activities of the Polish White Cross and the Polish Women's Rescue Section in the United States of America, 1918–1920], *Przegląd Polonijny* 1(1990): 114.

⁴² Central Military Archives (hereinafter: CAW) in Rembertów. Office of the Minister, ref. I. 300.1.1272, p. 42 ff.

⁴³ Kryńska, *Polski*, 82.

⁴⁴ Elwira J. Kryńska, "Polski Biały Krzyż i jego działalność dla dobra Polski niepodległej" [The Polish White Cross and its activities for the benefit of independent Poland]. In: *Dziecko w historii. Sytuacja dziecka w odrodzonym państwie polskim* [Child in history. The situation of the child in the reborn Polish

It is estimated that through the Centralny Komitet Pomocy dla Dzieci [Central Children's Relief Committee], headed by Helena Paderewska, a total of \$500,000 was allocated to help these Polish children.⁴⁵ At the same time, every effort was made to ensure that the Polish White Cross association retained "its Polish character to the highest possible degree."⁴⁶

The White Cross structure quickly transformed from an ordinary organization caring for Polish soldiers into a registered association with legal personality, and the ability to establish branches and form unions.⁴⁷ Thus, it was transformed from a local organization into a universal social institution.

Conservative moral and spiritual values guiding the work of the Polish White Cross

The support of Polish regiments in France was possible because a significant part of the Polish American community actively joined the current of assistance to Poland's struggle for independence, since their native land had become the terrain of warfare conducted by armies representing foreign powers, which was blamed for the pre-war conditions, as well as for the fate of the emigrants.

Although the formation of the Polish military ranks was enthusiastically welcomed by many Polish emigrants, this patriotic explosion was not immediately shared by the entire Polish community. During the years of World War I, it is possible, according to Andrzej Brożek, a well-known researcher of these issues, to speak of neutralist sentiments, of indifference, and of anti-war activity on the socialist left:

It seems that in the stratification of the Polish-American community during the years of the World War I, it is possible to distinguish a layer that was actively engaged in favor of the events in Europe (while it was internally antagonized by the programs of the National Defense Committee and the National Department), as well as a layer that consciously took a different stance towards the war. Finally, there was the entire fundamental core of Polish-American society, whose attitude toward the war was shaped by impulses coming out of these two 'elite' layers.⁴⁸

This polarization of positions was, in a way, the result of the fact that a wave of people who had been deprived of their own statehood for generations moved from the lands of a Polish state that had not existed for more than 100 years. They came to a mythical America, where the Statue of Liberty was a symbol of "dreams

state], eds. Elwira J. Kryńska, Agnieszka Suplicka, Łukasz Kalisz (Białystok: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu w Białymstoku, 2020), 64-66.

⁴⁵ Joanna Puchalska, "Pani Paderewska" [Mrs. Paderewska]. *Sieć Historii* 11 (66) (2018): 89.

⁴⁶ AAN, team of I. J. Paderewski, sygn. 3860, Projekt statutu [Draft of the statutes] PBK, k. 28.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 25-26.

⁴⁸ Andrzej Brożek, *Polonia amerykańska 1854-1939* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Interpress, 1977), 179.

of freedom” and all “that was unattainable in the distant Polish countryside” in the hope that emigration was a chance to change their fate.⁴⁹ According to Dariusz Terlecki, this was a “true exodus. [...] the largest wave of emigration that ever flowed away from the Polish territories.”⁵⁰ Nearly three million immigrants arrived in the United States at the time, among them “very conservative farmers” from Europe, and those who “took holy images, rosaries, rusks and sausage for the road and headed out into the great world. Into the unknown [...]”⁵¹ who at the “gates of the New World” certified that they were not persons “convicted of crimes committed or other criminal acts or any offenses against morality, such as polygamy, [...] anarchism, prostitution.”⁵² They were poor, illiterate, ignorant of English, unskilled “with very strange customs, fanatically religious by American standards, in addition, Catholics.”⁵³ “In America they were still Poles. Consciously and consistently for generations, and they still sometimes were attacked for it, even there.”⁵⁴ . Despite this, they formed a well-organized community, deeply devout, attached to religious and national traditions, and actively working for an independent Poland.

