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**THE LEADER OF CONSERVATIVES
OF THE KINGDOM OF POLAND,
ZYGMUNT WIELOPOLSKI,
AGAINST THE SECULARISATION AND DEMOCRATISATION
OF EUROPEAN SOCIETIES
IN THE SECOND HALF OF 19TH CENTURY**

The paper presents the issue of a critical stance towards socio-political transformations taking place in European countries during the nineteenth century as maintained by the margrave Zygmunt Wielopolski, the leader of prominent conservative landed gentry in the Kingdom of Poland. His pessimistic evaluations resulted from the fall of the Second Empire and the rise of the Third Republic, which proved in his view that the postfeudal model of socio-political relationships was fading. An expression of this was to be the popularity of ideologies (socialism and liberalism) that contested the traditional moral order epitomised by the symbiosis of Christian religions, the dominance of the old elites and the timeless institution heading them, i.e. the monarchy. According to Wielopolski, these world views relegating religion to the private sphere proved secularization and democratization of European societies of that time.¹ This would raise the margrave's alarm as the aforementioned trends penetrated the imperial Russia and its subordinate Kingdom of Poland. Modernisation of the social and economic state of the Romanovs in the post-granting land era was accompanied by the transfer of radical ideologies, which were contrary to the monarchical order of the empire. There

¹ Much like today, democratization processes were understood by the contemporaneous observers as the "power of the people," i.e. the system, which recognizes the will of the majority as a source of law, resulting from the political freedoms held by the general public and allowing them to participate in the exercise of power. Secularization meant the transfer of the religious from the public to the private sphere as was evidenced in the nineteenth century by the demands of the ideological neutrality of the state and the separation of the Church. In that era this was clearly manifested by limiting the prerogatives of religious institutions for education and property rights. Cf.: *W semirnajaistorija*, vol. 5: *Mir w XIX wiecke na putik'industrialnoj cywilizacji*, ed. W. S. Mizachnow, Moscow 2014, pp. 192-193; M. Król, *Słownik demokracji*, Kraków 1989, pp. 4-8.

followed that the margrave searched how to overcome the impasse relying on a conservative world view.

It should be emphasized at the beginning that Zygmunt Wielopolski's conservative political views were largely shaped by his father, the entailer of Chroberz, margrave Aleksander (1803–1877).² This well-known conservative publicist raised his offspring in the faith in the crucial role of the landed gentry in the history of the country, while putting the emphasis on the ethos of his social rank which, – as thought by him, was still attractive for the contemporaneous society. In addition, he preached that social relations should be based on patriarchal reasons so that the existing ruling class maintains its advantage.³ These assertions had already entered in 1846 the famous letter *List szlachecka polskiego do ks. Metternicha*. His son Zygmunt witnessed the editing of the brochure, which he later recalled, saying that this type of concept stemmed from “the socio-political condition of the country at that time and it being closed behind a Chinese wall from the outside.”⁴

This idea of a top-down controlled process of transformation granting former elites privileged position in a modernizing society, appeared in his subsequent political writings from the fifties and sixties of the nineteenth century. Thereby he joined the current of Polish conservatives represented by Antoni Helcel, Paweł Popiel and Ludwik Górski⁵, based on the so-called evolutionary conservatism of the English theorist Edward Burke. In line with this vision, Aleksander Wielopolski claimed that despite the changing social and political order, there are objective, timeless, moral laws and values, i.e. the tradition, organicism, religion, the concept of private property and the family. The Polish gentry was the carrier of the above values during the transition period, bonding internally the modernizing society. Therefore, guided by these premises and a kind of political realism, he suggested that given captivity of the Polish nation and a lack of statehood, one factor that could counteract the threats against traditional society posed by religious indifference of liberals and social demagoguery of radicals, was the partitioning powers.

In the period under discussion Zygmunt became a close associate of his father in his political activities.⁶ The proof of this were his missions to St. Petersburg in the years 1861–1862, assigned to him by Wielopolski senior in order for consultations with bureaucrats from St. Petersburg and the courtiers of Tsar Alexander II. During their course he outlined a conservative vision of a settlement, understood as the coop-

² A. M. Skalkowski, *Aleksander Wielopolski (1803–1877) w świetle archiwów rodzinnych*, Poznań 1947, vol. 2-3.

³ S. Kieniewicz, *Dramat trzeźwych entuzjastów. O ludziach pracy organicznej*, Warsaw 1964, pp. 112-113.

⁴ State Archive in Kielce (hereafter: APK), Archiwum Ordynacji Myszkowskiej (hereafter: AOM), sig. 83, p. 330.

⁵ R. R. Ludwikowski, *Główne nurty polskiej myśli politycznej 1815–1890*, Warsaw 1982, pp. 75-76.

⁶ APK, AOM, ref. 1420, p. 20.

eration between the elites of the Kingdom of Poland and the Russian authorities.⁷ Sharing the point of view of Aleksander Wielopolski, Zygmunt understood this agreement as an opportunity to guarantee a privileged position to the landed gentry and gain a limited autonomy for the country.

