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Excerpts from the History of Peasant Communities in the Polish Lands under Partitions in the Light of the American Press at the Turn of the 19th and 20th Centuries

*Z dziejów społeczności chłopskich na ziemiach polskich pod zaborem
w świetle amerykańskiej prasy z przełomu XIX i XX w.*

ABSTRACT

The American press at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries wrote extensively about the situation of Polish peasants under partitions. In the pages of press articles, journalists described the legal and economic situation of peasants in the territories of the three partitions, focusing on the nature of peasant serfdom and the attitude of Polish landowners towards the peasantry. Considerable attention was also given to events that led to a general change in the status of the peasant population. Successive American press titles presented and evaluated the process of enfranchisement, conducted on different terms by each of the partitioners. Examples of peasant revolts against the domestic nobility, partitioning powers and the very processes of Russification and Germanisation were also of interest to the press. However, the groundbreaking events at the beginning of the 20th century,

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such as the Russian Revolution of 1905 and World War I, were given the greatest amount of detail. These events were understood as crucial for the change in the legal and economic situation as well as the gradual formation of national consciousness among Polish peasants. The analysis of issues discussed in the press at the turn of the century makes it possible to characterise American society of that period as a community concerned with the fate of the socially oppressed peasant class and even expressing sympathy towards its representatives.

Key words: Polish peasants, peasant communities, Polish lands under partitions, American press, enfranchisement, the Russian Revolution of 1905, World War I

STRESZCZENIE

Amerykańska prasa na przełomie XIX i XX w. szeroko rozpisывała się na temat sytuacji polskich chłopów pod zaborami. Na łamach artykułów prasowych dziennikarze opisywali prawno-ekonomiczne położenie chłopów na terenie trzech zaborów, zwracając przy tym uwagę na charakterystyczne cechy chłopskiego poddaństwa oraz stosunek polskich ziemian w odniesieniu do włościan. Wiele miejsca poświęcono również wydarzeniom niosącym za sobą generalną zmianę w zakresie statusu ludności chłopskiej. Kolejne amerykańskie tytuły prasowe przedstawiały oraz oceniały proces uwłaszczenia, przeprowadzany na odmiennych zasadach przez każde z państw zaborczych. Przedmiotem zainteresowania prasy były również przykłady chłopskich buntów przeciwko rodzimej szlachcie, władzom zaborczym, a także samym procesom rusyfikacji i germanizacji. Z największą dozą szczegółowości opisywano natomiast przełomowe wydarzenia z początku XX w., w rodzaju rewolucji 1905 r. oraz I wojny światowej. Wskazywano również na szczególną rolę tych wydarzeń dla zmiany prawno-ekonomicznego położenia ludności chłopskiej oraz stopniowego kształtowania się świadomości narodowej wśród polskich włościan. Analiza problemów opisywanych na łamach prasy z przełomu stuleci pozwoliła na przedstawienie charakterystyki społeczeństwa amerykańskiego z tego okresu, jako zainteresowanego losem społecznie uciskanej warstwy chłopskiej, a nawet wyrażającego współczucie wobec jej przedstawicieli.

Słowa kluczowe: polscy chłopci, społeczności chłopskie, ziemie polskie pod zaborami, amerykańska prasa, uwłaszczenie, rewolucja 1905 r., I wojna światowa

INTRODUCTION

The second half of the 19th century was marked by rapid economic, social, cultural and technological change. This progress was possible due to a sense of relative international stability in Europe and America. In the Old World, the decisions made during the Congress of Berlin in 1878 redefined the balance of power in the region, strengthening Germany's international position, and weakening the Russian Empire. In the United States, the situation was stabilised even earlier, as with the end of the Civil War (1861–1865) the country entered a period of rapid development, further solidifying its position as the most powerful state on the American continent.

At the same time, the gradual improvement of printing technology along with various social changes—such as the abolition of slavery, rising literacy rates or incremental emancipation of the poorest social strata—led to the rapid development of the press. This trend was most evident in the United States, which occupied a leading position in printing technology during the late modern period. Technological change transformed elite sources of information into daily papers and magazines, creating thereby new opportunities and requirements for the profession of journalism¹. After 1865, the number of newspapers published in the United States rose sharply from 4,000 on the eve of the Civil War to more than 17,500 titles in 1890². The nineteenth-century American press published articles of an informative, opinion-forming and critical nature. Their role was not only to reliably present events or opinions on a given topic but also to engage readers in the content discussed. To this end, American press titles widely commented on events taking place in the New World, which found the greatest interest among readers³. Occasionally, the press also featured articles on the political and social situation in countries across the Atlantic, among them those concerning the Polish lands under partition.

After the fall of the January Uprising in 1864 there were no significant independence spurts against the partitioning powers in the Polish lands until the end of the 19th century. 'The times of trilateralism, organic work and the beginnings of the labour movement' had begun. This is precisely how Stefan Kieniewicz titled one of the chapters in his now-iconic book⁴. Nevertheless, significant social changes, which appeared to be of interest to the American press, took place in the Polish lands in the second half of the 19th century. For the most part, these changes affected the largest and poorest social class there, namely the peasants. Transformations in ownership structure, emancipation reforms and the processes of Germanisation and Russification shaped the legal-economic position of peasants in all three partitions at the end of the 19th century. Extending the perspective into the early 20th century as well, the Russian Revolution of 1905 and World War I should be included among the events that significantly influenced the formation of social status and consciousness of the peasant population. These phenomena proved to be critical for Polish society composed predominantly of members of the peasant class. Some researchers even claim

¹ B. Golka, *Prasa w USA*, Warszawa 1977, p. 18.

² A. Paczkowski, *Czwarta władza. Prasa dawniej i dziś*, Warszawa 1973, p. 76.

³ M. Jeleń, *Zakup Alaski przez Stany Zjednoczone w 1867 r. w świetle prasy amerykańskiej*, "Annales Universitatis Mariae Curie-Skłodowska. Sectio F" 2023, 78, pp. 79–80.

⁴ S. Kieniewicz, *Historia Polski 1795–1918*, Warszawa 1998, pp. 263–265.

that they became the key factors which stirred the consciousness of Polish peasants and prompted reflection on their social and national situation⁵. However, the history of Polish peasants was not presented by the American Press in terms of transformation of the entire social stratum, although such considerations did occasionally appear. Much more often, American journalists described the fate of individual peasant communities; for instance, inhabitants of one village or region who responded in a characteristic manner to the events from the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries. Nevertheless, the sum of described experiences yields an overall depiction of the peasant class understood as a whole.

The attitude of the American press in the late 19th and early 20th centuries along with expressed opinions about the fate of Polish peasants under partitions have not found interest among Polish researchers yet. Changes in various aspects of Polish peasant life during this period have been usually described on the basis of Polish press titles⁶. Considerable attention has also been given to individual communities of Polish peasants in exile, for instance in the United States or Brazil. The research stream focusing on the social reception of Polish emigration to America was initiated with the publication of *The Polish Peasants in Europe and America* by Florian Znaniecki and William Thomas, which is a seminal sociological study of Polish rural emigrants residing in the United States⁷. Therefore, the problem of Polish emigrants living on the American continent was widely described in Polish⁸ as well

⁵ M. Krisań, *Świadomość narodowa polskich chłopów w XIX wieku widziana przez historiografię polską po drugiej wojnie światowej*, "Historyka. Studia metodologiczne" 2004, 34, p. 140.

⁶ B. Józefów-Czerwińska, *Przemiany mentalności mieszkańców wsi na przełomie XIX/XX wieku (rejestrowane w dyskursach publicznych oraz w źródłach etnohistorycznych)*, "Studia Warmińskie" 2022, 59, pp. 299–313; A. Koprowicz, *Peasants, Photography and Citizenship: An Exercise in Re-Framing Social Imagination in the Polish Lands in the Nineteenth Century*, "Sprawy Narodowościowe: Seria nowa" 2023, 55, pp. 1–23.

⁷ W.I. Thomas, F. Znaniecki, *Chłop polski w Europie i Ameryce*, vols. 1–5, Warszawa 1976. The monumental work of two authors is considered a classic in the field of sociology and serves not only as essential scientific literature but also a subject of independent research per se. See: J. Szczepański, *Chłop polski w Europie i w Ameryce*, "Przegląd Socjologiczny" 1976, 28, pp. 167–176; R. Cichocki, K. Jankowska, „Chłop polski w Europie i Ameryce” a problem relacji pomiędzy badaniami socjologicznymi a ich aplikacjami dla potrzeb rozwiązywania problemów społecznych, "Człowiek i społeczeństwo" 2019, 47, pp. 19–35.

⁸ H. Brodowska-Kubicz, *Z listów chłopów emigrantów*, "Annales Universitatis Mariae Curie-Skłodowska. Sectio K" 1999, 6, pp. 95–106; J. Kita, *Podróż w nieznanie. Losy chłopskich emigrantów do Ameryki z okresu „gorączki brazylijskiej” w świetle listów do kraju z lat 1890–1891*, in: *Życie prywatne Polaków w XIX wieku*, vol. 7, *Prywatne światy zamknięte w listach*, eds. J. Kita, M. Korybut-Marciniak, Łódź–Olsztyn, 2018, pp. 77–90.

as foreign⁹ literature; however, only a few authors have based their research on the content of the American press articles. The most comprehensive depiction of Polish peasant communities under partitions may be found in John Radzilowski's article titled *In American Eyes: Views of Polish peasants in Europe and the United States, 1890s–1930s*. The author used examples from the American press, but his research primarily focused on topics related to the everyday life and culture of peasants, whereas the main part of the work was devoted to the life of Polish emigrants in America¹⁰.

The press sources for this paper were selected with the help of tools provided by the online American press database *Chronicling America. Historic American Newspapers* (ISSN 2475–2703), the culmination of the National Digital Newspaper Program (NDNP). The digitalisation of U.S. press sources is the result of a collaborative project between the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) and the Library of Congress (LC)¹¹. The *Chronicling America* database has been increasingly used for research on the American press, serving as a repository for studies on a wide range of topics¹². Thanks to the functionality of document word search, the authors were able to select press articles describing the legal and economic situation of peasants in the Polish lands as well as its transformation against the backdrop of events at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries. The research process consisted of identifying all the press articles in which the phrase 'Polish peasants' was used. A preliminary selection was then made, leaving only articles discussing the history of Polish peasants from 1795 to 1918 for further research. In the second stage of selection, it was decided to use only articles from the period 1848–1918,

⁹ T.J. Napierkowski, *The Image of Polish Americans in American Literature*, "Polish American Studies" 1983, 40, 1, pp. 5–44; A.D. Jaroszyńska-Kirchmann, 'Don't be Mute! The Culture of Letter-Writing to the Press among Polish Immigrants in America', "Cultural and Social History" 2013, 10, 3, pp. 397–417; M. Cieślak, *Crossing the Boundaries of Modernity: The Post-Abolition Journey of Polish Peasants to the United States*, "Polish American Studies" 2016, 73, 2, pp. 56–82.

