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THE FORMATION OF AUTHORITARIAN RULE IN POLAND BETWEEN 1926 AND 1939 AS A RESEARCH PROBLEM

Abstract

In the aftermath of the First World War, many countries in Southern, Central, and Eastern Europe experienced authoritarian rule due to the political and economic turmoil of the era. The similarities and differences among various European authoritarian regimes have been extensively studied in both Polish and international scholarly literature. The case of authoritarian rule in Poland, particularly following the May Coup of 1926, is notable for its unique origins. Rooted in a period when Poland lacked statehood and fuelled by the armed independence irredentist movements of the First World War and the preceding years, Polish authoritarianism evolved from initial ideals of freedom and democracy. Central to this phenomenon was Marshal Józef Piłsudski, the ideological leader of Poland's ruling camp after the May Coup of 1926. This article presents an analysis of the current state of research on authoritarian rule in the Second Polish Republic, examining its origins, mechanisms, and distinctive features. It also outlines the key research postulates according to the author. The article seeks to answer why the liberationist and seemingly democratic movement of the former Polish independence irredentist camp became disillusioned with democracy and parliamentarism in the newly reborn independent Poland, eventually adopting authoritarian rule.

Keywords: authoritarianism, authoritarian rule, Second Polish Republic, Sanation, May Coup, Nonpartisan Block for Cooperation with the Government, Camp of National Unity

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Authoritarian rule, which emerged gradually in much of interwar Southern, Central, and Eastern Europe, was as much a response to the statehood challenges of the time – challenges that previous parliamentary-cabinet systems had failed to address effectively – as it was an expression of the ambitions of often charismatic and determined political leaders and the movements or groups behind them, who sought to govern and reconstruct the state system according to their evolving ideas and concepts. The situation in Poland after the May Coup of 1926, when viewed against the backdrop of other European authoritarian regimes, exhibited similarities but also significant differences, which were primarily due to distinct historical circumstances. These differences made Poland under Marshal Józef Piłsudski's supporters a unique case among European authoritarian states in terms of the origins and nature of its authoritarian government.

DEFINITION OF AUTHORITARIAN RULE IN THE INTERWAR PERIOD

Authoritarian rule in Europe during the interwar period can be largely attributed to the economic and political problems resulting from the First World War. The retreat from the parliamentary-cabinet system was often facilitated by the lack of democratic traditions and the susceptibility of societies to what was then termed 'strong-arm rule'. Despite the similarities and differences among authoritarian governments in Europe after the Treaty of Versailles, and their increasing oppressiveness towards political opposition and various social and professional groups that were ready to oppose them, it can hardly be argued that a fully-fledged political and legal authoritarian system, akin to António de Oliveira Salazar's New State (Por. *Estado Novo*) established in Portugal in the 1930s, developed in most of these countries. Therefore, it is more appropriate to speak of authoritarian rule during this period rather than a definitive authoritarian system. Common features of such governments include their establishment through *coup d'état*, reliance on the authority of a leader with strong but not always formally specified dictatorial powers, to whom the army and all bureaucracy is subordinated. Over time, such governances also relied on a social movement, typically created in a top-down way, which nevertheless retained some features of a genuine social movement and *de facto* functioned as a ruling party. In states governed by authoritarian regimes, there is a clear primacy of the executive over the legislative and judiciary branches, although the subordination of the latter is not always explicitly stated. Unlike fascist regimes, authoritarian governments did not generally seek to abolish democratic institutions outright but consistently deprived them of their significance and traditional functions. This applied to the parliament (and thus elections), political parties, and, to some extent, local government. On the other hand, economic, cultural, and religious freedoms were maintained to varying degrees

across different countries. The authoritarian state, which respected private property and viewed society as a national and solidaristic community (which excluded class-based impulses), nonetheless required citizens to subordinate their individual interests to those of the state. Modern definitions of authoritarianism often describe it as a system that is more pragmatic than ideological¹. Its essence lies in shifting decision-making powers almost exclusively to the executive branch, which determines what is in the interests of the state and society. It is worth noting that in the Polish historiography of the 1970s and 1980s, there was an interesting discussion on interwar authoritarianism and dictatorial rule, which focused on the similarities to fascist regimes, the ideological inspirations and borrowings from them, and the differences between the Polish model of authoritarianism and other European models².

THE STATE OF RESEARCH ON AUTHORITARIAN RULE IN POLAND AFTER THE MAY COUP

The May Coup of 1926, which *manu militari* brought Marshal Józef Piłsudski and his supporters to power, resulted in the formation of a political camp known as the May Camp and later Post-May Camp, which retained power until the end of the Second Polish Republic in September 1939. For this reason, this period in Poland's interwar history is retrospectively referred to as the 'post-May period' or 'post-May Poland'. From the outset, the policies of the ruling camp and its leader, as well as the tightening political trajectory of their governance, were subjects of analysis and interpretation aimed at describing and capturing the essence of the activities undertaken to rebuild – according to Piłsudski's supporters – the internal relations within the state³. Studies written

¹ Cf. *Encyklopedia Gazety Wyborczej*, t. 1, Kraków 2004, p. 719 (encyclopaedic entries prepared by the Scholarly Publishing House PWN); see also: *Nowa encyklopedia powszechna PWN*, t. 1, Warszawa 1995, p. 292.

² Piotr ŁOSSOWSKI, *Kraje bałtyckie na drodze od demokracji parlamentarnej do dyktatury (1918–1934)*, Wrocław–Warszawa–Kraków–Gdańsk 1972; *Dyktatury w Europie Środkowo-Wschodniej 1918–1939. Konferencja naukowa w Instytucie Historii Polskiej Akademii Nauk 2–3 XII 1971*, red. Janusz ŻARNOWSKI, Wrocław–Warszawa–Kraków–Gdańsk 1973; Jerzy W. BOREJSZA, *Mussolini był pierwszy...*, Warszawa 1979; idem, *Rzym a wspólnota faszystowska. O penetracji faszystwu włoskiego w Europie Środkowej, Południowej i Wschodniej*, Warszawa 1981; Władysław T. KULESZA, *Koncepcje ideowo-polityczne obozu rządzącego w Polsce w latach 1926–1935*, Wrocław–Warszawa–Kraków–Gdańsk–Łódź 1985, pp. 227–286.

³ Cf. Adam KRZYŻANOWSKI, *Rządy Marszałka Piłsudskiego*, Kraków 1928; Julian MALICKI, *Marszałek Józef Piłsudski a Sejm. Historia rozwoju parlamentu polskiego 1919–1936*, Warszawa 1936. Among the works written by various groups in opposition to the Post-May Camp, which focus on the camp's activities in law, economy, and local government, one notable example is the attempt at a comprehensive account of the first 15 years of reborn independent Poland by the historian Adam Próchnik. Associated with the Polish Socialist Party (Pol. *Polska Partia Socjalistyczna*), Próchnik published his work in 1933 under the pseudonym Henryk Swoboda,

by both supporters of the ruling camp and its critics retain value in terms of factual content and, to a large extent, interpretative insights. They serve as records of the period and reflect the perceptions of events by the scholarly and political elite involved in the political disputes in Poland after 1926. Among these works, a study by a senior official of the Ministry of Internal Affairs on the organisation of state administration in the Second Polish Republic holds exceptional cognitive value to this day⁴. Journalistic works, both Polish and foreign, devoted to the power elite of the time are also noteworthy, as they provide many interesting insights⁵.

The political camp formed by Piłsudski's supporters, also known as the Sanation Camp due to their slogans of moral 'sanation' (i.e. healing) of political relations in Poland, found itself on the defensive both in Poland and in exile after the collapse of the Polish state in September 1939. They were blamed for the military defeat in the war with Nazi Germany and for the style of government exercised by Piłsudski's camp between 1926 and 1939. This situation hindered objective research for many years. After the Second World War, descendants of this political camp and participants in the Sanation government could express themselves freely only in exile. A significant work from this milieu is the synthesis of Polish political history by Władysław Pobóg-Malinowski, written in the first half of the 1950s. Despite not eluding critical accents, this work sought to capture the essence of Piłsudski's and his camp's policy, and remains a lasting monument in Polish historiography⁶. Another notable work, in addition to the magazine *Independence* (Pol. *Niepodległość*) irregularly published by Józef Piłsudski Institute in London and New York, which was a continuation of the pre-war edition from 1930–1939, was *The Chronicle of the Life of Józef Piłsudski 1867–1935* (Pol. *Kronika życia Józefa Piłsudskiego 1867–1935*) by Waław Jędrzejewicz⁷, published twenty years after Pobóg-Malinowski's work. Source

which did not prevent it to be partially confiscated by censors; see Henryk SWOBODA (Adam PRÓCHNIK), *Pierwsze piętnastolecie Polski Niepodległej (1918–1933). Zarys dziejów politycznych*, Warszawa 1933. See also the first more widely accessible postwar edition: idem, *Pierwsze piętnastolecie Polski Niepodległej. Zarys dziejów politycznych*, Warszawa 1957.

⁴ Roman HAUSNER, *Pierwsze dwudziestolecie administracji spraw wewnętrznych*, Warszawa 1939.

⁵ Cf. Konrad WRZOS, *Piłsudski i piłsudczycy*, Warszawa 1936; Heinrich KORTZ, *Männer um Piłsudski. Profile der polnischen Politik*, Breslau 1934. For a book authored by the opponents of the ruling camp refer to: Marian PORCZAK, *Dyktator Józef Piłsudski i „piłsudczycy”*, Kraków 1930.

⁶ Władysław POBÓG-MALINOWSKI, *Najnowsza historia polityczna Polski 1864–1945*, t. 2: 1919–1939, Londyn 1956.