Father and son looked at this issue from a broader perspective, i.e. while admitting the inevitability of reconstruction of contemporary social structures, they tried to make it proceed in an orderly manner, putting it under the control of the old elites; which was to minimize the threat of revolution.⁸ Only in this formula a multifaceted modernization of the country can be carried out. Fascinated by the success of modernizing Prussia under the leadership of the local gentry, Aleksander and Zygmunt Wielopolski sought confirmation of the view that progress inevitably leads to the democratic egalitarianism. Modernization can strengthen hierarchically organized society based on “the tradition of the nation of nobles.”⁹ They identified it with conservatism, which builds on the respect for private property, social solidarity and persistence with Christian morality.¹⁰ The Wielopolskis thought that the popularization of this philosophy and implementation of the selected “top-down transformations” would weaken the negative effects of egalitarian social relations in Europe and their partial reception in the imperial Russia.¹¹

Under the conditions of the partitioned Kingdom of Poland these measures were to be implemented at a price of the Polish elites' acceptance of this country's dependence on the state of the Romanovs. Temporarily, in the years 1862–1863, Aleksander Wielopolski, acting as the head of the civil government in the Kingdom of Poland, managed to get a number of concessions in the field of education, economy and legal rights.¹² The margrave and his entourage believed that the establishment of local government institutions and the consent of the tsarist regime to the modernization of the country were the prelude to the restoration, and in the long run, autonomy in the years 1815–1830.¹³ However, the plans of “Wielopolski's followers” collapsed, because the settlement with the Russian invader aroused opposition of the patriotically-minded general public. An attempt to break the resistance was Aleksander and Zygmunt's plan of conducting an enforced conscription to the tsarist army. Their intention was to break the conspiracy of irredentists and to exercise pressure on moderate landed gentry. In

⁷ R. R. Ludwikowski, *Główne*, pp. 97-98.

⁸ APK, AOM, ref. 132, p. 32.

⁹ *Ibidem*, ref. 1513, p. 106.

¹⁰ *Ibidem*.

¹¹ R. R. Ludwikowski, *Główne*, p. 106.

¹² Among others, the rents imposed on peasants; equal rights for the Jewish population; the act on the county, municipal and gubernatorial governments; the act on reorganisation and polonization of the educational system at all levels (including the establishment of the Main School University), J. Grabciec-Dąbrowski, *Ostatni szlachcic. Aleksander hrabia Wielopolski, margrabia Gonzaga Myszkowski na tle dziejów*, vol. 1, Warsaw 1924, pp. 271-302.

¹³ A. Szwarz, *Sąd nad Wielopolskim*, [in:] *Rok 1863*, ed. W. Caban, Kielce 1993, pp. 45-48.

reality, contrary to their calculations, the impressment led to the premature outbreak of the uprising in January 1863. After a few weeks, in the conditions of escalating violence in the Kingdom, the leadership of the Russian state concluded that it was the margrave who was responsible for the crisis. Consequently, in September 1863 he resigned and moved to Dresden (where he lived until his death in 1877). Aleksander Wielopolski, having departed from the national political scene, passed the leadership of the conservative-conciliatory camp in the post-uprising period to his son Zygmunt (and after the death of the former, the same was true with the family entail and the title of margrave).

Watching him progress over the next three decades, it can be stated that he sought to obtain some re-concessions to the Kingdom of Poland. Years of operations, however, proved unsuccessful, as the tsarist regime was not interested in the settlement with local conservative elites because, according to the accusations, they did not counteract another uprisings as of 1830 and 1863. With such an attitude of St. Petersburg, which was proved by the russification processes in the Kingdom, Zygmunt Wielopolski and his supporters were confined to declarations of loyalty to the throne of the Romanovs. It was hoped that in this way the invader's repression would be eased. So far he was willing to maintain distinctiveness of the margrave's countrymen in "faith and language."¹⁴ Minimization of the demands resulted from the downturn of the Polish cause in the international arena – in the sixties and seventies of the nineteenth century it was raised only occasionally, mostly by Paris.¹⁵ The outbreak of the Franco-Prussian War (1870–1871) sparked hopes of the Polish society, especially among those from the Kingdom, to rebuild the country with the support from the state of Napoleon III.¹⁶ Zygmunt Wielopolski, a retired officer of the Russian army, showed great interest in the course of the conflict, referring negatively to the chances of the French victory (and thus to new perspectives for the Polish cause).

Already at the beginning of August 1870, when analysing the internal situation in the Second Empire, and especially the anachronistic way of conducting its army's warfare, he predicted the defeat of Napoleon III. His further comments on the international situation were formed based on the information about the proclamation of the Third Republic. In mid-September 1870 he would judge pessimistically that this political regime represents a threat to the conservative states in Europe. He referred to the events of the past, i.e. to the turn of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and the ideological expansiveness of the French First Republic. Zygmunt claimed that, much as it was more than seventy years ago, its example will activate the radical movements, resulting in the increased popularity of democratic ideas contesting the legitimacy of

¹⁴ Z. Stankiewicz, *Zygmunt Wielopolski w okresie powojennym. Z dziejów ugody*, "Kwartalnik Historyczny", no. 2, 1974, pp. 268-286.

¹⁵ A. Szwarc, *Od Wielopolskiego do Stronnictwa Polityki Realnej. Zwolennicy ugody z Rosją, ich poglądy i próby działalności politycznej (1864–1905)*, Warsaw 1990, pp. 56-69.