¹⁰ J. Radzilowski, *In American Eyes: Views of Polish peasants in Europe and The United States, 1890s–1930s*, "The Polish Review" 2002, 47, 4, pp. 393–406.

¹¹ <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/about/> [access: 22.12.2024]. With the arrival of 2025, *Chronicling America* is to receive a new graphic design, which also involves a change in the Internet address, interface and search rules within the largest American press database. The new website is available now at: <https://www.loc.gov/collections/chronicling-america/> [access: 22.12.2024].

¹² M. Jeleń, *Zakup*, p. 8; I. Wawrzyczek, *Behind the Facade of Victorian Womanhood: Cultural Implications of Helena Modjeska's Coverage in the American Press, 1877–1909*, "Res Historica" 2021, 52, p. 242.

with a few exceptions. It was during this period that by far the largest number of texts came, and thus it was considered the most representative of the history of Polish peasant communities. The second half of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th centuries was a period of significant transformations in the status of the peasant population. In the final, third stage of selection, the authors identified a group of articles discussing the peasants' everyday life and culture in a broad sense (including their costumes, customs or celebrated festivities). Texts of this sort may also be considered an extremely interesting source; however, the strictly defined thematic framework for this article prompted the authors to treat specific issues of the peasant culture as the subject of separate research. Consequently, solely those texts discussing political events and more important socio-economic reforms initiated by the state administration were retained for detailed content analysis.

The aim of the article is then to analyse a selected group of press articles concerning references to the fate of Polish peasants under partition, particularly their legal and economic situation as well as the events that significantly influenced its transformation. This approach facilitates the identification of events or issues that have been most frequently depicted in the American press. The authors' objective is twofold: firstly, to ascertain the motivations that guided American journalists in the publication of these articles; and secondly, to identify and categorise the emotions intended to be evoked in the readership of the press.

THE LEGAL AND ECONOMIC SITUATION OF PEASANTS IN THE KINGDOM OF POLAND

American nineteenth-century newspapers wrote extensively about the legal and economic situation of Polish peasants under partitions. At the end of the 18th century, the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth was partitioned three times among the Russian Empire, the Kingdom of Prussia and the Austrian monarchy¹³. The partitioning states inherited from the Commonwealth the challenge of resolving the so-called 'peasant question', which was the need to determine the form, scope, and method of enfranchising the poorest social stratum in the Polish lands. Each partitioner took a slightly different approach to shaping the future of peasant communities. Therefore, the American press closely analysed changes in the legal status of Polish peasants across the territories

¹³ "The Day Book" (Chicago) 3 March 1915, p. 9.

of the three partitions and highlighted the differences in their approach to enfranchisement.

In reference to the process of enfranchisement in the Russian Empire and the Kingdom of Poland, American press titles applied the term 'emancipation', commonly used in the context of granting full civil rights to representatives of religious minorities, slaves or women¹⁴. The problem of enfranchisement and its role in shaping a new social reality in the territories governed by the Russian tsar were generally perceived as little-known in the consciousness of Western Europe and the United States, and underestimated by representatives of the local elites¹⁵. However, as some press titles show, information about the tsarist enfranchisement reforms occasionally made headlines¹⁶.

"The Emporia News" weekly described events such as: the abolition of serfdom in the Russian Empire in 1861, the convocation of the state parliament in the Grand Duchy of Finland in 1863¹⁷ (which was even referred to in the press as 'the inauguration of a constitutional form of government in the Grand Duchy of Finland'¹⁸) or the establishment of district and provincial representative assemblies (Russ. *земские учреждения*) in the Russian Empire territory, as 'the political and social regeneration of Eastern Europe'¹⁹. Several weeklies provided a brief overview of the enfranchisement process that had taken place in the Polish lands

¹⁴ "The Liberator" 1 September 1865, p. 1; T. Benton, *Emancipation*, in: *Encyclopedia of Democratic Thought*, eds. P.B. Clarke, J. Foweraker, London–New York 2001, pp. 332–333; <https://www.etymonline.com/word/emancipate> [access: 8.12.2024]. In literature, the term 'enfranchisement' is also used in reference to the abolition of serfdom in the Polish lands. See: M. Jeleń, *Realizacja reformy uwłaszczeniowej z 1864 r. w guberni lubelskiej, na przykładzie dóbr ziemskich Chodel-Ratoszyn i Radlin*, "Rocznik Lubelski" 2023, 49, p. 92.

¹⁵ "The Liberator" 1 September 1865, p. 1.

¹⁶ This was the case for the following newspapers: "The Emporia News" 14 May 1864; "The Richmond Palladium" 15 June 1864; "National Opinion" (Bradford, Vermont) 4 April 1873; "The Liberator" 1 September 1865.

¹⁷ Krystyna Szelałowska indicates that Finnish legislative assemblies had also been held sporadically before 1863. When Finland was merely a Swedish province, assemblies of this kind used to be called 'Landtags'. In 1809, Finland came under the Russian rule, and power in the country was seized by the governor-general appointed by the tsar. It was not until 1863 that the Finnish parliament was reconvened under the name 'Riksdag', which was also noted by representatives of the American press. See: K. Szelałowska, *Królestwo Polskie – Wielkie Księstwo Finlandii. Próba historycznej paraleli*, in: *Klasyczna i romantyczna: nowa postać Europy po kongresie wiedeńskim*, ed. M. Winograd, Białystok, 2018, p. 58; <https://encyklopedia.pwn.pl/haslo/4574092/finlandia-historia.html> [access: 8.12.2024].

¹⁸ "The Emporia News" 14 May 1864, p. 1.

¹⁹ *Ibidem*.

so far, focusing on events such as: the introduction of the Napoleonic Code in the Duchy of Warsaw under the 1807 Constitution promulgated by Napoleon²⁰, or the December Decree issued by Frederick Augustus, Duke of Warsaw²¹.

The set of ukases issued by Tsar Alexander II in 1864 was recognised by "The Emporia News" journalists as the most important event foreshadowing the socio-economic change in this part of Europe. Under these decrees, peasants in private estates, majorates, as well as institute and government estates were to become owners of the farms they used (land and real estate), along with livestock, agricultural tools and crops²². In the pages of the aforementioned newspaper, a more precise enumeration of changes introduced by the enfranchisement ukases can also be found. It states that since the new law came into force, Polish peasants were no longer subject to the jurisdiction of the nobility, who had previously wielded near-absolute power in this regard. Moreover, peasant communities in the Kingdom of Poland were granted the right to freely elect their own self-government representatives. As indicated in the concluding section of this article, the text goes on to provide detailed information regarding the financial obligations that were expected to be remitted by Polish peasants to the relevant state authorities. These sums were subsequently to be allocated as compensation to landowners who were impacted by the enfranchisement process²³.

American journalists were remarkably precise in discerning the motives behind the tsarist authorities' actions at the time. According

²⁰ J. Przygodzki, *Kodeks Napoleona i jego recepcja w Księstwie Warszawskim*, "Prawo i więź" 2022, 4 (42), p. 534.

²¹ The Royal Decree of 2 December 1807 was referred to in the press as 'a decree of Napoleon I'. It seems that American journalists were perfectly aware of the fact that the Duchy of Warsaw was actually dependent on the French Empire. See: "The Liberator" 1 September 1865, p. 1; M. Kallas, *Powstanie i ustrój Księstwa Warszawskiego (1807–1815)*, "Annales Universitatis Mariae Curie-Skłodowska. Sectio F" 2007, 62, p. 16.

²² *Dziennik Praw Królestwa Polskiego*, vol. 62 [Warszawa 1864], no. 187, pp. 9, 13, 15; A. Przeglasiński, *Z rozważań nad reformą uwłaszczeniową w Królestwie Polskim. Próba analizy i opisu na przykładzie guberni lubelskiej*, in: *Wolni i uwłaszczeni. Chłopi a przemiany społeczne, gospodarcze i polityczne w Europie Wschodniej w XIX i na początku XX wieku*, ed. D. Michaluk, Ciechanowiec, 2017, pp. 11–12.

²³ "The Emporia News" 14 May 1864. The reorganisation of property relations, establishment of rural self-government and compensation payments given to landowners were regulated within the set of four ukases published in 1864, which included: *Decree on the installation of the peasantry*, *Decree on the installation of Village Municipalities*, *Decree on the Liquidation Commission* and *Decree on how to introduce new laws on peasantry*. See: A. Przeglasiński, *Z rozważań*, pp. 2–3.

to Americans, the purpose of the enfranchisement ukases issued on 19 February/2 March 1864 was primarily 'to divide the peasants from the nobles, to light the flames of civil war, to murder by the hands of her own sons that unhappy country'²⁴. However, not all press titles adopted a negative stance on the policy pursued by the invaders. In the article *Some parallels between the race problem in Poland and in the United States*, published in the weekly publication "The Gazette" (Cleveland), the author posits the argument that '[t]hey [Polish peasants] were not able to help themselves and every effort that the different governments, particularly Russia and Germany, made to improve their condition was paralyzed by the political intrigues of the nobility, in Paris and elsewhere, whose policy was to sacrifice everything else to the cause of national existence'²⁵.

American journalists were also inclined to comment on the stance of Polish peasantry during the January Uprising of 1863–1864. On 15 June 1864, when the insurrection was already going into decline, "The Richmond Palladium" weekly published an article titled *Knout, Plete and Gantlet*. The main purpose of it was to enumerate and describe in detail the types of corporal punishment adopted by the tsarist army. However, the text also described the situation in the Kingdom of Poland during the final months leading up to its publication. Polish peasants were presented there as a group clearly dissatisfied with the rule of the Russian Empire. The issuance of the ukases by the Russian tsar was reported to have been met with dissatisfaction or even contempt. The author explicitly stated that '[h]aving been already emancipated by their own leaders, they [Polish peasants] [did] not appear to be aware of his superhuman benevolence in their behalf'²⁶. Nevertheless, the aforementioned Central National Committee Manifesto of 10/22 January 1863, granting the peasants ownership of the land they cultivated, was, in fact, received by them with no greater enthusiasm²⁷. In the following passage, the author of the article presented

²⁴ "The Richmond Palladium" 15 June 1864, p. 1.