⁷ Waław JĘDRZEJEWICZ, *Kronika życia Józefa Piłsudskiego 1867–1935*, t. 1–2, Londyn 1977. This work was further developed in the following years, see Janusz CISEK, *Kalendarium życia Józefa Piłsudskiego. Uzupełnienie do „Kroniki życia Józefa Piłsudskiego 1867–1935”*, Nowy Jork 1992; Waław JĘDRZEJEWICZ, Janusz CISEK, *Kalendarium życia Józefa Piłsudskiego 1867–1935*,

editions included *The Diary and Files of Jan Szembek* (Pol. *Diariusz i teki Jana Szembeka*)⁸. Discussions of the interwar period also took place in the émigré press and publications, most notably in the London-based *The News* (Pol. *Wiadomości*), and the Paris-based *The Culture* (Pol. *Kultura*) and *Historical Notes* (Pol. *Zeszyty Historyczne*). In communist Poland, members of the Sanation Camp, who were persecuted, often murdered, and remained under surveillance for the rest of their lives, spoke out relatively rarely. The domestic historiography of the Stalinist period in Poland (1948–1956) largely dismissed the Second Polish Republic as an ideologically hostile state, a view reflected in historical scholarly publications of the time⁹. Following the easing of ideological pressure on historical research, the first smaller studies on selected elements of the Sanation Camp's history were published at the end of the 1950s¹⁰.

The first monographs began to appear in the early 1960s, addressing changes in the law and the functioning of the state administration after the May Coup of 1926¹¹, the restriction of press freedom in the Second Polish Republic¹², the period of parliamentary democracy until 1926¹³, and the formation of an oppressive government in the early years after the coup in the context of a developing democratic opposition to the ruling camp and the increasingly dictatorial tendencies of the regime¹⁴. They also examined the emergence of the Camp of National Unity, a political formation founded by the Sanation political movement¹⁵. Despite being a testimony to the socialist period in Polish historiography, which is sometimes evident in the style and language of the narrative, these works retain factual and, partially, interpretative value. In addition to scholarly studies, it is important to note the interesting journalistic pieces

t. 1–3, Wrocław 1994. The 1994 edition was extended and supplemented even further, see iidem, *Kalendarium życia Józefa Piłsudskiego 1867–1935*, t. 1–4, Kraków–Łomianki 2007.

⁸ *Diariusz i teki Jana Szembeka (1935–1945)*, t. 1–3, opr. Tytus KOMARNICKI, Londyn 1964–1969; *Diariusz i teki Jana Szembeka (1935–1945)*, t. 4, opr. Józef ZARAŃSKI, Londyn 1972.

⁹ Cf. Marek SIOMA, *Historia polityczna*, [in:] *Wokół nowej syntezy dziejów Drugiej Rzeczypospolitej*, red. Włodzimierz MĘDRZECKI, Warszawa 2019, p. 40.

¹⁰ Cf. Janusz ŻARNOWSKI, „Lewica sanacyjna” w latach 1935–1939, *Przegląd Historyczny*, t. 49: 1958, nr 4, pp. 714–737, 829–836. See also a subsequent extension of these study results: iidem, *Struktura i podłoże społeczne obozu rządzącego w Polsce w latach 1926–1939*, *Najnowsze Dzieje Polski. Materiały i Studia z Okresu 1914–1939*, t. 10: 1966, pp. 67–83.

¹¹ *Historia państwa i prawa Polski*, t. 5: 1918–1939, cz. 1–2, red. Franciszek RYSZKA, Warszawa 1962.

¹² Michał PIETRZAK, *Reglamentacja wolności prasy w Polsce (1918–1939)*, Warszawa 1963.

¹³ Andrzej AJNENKIEL, *Od rządów ludowych do przewrotu majowego. Zarys dziejów politycznych Polski 1918–1926*, Warszawa 1964.

¹⁴ Antoni CZUBIŃSKI, *Centrolew. Kształtowanie się opozycji antysanacyjnej w Polsce w latach 1926–1930*, Poznań 1963.

¹⁵ Tadeusz JĘDRUSZCZAK, *Piłsudczycy bez Piłsudskiego. Powstanie Obozu Zjednoczenia Narodowego w 1937 roku*, Warszawa 1963.

that infrequently appeared during this period, which were essentially free of ideological bias¹⁶. Among the publications appearing in Western historiography at the time, Joseph Rothschild's extensive monograph on the May Coup of 1926 is particularly noteworthy¹⁷.

The historical research on post-May Poland progressed significantly and resulted in several publications in the 1970s. Among foreign scholars of Polish history, Anthony Polonsky followed in the footsteps of Joseph Rothschild by publishing a monograph on the political history of the Second Polish Republic, with a clear emphasis on the causes and consequences of the transition from democracy to authoritarianism¹⁸. Shortly thereafter, Edward D. Wynot's work on the Camp of National Unity (Pol. *Obóz Zjednoczenia Narodowego*, OZN) was published¹⁹, followed by Nina Kozłowski's study on the political geography of the Sanation Camp in the late 1970s²⁰. Unfortunately, the reception of these works in Polish historiography remains negligible, which is particularly regrettable in the case of Wynot's book on the OZN. In domestic historiography, an important work on the influence of the military on Polish domestic politics during the last four years of the Second Polish Republic appeared as early as the late 1960s²¹. The 1970s saw several significant studies devoted to the final years of the Second Polish Republic²², the activities of some structures of the Post-May Camp, and the political thought within it²³. This period also produced the first comprehensive account of the interwar Polish political scene published in the Polish People's Republic²⁴, and studies on the Polish politics

¹⁶ In particular, see Andrzej MICEWSKI, *W cieniu marszałka Piłsudskiego. Szkice z dziejów myśli politycznej II Rzeczypospolitej*, Warszawa 1968.

¹⁷ Joseph ROTHSCHILD, *Piłsudski's coup d'état*, New York–London 1966.

¹⁸ Anthony POLONSKY, *Politics in Independent Poland 1921–1939: The Crisis of Constitutional Government*, Oxford 1972.

¹⁹ Edward D. WYNOT, *Polish Politics in Transition: The Camp of National Unity and the Struggle for Power, 1935–1939*, Athens, Georgia 1974.

²⁰ Nina KOZŁOWSKI, *Die politischen Gruppierungen innerhalb des Piłsudski-Lagers 1926–1939*, München 1978.

²¹ Piotr STAWECKI, *Następcy Komendanta. Wojsko a polityka wewnętrzna Drugiej Rzeczypospolitej w latach 1935–1939*, Warszawa 1969.

²² Hanna JĘDRUSZCZAK, Tadeusz JĘDRUSZCZAK, *Ostatnie lata Drugiej Rzeczypospolitej (1935–1939)*, Warszawa 1970.

²³ Cf. Wiesław WŁADYKA, *Działalność polityczna polskich stronnictw konserwatywnych w latach 1926–1935*, Wrocław–Warszawa–Kraków–Gdańsk 1977; Jacek M. MAJCHROWSKI, *Czynniki jednoczące naród w myśli politycznej Obozu Zjednoczenia Narodowego*, Kraków 1978; Jerzy GOŁĘBIEWSKI, *Spór o etatyzm wewnątrz obozu sanacyjnego w latach 1926–1939*, Kraków 1978. For a study dedicated to the long-time pro-government association of trade unions, see Seweryn AJZNER, *Związek Związków Zawodowych 1931–1939*, Warszawa 1979.

²⁴ Jerzy HOLZER, *Mozaika polityczna Drugiej Rzeczypospolitej*, Warszawa 1974.

of nationality²⁵. Towards the end of the 1970s, alongside these works, Andrzej Garlicki began a series of studies focused on Piłsudski's camp and its leader in the Second Polish Republic. His work would fully develop in the 1980s, culminating in the first biography of Józef Piłsudski in Polish domestic historiography²⁶. The 1980s saw significant advancements in the study of Polish political history after the May Coup. A notable monograph on this subject was written by Andrzej Ajnenkiel²⁷, who later in the decade also published works on constitutionalism and Polish parliamentarism of the Second Polish Republic²⁸. Scholarly studies published in the 1980s further investigated the history of two major political formations within the ruling camp: the Nonpartisan Bloc for Cooperation with the Government²⁹ and the Camp of National Unity³⁰. Their authors explored the ideological and political concepts within the ruling camp³¹ and made the first attempt at compiling its history from a regional perspective³². An important development during this period was the publication of works on the Polish press, focusing on its control by the authorities and its role in state propaganda³³. The 1980s also brought the first biographies of leading politicians within Piłsudski's camp who were close to the leader³⁴. These studies, given the research opportunities of the time – limited access to archival sources, both domestically and abroad, including the accessibility of travelling

²⁵ Andrzej CHOJNOWSKI, *Koncepcje polityki narodowościowej rządów polskich w latach 1921–1939*, Wrocław 1979.

²⁶ Andrzej GARLICKI, *U źródeł obozu belwederskiego*, Warszawa 1978; idem, *Przewrót majowy*, Warszawa 1978; idem, *Od maja do Brześcia*, Warszawa 1981; idem, *Od Brześcia do maja*, Warszawa 1986; idem, *Józef Piłsudski 1867–1935*, Warszawa 1988.

²⁷ Andrzej AJNENKIEL, *Polska po przewrocie majowym. Zarys dziejów politycznych Polski 1926–1939*, Warszawa 1980. It was the continuation of his work from 1964, see footnote 13.

²⁸ Idem, *Polskie konstytucje*, Warszawa 1982, especially pp. 278–346; idem, *Historia sejmiku polskiego*, t. 2, cz. 2: *II Rzeczpospolita*, Warszawa 1989.

²⁹ Andrzej CHOJNOWSKI, *Piłsudczycy u władzy. Dzieje Bezpartyjnego Bloku Współpracy z Rządem*, Wrocław–Warszawa–Kraków–Gdańsk–Łódź 1986.