¹⁶ W. Feldman, *Stronnictwa i programy polityczne w Galicji 1846–1906*, Kraków 1907, pp. 157-164.

the monarchy in different European countries. Moreover, he argued, that the Third Republic will be keenly interested in recovering lost Alsace and Lorraine, which would result in the destabilization of the balance between the most powerful countries on the Old Continent: England, France, (Prussia) Germany, Austria and Russia. As a result of growing antagonisms between them, in place of the concert of powers from the era of the Congress of Vienna, there may emerge politico-military blocs competing with one another. Zygmunt Wielopolski pointed out that thus obtained accumulation of military power by the adversaries means balancing on the brink of war and peace. In situation of armed conflict the theatre of operations will cover almost the entire continent, and the inevitable provision crisis associated with the war and social radicalisation can be employed by social demagogues to call a revolution.

His belief was additionally strengthened by the information about the outbreak of the rebellion of radicals, i.e. the Communards in Paris in March 1871. It was symptomatic that the above analysis of his was not an isolated one. Similarly, the conservatives from Cracow termed the program of revolutionaries as "nihilistic". Characteristically, however, this term was concurrently used by Zygmunt Wielopolski to define political groups advocating democratization of the state and social relations. Moreover, as he himself admitted, until the Franco-Prussian War he believed that the conservative-monarchical ideas had overcome the crisis of the Napoleonic era, thus showing great adaptability. He claimed that this was evidenced by the political credo of contemporary conservatives who, with the exception of a small group, were not reactionaries, for they accepted the possibility of prudent social transformations. During the second half of the nineteenth century there was a marked increase in the influence of radical ideologies, which Wielopolski thought were represented by socialism and liberalism. From his point of view, as a conservative and an outspoken loyalist to the rulers of Russia, and at the same time a big landlord, these movements carried the highest risks.¹⁷ It was especially so, as the attacks launched by their supporters against the institution of monarchy were viewed by Wielopolski as an assault at the traditional social order, considering the fact that wealth disparities and the resulting social divisions were also negated. The groups contesting conservative ideals from the liberal and socialist positions strive to overthrow traditional society based on hierarchy and moral standards which are relevant in Christianity.

He searched for confirmation in press releases from the period of March-April 1871 on anti-religious excesses of Communards, accompanying desecration of temples, attempts to fight the religion through the slogans of atheism and ideological neutrality of the state, separation of the church and state declared by the Commune or confiscation of the clergy's property.¹⁸ Zygmunt's pessimism was provoked by his fears that the French example will spur a revolt in other countries, especially in Russia. Some evidence of this was the news coming from the late sixties of the nineteenth cen-

¹⁷ M. Broda, *Narodnickie ambiwalencje. Między apoteozą ludu a terrorem*, Łódź 2003, pp. 10-23.

¹⁸ H. Lissagaray, *Historia Komuny*, Warsaw 1951, pp. 210-246.

tury from the main cities of the empire about tracing anti-state groups (like “szutinyowcy” or “nieczajewowcy” groupings), sympathizing with the program of liberation of the people from the oppression of the gentry, and driven by the ideas of democratization and secularization of social relations.¹⁹

Some insight into the margrave's analysis of the internal situation in Russia against the international background has been brought by his correspondence from the years 1872–1878, which he kept with his followers. Zygmunt was concerned about the fact that the Russian youth studies the works of theoreticians of western socialism, which meant that the subjects of the Romanovs acquired views which were dangerous for the landed gentry elites: “these people are mob fanatics [...] the only thing they understand are the plans of Louis Blanc et Co's.”²⁰ Hence he “realistically” assessed that when attempting to prevent the outbreak of revolution in Russia, in order to defend the monarchy, the spheres of the tsarist administration and the conservatives from the Kingdom should enter into a closer cooperation. Wielopolski was determined to pursue this alliance, hoping to obtain in return some concessions for the country's autonomy. He postulated this despite the fact that Russia under the rule of Alexander II was going through an internal crisis caused by the so-called anti-Tsarist elites, which emerged in the very womb of Russian intellectual circles, (advocating changes to the regime towards constitutionalism, if not republicanism).²¹

This concept of cooperation between conservatives from the Kingdom and their Russian counterparts stemmed from the observation of dangerous changes in the international power structure, brought about by the defeat of France in 1871 and the unification of Germans under the aegis of Prussia. He estimated that in view of the internal crisis in Russia, only the Bismarck's Germany represented the force capable of neutralizing the revolution, which can explode in western countries and try to take over the entire Europe. Therefore, in the late seventies of the nineteenth century he abandoned his previous view of Bismarck's mistake as to the occupation of Alsace and Lorraine, which he had regarded as a flashpoint in relations with France. He called them “cordon sanitaire”, which was to stop the transfer of the revolution to the Central and Eastern Europe.²²

Zygmunt Wielopolski was worried by the fact that due to the internal tensions Russia under Alexander II stopped being a stabilizer of a conservative-monarchical order,

¹⁹ APK, AOM, ref. 212/II, p. 491. About the attempts at contesting the social order in Russia, succumbing to the influence of utopian socialism, the struggle for the so-called “peasant socialism” (“gminowładztwo”) waged by the identified groups of Nicholas Iszutyn from Moscow and Sergei Nechayev from St. Petersburg, all within the current of radical Russian intelligentsia (also called “narodnichestwo”): L. Bazyłow, *Działalność naradnictwa rosyjskiego w latach 1878–1881*, Wrocław 1960, pp. 8-29; idem, *Dzieje Rosji 1800–1917*, Warsaw 1970, pp. 284-290.