²⁵ "The Gazette" (Cleveland) 6 January 1912, p. 1.

²⁶ "The Richmond Palladium" 15 June 1864, p. 1.

²⁷ As Krzysztof Groniowski explains, '[t]he insurrectionary decrees of 22 January 1863 repealed the rents, serfdom and other duties imposed on peasants with the exception of taxes, providing indemnification from the state treasury and revoking the partitioner's legislation on peasantry. The landless fighting in the insurgency ranks were promised a minimum of 3-morgue farm after the war. Essentially, the acceptance of peasant servitude rights also resulted from the decrees'. See: K. Groniowski, *Uwłaszczenie chłopów w Polsce. Geneza – realizacja – skutki*, Warszawa 1976, p. 131; idem, *Chłopi w powstaniu styczniowym a reformy agrarne lat 1861–1864*, in: *Powstanie Styczniowe 1863–1864. Wrzenie. Bój. Wizje*, ed. S. Kalembka, Warszawa 1990, pp. 133, 138–139.

a somewhat 'romanticised' vision of the subsequent course of events, according to which the peasants:

[are] determine[d] to resist 'the odious, fierce, greedy, and astute Muscovite, and to organize «en masse» under their own captains, while their own National Government will designate the day upon which the general movement will take place.' Having accomplished their object – the deliverance of Poland – the peasants will elect chiefs to arrange the repartition of taxes, and a national diet will undertake the management of affairs of the country. Prussia and Austria will then be called in again to aid in the subjugation of Poland. This will throw the firebrand of war and revolution over Western Europe, the oppressed peoples will rise in their might, and Liberty be inscribed on the banner of the world. In the indignant refusal of the Polish peasants to receive as a boon from the foreigner what they already possess as a right from their own leaders; in the devoted patriotism they are now evincing, they rob Russia of the vast advantage she hoped to gain in depriving Poland of what has made part of her marvelous force, the moral sympathies of the civilized world²⁸.

In light of contemporary knowledge, it is evident that such predictions should be considered erroneous since, as is well known, the peasant question emerged as a pivotal point of contention during the 1860s, particularly exemplifying the ongoing dispute between the authorities of January irredentism and the tsar. Eventually, the anticipated 'indignant refusal of the Polish peasants to receive as a boon from the foreigner what they already possess as a right from their own leaders'²⁹ ended only with 'a personal disaster for the landed gentry, while for the people – a resounding victory with a subtle tinge of bitterness'³⁰.

Moreover, American weeklies expressed opinions on the attitudes of Polish landowners towards the socially disadvantaged peasant stratum. Therefore, intense events of the 1860s provided a relevant opportunity to summarise certain actions taken by representatives of the Polish nobility. The opinions and comments expressed by the American press

²⁸ "The Richmond Palladium" 15 June 1864, p. 1.

²⁹ *Ibidem*.

³⁰ A. Leszczyński, *Ludowa Historia Polski*, Warszawa 2020, p. 338. In the years following the issuance of the tsarist enfranchisement ukases, mentions of the public mood among Polish peasants could also be found in the pages of the American press. As some press articles prove, representatives of the most numerous social stratum in the Kingdom of Poland continually feared the reintroduction of serfdom by the Kingdom's authorities, despite the fact that American journalists themselves considered these fears to be 'an unfounded report'. See: "National Opinion" (Bradford, Vermont) 4 April 1873, p. 1.

against the landed gentry of Poland were almost unanimously negative. The legal-economic relationship between representatives of the noble and the peasant estates until mid-19th century had been quite accurately described as 'an almost unlimited control' or 'serfdom'³¹. A fundamental change in this matter was to take place precisely with the famous enfranchisement ukases entering into force in 1864. In the pages of "The Liberator" weekly, in 1865, a decidedly negative view on the morality of Polish aristocracy was expressed. According to it, 'the Polish aristocracy, whom history adorns with such brilliant qualities, could never be praised for the Christian virtue of brotherly love, if they ever considered the peasants as brethren. Their indifference for the fate of the peasants contributed most to the decline and fall of that unfortunate nation'³². Therefore, American journalists identified one of the primary reasons behind the failure of the 19th-century Polish national uprisings, which was, without doubt, the absence of appealing ideas and desire to solve the so-called peasant problem by representatives of Polish landed gentry. The direct consequence of such an approach was the limited involvement of Polish peasants in the struggle for independence, while the indirect result was the emergence of further articles negatively assessing the Polish nobility's attitudes. In the years following the enfranchisement, the American press continued to address this issue. Journalists of "The San Francisco Call" commenting on the course of the 1905 Revolution in the Polish lands

³¹ "The Emporia News" 14 May 1864, p. 1; "The Gazette" (Cleveland) 25 August 1912, p. 1. The problem of a precise, terminological definition for the legal-economic relationship between representatives of the two aforementioned social estates has been the subject of dispute between Polish historians for decades. The discussion in this area significantly intensified in the first half of the 20th century, when Franciszek Bujak and Kazimierz Tymieniecki began to discuss the existence of slavery in the Polish lands. Bujak argued that 'slavery constituted the social and legal foundation of the servile relationship in medieval and modern Poland'. On the other hand, Tymieniecki, who approached Bujak's arguments negatively, indicated that representatives of the peasant and noble estates were bound only by material and financial obligations, and the peasants themselves were essentially a group of free people. For more, see: J. Zazuliak, *"Niewola chłopska" i „poddanie”: konceptualizacja nowożytnego poddaństwa i zależności chłopów galicyjskich we wczesnym okresie rządów Habsburgów i jej polsko-litewskie implikacje*, in: *Z dziejów pojęć społeczno-politycznych w Polsce: XVIII–XIX wiek*, ed. M. Janowski, Warszawa, 2019, pp. 348–349; F. Bujak, *Z dziejów wsi polskiej (wsi zamku oświęcimskiego na początku XVI w.)*, in: *Studia historyczne wydane ku czci prof. Wincentego Zakrzewskiego*, Kraków, 1908, pp. 317–344; K. Tymieniecki, *Zagadnienie niewoli w Polsce u schyłku wieków średnich*, in: *Bronisławowi Dembińskiemu w 50-lecie pracy naukowej*, "Poznańskie Towarzystwo Przyjaciół Nauk. Prace Komisji Historycznej" 1933, 7, pp. 497–537.

³² "The Liberator" 1 September 1865, p. 1.

claimed that '[t]he Polish peasants and working men [...] have nothing against the Russian Government as a Government. In fact they prefer it to being subjected to the tyrannical extortions of the old Polish aristocracy'³³. Similar opinions repeatedly appeared in the pages of other American press titles³⁴. Journalists expressed particularly negative views on the Polish nobility during successive national uprisings, such as the November and January Uprisings, as well as during workers and peasants' revolutions, as in the case of the 1905 Revolution³⁵. The use of such arguments additionally justified further failures occurring on the Polish nation's path to independence.

The American Press wrote extensively about the legal and economic situation of peasantry in the Polish lands, particularly in the Kingdom of Poland. When such reflections occurred, the historical outline of events leading to the collapse of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth and successive failures of national uprisings was usually recalled³⁶. The pre-enfranchisement position of peasantry in the Polish lands, the very conditions of the peasant emancipation process, as well as its effects were presented. At the same time, American journalists did not fail to assess the attitudes of two radically distinct social strata – the peasants and the landed gentry – towards the ongoing changes. With regard to the portrayal of the peasantry, expressions of sympathy for the hardship faced by these legally disadvantaged inhabitants of the Polish lands were predominant. In relation to the Polish nobility, the comments that appeared contained a harsh critique of the actions taken by landowners and aristocracy. American journalists rightly believed that the collapse

³³ "The San Francisco Call" 23 April 1905, p. 17.

³⁴ The American press drew attention to the specific nature of the actions by the nobility, both at home and in exile. Their policy was often 'to sacrifice everything else to the cause of national existence'. It was believed that 'the Polish nobility were not satisfied with anything short of a complete independence and a reunion of the different parts of the ancient republic'. See: "The Gazette" (Cleveland) 25 August 1912, p. 1.

³⁵ At times, journalists also referred to earlier events, examining a given issue from a long-term perspective. In the article titled *Fate of Poland – Efforts for her Restoration – Reflections*, published in 1848 in the Republican newspapers "The New York Herald", the author lamented over the fate of Polish society, comparing Poles to the French House of Bourbon: 'If, in the memorable contest of 1830, the Poles, who are ever found on the battlefield of liberty against oppression, had granted those rights to their peasants, which they demand so loudly for themselves, the fate of this chivalrous nation would have been very different. Like the Bourbons, they had learned nothing and, like the Bourbons, in the family of Kings, so do the Poles, in the family of nations, seem singled out as the shuttlecock for the battledore of fate'. See: "The New York Herald" 16 October 1848, p. 1.

³⁶ "The Day Book" (Chicago) 3 March 1915, p. 9.

of the Polish state, along with all subsequent failures, was the aftermath of the nobility's inaction on the 'peasant problem'. It was anticipated that the legal situation of Polish peasants would change with the arrival of the desired enfranchisement: 'The masses of the Polish peasants had been land hungry ever since they were emancipated and now they were not only given a motive for getting land, but it became a patriotic thing to do. For the first time Polish peasant began to have some share in the life of the people. In fact, it was no longer the spendthrift, idle, intriguing, political noble who was to have the Polish nation, but the humble, thrifty and despised peasant'³⁷.

THE LEGAL AND ECONOMIC SITUATION OF PEASANTS UNDER THE PRUSSIAN PARTITION

As for the legal and economic status of Polish peasants under the Prussian partition, American newspapers did not tend to focus on the process of enfranchisement itself. Unlike the territories of the Congress Kingdom of Poland, the process of peasant emancipation in the Kingdom of Prussia was considerably more protracted.

In fact, the Prussian legislation introduced a voluntary exchange of serfdom for rent in certain royal demesnes as early as 1799³⁸. With the entry into force of the so-called October Edict of 9 October 1807, serfdom in the Kingdom was abolished, allowing representatives of rural communities to move freely to the cities³⁹. In the following years, specifically in 1808 and 1811, peasants in state and private estates were granted land, with compensation paid either through the confiscation of a portion of the land received by a peasant or in cash. Consequently, compensation went to the owners of large landed properties, who, unlike the owners in the Russian and Austrian partition territories, remained in a relatively strong position⁴⁰. As with the other partitions, American press titles summarised the gradual enfranchisement process as a success of the Prussian state administration. Moreover, the newspapers perceived this as an unequivocal failure of the Polish nobility, who thereby lost the support

³⁷ "The Gazette" (Cleveland) 25 August 1912, p. 1.