The work of the Polish White Cross was also vigorously supported by the Polish clergy. For example, in Chicago, Illinois, the metropolis of Polish-American Polonia, a command center was organized in the parish of *Wojciechowo*, where the parish priest, Father Kazimierz Gronkowski, was honorary chairman of the PBK circles operating at the parishes. The center not only collected donations arriving from other parishes and sent them to France, but also dealt with the “production” of basic clothing for soldiers (warm socks, scarves, gloves, sweaters were made from wool) and its distribution. In New York, the campaign to help the Polish soldier was led, among others, by parish priests: Rev. Stanisław Rysiakiewicz, Rev. Dr. Franciszek Szubinski, Rev. Canon Kruczek. In Bay City, Michigan, the action was led by Rev. Dr. Władysław P. Krakowski, while in Detroit Rev. Lempke, a friend of Rev. Ludwik Grudzinski, a representative of *Zjednoczenie Kapłanów w Wydziale Narodowym* [Union of Chaplains in the National Department], was involved in cooperation with the White Cross in the work of the PBK. In New Britain, Connecticut, the idea of PBK was spread by a faithful friend of the Paderewskis, the parish priest Rev. Lucjan Bojnowski. He was also a donor, sending monetary donations and packages for soldiers serving in the Polish army. In Boston, Massachusetts, the organization of aid to the soldiers rested in the experienced hands of the general secretary of the first Sejm of the Exile and secretary of the Board of Supervisors of the National Department, Rev. Dr. Aleksander Syski. In Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, the work of

⁴⁹ Terlecki, *Po dolary*, 17, 20.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 8.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 8

⁵² *Ibid.*, 21.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 21.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 21.

the Polish White Cross was led by Rev. M. Monkiewicz and Rev. Roman Kraus. In Yonkers, New York, Rev. Dr. Jozef Dworzak showed unrelenting energy and great enthusiasm to work for the Polish Army in France.⁵⁵ Rev. Prof. Leszczynski, president of the Polish White Cross circle of the 1st Polish Rifle Regiment,⁵⁶ was also greatly involved in the cause. I have mentioned only a few names from among the clergy supporting the work of the Polish White Cross, as it is impossible to name all the distinguished representatives of the Church taking part in helping the Polish soldier.

The cordial care and assistance that the clergymen associated with the Polish White Cross provided to the soldiers meant that they were held in high esteem among them, which was of considerable importance in their training. Thanks to the authority these priests gained, and their ability to establish personal contacts, they were a valuable aid to commanders in passing on national values and traditions. Besides, for many soldiers who were away from Poland, the chaplain's cassock was the only familiar element reminiscent of their home village, and hence the clergy were, in a way, spiritual guides in national-patriotic education. In practice, this meant that priests were not only ministers of the sacraments, but that as members of the PBK and "shepherds" of the soldiers entrusted to them they strove to create a spiritual atmosphere in the military community which was consistent with the Polish national-democratic conservative position. It was based on a "strong national feeling, [...] ardent love of the homeland, [...] high moral level of the people."⁵⁷ And among the most important virtues of the "soldier-citizen" were the ability to cooperate, discipline, camaraderie, deep religiosity, physical fitness, activism and entrepreneurship.⁵⁸

Understanding that the Catholic religion has always been of fundamental importance to Poles, the Polish White Cross encouraged the cooperation of many priests. The service performed by the clergy helped them in the most difficult moments; it was a remedy for pain after the loss of loved ones, the homeland and freedom. It enabled them to preserve and nurture their faith in good, in another human being, and also their hope for freedom and a return to an independent Homeland. For this reason, Polish priests had a special mission: they were "chaplains to citizens, took part in rallies, committees and demonstrations."⁵⁹

Thanks to the integration of lay and clerical people of the Polish American community and their determination, work and love of their homeland, it was possible

⁵⁵ Kryńska, *Polski*, 43.

⁵⁶ "Święto pułkowe Bajończyków w Dubinie" [Regimental feast of the bayonets in Dubin], *Błękitny Weteran* 8-9 (1937): 7.

⁵⁷ Roman Dmowski, *Upadek myśli konserwatywnej w Polsce* [The fall of the conservative thought in Poland] (Warszawa: Spółka Wydawnicza Warszawska A. Sadzewicz, M. Niklewicz i S-ka, 1914), 55.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 72.