³⁰ Jacek M. MAJCHROWSKI, *Silni, zwarci, gotowi. Myśl polityczna Obozu Zjednoczenia Narodowego*, Warszawa 1985.

³¹ W. T. KULESZA, op.cit., passim.

³² Edward DŁUGAJCZYK, *Sanacja śląska 1926–1939. Zarys dziejów politycznych*, Katowice 1983.

³³ Andrzej PACZKOWSKI, *Prasa polska w latach 1918–1939*, Warszawa 1980; Andrzej NOTKOWSKI, *Polska prasa prowincjonalna Drugiej Rzeczypospolitej (1918–1939)*, Warszawa–Łódź 1982; idem, *Prasa w systemie propagandy rządowej w Polsce (1926–1939). Studium techniki władzy*, Warszawa–Łódź 1987; Wiktor PEPLIŃSKI, *Prasa pomorska w Drugiej Rzeczypospolitej 1920–1939. System funkcjonowania i oblicze społeczno-polityczne prasy polskiej*, Gdańsk 1987.

³⁴ Iwo WERSCHLER, *Z dziejów obozu belwederskiego. Tadeusz Hołówko. Życie i działalność*, Warszawa 1984; Jerzy M. NOWAKOWSKI, *Walery Sławek (1879–1939). Zarys biografii politycznej*, Warszawa 1988.

abroad, and the existence of censorship³⁵ – provided a foundational framework of knowledge regarding the formation and functioning of authoritarian rule in Poland after the May Coup. They identified the mechanisms of power and decision-making within the state³⁶, as well as the goals, methods, and directions of the ruling camp, although at this stage of research, the focus was primarily on the central state level.

The political breakthrough of 1989 led to a significant leap in research on twentieth-century Polish history. The development of the scholarly community throughout the 1990s, increased availability of archival materials both domestically and internationally, and advancements in technical capabilities resulted in the expansion of research fields and methodologies. This allowed for in-depth studies on the structures of the state and political life in Poland after the May Coup, including regional perspectives. The growth of the publishing market contributed to a relatively rapid increase in the number of comprehensive publications, particularly biographies related to Piłsudski's camp. In 1995, for the first time after the political breakthrough of 1989, a new biography of Józef Piłsudski was published, finally free from the negative biases of socialist historiography, typical for the period of the Polish People's Republic³⁷. Although numerous authors in Poland and abroad have attempted to write Piłsudski's biography both before and after 1989, and while our understanding of his actions and decisions has grown, a comprehensive political and military biography of Piłsudski is still awaited³⁸. Piłsudski's political camp and its supporters, as an ideological and political formation, have been the subject of extensive biographical research. These studies, mostly published after 1989, include both full monographs and smaller scholarly pieces, covering a wide range of politicians and military officers³⁹. To understand the various aspects and essence of the governance in Poland after May 1926, biographies of politicians are paramount. These politicians were often current or former military officers, a characteristic feature of the camp. Biographies provide insights into

³⁵ That is, the Central Office of Control of the Press, Publications and Performances (Pol. *Główny Urząd Kontroli Prasy, Publikacji i Widowisk*) and its branch offices.

³⁶ With regard to the armed forces, see the study that has remained the basic source of information until this day: Jerzy HALBERSZTADT, *Józef Piłsudski a mechanizm podejmowania decyzji wojskowych w latach 1926–1935*, *Przegląd Historyczny*, t. 74: 1983, z. 4, pp. 676–720.

³⁷ Włodzimierz SULEJA, *Józef Piłsudski*, Wrocław 1995.

³⁸ In this context, it is noteworthy to refer to recently published works: Jerzy GAUL, *Trzymajcie się z Zachodem... Józef Piłsudski w poszukiwaniu polskiej racji stanu*, Warszawa 2023; Krzysztof KŁOC, *Piłsudski. Studium fenomenu Komendanta*, Kraków 2021 (also with reference to the circle of the ruling elites of Piłsudski's supporters).

³⁹ For a review of previous scholarship up to the late 1990s, see Przemysław OLSTOWSKI, *Biografistyka piłsudczyków – stan badań oraz potrzeby dalszych prac badawczych*, *Czasy Nowożytne*, t. 8 (9): 2000, pp. 221–253.

the ruling political elite, decision-making processes⁴⁰, and regional politics⁴¹. In addition to biographies of leading political figures and regional representatives of the ruling camp, other significant sources for understanding the structure of authoritarian rule after May 1926 include monographic studies of various ideological circles within the camp⁴², the origins of the May Coup⁴³, the political thought of Piłsudski's supporters⁴⁴, and the regional political structures of the Sanation movement⁴⁵. These studies sometimes cover political life at the regional level⁴⁶, pro-government social and professional organisations⁴⁷,

⁴⁰ Cf. Jerzy KOCHANOWSKI, *Zapomniany prezydent... Życie i działalność Ignacego Boenera 1875–1933*, Warszawa 1993; Arkadiusz ADAMCZYK, *Bogusław Miedziński (1891–1972). Biografia polityczna*, Toruń 2000; Dorota MAŁCZEWSKA-PAWELEC, *Bogusław Miedziński (1891–1972). Polityk i publicysta*, Łódź 2002; Janusz GOŁOTA, *Jędrzej Moraczewski (1870–1944). Pierwszy premier II Rzeczypospolitej*, Ostrołęka 2002; Marek SIOMA, *Felicjan Sławoj Składkowski (1885–1962). Żołnierz i polityk*, Lublin 2005; Alicja BIEŃKOWSKA, *Juliusz Poniatowski. Biografia polityczna*, Warszawa 2012; Paweł DUBER, *Działalność polityczna Kazimierza Świtalskiego w latach 1926–1939*, Poznań 2013; idem, *Działalność polityczna Kazimierza Bartla w latach 1926–1930. Z dziejów „liberalnego skrzydła” obozu sanacyjnego*, Warszawa 2014; Sławomir KALBARCZYK, *Kazimierz Bartel 1882–1941. Uczony w świecie polityki*, Warszawa 2015; Robert LITWIŃSKI, *Kordian Józef Zamorski „granatowy” generał*, Lublin 2018; Marek KORNAĆ, Mariusz WOŁOS, *Józef Beck. Biografia*, Kraków 2020; Grzegorz KAŁA, *Sen o potędze. Plany i działalność polityczna Edwarda Śmigłego-Rydza w latach 1935–1939*, Olsztyn 2021.

⁴¹ Particularly the biographies of voivodes endowed with a significant position in the ruling camp and a high degree of autonomy in the implementation of regional policy; see Henryk RECHOWICZ, *Wojewoda śląski dr Michał Grażyński*, Warszawa–Kraków 1988 (a work dating back to the period of the Polish People's Republic); Wanda MUSIALIK, *Michał Tadeusz Grażyński 1890–1965*, Opole 1989; Jan KĘSIK, *Zaufany Komendanta. Biografia polityczna Jana Henryka Józefowskiego 1892–1981*, Wrocław 1995; Piotr CICHORACKI, *Droga ku anatemie. Wacław Kostek-Biernacki (1884–1957)*, Warszawa 2009; *Londyńska reduta. Władysław Raczkiewicz (1885–1947)*, red. Jarosław KŁACZKOW, Mirosław GOLON, Krzysztof KANIA, Zbigniew GIRZYŃSKI, Toruń 2017.

⁴² Cf. Przemysław WAINGERTNER, *„Naprawa” 1926–1939. Z dziejów obozu pomajowego*, Warszawa 1999; idem, *Ruch zetowy w Drugiej Rzeczypospolitej. Studium myśli politycznej*, Łódź 2006.

⁴³ Mariusz WOŁOS, *O Piłsudskim, Dmowskim i zamachu majowym. Dyplomacja sowiecka wobec Polski w okresie kryzysu politycznego 1925–1926*, Kraków 2013.

⁴⁴ Cf. Janusz FARYŚ, *Piłsudski i piłsudczycy. Z dziejów koncepcji polityczno-ustrojowej (1918–1939)*, Szczecin 1991; Waldemar PARUCH, *Od konsolidacji państwowej do konsolidacji narodowej. Mniejszości narodowe w myśli politycznej obozu piłsudczykowskiego (1926–1939)*, Lublin 1997; idem, *Myśl polityczna obozu piłsudczykowskiego w latach 1926–1939*, Lublin 2006.

⁴⁵ Przemysław OLSTOWSKI, *Obóz pomajowy w województwie pomorskim w latach 1926–1939*, Warszawa 2008; Piotr OKULEWICZ, *Obóz sanacyjny w województwie poznańskim w latach 1926–1935*, Poznań 2014.

⁴⁶ Piotr CICHORACKI, *Województwo poleskie 1921–1939. Z dziejów politycznych*, Łomianki 2014.