²⁰ APK, AOM, ref. 244, p. 63.

²¹ Ibidem, p. 491. Cf.: A. Nowak, *Ofiary, imperia i historycy. Studium przypadków (od XVIII do XXI wieku)*, Kraków 2009, p. 94.

²² Ibidem, ref. 212/II, pp. 465-467.

which it had represented just thirty years ago in the era of Nicholas I.²³ The state of the Romanovs could become a seedbed of revolution in Europe. He came to this conclusion upon monitoring internal relations in the tsarist empire and the Western Europe. The occasion for this were numerous trips of the margrave, which was reflected in his correspondence and memoranda from the second half of the seventies of the 19th century.

He found that the sources of radical tendencies on the Russian soil were similar to those observed in the West. Their supporters are hailing from the *déclassé*, pauperised elements: student youth and part of intelligentsia frustrated with ossified system, which prevented them from fulfilling their social and economic aspirations.²⁴ In Zygmunt's opinion, particularly dangerous was their attention to the views negating the existing constitutional and political order. Referring to it as "regime", they considered it as backward and reactionary. Condemnation of the old order was accompanied by the rejection of the "old" morals based on Christian ethics, and replacing them by the new ones, which were their antithesis.²⁵ In the opinion of the Polish aristocrat, social and political crisis reached a pan-European level, and it was based on the process of secularization. He traced their sources in the indifferentism of the masses and even some elites, sourced by the rhetoric of the Enlightenment, namely rationalism and voluntarism. External manifestation of the crisis was the rejection of the existing authorities (state-monarchy and the institutional Church) and a disturbingly weak position of the family and moral standards. This nihilistic rebellion rejecting Christian values led the student youth and university graduates to accept slogans of "a wild and inhuman socialism,"²⁶ which preached social upheaval. The radical young intelligentsia, called by him "moral proletariat" revolting against the inertia of existing elites, fed the ranks of the revolutionaries,²⁷ diverting their eyes from the reality other than that which was preached by social demagogues. Zygmunt Wielopolski believed that sectarianism of radical groups implied the rejection of gradual transformations and would seek to bring them about using the method of terror, thus realizing "subversive social and political theories drawn from German and French works."²⁸

Another reason for the pessimistic considerations of this Polish conservative on the moral and political crisis in Europe were the events that he had actually foreseen, i.e. the campaign of terrorist acts in Russia in the years 1879–1880. The activities carried

²³ Ibidem, pp. 430-449.

²⁴ Ibidem, ref. 214/IV, p. 115.

²⁵ Ibidem, ref. 1513, p. 106. Cf. e.g.: the communities formed in St. Petersburg and Moscow in this period, created by young enthusiasts of socialism, rejecting the principle of private property and marriage. J. Stella-Sawicki, *Moje wspomnienia (1831–1910)*, Lwów 1921, pp. 23-47.

²⁶ APK, AOM, ref. 241, pp. 41-46.

²⁷ Ibidem, ref. 1481, p. 243.

²⁸ Ibidem, ref. 242, pp. 68, 71.

out by the “Narodniks”, a populist grouping of radical intellectuals²⁹ were, as he saw it, the result of increasing differentiation of conservative elites into reactionaries and moderates, which had been taking place since the mid-nineteenth century. This division was the sequel to the ideological dispute on further development of the Romanov empire after granting land to the peasants and the introduction of capitalist social and economic mechanisms. There wasn't any consensual programme that could win over the peasantry and the middle class (including the bourgeoisie and intelligentsia), which emancipated out of the current dominance of the landed gentry.³⁰ He was puzzled by the fact that, as long as “reactionaries” wanted to preserve the current socio-political status quo in Russia, part of the pro-liberalization gentry proclaimed the idea of the so-called “bureaucratic and democratic cesarism”, referring to the concept of the alliance of the throne with the masses of landowners. Wielopolski argued that both models of escaping the crisis were wrong, since just as it was not possible to hold back social changes, it was equally abortive to appeal to unknowing and claimant peasant class, hoping naively that their conservatism and folk religiosity will affect their attitude of loyalty to the monarchy of Romanovs.³¹

In the absence of a coherent vision among the elites and the leadership of the tsarist state, an attempt to escape the crisis through a top-down reconstruction of the system of power, which was formed yet in the times of Peter I, was seen by Zygmunt Wielopolski as fraught with considerable risk. These actions were manifested by the reforms of Alexander II, which were to implement the socio-economic demands of lower classes, while maintaining the political principles of autocracy. Zygmunt hinted that the effect was different. Cautious social and economic changes were not accompanied by serious political reconsiderations; this

²⁹ “Narodnaya Volya” (Russian “People's Freedom”, the Narodniks) – an extremist terrorist organization founded in 1879 following the dissolution of the so-called First “Land and Freedom” (a revolutionary organization founded in the mid-sixties of the nineteenth century, proclaiming the slogans of peasant socialism). The reason was a dispute on the methods of its operation: the moderates (called “Czornyj Pieriediel” – “Black Repartition”) referred to using propaganda methods among the people, raising their awareness, so as to bring about a revolution in the long term; radicals sought to overthrow the tsarist regime using individual terror methods. M. Wawrykowa, *Rewolucyjne narodnictwo w latach siedemdziesiątych XIX wieku*, Warsaw 1963, passim; L. Kiejzik, *Idea rosyjska w pismach myślicieli rosyjskich XIX i XX wieku*, [in:] *Emigracja rosyjska. Losy i idee*, eds. R. Bäcker and Z. Karpius, Łódź 2002, pp. 29-35.