⁵⁹ Halina Florkowska-Francić, Heronim Kubiak, *Czyn zbrojny wychodźstwa polskiego w Ameryce. Zbiór dokumentów i materiałów historycznych* [The armed deed of the Polish Exile in America. A collection of documents and historical materials], (New York-Chicago: Comandor, 1957), 464-465.

to create an army of more than 20,000, commanded by General Jozef Haller, which tipped the scales of victory in the Polish-Bolshevik war in favor of Poland. For in the ranks of General Jozef Haller's army, the idea of armed struggle for Polish freedom and independence was a reflection of enduring national values. Military service in the Polish Army in France was understood primarily as service to the "Great Idea of Homeland." This was reflected in the oath of the Polish Army's officer corps, which vowed, among other things "Toward an Immortal, United and Free Poland":

1. [...] to be a knight modelled by Zawisza, a Polish knight without blemish.
2. [...] to live and act always and everywhere, in the face of the enemy, in the trenches, in the camp, among one's own and among strangers according to the most sacred instructions, handed down to me by the unexpired torch of the luminous tradition of Polish chivalry.
3. As a faithful son of Poland I vow that I will cherish the love of my homeland [...].⁶⁰

As a national army, the Polish Army was to be a school in which "both body and spirit were perfected, in order to liberate the greatest Polish and human values."⁶¹ These values were instilled by the Polish White Cross by fostering valor, prudence, justice and temperance. Particular attention, however, was paid to awakening a patriotic attitude, consisting of love of the homeland and knowledge of and respect for the history of the nation. Efforts were made to strengthen all initiatives promoting Polish tradition and culture, as the ranks of the Polish Army in France included volunteers from the USA, Canada, Italy, France. In addition, the Polish army included Poles from former partition armies,⁶² who were often unfamiliar with the Polish language.

"After the application of the Verification Act, the corps of professional officers of the Polish Army included: 31% legionaries, 29% officers from the Austrian army, 30.4% from General Haller's army."⁶³ Thus, it was a very diverse army, both in terms of numbers and organizational structure, armament and uniforms, as well as training and tactics of warfare. Soldiers and officers of Polish nationality, previously serving in the units of the partitioned armies, were to a large extent permeated by the spirit of a foreign army. Hence, at the forefront of educational activities in the army was the question of forming a civic attitude towards the state and the nation.

It was believed that soldiers imbued with love for their native country would be ready to give their lives in its defense. The military was aware of this noble goal thanks to, among other things, the cultural and educational work of the Polish

⁶⁰ *Armia Polska we Francji. Dzieje wojsk generała Hallera na obczyźnie* [The Polish Army in France. The history of General Haller's troops abroad], ed. Józef Sierociński (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo LTW 1929), 143.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 144.

⁶² Piotr Stawecki, *Polityka wojskowa Polski 1921-1926* [Poland's Military Policy 1921-1926] (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo MON, 1981), 56 ff.

⁶³ Stefan Rosołowski, *Z dziejów kultury intelektualnej Wojska Polskiego* [History of the intellectual culture of the Polish Army] (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo MON, 1980), 393.

White Cross and the conservative moral and spiritual values it promoted. The Polish White Cross was an organization “which gives the soldiers, who in the shooting trenches with the bayonets of rifles expand and establish the borders of the Republic, a sign that they are not fighting for Poland alone, that the whole society is with them, with their heart and concern.”⁶⁴ This was a concept of the work of the Polish White Cross that was uniquely suited to the needs of the moment. Even the fact that Ignacy and Helena Paderewski left the United States did not result in the abandonment of the Polish White Cross, even though it became apparent that further activity of the organization was not possible. In its place, Wydział Narodowy Polski [Polish National Division] established Sekcja Ratunkowa Polek [Polish Women’s Rescue Section] as its integral agenda. Its leadership, by order of the Polish National Division Governing Council, was assumed by Anna Neuman, who had until then been actively working in the PBK.

Faced with the enormous needs of the Polish army and the civilian population at home, Paderewski once again turned to the Polish Exiles in America for help. Many social organizations responded to Ignacy and Helena Paderewski’s appeal, including: “Sokół”, Polish Women’s Union, the Catholic Union, and private individuals and institutions. At their head was the National Department, which “with its active work kindled a sincere zeal for the rescue action.”⁶⁵ Editors of Polish and American periodicals also joined the campaign. In the American press, the idea of helping tormented Poland was promoted by, among others James White, then vice president of the North Western Bank in Chicago, prominent Catholic writer Charles D. Cameron in Detroit and co-editor of the influential American Daily News in Chicago, and Federal Commissioner Antoni Czarnecki, who “accompanying President Hoover on a tour of the devastated Polish lands, pointed out to him images of the terrible misery that the first lady, Paderewska, wanted to relieve and change.”⁶⁶ This collective cooperation yielded remarkable results. The National Department sent 6,794 boxes of food and industrial products to the Polish White Cross. The transportation of these gifts from the exiles in the US was handled by Edward S. Witkowski as a delegate of the National Division and the owner and head of the shipping and ship charters office in New York.⁶⁷ In addition, the National Department, together with the Polish Central Rescue Committee, donated \$47,500 to Dr. Franciszek E. Fronczak of the PBK for the relief of the population in Poland and the formation of the Polish army.⁶⁸ During