⁴⁷ Cf. Elżbieta KOSSEWSKA, *Związek Legionistów Polskich 1922–1939*, Warszawa 2003; Joanna DUFRAT, *W służbie obozu marszałka Józefa Piłsudskiego. Związek Pracy Obywatelskiej Kobiet (1928–1939)*, Kraków 2013; Grzegorz ZACKIEWICZ, *Między władzą a społeczeństwem. Zjednoczenie Polskich Związków Zawodowych 1937–1939*, Białystok 2021.

and the political propaganda of the ruling camp, with special emphasis on the utilisation of the figure of Józef Piłsudski⁴⁸. They also address administrative policies at central⁴⁹, regional⁵⁰, and local levels⁵¹, the clandestine activities of the state administration and ruling camp⁵², and the repressive policies of the authorities in the context of social resistance⁵³, particularly with regard to the internment camp in Bereza Kartuska⁵⁴. Further research directions are often outlined by multi-authored volumes, typically the result of scholarly conferences dedicated to Piłsudski's camp⁵⁵, and the state and society of the Second Polish Republic⁵⁶. Among the important synthesising approaches to interwar

⁴⁸ Heidi HEIN, *Der Piłsudski-Kult und seine Bedeutung für den polnischen Staat 1926–1939*, Marburg 2002 (see also the Polish edition: Heidi HEIN-KIRCHER, *Kult Piłsudskiego i jego znaczenie dla państwa polskiego 1926–1939*, Warszawa 2008); Elżbieta KASZUBA, *System propagandy państwowej obozu rządzącego w Polsce w latach 1926–1939*, Toruń 2004; Piotr CICHORACKI, *Legenda i polityka. Kształtowanie się wizerunku marszałka Józefa Piłsudskiego w świadomości zbiorowej społeczeństwa polskiego w latach 1918–1939*, Kraków 2005; idem, „Z nami jest On”. *Kult Marszałka Józefa Piłsudskiego w Wojsku Polskim w latach 1926–1939*, Wrocław 2001.

⁴⁹ Waldemar KOZYRA, *Polityka administracyjna ministrów spraw wewnętrznych Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej w latach 1918–1939*, Lublin 2009.

⁵⁰ Above all, with regard to the eastern voivodeships, see Wojciech ŚLESZYŃSKI, *Bezpieczeństwo wewnętrzne w polityce państwa polskiego na ziemiach północno-wschodnich II Rzeczypospolitej*, Warszawa 2007; idem, *Województwa kresowe II Rzeczypospolitej. Województwo poleskie*, Kraków 2014; Joanna JANUSZEWSKA-JURKIEWICZ, *Stosunki narodowościowe na Wileńszczyźnie w latach 1920–1939*, Katowice 2010; Werner BENECKE, *Die Ostgebiete der Zweiten Polnischen Republik. Staatsmacht und öffentliche Ordnung in einer Minderheitenregion 1918–1939*, Köln 1999.

⁵¹ Janusz MIERZWA, *Starostowie Polski międzywojennej. Portret zbiorowy*, Kraków 2012.

⁵² Przemysław OLSTOWSKI, *Procesy „starościńskie” w województwie pomorskim w latach 1936–1937. Polityka obozu rządzącego i niejawnie mechanizmy władzy na szczeblu powiatu w pierwszej połowie lat trzydziestych w świetle kilku procesów karnych*, Warszawa 2014.

⁵³ Piotr CICHORACKI, Joanna DUFRAT, Janusz MIERZWA, *Oblicza buntu społecznego w II Rzeczypospolitej doby wielkiego kryzysu (1930–1935). Uwarunkowania, skala, konsekwencje*, Kraków 2019.

⁵⁴ Ireneusz POLIT, *Miejsce odosobnienia w Berezie Kartuskiej*, Toruń 2003; Wojciech ŚLESZYŃSKI, *Obóz odosobnienia w Berezie Kartuskiej 1934–1939*, Białystok 2003.

⁵⁵ Cf. *Józef Piłsudski i piłsudczycy*, red. Zbigniew ZAPOROWSKI, Lublin 1999; *Zamach stanu Józefa Piłsudskiego 1926 roku*, red. Marek SIOMA, Lublin 2007; *Polska bez Marszałka. Dylematy piłsudczyków po 1935 roku*, red. Mariusz WOŁOS, Krzysztof KANIA, Toruń 2008; *Piłsudczycy i senatorzy drugiego planu. Portrety zbiorowe i indywidualne*, red. Robert LITWIŃSKI, Marek SIOMA, Lublin 2019.

⁵⁶ Here, works published by the Institute of History of the Polish Academy of Sciences as part of the *Metamorfozy Społeczne* series stand out: *Państwo i społeczeństwo Drugiej Rzeczypospolitej*, red. Janusz ŻARNOWSKI, Warszawa 2014; *Praca i społeczeństwo Drugiej Rzeczypospolitej*, red. Włodzimierz MĘDRZECKI, Cecylia LESZCZYŃSKA, Warszawa 2014; *Wokół nowej syntezy dziejów Drugiej Rzeczypospolitej*, red. Włodzimierz MĘDRZECKI, Warszawa 2019. See also the special issue titled *Oblicza Polski niepodległej 1918–1939* of the *Prace Historyczne* journal (t. 147: 2020, z. 4), edited by Janusz Mierzwa.

Polish statehood, Włodzimierz Mędrzecki's study stands out⁵⁷. The achievements of Polish historians also include numerous studies and editions of diaries kept by members of the ruling political elite⁵⁸ and significant opposition politicians⁵⁹. For researchers of that period, these diaries are invaluable primary sources, especially given the gaps in surviving archival material. Additionally, collections of documents published over the last quarter-century are crucial for comprehensive research⁶⁰.

In light of the research to date, a clearly delineated picture of authoritarian rule in Poland from 1926 to 1939 emerges. It was a rule based on the authority of a leader, a sense of mission and indisputable self-righteousness, and the state administration apparatus and military. A rule that appropriated the state and public space, and limited the autonomy of the legislature and judiciary in favour of the executive. However, the peculiarity of Polish authoritarianism during the interwar period, and its dissimilarity from other contemporary forms of authoritarian rule in Europe, made it a particularly unique phenomenon⁶¹. Unlike other authoritarianisms, it did not stem from nationalism or any specific political doctrine. It was not an expression of the political aspirations of any social stratum or economic interest group, though it managed to coexist and cooperate with some of them once in power. This included the Catholic Church, which, although significant in the public life of interwar Poland, played a rather secondary and 'decorative' role for the Sanation Camp. The source of authoritarian rule in the Second Polish Republic can be traced back to the Polish irredentist tradition, personified by Józef Piłsudski and his soldiers. This tradition instilled faith in the necessity and value of sacrificing one's life in the effort to regain the independent Polish state – an idea bolstered by the presumed glory and greatness of the Kingdom of Poland and the

⁵⁷ Włodzimierz MĘDRZECKI, *Odzyskany śmietnik. Jak radziliśmy sobie z niepodległością w II Rzeczypospolitej*, Kraków 2022.

⁵⁸ Kazimierz ŚWITALSKI, *Diariusz 1919–1935*, opr. Andrzej GARLICKI, Ryszard ŚWIĘTEK, Warszawa 1992; idem, *Diariusz. Uzupełnienie z lat 1919–1932*, opr. Paweł DUBER, Włodzimierz SULEJA, Warszawa 2012; Bronisław ŻONGOŁOWICZ, *Dzienniki 1930–1936*, opr. Dorota ZAMOJSKA, Warszawa 2004; Władysław M. ZAWADZKI, *Dziennik*, opr. Janusz MIERZWA, Kraków 2010; Kordian J. ZAMORSKI, *Dzienniki (1930–1938)*, opr. Robert LITWIŃSKI, Marek SIOMA, Warszawa 2011.

⁵⁹ *Dziennik Juliusza Zdanowskiego*, t. 1–7, opr. Janusz FARYŚ, Tomasz SIKORSKI, Henryk WALCZAK, Adam WĄTOR, Szczecin 2013–2015.

⁶⁰ Zbigniew CIEŚLIKOWSKI, *Zamach stanu. Materiały źródłowe do przewrotu majowego*, Warszawa 2002; *Przewrót majowy 1926 r. w relacjach świadków i uczestników. Materiały Instytutu Józefa Piłsudskiego*, red. Arkadiusz ADAMCZYK, Londyn–Piotrków Trybunalski 2003; *Polesie w polityce rządów II Rzeczypospolitej*, opr. Wojciech ŚLESZYŃSKI, Białystok–Kraków 2009; *Rzeczpospolita niedoskonała. Dokumenty do historii buntu społecznego w latach 1930–1935*, opr. Piotr CICHORACKI, Joanna DUFRAJ, Janusz MIERZWA, Piotr RUCIŃSKI, Łomianki–Kraków 2019.

⁶¹ W. T. KULESZA, op.cit., pp. 287–290.

Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth of old. It helped those who subscribed to this idea to develop a habit of actively engaging with reality and a belief that 'if there is a will, there is a way', as later expressed in the famous Polish song *March of the First Brigade*. Awareness of one's merits and sacrifices made for the cause of Poland's rebirth through military action and clandestine political activities, in addition to justifiable pride, also brought a sense of predestination to realise youthful dreams of freedom and democratic spirit through real participation in power, as embodied by the figure of Józef Piłsudski. The inability to achieve these goals within the conditions of a democratic play of political forces and the fear of being marginalised in social life led Piłsudski's relatively small political-military milieu to begin abandoning their faith in the democratic-parliamentary system as something hitherto taken for granted, based on the conviction that the parliament of the restored Polish state, being a constituent assembly and expressing the will of society, symbolised the freedom and independence of the Polish Republic. Instead, ideas began to germinate within these circles about creating a different model that combined executive efficiency with public participation in the life of the state, while excluding traditional political parties⁶². This shift was undeniably accompanied by a strong conviction that Poland's international security was being compromised, as evidenced by the Locarno Treaties of October 1925 and the military cooperation treaty concluded by Germany and the Soviet Union in Berlin in April 1926. Parliamentary-cabinet governance began to be perceived as incapable of confronting these threats in the long run. For Piłsudski's supporters, the state recovered in 1918 was the highest value, so they began to evaluate parliamentary democracy based on its utility for the good of the state. They questioned it, at least in its then present form, when they and their leader recognised that it was an inefficient system in terms of the internal and external challenges Poland faced. This perspective can be seen as the origin of the May Coup of 1926, which resulted in a gradual shift away from parliamentary democracy towards the construction of an authoritarian model of the state.