³⁸ K. Groniowski, *Uwłaszczenie*, pp. 35–36.

³⁹ K. Orzechowski, *Własność feudalna i jej przemiany u schyłku epoki*, "Czasopismo Prawno-Historyczne" 1957, 9, 2, pp. 105–108; S. Kaczor, *Idea Państwa w filozofii Georga Wilhelma Friedricha Hegla i Claude'a Henri Saint-Simona*, in: *Śląsk w dobie kampanii napoleońskich*, ed. D. Nawrot, Katowice, 2014, p. 136.

⁴⁰ K. Groniowski, *Uwłaszczenie*, pp. 38–39.

of the peasant stratum during the economic and military struggle against the partitioner: 'since the first division of Poland, the nobility have been the sworn and bitter enemies of the Germans. The Polish nobility had held their peasants in a state of bondage, until they were liberated and raised in the scale of existence by the Prussians. This caused the Polish peasants to take the side of Prussia against their own nobles'⁴¹.

American journalists exhibited a pronounced interest in the issue of Germanisation policy pursued by Prussians towards Polish society, which intensified in the second half of the 19th century. The anti-Polish policy of the Prussian government against the peasant population initially took the form of the so-called 'rugi pruskie' (Eng. 'Prussian deportations'). These measures involved the forced expulsions of all foreigners of Polish origin from Prussia's eastern provinces, carried out under directives issued in 1885. The scale of expulsions was by far the largest in the years 1885–1887, when the Prussian government policy affected Poles and Jews with Russian citizenship. Soon after, the expulsion regulations were extended to Austrian citizens as well⁴².

The next stage of the broadly conceived Germanisation policy was to strengthen the German presence in the eastern provinces of the German Empire. Therefore, on lands expropriated from Polish peasantry, the authorities endeavoured to resettle German peasants, thereby establishing the foundation for the Prussian Settlement Commission, which was inaugurated in 1886. The actual purpose of the Commission's activity was to settle German farmers in Wielkopolska and Gdansk Pomerania⁴³.

⁴¹ *Fate of Poland*, "The New York Herald" 16 October 1848, p. 1.

⁴² A. Galos, *Rugi pruskie na Górnym Śląsku (1885–1890)*, "Śląski Kwartalnik Historyczny Sobótka" 1954, 9, pp. 56, 68, 100. The effectiveness of the resettlement operation was limited, as evidenced by the fact that a large number of Poles were still present in the Masurian Lake District at the beginning of the 20th century. "The Circle Banner" described the region at the advent of the Great War as follows: 'East Prussia's lake region is worth a visit. It has nothing of the impressive grandeur of the Alps, where one never does get upon familiar terms with surrounding nature, but it is a place – and, in the characteristic, it stands in sharp contradistinction to the rest of East Prussia – which receives the stranger upon the easy terms of old friendship on his first day out. Poles migrated in large numbers to this region in the fifteenth century, and of its some 400,000 population, many are the descendants of these early immigrants. These people speak a Polish language which bears about the same relationship to good Polish as Pennsylvania 'Dutch' bears to pure German. The Polish peasants live scattered through the marsh and lake lands; the German settlers and found mostly in the larger cities. Among these cities are Angerburg, Johannisburg, Lensburg, Loetzen, Lyck, Ortelsburg and Neidenburg'. See: "The Circle Banner" 22 January 1915, p. 4.

⁴³ W. Jakóbczyk, *Pruska Komisja Osadnicza 1886–1919*, Poznań 1976, p. 14.

In order to achieve this, German officials sought to purchase small plots of land or even entire landed properties from the Polish nobility and peasants. The sale of one such farm in 1881 was documented by the American daily newspaper, the "Public Ledger":

The people of Prussian Poland are said to have taken much to heart the sale of one of the largest estates in the country, heretofore the property of an ancient and noble Polish family to a German capitalist, resident in Berlin. The estate thus alienated embraces some fourteen thousand acres of the best soil, including nearly five thousand acres of forest land. The *Kurier Poznański*⁴⁴ speaks of the occurrence as a new and distressing loss to the cause of Polish nationality. It is only one of many similar sales of ancient Polish estates to German capitalists and speculators that have occurred within a recent period, and this, combined with the extensive emigration of Polish peasants and laborers, has deprived those who still dream of restoring the Polish nation to its own of almost all hope of seeing their desires realized. It is said that the time is near at hand when hardly a trace of the Polish nobility will remain, and when even the mass of the population will belong to the conquering nationality⁴⁵.

The response of the Polish landed gentry to the settlement activities was the establishment of the Land Bank of Poznań by the Pomeranian landowner Teodor Kalkstein in 1886. The Bank was responsible for overseeing the acquisition intermediary, as well as the actual acquisition, sale and subdivision of larger landed properties in the Prussian partition. Fragments of subdivided landed properties as well as land purchased from Prussians were given to Polish peasant families⁴⁶. According to data provided by the Bank itself, by mid-1896 more than a thousand Polish families had obtained possession of landed properties with a total area of 48 thousand morgens thanks to the Bank's activities⁴⁷. In 1902, the American newspaper "The Colfax Chronicle" noted the ever-expanding activities of this institution: "The Bank of Ziemiński", which is being organized at Posen, Germany, to counteract the Germanization of the province, has enlarged its capital to 15,000,000 marks. Paderewski, the pianist, is a large subscriber to the bank, the object of which is to acquire estates

⁴⁴ Original version.

⁴⁵ "Public ledger" 11 August 1881, p. 2.

⁴⁶ "The Colfax Chronicle" 23 August 1902, p. 4.

⁴⁷ *W sprawie Banku Ziemińskiego w Poznaniu*, Poznań 1896, <https://polona.pl/preview/97e-e31c6-8cb8-430c-843f-cf0854853f34> [access: 11.12.2024]; *Bank Ziemiński w Poznaniu. Prospekt*, Poznań 1887, <https://www.wbc.poznan.pl/Content/543157/630843.pdf> [access: 11.12.2024].

⁴⁸ Original version.

coming upon the market, subdivide them and sell them to Polish peasants, and also to assist Polish manufacturers in mercantile enterprises'⁴⁹. The establishment of the Land Bank prompted Poles to launch more 'little co-operative banks and land companies'⁵⁰. The project's objective was to create a situation in which 'the land remained at least in the hands of the Polish people and they were not made aliens on their native soil'⁵¹.

As a result of the Polish landed gentry's actions described above, the Prussian government deemed the Settlement Commission's policy insufficient. Consequently, proposals to modify building regulations in order to limit the voluntary subdivision of properties began to emerge among the Commission's members. The hitherto effective regulations under *The Act of 1876 on the Creation of Dwellings and Settlements by New Developments* had been considered too easy for Poles to circumvent. The new regulations of 1904 said: 'anyone wishing to build a dwelling house outside a compact development or to arrange an existing building as a dwelling house should obtain permission from the District Authority Office'⁵².

The issuance of the 1904 Amendment created significant difficulties in terms of constructing new buildings, primarily affecting Polish settlers, who were required to obtain the necessary permits from the relevant district authorities. The aforementioned act remains relatively well-preserved in Polish national memory as a synonym for the invader's oppression and Germanisation, largely due to the story of a Polish peasant – Michal Drzymala – whose case was also reported by the 20th-century American press. The "Deseret Evening News" meticulously presented the story of Drzymala, who purchased a small farm at a time when the Prussian government had just 'passed a law forbidding Polish peasants to build cottages or any roofed building whatever on their own ground'⁵³. The dwelling house that Drzymala discovered on the plot of land was reported to be completely ruined; consequently, he attempted to rebuild it. In response to the objections raised by the authorities, Drzymala and his family took refuge in a granary, which was also scheduled for demolition by German gendarmes. The farmer decided then to purchase a circus caravan for a small sum. However, the vehicle was not suitable for severe weather, and since Drzymala's activities had gained publicity across the Prussian

⁴⁹ "The Colfax Chronicle" 23 August 1902, p. 4.

⁵⁰ "The Gazette" (Cleveland) 25 August 1902, p. 1.

⁵¹ *Ibidem*.

⁵² W. Jakóbczyk, *op. cit.*, pp. 133–134, 136.

⁵³ "Deseret Evening News" 1 August 1908, p. 15.

partition relatively quickly⁵⁴, a special committee was created in Poznań, which began to collect donations from Polish peasants and small land-owners in order to fund a new wagon. The story of Drzymala has become part of the 'Polish national myth'. After the end of the Great War, the Polish novelist Józef Weyssenhoff once again recalled one of the most famous Polish peasants who endured poverty in the 1920s. The public began to raise money to furnish the house and farm, and the Polish government even offered to grant a free plot of land. The above story, described in detail in the American press, was definitely of a tit bit-like nature. Overall, Drzymala was an outstanding example of a weak individual's struggle against a ruthless partitioning power⁵⁵.

In the subsequent years, a decision was reached to further strengthen the powers of the Prussian Settlement Commission. Upon discussing a new bill, the authorities justified the necessity to grant the state the right to expropriation for compensation, arguing that it would enhance and expand the settlement process. According to German Chancellor Bernhard von Bülow, the proposed law was to enable the Commission to settle twice the number of German colonists. The expropriation law was eventually passed in 1908. Thanks to its provisions, the German state gained the right to expropriate lands and real estate deemed essential for preserving and reinforcing Germanness 'on the edges of the German Empire'⁵⁶. Obviously, the enactment of such a controversial law, which sparked protests from both Polish and some German members of the Reichstag, did not go unnoticed by the American press. Even in 1914, newspapers still recalled these events years later: 'In 1907, the german [sic] parliament passed a law, so called the law of expropriation by which polish [sic] peasants must sell their property to the german [sic] government for the purpose of colonizing them with german [sic] peasants and laborers'⁵⁷.

In 1914, a few months before the outbreak of the Great War, the American press informed U.S. society about the intense discussions taking place in the Reichstag regarding another highly anti-Polish law. The Land Division Act was designed to grant local administration officials the authority to prohibit the division of landed properties smaller than 25 acres. As a result, the German government was given the right of pre-emption

⁵⁴ 'The Prussians confiscated a little stove in the car and fined Drzymala often, but he survived the injustices and soon became known throughout the Polish provinces for his tenacity and patriotism. The picture of the famous little house on wheels was circulated everywhere among the Poles'. See: "Douglas Daily Dispatch" 25 September 1927, p. 6.