⁶⁴ 15 Years of Work of the Polish White Cross Among the Military. Report on the Activities of the Poznań District of the PBK for the Year 1932/1933, Poznań 1934, Archives of the CBW in Rembertów, sygn. 117 775, p. 14.

⁶⁵ Orłowski, *Helena*, 156

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 157.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 157.

⁶⁸ *Archiwum polityczne*, 79.

the Polish-Bolshevik war, the range of social assistance provided by the American Polish community expanded even further. In order to alleviate the difficult living conditions not only of the army but also of the civilian population, especially of the eastern areas, huge amounts of clothing, foodstuffs, hygiene products, etc. were delivered, and financial assistance was also provided. These were donations collected among the Polish American community, which were received with great joy and attentiveness. This exceptionally wide-ranging social action was possible thanks to the recognition that the Polish White Cross gained by operating in exile.⁶⁹

Conclusions

One can find certain similarities between the willingness to sacrifice and deep commitment to tradition, based on a strong foundation of morality and faith found among Polish immigrants, and the various conservative currents found in the United States. First of all, conservatism is not a single idea, but an ensemble of ideas, linked by “complex, internal, multi-motivational ties.”⁷⁰ These ties and dependencies express the richness of conservative thought. One of them was indicated by the United States, more specifically by the administration of President Woodrow Wilson; its basis was the assumption of the universal right of people and peoples to freedom. Thanks to Wilson’s policy rejection of the logic of dividing the world into spheres of influence, Poland gained the right to self-determination.

Stefan Stablewski, an interwar conservative, claimed that conservatism is based on a certain decalogue of values: “These are, in the first place, religion, family, property, the rule of law. They are anchored in the law of nature, and therefore in divine law. If, at a certain moment in history, these values are recognized, then at the time the preservationist will defend this state. If they are threatened, then he will fight for their introduction or restoration.”⁷¹ This does not mean, however, that the conservatives had a unified program, or even a position towards Polish independence. Right from the beginning, significant differences between the Cracow group and the Eastern Galician conservatives⁷² were outlined on this issue. As a result, the interwar period indicates two basic conceptions of political role and the resulting personal patterns, which reinforced moral and spiritual values.

⁶⁹ Kryńska, *Polski*, 78 ff.

⁷⁰ Marta du Vall, *Neokonserwatyzm*, 43.

⁷¹ Janusz Kawalec, “Działalność polityczna polskich konserwatystów w latach 1918-1939” [Political activity of Polish conservatives in the years of 1918-1939], <http://www.legitymizm.org/dzialalnosc-polskich-konserwatystow>.

⁷² Szymon Rudnicki, “Działalność polityczna polskich konserwatystów 1918-1926” [Political activity of Polish conservatives in 1918-1926] (Wrocław: Wydawnictwo Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich, 1981), 34.

They corresponded to the commonly accepted division of politicians into idealists and pragmatists.⁷³ According to Vladimir Micha, these can also be considered as two varieties of conservatism,⁷⁴ of the two Polish schools of political patriotism, i.e., the National-Democratic and the supporters of Józef Piłsudski. These two varieties of conservatism guided the activities of the Polish White Cross. In the first period National Democracy had a decisive voice, together with activists of the conservative movement, who played an important role in the period of laying the foundations of the rebuilt Republic. After the May Coup the supervision was taken over by the Piłsudski camp, promoting the slogan of civic work for the state. Since 1928, the members of Piłsudski camp were identified with *Bezpartyjnym Blokiem Współpracy z Rządem* [Non-Partisan Bloc for Cooperation with the Government], represented by various ideological and political currents: the right (conservatives and, in the 1930s, also a group of former national activists); the center - Prime Minister Kazimierz Bartel's Labor Party, Christian Democratic and People's groups; the left - people originating from the PPS and PSL "Wyzwolenie", the syndicalist movement and trade unions.⁷⁵