'A MILITARY REVOLUTION DRIVEN BY A MORAL IDEAL':

THE ORIGINS OF AUTHORITARIAN RULE IN POLAND AFTER THE MAY COUP

Maria Dąbrowska, a writer deeply connected with many prominent figures of Piłsudski's milieu, and a representative of the Polish democratic and liberal intelligentsia, recorded in her diary on 17 May 1926: '[...] In Warsaw, a frightful and magnificent event unfolded, reminiscent of a chapter from Greek history. It was a military revolution driven by a moral ideal, led by Piłsudski, with

⁶² For example, journalistic works of Adam Skwarczyński, one of the leading ideologists of these circles, see *Adam Skwarczyński – od demokracji do autorytaryzmu*, opr. Daria NAŁĘCZ, Warszawa 1998.

the army, the public, and the masses rallying behind him. For three days, Warsaw became the stage for a tragic conflict between the scant government forces and Piłsudski's army [...] [President Stanisław – P.O.] Wojciechowski and [Prime Minister Wincenty – P.O.] Witos's government were obliterated'. Later she added: 'Two moral nations clashed in Poland. One was a nation of creativity and self-improvement, delving into the essence of matters. The other was a nation of deceit and superficiality. (God, what a mistake this belief turned out to be – note from 1943). The conditions for a new life have been established'⁶³. Although Dąbrowska in 1943 backtracked from her views of those days, this did not invalidate her observations of May 1926. Her insights into the nature of those events, the goals of Piłsudski's supporters and their leader, and the dramatic clash of two 'moral nations' remained unchanged, even if her interpretation of these words is debatable. One of the key participants in the May Coup, Colonel January Grzędziński, who became a strong critic of the ruling camp in the late 1930s, made a notable observation in the afterword to the Paris edition of his diary of the May 1926 events, originally published in 1936⁶⁴. Reflecting from the perspective of more than forty years, he noted that after regaining independence in 1918, the public ('the people') largely supported parties that were ideologically distant from the idea of a democratic and people's Poland and had not been actively involved in the struggle for independence. '[The people – P.O.] did not comprehend that their moment had arrived. They cast their votes for those to whom Poland had emerged "out of the blue", those who had sacrificed nothing for its sake. Worse still, those individuals feared that in a free, democratic and people's Poland they might lose their cherished privileges that until recently had been protected by the partitioning powers'⁶⁵. Therefore, in 1965, almost forty years after the May Coup, he regarded it as

⁶³ '[...] stała się w Warszawie rzecz przeraźliwa i wspaniała zarazem, jakby rozdział z historii greckiej. Rewolucja wojskowa o ideał moralny. Dokonał jej Piłsudski, za którym stanęło wojsko, cała ulica, cały dół społeczeństwa. Przez trzy dni Warszawa była widownią tragicznej walki nielicznych wojsk rządowych z wojskami Piłsudskiego [...] Wojciechowski i rząd Witosy zostały zmiecione'; 'Starły się w Polsce dwa narody moralne. Jeden naród twórczości i doskonalenia się, docierający do istoty zagadnień, i drugi naród – naród kłamstwa i konwenansu. (Boże, jaką pomyłką okazała się ta wiara – przyp. z 1943). Zostały stworzone warunki do nowego życia'; Maria DĄBROWSKA, *Dzienniki 1914–1945*, t. 2: 1926–1935, opr. Tadeusz DREWNOŃSKI, Warszawa 1999, pp. 18–19. The essence of this passage was highlighted thirty years ago by Daria Nałęcz in her insightful work on the evolution of the democratic and liberal intelligentsia's stance toward the state and society between the restoration of independence and the May Coup, see Daria NAŁĘCZ, *Sen o władzy. Inteligencja wobec niepodległości*, Warszawa 1994, pp. 255–256.

⁶⁴ January GRZĘDZIŃSKI, *Maj 1926. Kartki z pamiętnika*, Warszawa 1936.

⁶⁵ 'Nie zrozumiał, że jego to czas przyszedł i oddał swe głosy tym, dla których Polska powstała "ni z tego, ni z owego", tym którzy nic dla niej nie poświęcili, a nawet, co jest najgorsze, bali się stracić w Polsce wolnej, demokratycznej i ludowej te cenne przywileje, na straży których stała jeszcze przed chwilą zaborcza władza'; idem, *Maj 1926*, Paryż 1965, p. 106.

‘the final act truly worthy of the Polish Legions. It was, as in *The Red Standard* [Pol. *Czerwony sztandar*, i.e. the Polish version of the revolutionary song *The Standard of Revolt* – P.O.] of our youth, “the bolt of revenge – the wrath of the people”. Revenge for what? Why the wrath? Revenge and wrath for tarnishing the ideals we cherished in our hearts, for which we so calmly, even willingly, accepted death on the battlefields. Revenge for comrades fallen in battle, wrath for sulling our ideals’⁶⁶.

Grzędziński’s confession extended beyond veteran resentment – one of the key factors contributing to the cumulating social sentiment that set the stage for the military coup in Poland in May 1926. It touched precisely on what Maria Dąbrowska called the ‘moral nation’, a phenomenon rooted not just in a specific segment of society, but also in a canon of attitudes, views, and an understanding of public ethics. A significant number of former veterans from the Polish Legions and the Polish Military Organisation (Pol. *Polska Organizacja Wojskowa*), along with members of various social and political organizations originating from the independence irredentist camp before and during the First World War, found it increasingly difficult to accept the political reality in reborn independent Poland throughout the first half of the 1920s. They felt marginalised by this reality and were troubled by phenomena they found unacceptable, particularly the rise of radical nationalism. This nationalism was directed not only against national minorities but also against the Belvedere Camp, centred around Chief of State and Commander-in-Chief Józef Piłsudski from 1918 to 1922. The liberal intelligentsia, largely aligned with this camp, shared these concerns. While the victorious war against Soviet Russia in 1920 temporarily united Polish society around the common goal of defending its recently regained independence, the internal problems of the postwar period and differing visions for a reborn Poland revealed significant challenges in Polish domestic politics. The Belvedere Camp and left-wing parties ready to cooperate with it held one vision, while centre and right-wing parties led by the National Democracy (Pol. *Narodowa Demokracja*) party held another. This divide was symbolised by the brutal campaign unleashed by the National Democrats against Gabriel Narutowicz, the first President of the Republic, in December 1922, leading to his assassination in the Zachęta Art Gallery in Warsaw. The events surrounding the election and swearing-in of the president highlighted a growing willingness to use physical force to achieve political goals, particularly among the younger generation of the nationalist

⁶⁶ ‘ostatni czyn naprawdę *pur sang* legionowy. Był to, jak w “Czerwonym Sztandarze” naszych młodzieńczych lat “zemsty grom – ludu gniew”. Za co zemsta? Czemu gniew? Zemsta i gniew za sponiewieranie idei, którą pielęgnowaliśmy w sercu i za którą, tak spokojnie, tak nawet ochoczo – przyjmowaliśmy śmierć na polach bitew. Zemsta za poległych towarzyszy boju, gniew za szarganie naszych ideałów’; *ibid.*, p. 104.

right-wing⁶⁷. They also demonstrated that the authoritarian inclinations of Piłsudski's supporters, revealed after May 1926, were not unique in Polish politics at the time. The internal problems of the young Polish state, which became apparent during the postwar economic crisis of the early 1920s, led much of the public to mistakenly believe that parliamentary-cabinet governance was inadequate. This fostered an expectation for a 'saviour' and 'strong-arm rule', a sentiment that was present, to varying degrees, on both sides of the political dispute in Poland.

The memory of the armed struggle for an independent Poland and the clandestine educational work during the partition period, which laid the foundations for the future civic nation, was one of the most important founding myths of the Second Polish Republic. All political orientations within Polish society identified with this myth, except the communists, who opposed the Polish state. For Piłsudski's supporters, however, it was perhaps the most crucial ideological element, alongside the authority and eventual cult of their leader. From this myth, they derived their legitimacy to govern Poland after May 1926, and it served as their primary source of state ideology. The Polish Legions, established in 1914 from riflemen's associations formed before the First World War in Galicia, became legendary during the war. As one author aptly noted, they were 'the first formation in our history endowed with mythical self-awareness'⁶⁸. They grew out of the insurgent tradition of thinking in terms of the path to regaining independence. For their soldiers, especially those from the First Brigade commanded by Józef Piłsudski, the Polish Legions were a school of soldiering and discipline in the name of the national cause, instilling loyalty to their volunteer military formation and a willingness to make the ultimate sacrifice for their ideals. This led to a sense of exceptionalism and the belief that the fight for freedom legitimised all actions. The recent socialist-combatant past of Józef Piłsudski and his closest associates from 1905–1907, combined with an awareness of the entire Polish insurrectionist tradition, to which they felt they were heirs, dictated harsh words. In Piłsudski's address to the inhabitants of the Kingdom of Poland on 12 August 1914, shortly after his troops entered the Russian partition, he stated: 'From this day forward, the entire Nation must unite under the leadership of the National Government. Only traitors will remain outside this camp, and we shall be ruthless

⁶⁷ Cf. the recently published work: Paul BRYKCYŃSKI, *Primed for Violence: Murder, Antisemitism and Democratic Politics in Interwar Poland*, Madison 2016. See also the Polish edition: Paweł BRYKCYŃSKI, *Gotowi na przemoc. Mord, antysemityzm i demokracja w międzywojennej Polsce*, tł. Michał SUTOWSKI, Warszawa 2017.