⁵⁵ *Ibidem*; "Evening Star" 26 July 1908, p. 5.

⁵⁶ W. Jakóbczyk, *op. cit.*, pp. 149, 156, 160.

⁵⁷ "Wibaux Pioneer" 2 October 1914, p. 1.

over these lands: 'Whenever a sale of land occurs the contract must be laid before the local administrative officials, who have the right to take the land at the price named for the government'⁵⁸. One of the most radical provisions of the law even entitled the government to prohibit the sale of land between two Poles. Journalists from "The Sentinel Record" openly stated that the clear aim of the new law was to facilitate the Germanisation of Polish provinces, which were to be settled by Germans in a relatively short time⁵⁹.

The situation of Polish peasants under the Prussian partition was mainly presented in the American press in terms of the broadly understood Germanisation problem. The phenomenon, which affected the peasants enormously, manifested itself in the form of the Prussian reforms. Their goal was to remove as many Polish peasants as possible from their native lands and subsequently replace them with German settlers. American newspapers reported on the regulations successively introduced by the German government, primarily highlighting the severe harm experienced by Polish peasants due to the imposition of the new law. In this case, most of the press titles adopted a thoroughly compassionate attitude towards the peasants. However, some articles, such as those recounting the story of Michal Drzymala, were certainly intended to engage American society by illustrating the life of a Polish peasant through a specific example.

THE LEGAL AND ECONOMIC SITUATION OF PEASANTS UNDER THE AUSTRIAN PARTITION

As with the analogous situation under the Prussian partition, the legal and economic status of peasants living in Austrian Galicia was of interest to American daily papers and weeklies only in certain aspects.

The gradual process of serfdom abolition in the Habsburg monarchy began during the joint reign of Empress Maria Theresa and her son, Joseph II, her successor. As the first partition of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth was finalised in 1772, the rulers launched intensive efforts to standardise the monarchy's territories both legally and economically. This was a crucial step towards improving the country's economic situation. The necessity of reforms proved to be particularly urgent in the economically-backward territory of Galicia, as reports informed 'about the difficult

⁵⁸ "The Sentinel Record" 5 April 1914, p. 8.

⁵⁹ *Ibidem*.

situation of peasants in this area, about the local population's poverty as well as lawlessness and oppression prevailing here⁶⁰.

By virtue of successive patents issued by the Austrian rulers over the course of several years, the following were introduced: the prohibition of performing any serfdom duties during holidays (1773); the limitation of the maximum weekly amount of serfdom to five days (1773); the elimination of additional days of serfdom outside the weekly dimension in the form of free service at the manor, forest work or fishing in ponds (1775); the possibility for subjects to lodge claims against their masters through the agency of the dominion or the Kreis authorities (1781)⁶¹; the abolition of personal serfdom, which consequently allowed peasants to move to another dominion provided they found a capable successor for their work (1782); the reduction of serfdom to a maximum of three working days per week (1786); and the general replacement of serfdom with rents as part of the so-called urbarial reform implemented by Joseph II in 1789. Obviously, the primary aim of these socio-economic reforms was not to improve the situation of Polish peasants or diminish the influence of the nobility, but rather to increase the Austrian treasury revenues by enabling the collection of taxes from the increasingly independent peasant subjects in Galicia⁶².

After the death of Emperor Joseph II in 1790, his successor Leopold II repealed the patent introducing the urbarial reform that had been enacted by his predecessor. This represented a positive response from the Throne to the requests and complaints made by the Galician nobility, who viewed the new reforms as a threat to their workforce on noble estates and a reduction of their income. In 1798, the imperial patent was issued once again, allowing the replacement of peasant duties with rents; however, each case had to be approved by the territorially appropriate Kreis office⁶³.

The problem of peasant enfranchisement in the Galicia territory was not raised in the public discourse until the 1840s. The initiative was subsequently taken up by Polish landed gentry, whose representatives often

⁶⁰ D.K. Nowak, *Sytuacja społeczno-gospodarcza Galicji w latach 1772–1848*, "Resovia Sacra. Studia teologiczno-filozoficzne diecezji rzeszowskiej" 2018, 25, p. 274.

⁶¹ Krzysztof Groniowski indicates, however, that the possibility of lodging claims against landowners to the Kreis authorities and higher instances had already been established within the patent of 18 March 1775, modelled on an analogous document issued for the Bohemia residents. See: K. Groniowski, *Uwłaszczenie*, p. 73.

⁶² D.K. Nowak, *op. cit.*, pp. 274, 281–287; M. Niewierowicz, *Uwłaszczenie pod zaborami, "Mówią Wieki"* 2018, 7, p. 75; K. Groniowski, *Uwłaszczenie*, pp. 71–76.

⁶³ D.K. Nowak, *op. cit.*, p. 288.

spoke in favour of abolishing serfdom and granting peasants land without compensation. The debate over such a solution came to an end with the outbreak of the Galician Peasant Uprising in 1846, the so-called Galician Rabacja. The reason for the revolt and bloodshed between peasants and the nobility in Galicia was probably a rumour deliberately spread by the Austrian government. It was rumoured that the nobility was planning a rebellion to thwart the emperor's enfranchisement reform efforts. The situation in Galicia was eventually brought under control thanks to the effective assistance of the imperial troops⁶⁴. More than half a century after the Galician riots had ceased, the "Colorado Statesman" daily maintained that the conflict between peasants and the nobility from 1846 still existed in the early 20th century: 'there is a long-standing feud between the Polish peasants and the Polish nobility. This division is so great that the Polish peasants have frequently sided against the Polish nobility in the contests of the latter with the central government of Austria'⁶⁵.

The plans to introduce the enfranchisement reform initiated by the nobility, were ultimately thwarted by Galician Governor Franz von Stadion, who took advantage of the discord within the nobility and the political turmoil caused by the 1848 revolutions across Europe. Therefore, on 22 April 1848, he declared the abolition of serfdom with compensation at the government's expense⁶⁶. A corresponding imperial patent was is-

⁶⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 289.

⁶⁵ "The Colorado Statesman" 17 June 1911, p. 1. In the pages of the article, journalists also mentioned the conflicts unfolding at that time in Galicia between the Polish, Ukrainian, and Jewish populations: 'However, this sentiment of caste which separates the two classes of the Polish people is nothing compared with the contempt with which every Pole, whether he be peasant or noble, feels for every Ruthenian, a people with whom the Pole is very closely related by blood, and with whom he has long been in close political association. On the other hand, the Ruthenian in Galicia looks upon the Pole, just as the Czech in Bohemia looks upon his German neighbor, as his bitterest enemy. The two peoples refuse to intermingle socially; they rarely intermarry; in many cases they maintain separate schools, and are represented separately in the Imperial Parliament, each race electing its own representatives. But all are united in hating and despising the Jew, who, although he claims for himself no separate part of the Empire, and has no language to distinguish himself from the other races about him, still clings as tenaciously as any other portion of the population to his own racial traditions and customs'.

⁶⁶ J. Skodlarski writes: 'The compensation due to a landowner was calculated as follows: of the amount obtained by converting all the manorial burdens into money, about one-third was to be deducted and the remainder was to be paid to landowners, with half of the amount provided by the Vienna central authorities and the other half by the national government in Galicia'. See: J. Skodlarski, *Zarys historii gospodarczej Polski do 1945 roku*, Warszawa-Łódź 1997, pp. 116–117.

sued as well. In the following year, serfdom was further abolished for the poorest, landless peasants⁶⁷.

Therefore, the abolition of serfdom in Galicia took place without a pivotal role played by the landed gentry. This was rather peculiar, since in the second half of the 19th century, the Polish nobility gained considerable influence over domestic policy in Galicia, as a result of the establishment of the so-called Galician Autonomy⁶⁸. Thus, the American press did not miss the opportunity to 'remind' the Polish privileged social stratum of certain neglect in their approach to the 'peasant problem': 'in Austrian Poland where the Polish nobility has had a free hand in the government of the province, where they have had their own language and their own university, and the racial struggle has been rather between the Poles and the Ruthenians, their conditions are pretty much as they were. The peasants have made some progress in recent times, but it has not been due to the influence of the nobility, but rather to the influence of returned emigrants from America'⁶⁹.

The abolition of serfdom was a turning point in the history of Polish peasant communities in Galicia. This was so significant that any rumours about the reintroduction of this notorious practice caused outrage and riots among the peasants. An instance of unrest, further fuelled by agitators from the Russian Empire, was reported in the 1886 issue of "The Dillon Tribune" as follows:

A dangerous state of excitement exists among the ignorant peasantry of Galicia, Austro-Hungary, owing to the rumor that the Austrian Government intends to restore the forced labor laws and to the report that the aristocracy are organizing a massacre of Polish peasants in revenge for atrocities which the peasants committed upon nobles in 1846 r. Secret meetings are being held by the peasants, a majority of whom are armed. The nobles are taking refuge in the cities. Forces of cavalry and infantry have been disposed throughout Galicia. Several agitators, who are supposed to be Russians, have been arrested there. The Austrian Government is taking measures to calm and disabuse the minds of the peasants⁷⁰.

⁶⁷ D.K. Nowak, *op. cit.*, p. 290; K. Groniowski, *Uwłaszczenie*, pp. 89–92.

⁶⁸ "The Milwaukee Leader" 30 January 1914, p. 10; "Wibaux Pioneer" 2 October 1914, p. 1.

⁶⁹ "The Gazette" (Cleveland) 25 August 1912, p. 1.

⁷⁰ "The Dillon Tribune" 1 May 1886, p. 1. Similar accounts of tumultuous sentiment shared by Galician peasants were also given by others American newspapers: "The Beatrice Daily Express" 27 April 1886, p. 1; "San Antonio Daily Light" 26 April 1886, p. 1.

As for Galicia, American journalists reflected on the Polish nobility's attitudes towards their peasant countrymen. These attitudes were mainly criticised for struggling to hinder the process of enfranchisement in the area. American correspondents also made sure that reports coming from Austrian lands contained revolutionary sentiment, commonly found among 19th-century peasants. Thus, Galicia under Austrian rule was portrayed by Americans as a place of constant conflict between the Polish nobility and peasants, often fuelled by the Austrian authorities and occasionally involving the participation of Ukrainian and Jewish people as well.