Conservatism as a political direction was formed in the various partitions independently of each other. The different balance of social forces and operating conditions across the partitioned areas were the cause of significant differences between conservative parties, expressed, among other things, in a different tradition of political alliances. After independence, despite numerous attempts conservative activists failed to bridge these differences. Although relations between the various parties were fraught with tension, the activities of the Polish White Cross for Poland's independence were an element that united the various political groupings. This is because the fundamental goal of the Polish White Cross, both in exile and at home, was the good of the homeland. Although the Polish White Cross was initially associated with National Democracy, and later with Sanation, it always tried to meet the aspirations and needs of the soldier community. Moreover, in providing assistance to Polish army volunteers and civilians (including children), both in exile and at home, it was also an organization that brought hope to the Polish people for the freedom of the Homeland, and in independent Poland served the nation and its armed forces. During World War II, its activists (abroad and at home) made efforts to come to the aid of their fighting compatriots. Despite

⁷³ Elwira Kryńska, "Konserwatywne aspekty myśli społeczno-wychowawczej Adama Skwarczyńskiego" [Conservative aspects of the socio-educational thought of Adam Skwarczyński], *Polish Pedagogical Thought*, 8 (2022): 211.

⁷⁴ Włodzimierz Mich, "Adaptacja państwa w myśli politycznej polskiego ruchu konserwatywnego" [Adaptation of the state in the political thought of the Polish conservative movement]. *Annales Universitatis Mariae Curie-Skłodowska Lublin-Polonia* vol. XLVIVII, Sectio F, Historia (1991/1992): 391.

⁷⁵ Waldemar Paruch, *Myśl polityczna obozu piłsudczyńskiego 1926-1939* [The political thought of Piłsudski's camp in 1926-1939, (Lublin: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Marii Curie-Skłodowskiej, 2005), 13.

this, the post-war state authorities discredited the achievements and deeds of the political circles of the Second Republic. History had to wait a long time to record the “last chapter” of the struggle between totalitarianism and freedom, which began in September 1939 with the Polish defense against German-Soviet aggression. In this situation, once again a special role fell to the Polish political émigré, among whom also the Polish White Cross tried to realize the idea of independence through the implementation of its own tasks and goals, deeply embedded in traditional Polish values, and according to the belief that tradition is the permanent basis of the nation’s self-knowledge; and secondly, it is also a revolutionary idea. Hence, as Adam Skwarczyński has it, when it comes to the traditionalists their aspiration to fight for an independent state did not disappear, but on the contrary was consolidated. Revolutionaries, on the other hand, were focused on historicism, especially the side that sees “the power valid for the future” in the achievements of the past.⁷⁶ This was in line with the assumption that the past is of paramount importance to the consciousness of a nation, so the past should be always considered in thinking about the future.⁷⁷ For the dialogue with the past to be effective, the cultivation of traditions should be subordinated to planning activity directed towards the future. A notable example of such dialogue was the work of the Polish White Cross.

The widespread support that the Polish White Cross gained from numerous Polonia groups, as well as individuals of Polish and foreign origin, allowed it to develop extensive work for the benefit of Poland and Polish Army volunteers in France. As a token of appreciation for the successful realization of its cultural, educational and social objectives, the Polish White Cross, operating under the protectorate of the General Inspector of the Armed Forces, was given the rank of an association of higher utility on the basis of the decree of Poland’s Council of Ministers of January 17, 1936.⁷⁸

Notably, the status of an association of higher utility was granted at the request of the Minister of the Interior in 1933–1939 to only 9 organizations, including the PBK. In addition, the Polish White Cross is an organization unprecedented in Polish history, based on voluntary principles. It was an initiative that had survived for more than 40 years. Unfortunately, despite the fact that almost every soldier in the Second Republic and in the Polish Armed Forces in the West encountered the work of the Polish White Cross, the awareness of its existence and achievements is still very limited, probably due to the fact that the so-called *Ludowe Wojsko Polskie* [People’s Polish Army] grew out of different ideological aspirations and detached

⁷⁶ Adam Skwarczyński, *Mysli o nowej Polsce* (Warszawa: Drukarnia Artystyczna, 1934), 99–100.

⁷⁷ Ad Lux (A. Skwarczyński), “Jubileusze” [*Jubilees*]. *Przedświt* 10–12 (1913): 162.

⁷⁸ Decree of the Council of Ministers dated 17.01.1936 Dz.U.R.P. No. 77, item 89 dated 31.01.1939. On the recognition of the Polish White Cross as an association of higher utility.

itself from the traditions of the military formations of the interwar period and the organizations cooperating with it. The authorities of People's Poland supported only socio-political associations associated with "real socialism".