³⁰ When in March 1880 Zygmunt Wielopolski asked the Minister of Justice, Dmitrij Nabokow “whether the government has a program to remedy the crisis, he claimed that it has the Supreme Commission [*Managing the Conservation of the State Governance and Public Peace – this extraordinary institution to combat the Narodniks' terrorism was established after the later had failed their coup on the tsar's Winter Palace in February 1880.*]”, to which the margrave retorted briefly: “These are people and not a program”. APK, AOM, ref. 242, p. 30.

³¹ Cf.: A. Walicki, *W kręgu konserwatywnej utopii. Struktura i przemiany rosyjskiego słowianofilstwa*, Warsaw 1964, pp. 396-400.

type of dissonance was raised against the authorities by these circles of landed gentry and intelligentsia who identified themselves with the ideals of Western liberalism. Their claims to the throne of the Romanovs came down to the demand of the establishment of a constitutional government. The obvious objection of the tsarist regime, which regarded it as the weakening the autocracy, raised opposition. In addition to moderate measures, like local actions of landowners addressing the tsar on the need of political changes organised in the late seventies of the nineteenth century, there were also extreme forms of actions taken by extremists seeking to overthrow the monarchy and establish the people's commune government ("gminowładztwo").³²

Not only did Zygmunt Wielopolski note dramatic position of the Russian state, but he also sought some remedies, like the regime taking over the methods used by the radicals in fight against it, that means terror against revolutionaries and pro-government propaganda in the spirit of solidarity and, at the same time, exposing ideological nihilism of the later. Wielopolski indicated that the elimination of the "enemies of the existing order," will simultaneously break the "ill public spirit in Russia."³³

The uncompromising attitude of the Polish nobleman towards the radicals in Russia brought with it implications of strengthening his conservative world view even more. Hence he disapprovingly referred to the phenomenon of progressive democratization of socio-political developments in the Western European countries. Such an approach to the problem caused some historians to view Wielopolski as an "extreme conservative", attacking "his contemporary European secular culture, liberalism and parliamentarism."³⁴ This kind of remarks might have stemmed from the fact that he would compare the monarchical system to the republican one, register and point out the imperfections of the later from the position of a royalist.

According to Zygmunt, the monarchy was a timeless institution, which was determined by the fact that the legitimacy of the ruler was not passed under the public assessment, i.e. elections. The effectiveness of this model of state power was also decided upon by the possibility of balancing various elements of the system due to the role of the dynasty. This one arbitrated disputes among the *representations* of the society like assistant councils or the parliament elected on the basis of the property criterion. The margrave Wielopolski stressed that this type of function of a chief arbitrator was present both in the absolute and constitutional monarchy, in contrast to the Republican system. The supreme body of a president was an office the appointment to which was subject to configuration of political

³² M. Sempołowicz, *Imperialna Rosja w myśli Konstantina P. Pobiedonoscewa. Idea i jej wpływ na praktykę polityczną*, [in:] *Ofiary imperium. Imperia jako ofiary. 44 spojrzenia*, ed. A. Nowaka, Warsaw 2010, pp. 368-380.

³³ APK, AOM, ref. 167, pp. 20-21.

³⁴ A. Jaszczuk, *Spór pozytywistów z konserwatystami o przyszłość Polski 1870-1903*, Warsaw 1986, p. 80.

forces. Moreover, the parliament was the the place of permanent struggle of competing parties. This kind of reflections were brought about by the observations of political life of the Third French Republic.

The Polish aristocrat traced there some signs of acquiring ideological legacy of the Great Revolution of 1789. That one had consolidated its own, as he claimed, erroneous understanding of progress as an alternation, and not the improvement of existing forms. The political turmoil of the Third Republic seemed to him the confirmation of a disastrous structure of political organization of societies, i.e. the parliamentary republics, where democracy led to demoralization and an identity crisis of the masses. It dazzled him that France was cut off from those historical traditions of the days of the monarchy, which were contrary to republicanism and revolutionary ideological triad (liberty – equality – fraternity).³⁵ Zygmunt Wielopolski thought that France was in a state of constant downturn, which was to be manifested by “ongoing politicising and counter trade between bigger or smaller parties,”³⁶ parliamentary play and creating ephemeral government coalitions. Hence he condemned the so-called “dictate of the number”, i.e. the dominance of the majority who are but expression of the changing moods of the public.³⁷ What lied behind it was the criticism of spreading political privileges to the masses, exemplified by the universal suffrage. At the same time he strongly resented the manner of a type of political activist whom he called a doctrinaire, and who was called to life by such a system. This one was supposed to constantly invent his program as pandering to the pretensions of the broad masses whose support he was to maintain despite the fact that, as the margrave argued, the very assumptions of the demagogues were erroneous or their creed impossible to execute. The evidence of this was the passage in an open letter to the Count Stanisław Tarnowski, saying that “peoples do not think, but feel” and a further observation that his fate is determined not by the mob but a narrow elite group of politicians.³⁸ Hence the margrave postulated the need for the management of responsible decision-making spheres, guided by the ethos of the old elites and the attachment to traditional morals. The leader of Polish conciliatory group condemned the official secularism and verbal fight with religion, which he regarded as the moral basis of hierarchical society. He argued that “the Christian doctrine is the only alternative to the indifference of the radicals who had as their credo the Marseillaise and materialistic mentality of Figaro.”³⁹ In making this point, Wielopolski criticized not only the atheist left but also the mainstream liberalism. He denounced their hypocrisy of democrats who actually represented the interests of the bourgeoisie and intelligentsia who are closer to landowning elites than to vast social classes. The leader of the conservatives was

³⁵ APK, AOM, ref. 1482, p. 181.