⁶⁸ 'były pierwszą w naszych dziejach formacją obdarzoną samoświadomością mityczną'; Bohdan URBANKOWSKI, *Filozofia czynu. Światopogląd Józefa Piłsudskiego*, Warszawa 1988, p. 226.

towards them⁶⁹. Despite the negative impression these words evoked at the time⁷⁰, they are worth remembering because they echoed more than once in the Second Polish Republic. A particularly vivid symbol of this is the treatment of the leaders of the Centre-Left (Pol. *Centrolew*), a coalition of centrist and left-wing parliamentary parties, who were imprisoned on Piłsudski's orders in September 1930 in a military detention centre in Brest-on-Bug.

The supporters of Piłsudski were an elite group with ideological, political, and semi-military inclinations, who struggled to establish a significant political party of their own, despite having a leader they considered a co-creator of the state and the army. Piłsudski had ostentatiously removed himself from state affairs in 1923, and they found it challenging to function effectively within a democratic-parliamentary system that enabled a free play of political forces. This difficulty was starkly evident in the November 1922 parliamentary elections. With their leader and themselves sidelined from influencing the state to their expectations, they could not accept the rule of the right and centre, which they perceived as personally hostile. Observing the country's difficult economic situation and the deteriorating international position of Poland, especially after the Locarno Treaties in 1925, and driven by a leader determined to return to power, they staged a military demonstration in Warsaw on 12 May 1926. This demonstration escalated into an armed clash with troops loyal to the legal government. Piłsudski's supporters won this clash, seized control of the government, and maintained power until Poland's fall in September 1939. The period from 1926 to 1939 in Poland's history reflects their realistic opportunities and challenges in domestic and foreign policy, particularly economic problems and unfavourable international developments in the latter half of the 1930s. Initially feeling marginalised, they became the most influential part of the state and military elite of the Second Polish Republic after seizing power⁷¹.

‘IT WAS NOT SOCIETY THAT WAS SHAPING THE NEW REPUBLIC –
IT WAS THE IDEA OF THE REPUBLIC THAT PUT A CURB ON THE SOCIETY’:
ON THE MODEL OF AUTHORITARIAN RULE IN POLAND AFTER MAY 1926

This phrase was used by Kajetan Morawski, a Polish politician and diplomat during the Second Polish Republic, in his memoir entitled *Yesterday*:

⁶⁹ ‘Z dniem dzisiejszym cały Naród skupić się winien w jednym obozie pod kierownictwem Rządu Narodowego. Poza tym obozem zostaną tylko zdrajcy, dla których potrafimy być bezwzględni’; Józef PIŁSUDSKI, *Pisma zbiorowe. Wydanie prac dotyczących drukiem ogłoszonych*, t. 4, Warszawa 1937, p. 9.

⁷⁰ Michał BOBRZYŃSKI, *Wskreszenie państwa polskiego. Szkic historyczny*, t. 1: 1914–1918, Kraków 1920, p. 25.

⁷¹ Cf. Przemysław OLSTOWSKI, *Zur Rolle der Polnischen Legionen (1914–1918) bei der Gestaltung der militärischen und politischen Eliten der Zweiten Polnischen Republik (1918–1939)*, [in:] *Österreichisch-polnische militärische Beziehungen im 20. Jahrhundert*, Wien 2010, pp. 111–126.

Discussions of the Twenty Years of Independence (Pol. *Wczoraj. Pogadanki o niepodległym dwudziestolecu*), published in exile in 1967 and in Poland in 1981 by the underground publishing house *The Voice* (Pol. *Głos*)⁷². It was related to a significant question raised during the interwar period: should the nation shape the state, or should the state shape the nation? Although a third of the Second Polish Republic's society consisted of national and ethnic minorities, most of the Polish political elite at the time equated 'society' with 'nation'. Given the structural internal problems of the Second Polish Republic, particularly economic and nationality issues, and the right-wing nationalists' aspirations to create a Polish nation-state, one wonders if Poland could have avoided authoritarian rule in the long run. While it is difficult to resolve this question definitively at the current stage of research, it remains an important research postulate in the context of this issue. The rise in popularity of nationalist ideas in postwar Europe, and particularly the triumph of fascism in Italy, significantly impacted the development of authoritarianism in Central and Eastern Europe. In Poland, the National Democracy camp was not immune to fascination with some elements of fascist ideology. In the 1930s, it watched with interest the development of the Nazi movement in Germany, especially among the younger generation of the camp, while still retaining its identity as a nationalist formation linking nationalist thought with Catholicism⁷³. Another relevant research postulate is the study of moral principles and the intellectual atmosphere in Poland after regaining independence, particularly regarding society's susceptibility to authoritarian rule – whether by the supporters of Piłsudski or the conservative-nationalist right wing, taking into account the legacy of the partition period.

In May 1926, power was seized through an armed coup by Piłsudski's camp, a group largely composed of Polish intelligentsia, particularly those who, before the First World War, formed an essential base of independence irredentists. This group, having experienced the wars of 1914–1920, included many active and former military officers and politicians seasoned in clandestine activities. They wielded considerable influence within leftist and centrist groups and, most importantly, within the military. This political-military formation comprised many capable military leaders and astute politicians, who were able to effectively manage the state while remaining ruthlessly subordinate to their

⁷² 'Nie społeczeństwo kształtowało nową Rzeczypospolitą – idea Rzeczypospolitej brała w karby społeczeństwo'; Kajetan MORAWSKI, *O niepodległym dwudziestolecu*, Warszawa 1981, p. 136; quoted after: Krzysztof KAWALEC, *Spadkobiercy niepokornych. Dzieje polskiej myśli politycznej 1918–1939*, Wrocław–Warszawa–Kraków 2000, p. 176.

⁷³ Cf. Roman WAPIŃSKI, *Narodowa Demokracja 1893–1939. Ze studiów nad dziejami myśli nacjonalistycznej*, Wrocław 1980; Krzysztof KAWALEC, *Narodowa Demokracja wobec faszyzmu 1922–1939. Ze studiów nad dziejami myśli politycznej obozu narodowego*, Warszawa 1989.

leader. Kajetan Morawski argued from an émigré perspective that there was no 'post-May system', only Piłsudski, who personified the rule of his followers over Poland⁷⁴. While one might agree that there was no authoritarian system in the sense of a complete political construction, even considering the provisions of the Constitution of 23 April 1935, it is possible to speak of authoritarian rule. This authoritarian rule manifested itself in increasingly decisive methods of combating parliamentary and extra-parliamentary opposition, restricting civil liberties, freedom of the press, and judicial independence, influencing the results of parliamentary and municipal elections, and after the parliamentary elections in November 1930, also in preventing the removal of the Sanation Camp from power through the ballot. The ruling camp managed to build an efficient administrative system from the central to the local level and demonstrated a strong ability to absorb activists and political groups from left to right. This not only weakened opposition parties to the post-May government but also indicated a broader political intent.

Although the Post-May Camp was rooted in, among other ideological camps, pre-First World War nationalist circles, particularly those influenced by the Association of the Polish Youth 'Zet' (Pol. *Związek Młodzieży Polskiej 'Zet'*), the supporters of Piłsudski prioritised the creation of an efficient, strong, and secure state, both internally and internationally. This focus led to a desire to concentrate state power in the hands of the president and government at the expense of parliament, culminating in the highly centralised state structure formalised by the April Constitution of 1935. This centralisation came at the expense of local government, which had been well-developed in the former Prussian partition and Upper Silesia. Piłsudski's camp also exhibited definite hostility towards traditional political parties, aiming instead to replace them with social organisations that could better express societal aspirations across various fields of social and professional activity. This ambition drove efforts to control various levels of local government, especially evident in the elections of 1933–1935, and to dominate social, economic, and professional organisations. Despite significant efforts by local administration and the Post-May Camp structures, these endeavours fell short of the state authorities' expectations. In the final years of the Second Polish Republic, both chambers of the Polish Parliament (the *Sejm* and Senate) were brought under complete control due to the electoral law of 8 July 1935, which eliminated political parties from the electoral process and allowed state authorities to effectively select candidates for both chambers⁷⁵. Paradoxically, despite emphasising a non-partisan

⁷⁴ Kajetan MORAWSKI, *Tamten brzeg. Wspomnienia i szkice*, Warszawa 1996, p. 176.

⁷⁵ Cf. Alicja BELCIKOWSKA, *Partie polityczne i związki zawodowe w Polsce wobec wyborów do Sejmu i Senatu w 1935 r.*, Warszawa 1935, pp. 15–16.

approach, Piłsudski's supporters established their own political group in 1928, known as the Nonpartisan Bloc for Cooperation with the Government (Pol. *Bezpartyjny Blok Współpracy z Rządem*, BBWR). Despite the considerable literature already devoted to it, the BBWR requires further research, especially at the regional and local levels. There is a persistent, fundamentally correct perception of the Bloc as a political representation of the ruling camp and a political branch office of the local administration, essentially making it a secondary organisation to the state bureaucracy. Besides, it is viewed as a weak structure in constant need of restructuring, whose numbers were bolstered through procedures characteristic of authoritarian rule, such as 'the obligation to belong' within the state and local government sectors, and the authorities' licensing policies within state monopolies. However, little is still known about the day-to-day activities of the Bloc's local structures due to the fact that most of the organisation's documentation has not been preserved. Its broader foundation as a nationwide *social* organisation and a nationwide organisation *of society* remains elusive to researchers, especially considering its dissolution in October 1935, which cut short any long-term development plans. To achieve its broader goals, the Bloc incorporated a large number of professional, cultural, educational, and veterans' social organisations, eventually building professional sections within the BBWR, particularly in its urban structures. The idea was for society, through these social organisations, to replace the existing political parties in political and social life and gradually take responsibility for the state. This vision was not limited to Polish society. Ultimately, it was intended as an offer to national minorities as well, provided they expressed a willingness to engage more deeply in the life of the Polish state.