PEASANT COMMUNITIES DURING THE RUSSIAN REVOLUTION OF 1905–1907 AND THE GREAT WAR

The American press paid considerable attention to the situation and actions of Polish peasant communities during the unfolding events in the Kingdom of Poland at the beginning of the 20th century. The primary aim of most press articles, published in the pages of American dailies and weeklies, was to depict the fate of Polish peasants during the 1905–1907 Revolution in the Kingdom of Poland as well as in the first months after the outbreak of World War I. This was not a surprising phenomenon. After all, the Proletarian Revolution that spread across the Kingdom of Poland as well as much of the Russian Empire was the first popular uprising of the inhabitants of the Kingdom of Poland against tsarist rule since the fall of the January Uprising. This time, however, it was not the Polish landed gentry who took up arms, but the factory and agricultural workers as well as landless peasants who desired a change in their difficult economic situation. Their actions were additionally fuelled by agitators representing the interests of the emerging cadres of the socialist parties, specifically the Polish Socialist Party (PPS) and the Social Democracy of the Kingdom of Poland and Lithuania (SDKPiL). The outbreak of World War I had a violent impact on the inhabitants of the Kingdom of Poland from all social strata. As it later turned out, the majority of Eastern Front engagements were to take place on Polish lands.

One of the main reasons for the outbreak of the 1905 Revolution in the Russian Empire is considered to have been a series of humiliating failures that befell the Tsarist army during the war with Japan (1904–1905). These defeats significantly weakened the tsar's authority, while the Russian military effort had a negative impact on the country and its citizens' economic state. The outbreak of the war in the Far East remarkably affected the fate of Polish peasant communities under the Russian partition as well. This was because a contingent of soldiers from the Kingdom

of Poland, the vast majority of whom were of peasant origin, took part in the hostilities in Manchuria. It seems extremely difficult, if not impossible, to determine the exact number of people from the Kingdom of Poland who were mobilised to participate in the war. Jacek Legieć estimates that the struggles in the Far East may have involved approximately 50,000 such soldiers. However, at least several thousand Polish officers, sailors, doctors, pharmacists, veterinarians, and chaplains—only a relatively small portion of whom likely came from the peasant stratum—should also be added to this number⁷¹.

Readers of the American press were informed about the fate of Poles fleeing mobilisation into the Manchurian army. One of the stories recalled Stanisław Mazurowski, who was supposed to leave 'his humble home in southern Poland and swam the Vistula river near Sandomiera, on the border between Russia and Austria'⁷². Fleeing 'military service for [sic] a hated ruler'⁷³, Mazurowski intended to go to the United States, where he wished to talk about ruthless conscription practices enforced by Russian officials and the consequences of these actions. In his report, he even claimed that Poles from the Kingdom of Poland constituted approximately 40% of the first Manchurian army, placing them among the most mobilised groups, alongside Jews and Finns. The "Baxter Springs News" reported that, after arriving in America, the fugitive also provided several interesting letters. In one of them, a Polish noblewoman

tells of present conditions in stricken Poland; of husbands ordered to the front, who, rather than leave their families to suffer, kill them before joining their regiments; of lovers, who, rather than leave their sweethearts to become the prey of licentious army officers, kill them and then themselves. She tells of conditions so revolting and so terrible that it is almost impossible for the enlightened people of this free land to believe them, and yet this noble Polish woman asserts they are true⁷⁴.

The rest of the letter concerned the person of Tsar Nicholas II himself and expressed deep criticism of his conduct. The Polish noblewoman described the system of Russian imperialism and tsarist autocracy with strong disgust, while the Russo-Japanese War was depicted even more emphatically:

⁷¹ J. Legieć, *Żołnierzy-Polaków wrażenia z podróży na front wojny rosyjsko-japońskiej*, "Studia z historii społeczno-gospodarczej" 2017, 17, pp. 113–114.

⁷² "Baxter Springs News" 19 January 1905, p. 2.

⁷³ *Ibidem*.

⁷⁴ *Ibidem*.

It is not a war; it is a massacre! All scientific and technical progress intended for the increase of the power of the human race is being used for the work of devastation. A hail of bullets covers whole regiments. Battlefields are thickly strewn that it is necessary to burn the bodies or to place the dying and the dead in one grave. New regiments of victims crowd from all portions of that great country which Russia claims, to hail, by order of their superiors, the 'peace-loving czar'⁷⁵.

The horrors of the war in the Far East negatively affected public mood in the Kingdom of Poland. Thus, it was not until 22 January 1905 that the news of the 'Bloody Sunday' events in St. Petersburg further exacerbated the situation and triggered the outbreak of strikes across the Russian Empire. In the following months, workers' strikes in industrial plants began to break out throughout the Russian partition territory. These were followed by strikes of agricultural workers and peasants:

In every direction the peasants are striking. Higher wages, shorter hours, pasture and forest rights and the use of the Polish language instead of the Russian in village affairs – these are among the varied demands of the seven million peasants in Poland. Hitherto they have kept quiet, much to the relief of the authorities⁷⁶.

As can be seen, one of the leading demands of striking peasants was to obtain permission to use the Polish language in schools, municipal offices, courts, or, more generally, in public institutions⁷⁷. The imposition of the Russian language by municipal officials sparked peasants' outrage, as they did not speak the language well and were therefore unable to handle necessary administrative matters. Journalists from "The San Francisco Call" reported on the situation that occurred in one of the offices in the Kingdom of Poland:

Only the other day a peasant was waiting his turn in a village post office, and hearing that the official at the window was unable to give a customer change, volunteered to lend him some small coins. The official whom he was trying to oblige promptly fined him three roubles (\$1.50) for speaking Polish in a Government office. The peasant felt none the less aggrieved when he remembered that the aforesaid fine

⁷⁵ *Ibidem*.

⁷⁶ "The San Francisco Call" 23 April 1905, p. 17.

⁷⁷ A. Wójcik, *Wpływ partii politycznych na kształtowanie świadomości społecznej i narodowej chłopów na Lubelszczyźnie na przełomie XIX i XX wieku*, "Acta Universitatis Lodziensis. Folia Historica" 1992, 45, p. 117; A. Koprukowniak, *Świadomość chłopów na Lubelszczyźnie na przełomie XIX i XX wieku*, "Acta Universitatis Lodziensis. Folia Historica" 1992, 45, pp. 127–128.

would go into the pocket of the official. Such an incident is by no means uncommon and does not tend to promote pleasant relations between the peasants and the Russian local official world⁷⁸.

The problem of the official language also affected the organisation and functioning of education in the Kingdom of Poland during the post-enfranchisement period. With the gradual development of municipal self-government, as permitted by the provisions of the 1864 enfranchisement ukases, representatives of peasant communities became increasingly aware of the possibility of establishing rural and municipal schools on their own initiative, funded directly by peasant contributions. However, as the Russification of education progressed, the influence of local government on teachers' work diminished. Therefore, during the Russian Revolution of 1905, Polish peasants decided to boycott local schools and withhold contributions⁷⁹. These practices had already been noticed among the peasantry in previous years, but during the Revolution the general boycott of Russian school intensified significantly⁸⁰.

Occasionally, the peasants' actions during the 1905 Revolution took a more decisive form. In addition to protests and strikes, organised by workers in cities as well, peasants from the Kingdom of Poland raided manors or farms belonging to tsarist officials and occupied their farm-lands and pastures. Arson, property damage and assaults on officers also occurred, but these phenomena never became widespread⁸¹. The American press gave examples of specific incidents of this kind. The "East Oregonian" daily, in its evening issue of 11 July 1905, informed readers

⁷⁸ "The San Francisco Call" 23 April 1905, p. 17.

⁷⁹ In 1905, "Springfield Weekly Republican" wrote: 'Twelve hundred representatives of the peasantry at a meeting at Warsaw this week passed a resolution favoring autonomy in the administration of the Polish schools'. See: "Springfield Weekly Republican" 22 December 1905, p. 9; M. Kostrzewska, *Powstaszczeniowy ruch chłopski – podobieństwa i różnice z ruchem antyfeudalnym*, "Acta Universitatis Lodziensis. Folia Historica" 1995, 52, pp. 88–92.

⁸⁰ Governor-General of Warsaw Gieorgij Skalon commented on the situation in the Kingdom as follows: 'Peasants mobs besiege schools throughout villages, forcibly remove students and demand that teachers teach only in Polish. Many schools have been closed, while in some the Polish language has been introduced [...]. Currently, the idea of the national school revival in Vistula Land has already moved from the Polish upper classes to popular masses and reinforced itself so much due to concessions made by the local government that, alongside other political issues, it has become a matter of primary concern'. See: A. Koprukowniak, *Świadomość*, p. 129.

⁸¹ "The Yale Expositor" 3 March 1905, p. 5; "New-York Tribune" 28 February 1905, p. 1; J. Molenda, *Carat i klasy posiadające w walce z rewolucją 1905–1907 roku na wsi polskiej*, "Przegląd Historyczny" 1955, 46, 1–2, pp. 181–182.

that 'more than 2,000 Polish peasants have seized the magnificent hunting grounds of the czar near Spala, Russian Poland and are using them for grazing grounds for cattle and sheep'⁸². After occupying these areas, the determined peasants argued that they were forced to do so by the lack of pastures for grazing cattle. The authorities of the Kingdom of Poland considered expelling the intruders by force but feared it would spark an uprising or armed conflict. A few months later, "The Cairo Bulletin" reported on riots initiated by peasants in the Plock area, where infrastructure belonging to the tsarist apparatus of power was destroyed. The journalists informed that the outraged peasants 'have torn down the Russian eagles on the cantonal buildings'⁸³. Such incidents were often incited, or even directly organised, by the PPS (Polish Socialist Party) and SDKPiL (Social Democracy of the Kingdom of Poland and Lithuania) activists, which the press did not fail to mention⁸⁴. In February 1905, shortly after the outbreak of the Revolution, the "New-York Tribune" wrote:

The peasants hitherto have not figured to any great extent in this revolt which is confined to the two millions of workmen in the cities and towns. The Socialists recently sent delegates into the country districts for the purpose of stirring up the villages. According to reports they had speedy success. As 75 per cent of the peasants are unable to read, they are easily led away by Socialist oratory⁸⁵.