³⁶ Ibidem, p. 180.

³⁷ Ibidem, ref. 234, pp. 26-27; ibidem, ref. 242, pp. 19-21.

³⁸ Z. Wielopolski, *Do J. W. hrabiego Stanisława Tarnowskiego*, Kraków 1879, p. 23.

³⁹ APK, AOM, ref. 212/II, p. 491.

critical of the cosmopolitanism and religious indifference of liberals. He saw in it an expression of extreme individualism and selfishness, questioning the place of an individual in the traditional social hierarchy, which was equally revolutionary as the openly subversive propaganda of the leftist radicals.⁴⁰

The event which deepened his disapproval of contemporary trends of democratization of social relations in Europe (and as indicated previous considerations, he was not willing to see fundamental differences between liberalism and socialism) was the assassination of Alexander II by the Narodniks in March 1881.

Hugely impressed by this act of terror and the weakness of the state in the fight against the extremists, Wielopolski predicted that such a situation may lead to the destruction of Russia, in the form in which it operated, that is the autocracy based on the gentry elites. It was shocking for him to learn about the success of the populist Narodniks, hearing that part of Russian society showed huge interest in the slogans adopted by a nihilistic rebellion of intellectual elites (led by the negation of traditional values and hoping to liberate the people from the postfeudal order).

In 1882, following the developments in the Romanov empire after the death of Alexander II and the adoption of the reactionary trend in domestic policy by his successor, Alexander III, he came to negative conclusions. Russia, whose specific features were so different when compared to the West, and which he called the "Orthodox and Byzantine civilization"⁴¹, experienced a deep identity crisis. In his view, a distorted reception of Western philosophical and historiosophical concepts was raising on the Russian soil a rebellion not so much against Tsarist despotism, as the traditional ethical and moral standards. He saw it in the popularity of extreme individualism among the local youth, rejecting any subjection of an individual to the society, religion and family. What especially offended him was the activity of women in this movement who, while rebellious, thought to have escaped from the tyranny of patriarchy.

The pessimism of the Polish conservative was only deepened by consecutive months of relentless struggles of the state with the Narodniks. The tsarist regime striving to eliminate the nihilists physically strengthened the control of the bureaucratic apparatus over the society and thus, paradoxically, deepened insurmountable conflict that led to the revolution and the collapse of the present order.⁴² At the same time he argued that the crisis in Russia and its near collapse as a result of the revolution was also a threat to Europe, and especially the Polish lands. Concurrently, he would deprecate the hopes of some of the Polish public from all parts of partitioned Poland who counted that the new "time of troubles" in the State of the Romanovs will lead to the unrest in the neighbouring empires. He used to counter those who reckoned that they would regain independence of Poland developing the catastrophic scenario of events. He presented it in a letter of October 1882 to his close collaborator, a conservative columnist and historian Henryk Lisicki. There he wrote: "Imagine the fall of the dynasty

⁴⁰ Ibidem, ref. 216/II, pp. 1-31.

⁴¹ Ibidem, ref. 214/IV, p. 115.

⁴² A. Nowak, *Ofiary*, p. 148.

in Russia and with it the collapse of the official church, police and administration.”⁴³ In the margrave's vision of the revolution based on the affirmation of individualism and the resulting negation of authority (the state, church, family, etc.), there will be the tyranny of the revolutionaries, subjugating docile masses. This will entail catastrophic effects. Drawing an analogy to the late eighteenth century and the expansion of republican patterns and the First Republic in the European countries which it had defeated Wielopolski forecast: “something must arise, but this will come clad in a peasant's cloak and with an axe in his hand and go into the world in the name of liberty as the catechism of the nihilists translates it.”⁴⁴ The victorious Russian nihilists will attempt to transfer the revolution to other countries, and then “no Bismarck, no Moltke will survive the war with the nihilistic state, finding support from socialists and anarchists across Europe.”⁴⁵

Having thoroughly analysed the events of the past (especially those of France), Zygmunt Wielopolski found the doctrine of social demagogues, both Western and Russian, rather weak. Both trends denied the current status quo while providing a rather vague reflection on the construction of an alternative order after the fall of the old regime. The margrave noted an excessive focus of the rebels on a verbal criticism of the later, which allowed them to gain support among the ignorant masses. The Polish conservative found the manifestation of the intellectual chaos in the camp of the radicals in their sectarianism. This was often evidenced by their conflicting concepts. Among others, they sought to reconstruct modern society through a moral change, then again, they switched to the revolution and the socialization of the means of production. He described it as a “defect”, since as a result of an ideological ferment among them there was “no fixed plan, nor the reason for a coup.”⁴⁶

During the first half of the eighties of the nineteenth century Zygmunt Wielopolski specified or rather clarified, as he saw them, the sources of social anti-gentry and anti-religious phraseology that stirred social tensions. The struggles of the tsarist regime with the Narodniks, which he monitored in the years 1882–1884, and the internal situation in France led him to directly accuse part of the intelligentsia who, assuming rebellious attitudes, demonised the negative sides of traditional order personified by the state and the church and expressing the interests of “landowning spheres.”⁴⁷ Wielopolski argued that the “intellectual proletariat” had no legitimacy to take over the leadership in modern society, as they were guided by selfishness, i.e. the desire to take the material and political position which so far belonged to the nobility. This conserva-

⁴³ A. Szwarc, *Od Wielopolskiego*, p. 206.