The primary goal of the Sanation Camp's influence on society (primarily Polish society, but not exclusively) was to educate it to serve the state. The debate in the scholarly literature about whether there was a greater desire to 'socialise the state' or 'nationalise the society' is largely academic⁷⁶. In practice, this policy was implemented at regional and local levels by the state administration and the BBWR with varying degrees of success. At the regional and local levels, the technocratic factor dominated the educational policy of the ruling camp and its influence. However, at the central government level, particularly within the leadership of the BBWR, there persisted a naive belief that the 'de-partisanship' of social life would enable the society to independently choose its political path, naturally aligning with the state vision of the ruling camp. This belief was epitomised by Walery Sławek, former BBWR chairman,

⁷⁶ Cf. Krzysztof JAKUBIAK, *Wychowanie państwowe jako ideologia wychowawcza sanacji. Kształtowanie i upowszechnianie w periodycznych wydawnictwach społeczno-kulturalnych i pedagogicznych*, Bydgoszcz 1994, pp. 35–36.

who sincerely expressed in a 1936 draft of the Universal Organisation of Society (Pol. *Powszechna Organizacja Społeczeństwa*), a year after the Bloc's dissolution, that: 'The system of appointing legislative chambers has changed. Political parties no longer elect members of parliament but the general population does'⁷⁷. However, in the parliamentary elections in September 1935, only candidates pre-designated by district assemblies (for candidates for the *Sejm*) and by voivodeship electoral colleges (for candidates for the Senate) participated. The district assemblies consisted of representatives of social organisations appointed by the regional state administration and the BBWR, while the voivodeship electoral colleges included representatives of the regional social and professional elite aligned with the ruling camp. Thus, while citizens were ostensibly given the opportunity to participate in public life through government-approved social organisations, the authenticity of much of this social engagement was questionable.

The policy of influencing society through the political and social sectors was closely linked to the broader Sanation agenda, aimed at modernising key aspects of public life in Poland. This included economic policy, hampered for a long time by the effects of the Great Depression in the early 1930s, security policy, and the unification of state administration and local government systems, as well as the educational system. Despite the undeniable achievements in these areas, they also bore the hallmarks of authoritarianism. Economic policy may have been the least influenced by authoritarian tendencies, aside from certain autarkic aspirations. The speed of decision-making and efficiency of implementation characteristic of authoritarian rule facilitated the success of initiatives led by Deputy Prime Minister and Treasury Minister Eugeniusz Kwiatkowski. Notable achievements included the construction of the Central Industrial Region and the development of economic infrastructure along the Polish Baltic coast in the latter half of the 1930s. From the perspective of the ruling camp, security policy was the most crucial, as it was essential for maintaining power and ensuring internal stability.

Following the May Coup, authoritarian measures were gradually introduced in the functioning of state organs, including both legislative chambers, throughout the late 1920s. These measures included bypassing the largely opposition-controlled parliament through statutory instruments issued by the President of the Republic under the constitutional amendment of 2 August 1926, as well as decrees issued by the prime minister and individual ministers. The ruling camp prioritised internal security from the outset, encompassing

⁷⁷ 'Zmienił się system powoływania izb ustawodawczych. Już nie partie polityczne, a ogół ludności wybiera posłów'; Andrzej CHOJNOWSKI, *Utopia utracona Walerego Sławka. Projekt Powszechnej Organizacji Społecznej*, Przegląd Historyczny, t. 80: 1989, nr 2, p. 360.

political, nationality, and broader public security issues, which often intersected. Control of political life included supervision of legal political groups and associations of both Polish and national minorities. Greater efforts were naturally expended by the security authorities in controlling illegal organisations, primarily those of a communist and radically nationalist nature, which operated within Polish society, and to a greater extent among national minorities, especially in the eastern voivodeships. The state authorities' policy toward both legal and illegal opposition groups, including those resorting to terrorist activities, can be characterised as moderately repressive. They responded decisively, employing substantial police forces often supported by the military, in situations they deemed volatile. A notable turning point occurred before the parliamentary elections in November 1930, when the Sanation Camp, feeling threatened by the potential loss of power, resorted to greater violence. Additionally, they skilfully leveraged the external threat from Germany in the western voivodeships and Ukrainian irredentism in eastern Galicia to rally Polish society around the government, achieving success to some extent. Overall, the policy of control and moderate repression was effective from the authorities' perspective, even though local situations occasionally spiralled out of control, as seen during the 1937 peasant strike primarily involving western Galicia. However, it is important to remember that one of the symbols and components of this policy was the internment camp in Bereza Kartuska, established in 1934. The camp's creation and operational rules were influenced by the experiences of German and Italian concentration camps. Regarding the hard-line policy toward national minorities, it is noteworthy that before May 1926, while in opposition to the centre-right parliamentary government, Piłsudski's supporters advocated for a liberal approach toward these communities, especially in the Eastern Borderlands of the Second Polish Republic. After seizing power, however, reality quickly forced a revision of this position despite initial ambitious plans. The first indication of this shift was the crackdown on the Belarusian Peasants' and Workers' Union (the *Hramada*) by administrative and police means in late 1926 and early 1927. Ultimately, the only remnant of the pre-May positive attitude toward some of the borderland national minorities' demands was the 'Volhynian policy' of Voivode Henryk Józewski. This policy, practised with Piłsudski's approval, was primarily motivated by geostrategic reasons in anticipation of a possible armed conflict with the Soviet Union⁷⁸.

⁷⁸ In addition to the work of Jan Kęsik mentioned in footnote 41, see Timothy SNYDER, *Sketches from a Secret War: A Polish Artist's Mission to Liberate Soviet Ukraine*, Yale 2005 (see also the Polish edition: idem, *Tajna wojna. Henryk Józewski i polsko-sowiecka rozgrywka o Ukrainę*, tł. Bartłomiej PIETRZYK, Kraków 2008); cf. Włodzimierz MĘDRZECKI, *Kresowy kalejdoskop. Wędrówki przez ziemie wschodnie Drugiej Rzeczypospolitej 1918–1939*, Kraków 2018, pp. 226–268.

The May Coup of 1926 intensified the unification processes within Polish statehood, which consisted of lands that had previously been under the authority of three partitioning states. This unification encompassed all significant areas of state and society, most notably legal and systemic issues. Following the adoption of the constitution by the Legislative *Sejm* on 17 March 1921, the efforts included the codification of laws and the unification of regulations governing the organisation and scope of state administration, local and professional government, and the educational system. Progress on these issues varied until 1926 but accelerated after the May Coup, moving towards strengthening the prerogatives of the executive branch, particularly the voivodeship and district general administration authorities. This shift was reflected in the Decree of the President of the Republic on the Organisation and Scope of Action of the General Administration Authorities on 19 January 1928. In terms of unifying local government, significant changes were enacted with the Law on the Partial Change of the Local Government System of 23 March 1933. The decree of 19 January 1928 streamlined state administration, while the law of 23 March 1933 extended territorial self-government at the level of the district and rural municipality across the entire country. Previously, this system functioned fully only in the lands of the former Prussian partition and Upper Silesia. However, because the act strengthened the role of the executive in local government and effectively made it an extension of the state administration in some areas of its work, and also limited rural residents' ability to freely elect councillors through an indirect election system, it became subject to criticism not only from opposition groups but also from many administrative law experts. This was especially true in the western voivodeships, which had inherited an extensive and well-functioning local government system from the Prussian and later German state. In these regions, the new legislation was seen as limiting self-government⁷⁹. On a state-wide scale, however, the introduction of the law on local government – and, in some regions, the establishment of local government where it previously did not exist – was a step in the right direction. The authorities believed that self-government in most areas should be built slowly and from scratch as part of their policy of educating the public to serve the state. They aimed to eliminate the influence of political parties at the local level, just as they had at the parliamentary level, allowing local communities to decide for themselves how to elect their representatives. This approach was intended to instil participation in public life. The supporters of Piłsudski viewed political parties, with their partisan interests, as detrimental to society.

⁷⁹ For the aims of the aforementioned laws and the discussion on them, see Anna TARNOWSKA, *Z dziejów unifikacji administracji II Rzeczypospolitej. Rola przepisów pruskich*, Toruń 2012.

In practice, however, the state authorities, along with their successive political representations in the form of the BBWR and later the OZN, effectively replaced the existing political groupings. The idealistic concept of a self-reliant society, aware of its role and responsibilities in the reborn state and free from the influence of political parties trying to 'close their small deals', in practice, led to the elimination of many local self-government activists. It also taught local communities, especially in the eastern regions, to primarily fulfil the expectations of state authorities.

A notable success was the school reform implemented on the basis of the Law on the System of Education of 11 March 1932. By modernising and unifying the state after 1926, the authorities recognised the importance of addressing social issues. The reform of the school system aimed not only at enhancing general education and eliminating illiteracy but also at elevating the role of state education. It effectively created state and local vocational education from scratch to equip the new generation entering the labour market with the necessary professional skills. This initiative was expected to boost economic development in the near future. However, some educational circles raised concerns about the increased role of the state in education and extracurricular activities, which was a central pillar of the new law⁸⁰. State education extended beyond the classroom, with authorities also providing education through organisations focused on educational, cultural, vocational, and military preparation for young people⁸¹.

The death of Józef Piłsudski on 12 May 1935 marked the beginning of significant changes within the ruling camp, both in its leadership and its ideological direction. The struggle for power among Piłsudski's 'heirs' was accompanied by a search for a unifying idea to renew the camp's legitimacy to govern, which was increasingly questioned. This idea soon evolved into a form of state nationalism, as opposed to the period of 1926–1935. The new leadership of the Post-May Camp aimed to broaden its political base by appealing to the electorate of the nationalist camp and ultimately incorporating some of its members, especially among the youth. Although this plan ultimately failed, the attempts to merge the political thought of Piłsudski's supporters with elements of the nationalist camp's ideology significantly influenced the ruling camp's character, especially its new political representation, the OZN, formed

⁸⁰ For the aims and implementation of this law and the discussions on it, see Joanna SADOWSKA, *Ku szkole na miarę Drugiej Rzeczypospolitej. Geneza, założenia i realizacja reformy Jędrzejewiczowskiej*, Białystok 2001.