Moreover, the revolutionary actions of Polish peasants occasionally triggered strong reactions from the authorities. In March 1905, "The Minneapolis Journal" daily informed about riots and fighting between striking peasants and a troop of Russian soldiers near Kutno in Warsaw Governorate. The massacre was said to have occurred as a result of the actions of agricultural workers who tried to encourage labourers from the landed property of Lanieto to initiate a strike. The head of the land guard from Kutno was sent to the scene along with a troop of soldiers who, according to the article, fired two salvos at the protesters, fatally shot ten of them and severely wounded fifty⁸⁶.

⁸² "East Oregonian" 11 July 1905, p. 1.

⁸³ "The Cairo Bulletin" 28 November 1905, p. 1.

⁸⁴ "The Yale Expositor" 3 March 1905, p. 5.

⁸⁵ "New-York Tribune" 28 February 1905, p. 1.

⁸⁶ "The Minneapolis Journal" 23 March 1905, p. 2. Marian Chudzyński gave a detailed account of the events of 1905 near Kutno. According to him, a troop of Russian soldiers fired three salvos and consequently killed twelve people, while only fifteen were injured. See: M. Chudzyński, *Strajki robotników fabrycznych i rolnych w latach rewolucji 1905–1907*

Based on the above considerations, it should be concluded that the events taking place in the Kingdom of Poland between 1905 and 1907 were the subject of interest not only within the country engulfed by the Revolution itself, but also beyond its borders. When analysing successive articles published in the early 20th-century American press, one must remember that any information arriving from the war-stricken Kingdom was subject to strict censorship, which raises doubts about the completeness and accuracy of certain reports⁸⁷. However, even a cursory examination of published texts reveals that American press journalists were primarily interested in the following issues: the causes of the Russian Revolution of 1905; key peasant demands, such as the introduction of the Polish language into offices, the reorganisation of the local school system, and even giving more land to peasant communities or retaining servitude; as well as the various forms of peasant activity in the revolutionary context, ranging from milder expressions of protest to more forceful and confrontational actions.

The outbreak of World War I in mid-1914 was perceived by Polish emigration circles and domestic landed gentry as an opportunity to regain the desired independence. For the first time, all partitioning powers were to fight against one another, divided between two hostile political-military camps, namely Triple Alliance and Triple Entente. The aforementioned opportunity was also recognised by Polish peasants, who already in the second half of the 19th century, and especially after the events of the 1905 Revolution, gradually developed a sense of national consciousness. A significant breakthrough in this matter, as well as in terms of improving the persistently strained relations between the landed gentry and peasants, was expected as both groups faced the hardships of the Great War. On the other hand, the events of 1914–1918 should also be viewed from a different standpoint. The war, with its Eastern Front cutting through the Polish lands, disrupted the long-standing economic development of the Polish countryside. The peasants' economic situation significantly deteriorated, leading many to migrate due to conscription and forced or voluntary evacuation⁸⁸. The American public, who observed

w regionie kutnowsko-gostynińskim, "Rocznik Towarzystwa Naukowego Płockiego" 1983, 4, pp. 75–78.

⁸⁷ D. Klemantowicz, *Rewolucja 1905 roku w opinii Henryka Vimarda*, "Przegląd Nauk Historycznych" 2005, 4, 2 (8), p. 173; S. Wiech, *Stan wojenny w Królestwie Polskim (1861–1905)*, "Studia z Dziejów Rosji i Europy Środkowo-Wschodniej" 2023, 58, 1, p. 54.

⁸⁸ M. Przeniosło, *Chłopi i ziemianie Królestwa Polskiego w latach I wojny światowej: stosunki wzajemne*, "Dzieje Najnowsze" 2001, 33, 4, p. 3; J. Molenda, *Chłopi polscy w 1914 r.*, "Dzieje Najnowsze" 2004, 36, 3, pp. 113–114.

the ongoing conflict in Europe, showed a keen interest in events unfolding on the war fronts. Beyond battles and casualty figures, Americans were also curious about stories of ordinary citizens affected by war hostilities. An accurate reflection of these interests is shown by a large number of press articles reporting on events from the Eastern Front.

In the 1910s, the gradually approaching outbreak of war seemed inevitable. Successive international tensions, such as the First Moroccan Crisis and the Balkan Wars, led Europe towards an unavoidable clash between the major powers. The first reports on the mood among Polish peasants, as they sought to secure their possessions in case of war, appeared in the American press as early as December 1912. The Galician peasantry who lived near the administrative boundary with the Kingdom of Poland sold unnecessary possessions to raise as much money as possible. At the same time, they also gathered supplies and buried them in their own yards⁸⁹. Some of the peasants fled for fear of conscription. In 1913, "The San Francisco Call" wrote about the fate of Polish peasants leaving their homes, carrying all their belongings on their backs and heading towards the border of the Kingdom of Poland. In this way, the majority of peasants from the Prussian partition responded to the actions of the German Empire's authorities, which 'had just extended her conscription laws to take in Poland'⁹⁰. In the following months, it became clear that peasants had taken preparatory or evasive measures wisely. Indeed, the most numerous mobilisation to the armies of the partitioning states occurred in the first weeks of the war, and among the mobilised people, peasants and agricultural workers definitely prevailed⁹¹.

The advent of the Great War triggered an economic crisis across all three partitions. The peasant economy suffered most severely in the Kingdom of Poland and Galicia, particularly due to direct war hostilities and requisitions carried out by the armies of both sides. Significantly fewer losses occurred among people living in the Prussian partition. In the German Empire, the first months of the war primarily afflicted the population of East Prussia, particularly in the Warmia and Masuria regions⁹².

⁸⁹ The "Albuquerque Morning Journal" daily provided some additional information: 'One day this week, no less than 20,000 pigs arrived at Vienna from Austria Poland to be sold'. See: "Albuquerque Morning Journal" 6 December 1912, p. 5.

⁹⁰ "The San Francisco Call" 7 October 1913, p. 10.

⁹¹ Jan Molenda claims, for instance, that in the case of the German army, peasants constituted 64% of all citizens mobilised in 1914. See: J. Molenda, *Chłopi*, pp. 114–115.

⁹² *Ibidem*, pp. 117–118.

Peasant farms suffered massive losses, especially during the evacuation of Russian troops in the spring and summer of 1915. This was particularly true for the eastern parts of the Kingdom of Poland. The retreating tsarist army tried to make it as difficult as possible for the Central Powers entering the area to conduct further military operations⁹³. Thus, Russian soldiers exported the vast majority of supplies and destroyed everything they could not take with them, including crops, farm buildings and peasant houses along with their furniture, equipment and tools. American journalists provided vivid accounts of the living conditions of Polish peasants in areas evacuated by the Russian army, accompanied by photographs taken across the Polish lands:

There is a double-page illustration of Polish peasants digging among the charred debris of their homes in a hopeless search for the little money that represents their years of toil, or for some other cherished possession. It is on these people that the burden of the war falls most pitilessly. Their houses and barns are ruthlessly burned by either army in order that they may not afford shelter to the enemy. Their stock is run off, their horses commandeered and even their seed grain taken. Only the devastated land is left them⁹⁴.

According to reports, the soldiers destroyed everything in their path, leaving thousands of peasants homeless⁹⁵. Deprived of their means of livelihood, the peasants were said to dwell in dugout holes in the ground or find temporary shelters in caves, dense thickets and wetlands⁹⁶. The "Brownsville Herald" wrote:

After the destruction of their homes these Polish peasants either were too shiftless or too uncertain of the future to do any work and dug the holes in the ground for shelter. In a very few cases their priests

⁹³ In the early months of the war, the American press informed about the decidedly hostile attitude of Polish peasants towards the incoming German troops. The "Daily Kennebec Journal" even claimed that 'The Polish peasants in Kalisza, Russian Poland, are carrying on a guerilla warfare, in which the Germans and the peasants hunt each other in the forest with the aid of snares and entanglements. No mercy is shown on either side'. See: "Daily Kennebec Journal" 5 October 1914, p. 1; "The San Francisco Call" 23 April 1905, p. 17.

⁹⁴ "Evening Star" 24 December 1914, p. 4.

⁹⁵ "Perth Amboy Evening News" 4 December 1915, p. 9. The situation was similar in other war-affected areas, e.g. in the Masurian Lake District. See: "Evening Star" 11 March 1915, p. 28.

⁹⁶ "The Bossier Banner" 10 June 1915, p. 2.

succeeded in getting them to provide against the future. The remainder are threatened with death from lack of sanitation and starvation⁹⁷.

In this tragic humanitarian situation, Polish peasants struggled to find food and clothing in the ruins of destroyed farms and towns. The "East Oregonian" daily, in its December 1915 issue, reported on peasants 'frantically scratching amid the ruins of farmhouse at Brest-Litovsk for salt'⁹⁸. Facing the threat of widespread famine, the peasants looked to the incoming German and Austrian troops for assistance⁹⁹.

The great expectations of the Polish people, arising from the arrival of the Central Powers' troops in the Kingdom of Poland, were reported by American press correspondents. In August 1915, German troops were joyfully greeted in Warsaw by Poles, Jews and Germans:

The inhabitants, the correspondent says, filled the streets and welcomed the inmarching troops with every sign of real enthusiasm and rejoicing. The streets were richly beflagged. The polish peasants who long had been restrained in the city began leaving in the early morning for their farms, driving their live stock and conveying their household effects. They covered the grounds with tears¹⁰⁰.

Initially, the actions taken by the Germans in the Kingdom of Poland were primarily aimed at stabilising the situation in the war-stricken areas. In February 1915, the "Fergus County Democrat" reported on 'the drastic efforts of the Germans to stamp out cholera'¹⁰¹. In order to suppress the epidemic, German soldiers attempted to isolate and eliminate potential outbreaks by burning all villages where cholera occurred. In the area of Lodz, a special sanitary regime was introduced. According to the findings, anyone who violated the strict sanitary regulations faced up to ten years in prison¹⁰².

The positive views of the new occupier initially expressed by Polish peasants began to change relatively quickly due to various requisitions

⁹⁷ "Brownsville Herald" 23 April 1915, p. 1.

⁹⁸ "Daily East Oregonian" 27 December 1915, p. 8.

⁹⁹ "Perth Amboy Evening News" 4 December 1915, p. 9; "The Bridgeport Evening Farmer" 21 September 1915, p. 11.

¹⁰⁰ "The Pensacola Journal" 8 August 1915, p. 8. The same article, only with minor changes, was also published in the pages of "The West Virginian". See: "The West Virginian" 7 August 1915, p. 1.

¹⁰¹ "Fergus County Democrat" 11 February 1915, p. 6.