⁴⁴ *Ibidem*, pp. 207-208.

⁴⁵ *Ibidem*.

⁴⁶ APK, AOM, ref. 214/IV, p. 116.

⁴⁷ *Ibidem*, ref. 242, p. 21. Another conservative from the Kingdom, the count Stanisław Zamoycki said: “We look forward to communism and barbarism of Moscow turning against their own government, we await this government crumble thanks to their subjects whom it corrupts for so long.” J. Jarzębowski, *Mówią Ludzie roku 1863. Antologie nieznanych i mało znanych głosów ludzi współczesnych*, Londyn 1963, p. 46.

tive from the Kingdom of Poland claimed that a primitive revanchism against “the former ruling class” as a way of solving “the misery of the people” would carry dramatic consequences, should there come to the fall of the *ancien regime* and the victory of the nihilistic dictatorship in Russia and other European countries.⁴⁸ Zygmunt envisaged its instability and the bogey of further coups mounted by extreme fractions of revolutionaries with their increasing determination to meet the sectarian vision of a classless society. This permanent state of nihilistic chaos was to lead to the destruction of the European civilization.⁴⁹

Summing up his pessimistic forecasts for Russia and Europe against the rise of radical forces, he declared the need to build transnational political camp of loyalists within the empire of the Romanovs (recruiters being not only landed gentry). They would be bonded by their recognition of the principles of a society organized hierarchically around monarchical and conservative principles.⁵⁰ In the opinion of the margrave, it was the only “way to save the country [*the Kingdom of Poland*] from the chaos of the Abyss.”⁵¹

Wielopolski's intellectual effort in searching for alternatives to counteract threats from radical powers was demonstrated for example in his draft changes to the organization of the Romanov monarchy. The wordy essay being developed for several years, was finally accomplished in March 1887. It was then repeatedly recalled by the margrave over the next decade during his talks with Russian politicians. In his opinion, the project was the antidote to the crisis of autocracy, which will inevitably end with a evolutionary upheaval. He found it of particular importance to combat extreme movements, which he considered were both socialist and liberal-democratic organizations. Wielopolski emphasized, however, that breaking down these centrifugal powers should only be treated as a temporary remedy.

A long-term stability of the Russian state was expected to be achieved by its decentralization.⁵² According to the margrave's plan, the Romanov empire would remain an autocratic monarchy, whereas the new administrative division was to be based on provinces, demarcated according to the criterion of nationality. These units were to enjoy some internal autonomy, which would find its way in representations (parliaments) adequate to the historical traditions of a given country. Nevertheless, he admitted that the key role should be played by conservatives recruited from the landowning elites (the landed gentry and the bourgeoisie), and conservative intelligentsia. The neu-

⁴⁸ APK, AOM, ref. 1513, p. 106.

⁴⁹ It was a fairly popular view among Polish conservatives: E. Stadtmüller, *Polskie nurty polityczne wobec Niemiec w latach 1871-1918*, Wrocław 1994, passim.

⁵⁰ APK, AOM, ref. 214/IV, p. 116.

⁵¹ Ibidem, ref. 1487, pp. 38-41.

⁵² The first political document in which Wielopolski signalled the idea of decentralization of Russia was the so-called “Dresden Memorial” from 1877. His plan was further developed in the analysed paper and, according to the author, was complete and did not require any amendments, as it would provide the answer to any doubts as to the correctness of his ideas. Ibidem, ref. 244, pp. 69-74.

tralization of lower classes in a given province was to be made through the package of laws conferring freedom of religion and giving the native language the rights of official language. The competencies over the public sphere would go to the local autonomous authorities.

This plan, however, had a number of disadvantages impossible to be surmounted by the author. Zygmunt did not explain the functional symbiosis of Russian autocracy and national representations. The functioning of these representations was not elaborated on. They would be in fact local non-quorum parliaments created by local land-owning elites and loyalists. Consequently, part of the society would be deprived of any opportunities to participate in the public life. Should the abovementioned reorganization of the Russian state, as proposed by the margrave, be implemented, then, quite contrary to his intentions, it would deepen the conflict between the court and bureaucratic elites and the movements requesting the democratization of internal relations, rather than weaken it. The aforementioned shortcomings were also noted by the tsarist policy makers, treating Wielopolski's project in terms of political fantasy. Therefore, having held confidential consultations with the representatives of the tsarist elites, he decided not to submit an official memorial. This crossed out the possibility of taking any constructive negotiations on the issue of decentralization of the empire and giving on this occasion new concessions to the Kingdom of Poland.⁵³