Translated from Polish by Marta Robson

Idee konserwatywne jako źródło działania Polskiego Białego Krzyża na terenie Stanów Zjednoczonych Ameryki Północnej

Streszczenie: Celem artykułu jest analiza idei konserwatywnych będących źródłem działania Polskiego Białego Krzyża na terenie Stanów Zjednoczonych Ameryki Północnej. Rozważenie tej kwestii jest pożądane z kilku powodów. Przede wszystkim odradzający się radykalizm powoduje, że świat, który nas otaczał przez ostatnie ćwierć wieku, na naszych oczach przestaje istnieć. Równocześnie europejskie *status quo* zostało zakwestionowane wywołaną przez Putina wojną. W tym kontekście pojawia się pytanie – czy Europa znajdująca się w procesie „zmiany” potrzebuje jeszcze konserwatywnego głosu? Aby odpowiedzieć na to pytanie, warto przywołać nie tyle ideologiczne pomysły określające przyszłą rzeczywistość, ile właśnie praktyczne, w tym te z początku XX wieku zainicjowane w USA, które odegrały historyczną rolę w budowaniu polskiej państwowości, a obecnie są świadectwem wspólnych inicjatyw-polsko-amerykańskich wspierających demokratyczne przemiany na świecie. Odwołanie się do tych wzorców postępowania jest tym bardziej uzasadnione, że opierają się na amerykańskiej myśli konserwatywnej, która była źródłem amerykańskiej polityki na rzecz praw człowieka w początkach XX wieku. Przedstawiciele tzw. nurtu idealistycznego (nazywanego też wilsonizmem) głosili, iż Stany Zjednoczone mogą skutecznie sprawować funkcję światowego lidera, jeśli ich polityka będzie promować tradycyjne wartości ochrony praw i wolności jednostki.

Przełomowe znaczenie dla sprawy polskiej miało wystąpienie prezydenta Thomasa Woodrowa Wilsona z 18 stycznia 1918 roku, w którym, określając cele wojenne Ameryki, stwierdził, że w wyniku wojny powstać musi niepodległe państwo polskie. Prezydent Wilson wyraził też zgodę na rekrutację ochotników do wojska polskiego i ich szkolenie w pobliżu granicy ze Stanami Zjednoczonymi.

Ponieważ każda narodowa armia ma swój oddział sanitarny nazywany Czerwonym Krzyżem, uznano, że Armia Polska również powinna posiadać taką jednostkę. Niestety, Polska jako państwo nieistniejące na mapie Europy nie brała udziału w obradach założycielskich międzynarodowego stowarzyszenia Czerwonego Krzyża utworzonego w 1864 roku w Szwajcarii, w związku z tym nie miała prawa do powołania własnej organizacji pod tą nazwą. Z tego powodu I.J. Paderewski podsunął myśl utworzenia Polskiego Białego Krzyża (PBK), którego źródłem działania były idee konserwatywne. Ponadto warto odwołać się do tradycji Polskiego Białego Krzyża, ponieważ pojawiają się opinie, że wolontariat w Polsce jest mniej powszechny niż w innych krajach zachodnich, brakuje bowiem tradycji wolontariatu. Tymczasem działalność PBK jest spektakularnym przedsięwzięciem w historii Polski, opartym na zasadach wolontariatu, porównywalnym z obecną akcją pomocową Polski udzielaną tysiącom cierpiących Ukraińców w związku z bezwzględną inwazją Rosji. I to jest kolejny powód odwołania się do białokrzyżskiej aktywności.

Niestety, mimo że niemal każdy żołnierz w II RP oraz w Polskich Siłach Zbrojnych na Zachodzie spotkał się z działalnością Polskiego Białego Krzyża, to świadomość istnienia i dokonania tej organizacji jest wciąż niewielka. Dzieje się tak zapewne dlatego, iż Ludowe Wojsko Polskie wyrosło z innych dążeń ideowych i wręcz odcinało się od tradycji formacji wojskowych dwudziestolecia międzywojennego oraz organizacji z nim współdziałających.

Władze Polski Ludowej popierały wyłącznie stowarzyszenia społeczno-polityczne związane z „realnym socjalizmem”.

Słowa kluczowe: Polski Biały Krzyż, USA, konserwatyzm, wolontariat

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