¹⁰² *Ibidem*.

and ordinary robberies carried out by the troops of the Central Powers¹⁰³. In December 1914, "The Grand Forks Daily Herald" reported:

Following the German army came an innumerable train of light wagons, at first almost empty, but at last filled – by the process of taking stores and clothing wherever they found them. Germans dead on the battlefield below Warsaw were found to be wearing the clothing of Polish peasants under their uniforms. Some were found wearing Russian boots, and many carried women's cotton shawls and flannel petticoats¹⁰⁴.

Therefore, Germans plundered both the landed properties left by fleeing Russians – which, according to some German promises, were to be obtained by peasants¹⁰⁵ – as well as entire villages. The army seized mainly food supplies and clothing but also bedding, furs and straw¹⁰⁶, sometimes paying for them with 'Russian tokens', i.e. 'checks printed in the Russian language and payable by the Russian government'¹⁰⁷. Moreover, German soldiers also paid for supplied requisitions 'with slips of paper upon which were written in German script – so the enraged Polish peasants learned through interpreters – «whoever presents this at the end of the war will be hanged»'¹⁰⁸, which further aggravated relations between the peasantry and the army.

Yet, the peasants did not leave German actions unanswered. The American press reported several cases of theft committed by Polish peasants, whose victims were German soldiers. Entire groups of peasants robbed German camps left unattended by the army. Their loot was mainly money and items of equipment¹⁰⁹. Moreover, some skirmishes between the military and the civilian population also occurred:

There has probably been sniping by the civilian population, as the bodies of six peasants were found hanging to a tree in a Polish town a few days ago. Their fellow-towns-men vowed to have revenge, and two days later a German scouting party found the bodies of 22 German soldiers hanging from the same tree¹¹⁰.

¹⁰³ J. Molenda, *Chłopi*, p. 119.

¹⁰⁴ "The Grand Forks Daily Herald" 11 December 1914, p. 2.

¹⁰⁵ "The Bennington Evening Banner" 3 May 1915, p. 2.

¹⁰⁶ "The Daily Progressive-Miner" 17 July 1918, p. 3.

¹⁰⁷ "The Grand Forks Daily Herald" 11 December 1914, p. 2.

¹⁰⁸ "The Sun" 2 October 1914, p. 3; "Alexandria Gazette" 2 October 1914, p. 4.

¹⁰⁹ "El Paso Herald" 12 June 1915, p. 11.

¹¹⁰ "Alexandria Gazette" 2 October 1914, p. 4.

As the war dragged on and human resources were gradually depleted on both sides, the Central Powers decided to exploit the potential of the Kingdom of Poland's population. Faced with the Austrian army's relative weakness and its inability to wage war on the Eastern Front independently, German commanders struggled to create a Polish army to bear the burden of war against the Russian Empire. According to the Act of 5th November, announced in 1916, the aim of the German and Austrian emperors was to create 'an independent state, with hereditary monarchy and constitutional system'. The authorities' true intentions were partially revealed only a few days later. On November 9, the governor-generals of Warsaw and Lublin issued a recruitment proclamation to Poles, encouraging them to join the ranks of new Polish units that were to be attached 'to German army in terms of high command and legal regulations'¹¹¹. The proposal put forward by the authorities of the Central Powers met with widespread distrust in Polish society, which was also acknowledged in the United States retrospectively. The press noted that 'the better informed Poles perceived that the scheme hatched at Potsdam was intended primarily to form a Polish army to fight with the Teuton armies against the entente [sic]'¹¹². By February 1917, only a few hundred Poles were reported to have declared their willingness to join the army, the majority being young representatives of the intelligentsia. The attitude of Polish peasants, however, was entirely different:

Polish peasants are so averse to becoming soldiers that they are going to Germany in large numbers, preferring to work in munitions factories and other industries, where they think they will be safe from conscription¹¹³.

This poor response from Polish society heralded the failure of the German plan to create a Polish army under German administration. Paradoxically, the Act of 5th November held crucial propaganda value for supporters of Polish state restoration. Raising the question of establishing a state substitute at the Central Powers' initiative was one of the first manifestations of the process of internationalising the Polish cause. Moreover, the occupying forces' actions indirectly facilitated the establishment

¹¹¹ Z. Gnat-Wieteska, *Akt 5 listopada, jego postanowienia i znaczenie*, "Niepodległość i Pamięć" 2016, 23, 2 (54), pp. 15, 17–18; J. Snopko, *Spółeczeństwo Królestwa wobec Legionów Polskich po akcji 5 listopada 1916 roku*, in: *Lata Wielkiej Wojny. Dojrzewanie do niepodległości 1914–1918*, eds. D. Grinberg, J. Snopko, G. Zackiewicz, Białystok, 2007, p. 286.

¹¹² "The Birmingham Age-Herald" 21 February 1917, p. 4.

¹¹³ *Ibidem*.

of the first forms of partially independent Polish administration, such as the Provisional Council of State or the Regency Council¹¹⁴.

The American Press commented on the course of World War I in the Polish lands in numerous articles. The vast majority of American journalists expressed their sympathy for the difficult situation faced by Polish society. The situation in the Polish lands was often compared to that in Belgium, which had been occupied by Germans from the first days of the Great War¹¹⁵. Polish peasants, commonly recruited into the armies of the Central Powers as well as tsarist troops, were often forced 'to shed the blood of their brothers'¹¹⁶. American correspondents reported any manifestations of peasant poverty in the Polish lands with particular meticulousness. Thus, the pages of American newspapers were filled with descriptions of destroyed houses, starving civilians as well as brutal requisitions carried out by the armies of both warring sides. Additionally, the press did not miss an opportunity to comment on political issues, such as the proclamation of the Kingdom of Poland by the Act of 5th November 1916 along with its consequences for the restoration of the Polish state.

CONCLUSIONS

The articles published in the American press in the second half of the 19th and early 20th centuries featured a great deal of information about the situation of Polish peasants under partitions. This phenomenon was not an isolated occurrence, as numerous American dailies and weeklies devoted entire columns to the most important events from the Old Continent, with headlines such as 'Items of interest' or 'Local dots'. Considering the group of analysed newspapers publishing information about events in the Polish lands, it is particularly noteworthy that a relatively large number of extensive articles occupied one or more pages of a standard broadsheet format. Publication of such texts indicates the continuing interest of American society in the 'Polish cause'.

A significant portion of all press articles devoted to the situation in the Polish lands characterised the peasant stratum, particularly its legal and economic position as well as events which influenced changes in the Polish peasants' status. Based on detailed issues discussed in the pages of specific articles, it can be concluded that Americans were

¹¹⁴ Z. Gnat-Wieteska, *op. cit.*, pp. 14–15, 20.

¹¹⁵ "Fergus County Democrat" 11 February 1915, p. 6; "The Grand Forks Daily Herald" 11 December 1914, p. 2.

¹¹⁶ "Fergus County Democrat" 11 February 1915, p. 6.

mainly interested in: the process of peasant enfranchisement in the Polish lands, and thus the genesis of the 'peasant problem', the course of reforms and various approaches to their implementation specific to each of the partitioning states; the relations between the Polish nobility and the peasants as well as the causes of conflicts between the two social strata; the nature of peasant participation in struggles against the partitioner, whether in the form of local strikes, national uprisings or nationwide revolutions; the attitude of peasants towards the politics of Germanisation and Russification as well as their forms of resistance; the peasants' fate during World War I, including the relations between peasants and foreign administrations.

Just by signalling problems discussed in the press pages, it is possible to construct the media resonance of American society. The media resonance method consists in a media reconstruction of certain problems, phenomena and processes that occur in social reality¹¹⁷. Therefore, the presence of the aforementioned issues in the American press allows at least for a partial characterisation of American society at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries. People in the United States were interested in the fate of nations fighting for independence. Indeed, similar challenges had affected the newly-forming American nation just at the end of the 18th century. Journalists also sought analogies between the situation of Black slaves on the American continent and the legal-economic position of Polish peasants under partitions. Moreover, Americans closely followed the course of social conflicts in the Polish lands, especially those emerging between the privileged and the socially disadvantaged strata, neither excluding ethnic conflicts. Eventually, information from the Eastern Front of World War I was of great interest to American public as well. It could even be said that the nation's good familiarity with events taking place in Europe during the Great War stimulated critical awareness in at least part of American society, which in 1917 was already mentally prepared to join the conflict.

Nevertheless, it should be remembered that any information appearing in the American press came from reports by American travellers or foreign correspondents employed by press agencies. Therefore, carefully selected news—expressing the opinions and emotions favoured by publishers and the politicians behind them—made the headlines. Consequently, the American press was largely sympathetic towards Polish peasant communities. The peasants were typically portrayed as a class socially

¹¹⁷ S. Michalczyk, *Prezydencja Polski w Radzie Unii Europejskiej, Teoretyczno metodologiczne aspekty badań rezonansu medialnego*, in: *Obraz prezydencji Polski w Radzie Europejskiej (2011) w wybranych tytułach prasy polskiej*, ed. M. Kolczyński, Katowice 2013, p. 11.

oppressed by both the partitioning powers and the domestic landed gentry. At times, the actions taken by foreign administration were evaluated even more positively than those of the nobility representatives, possibly reflecting a reluctance on the part of American liberal society to favour conservative, privileged social strata. A crucial factor behind the American public's interest in the Polish cause was also curiosity as well as willingness to learn about the realities of life in other parts of the world, which was made possible due to the rapid development of traditional media, such as the press, in the United States.

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NOTY O AUTORACH

Mateusz Jeleń – (ur. 2000) asystent w Katedrze Archiwistyki i Nauk Pomocniczych Historii Instytutu Historii Uniwersytetu Marii Curie-Skłodowskiej w Lublinie, a także absolwent studiów I i II stopnia na kierunku Historia oraz studiów I stopnia na kierunku Archiwistyka i nowoczesne zarządzanie zapisami informacyjnymi. Jego zainteresowania koncentrują się wokół dziejów wieku XIX, a konkretnie Cesarstwa Rosyjskiego wraz z Królestwem Polskim w okresie popowstaniowym, a także stosunków rosyjsko-amerykańskich w dobie tej epoki. Interesuje się również położeniem społecznym chłopów na ziemiach polskich pod zaborami oraz funkcjonowaniem warstwy społecznej ziemiaństwa w Królestwie Polskim. Jest aktywnym członkiem kół naukowych działających na Wydziale Historii i Archeologii UMCS, a także członkiem Towarzystwa Przyjaciół Nauki i Kultury 'Libra'.

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