Summing up this discussion, a few issues are worth noting. After 1864 Zygmunt Wielopolski took over the leadership of the Kingdom's conservative conciliators, as well as the duty of interpreting in the name of his camp the current political and social phenomena in the country and abroad. Being a declared conservative, he monitored with anxiety the crisis of the post feudal order, visibly in progress in the second half of the nineteenth century. Its symptom was the increasing importance of mass political movements, demanding the revision of the existing model of the state (mostly a monarchy), and hierarchically organized societies with the dominant role of the landed gentry. To fulfil the demands and claims of socialists and liberals was to decree secularization and democratization of public life, which was incompatible with Zygmunt Wielopolski's world view. His condemnation of the phenomenon of secularisation stemmed from his conviction that it as a waiver of moral norms which, together with the Christian religion, tradition and language, built the national identity. It was a dangerous phenomenon, the more that it affected the young generation, frustrated with their driving ambitions of social and material nature. Rebellious young intelligentsia supported the slogans of radicals, which resulted in the crisis of the old regime, both in the West and in the tsarist Russia facing the threat of nihilistic revolution. Zygmunt Wielopolski undermined the reason for a military coup, which meant only a change,

⁵³ Ibidem, ref. 1515, p. 19. Cf.: as well the margrave's earlier discussions on the idea of decentralization which took place in 1885 and engaged the Secretary of State Alexander Polovtsov, the Minister of Justice D. Nabokov and the Minister of the Court count Illarion Woroncow-Daszkow. Cf.: *Dziennik gosudarstwiennogo sekretara A. A. Polowcowa*, t. vol: 1883–1886 gg., Moscow 1966, pp. 360-364.

and not an improvement of the existing order. Acting within a canon of his contemporary conservatism, he proposed to realize the desideratum by weakening social tensions with the state's support (in the case of partitioned Poland this role was to be taken by the partitioning power). As was anticipated by him, the success of these actions was to confirm the validity of hierarchical organization of society. Preservation of the dominant role of the landed gentry did not exclude the possibility of gradual economic and social emancipation of the lower spheres. The ethos of the old elites was attractive to the bourgeoisie and intelligentsia, and weakened subversive tendencies among the peasants and burghers. According to Wielopolski it also inhibited individual and group selfishness, as well as counteracted social atomization. His attempt to counteract revolutionary and secular tendencies in Russian and Polish societies was the plan of decentralization of the Romanov empire proposed by him in the late nineteenth century. Although it was badly received by the bureaucrats and the court of St. Petersburg, the leader of the Kingdom's conservatives reckoned until the end of his public activity that it was the only antidote to deepening political and social crisis of the Russian state.

Résumé

LE CONSERVATEURS DE LA ROYAUME DE POLOGNE, ZYGMUNT WIELOPOLSKI AU PROCESSUS DE SECULARISATION ET DE DEMOCRATISATION DES SOCIÉTÉS EUROPÉENNES DANS LA SECONDE MOITIÉ DU XIX-E SIÈCLE

Article caractérisé les vues de Sigmund Wielopolski les processus de sécularisation et de démocratisation de la vie publique dans les pays européens dans la seconde moitié du XIXe siècle. Le chef des conservateurs de règlement dans le Royaume de Pologne à l'époque popowstaniowej évaluer ces phénomènes négatifs, les considérant une menace pour l'ordre social traditionnel. Le texte fait référence aux menaces d'annuaire de forces politiques (socialistes et libéraux) assimilées par lui, avec la popularisation de l'zeświedczenia idée et étendre les droits civils en général, précédemment réservés à la gentry élite. Margrave rapporté aux mesures du projet pour protéger la Russie et ses connexes Royaume de Pologne de la crise, qui à son avis a porté le transfert de ces tendances idéologiques sur le terrain Romanov empire.

Mots-clés: les gentil de robe, le conservatism, les laicisation, Royaume de Pologne
Keywords: landed gentry, conservatism, secularization, the Kingdom of Poland

Streszczenie

LIDER KRÓLEWIACKICH KONSERWATYSTÓW ZYGMUNT WIELOPOLSKI WOBEC PROCESU SEKULARYZACJI I DEMOKRATYZACJI SPOŁECZEŃSTW EUROPEJSKICH W DRUGIEJ POŁOWIE XIX W.

Artykuł charakteryzuje poglądy Zygmunta Wielopolskiego na procesy sekularyzacyjne i demokratyzację życia publicznego w krajach europejskich w drugiej połowie XIX w. Ten przywódca ugodowych konserwatystów w Królestwie Polskim w dobie powstaniowej oceniał negatywnie powyższe zjawiska, uznając je za zagrożenie dla tradycyjnego porządku społecznego. Tekst wskazuje na katalog zagrożeń, ze strony sił politycznych (socjalistami i liberałami), utożsamianych przez niego z popularyzacją idei ześwieczenia i poszerzenia na ogół praw obywatelskich, dotąd zastrzeżonych dla elit ziemiańskich. Margrabia zgłaszał przy tym projekt działań mających uchronić Rosję, i związane z nią Królestwo Polskie, przed kryzysem, jaki jego zdaniem niesło przeniesienie tych nurtów ideologicznych na grunt imperium Romanowów.

Słowa kluczowe: ziemiaństwo, konserwatyzm, sekularyzacja, Królestwo Polskie

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