⁸¹ This issue still remains a significant research postulate. Among older scholarly publications, cf. Mieczysław IWANICKI, *O ideowo-wychowawczym oddziaływaniu sanacji na młodzież szkolną i akademicką*, Siedlce 1986.

in March 1937. The core of the new message of the ruling camp emphasised pride in the restored statehood and the ideal of the citizen-soldier, highlighting readiness to defend threatened independence and honouring the tradition of armed struggle and freedom movements of Poles. This was described by one publicist from the camp of Piłsudski's supporters as '*Virtuti Militari* nationalism', a name derived from the highest Polish military decoration⁸². The narrative also incorporated a commitment to Catholic values, which had previously been absent from the Sanation narrative. Following the reorganisation of the OZN's structure in February 1938, the importance of nationalist slogans within its ranks increased, partly due to the growing sense of external threat from the worsening international situation. The influence of the National Democracy's sympathisers, especially in the western voivodeships, also brought anti-Semitic slogans and postulates to the forefront, which had not been present during the BBWR's tenure. While the BBWR focused on the state and society, the OZN's emphasis shifted to the state and the nation. This shift meant that the ruling camp's political faction offered no accommodation for national minorities other than prospective Polonisation, particularly concerning Slavic minorities. For the more than three-million-strong Jewish community, the ruling camp, guided by both economic considerations and expected domestic political gains, promoted the idea of stimulating Jewish emigration from Poland, which, given the international situation at the time, was unrealistic.

In the sphere of domestic politics, in the face of growing external danger, the OZN's programme to consolidate society around the government and Commander-in-Chief Marshal Edward Śmigły-Rydz, and the increasing militarisation of social life (a phenomenon present to varying degrees throughout the Second Polish Republic), was accompanied by disturbing actions of a totalitarian nature. This was particularly evident in the OZN's efforts to organise society through professional sections, forcibly unify the labour movement in a pro-government format, and Polonise various professions, particularly among the urban intelligentsia, including the medical and legal communities, which disproportionately affected the Jewish community. The escalating threat to the state and the outbreak of war halted the growth of these tendencies. However, the surviving documentation of the OZN headquarters⁸³ necessitates serious consideration of Władysław T. Kulesza's opinion from the concluding paragraphs of his 1985 monograph, which may have escaped the attention of many researchers. Kulesza noted that the OZN leadership's concept: '[...] was an ambitious and dangerous attempt to create an indigenous totalitarian state model. More precisely, it sought to associate a militaristic dictatorship with

⁸² Waclaw BUDZYŃSKI, *Lufcik na świat*, Warszawa 1937, p. 298.

⁸³ P. OLSZOWSKI, *Obóz pomajowy w województwie pomorskim*, pp. 305–310.

its own formula of totalitarianism, characterised by a clear nationalist and overtly anti-communist orientation, and to put it into practice⁸⁴. This did not stem from the inspiration of the National Democracy's ideas, where totalitarian concepts were also developing, but from a distinctly Polish militaristic nationalism. This nationalism was rooted in the tradition of the struggle for independence and grew out of the spirit of the pre-First World War irredentist independence camp and the war years themselves. It was fuelled by pride in these achievements and a conviction that, in the internal and international situation of the late 1930s, force was the decisive factor that justified everything, and the ruling camp, led by Józef Piłsudski's heirs and his successor Marshal Edward Śmigły-Rydz, was seen as the embodiment of this force and the guarantor of the security of a reborn Poland. The belief among the ruling elite that Poland was a superpower because it could decide for itself stemmed from that very conviction⁸⁵.

Ultimately, however, it was strength that Poland lacked in 1939, despite the hard work throughout the interwar period of independence. The historiography of the Polish People's Republic often criticised Piłsudski's camp, sometimes reflecting this criticism in the very titles of its works⁸⁶. Nevertheless, the accuracy of Andrzej Micewski's opinion from the late 1960s is hard to deny: 'Bluffing about power status was feasible only until a genuine clash of forces occurred. The power status and expansion envisioned by the political thought of the Sanation Camp were expressions of will, not force. The greatest will, lacking sufficient strength, holds only illusory significance. Opposing Sanation's concept of power status were real superpowers⁸⁷. Leaving aside the terms 'power status' and 'superpower' used here, which in relation to the post-May governments remain an important research topic (not only in the dimension of propaganda attempts to influence society), it should be noted that for almost the entire period between the two World Wars, Poland was a crucial keystone of the system of security in Central and Eastern Europe after

⁸⁴ 'Była ona ambitną i groźną próbą stworzenia rodzimego modelu państwa totalitarnego, a ściślej skojarzenia dyktatury militarystycznej z własną formułą totalitaryzmu o wyraźnej orientacji nacjonalistycznej i jawnie antykomunistycznej, a następnie urzeczywistnienia jej w praktyce'; W. T. KULESA, op.cit., p. 291.

⁸⁵ Cf. the opinion of the Polish ambassador in Paris in the autumn of 1938: Juliusz ŁUKASIEWICZ, *Polska jest mocarstwem*, Warszawa 1939, pp. 43, 58–59.

⁸⁶ E.g. Józef LEWANDOWSKI, *Imperializm słabości. Kształtowanie się koncepcji polityki wschodniej piłsudczyków 1921–1926*, Warszawa 1967.

⁸⁷ 'Bluffować mocarstwowością można było tylko do czasu, gdy nie nastąpiło realne starcie sił. Mocarstwowość i ekspansja wyrażana przez sanacyjną myśl polityczną były wyrazem woli a nie siły. Największa wola, nie wyposażona w odpowiednią siłę, ma znaczenie tylko iluzoryczne. Naprzeciw sanacyjnej koncepcji mocarstwowej stały realne wielkie siły'; A. MICEWSKI, *W cieniu marszałka Piłsudskiego*, p. 127.

the Treaty of Versailles. This status had to be taken seriously in political and military calculations before the first shots of the Second World War were fired in September 1939, and indeed it was. When, on 6 April 1933, Foreign Minister Józef Beck stated in a conversation with French Ambassador Jules Laroche, 'If any country, alone or with others, is tempted to seize even one square meter of our territory, the cannons will speak'⁸⁸, this statement was treated with due gravity in Paris. However, the change in the balance of power in Europe in the following years meant that such a position was taken seriously mainly in Warsaw by late August 1939. The Versailles System (or, in Central and Eastern Europe, the Versailles-Riga System) exhausted its possibilities when the period of prosperity for the independence of the small and medium-sized states in the region ended in the late 1930s. No Polish policy at the time, neither from the Sanation Camp nor from the opposition, could alter this reality. This does not, of course, invalidate the fundamental questions regarding many important aspects of Polish reality at that time.

Regarding the issues of the final years of the Second Polish Republic, it appears crucial to conduct new monographic studies focusing on the period after the death of Józef Piłsudski (1935–1939), as well as comprehensive examinations of the OZN, akin to that already conducted for the earlier period of the BBWR. Both political entities of the ruling camp, the BBWR and the OZN, have been portrayed in historiography as structurally weak organisations subordinate to state administration, which served as the primary driving force behind the ruling camp at regional and local levels. However, such assessments require re-evaluation and verification. Moreover, understanding the reception of activities and political messages from the BBWR and OZN is essential. This necessitates research into the mindset of the period, particularly in the more peripheral regions of Poland. In the case of the OZN, it also warrants studies on Polish fascism⁸⁹, regardless of whether the OZN's founders sought inspiration from Italy or Germany (a path not extensively explored in Polish historiography, despite leads indicated by Edward Wynot in his 1974 work)⁹⁰. These studies would shed light on the atmosphere that cultivated the popularity and growth of extreme nationalist ideas in the peripheral regions, often paralleling fascist ideology and practices. Such ideologies and practices were

⁸⁸ 'Jeżeli jakieś państwo, samo lub w towarzystwie innych, zechce pokusić się chociażby o jeden metr kwadratowy naszego terytorium, przemówią armaty'; Marek K. KAMIŃSKI, Michał J. ZACHARIAS, *Polityka zagraniczna II Rzeczypospolitej 1918–1939*, Warszawa 1987, p. 152.

⁸⁹ In this context, the research conducted by Grzegorz Krzywić of the Institute of History of the Polish Academy of Sciences is worth noting. Based on my observations so far, I can say that its results may prove interesting and inspiring.

⁹⁰ E. D. WYNOT, *op.cit.*, *passim*.

evident not only in circles associated with the nationalist camp, such as the National Radical Camp (Pol. *Obóz Narodowo-Radykalny*), the National Radical Movement 'Falanga' (Pol. *Ruch Narodowo-Radykalny 'Falanga'*), and the youth affiliated with the National Party (Pol. *Stronnictwo Narodowe*), but also began permeating the OZN after 1938. Referring to the intentions of the OZN leadership toward totalitarian solutions, Władysław T. Kulesza remarked: "These moves marked Poland's perilous approach to the totalitarian edge. Would it have come to that? What formulas might have emerged? It will likely never be possible to fully answer these questions. One thing is certain: by 1 September 1939, this edge had not been reached"⁹¹. Nonetheless, revisiting this question, posed in the mid-1980s, is valuable. It should be approached using contemporary research methods that expand the traditional skillset of a historian, offering a broader research perspective.

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⁹¹ "Te posunięcia oznaczały niebezpieczne zbliżenie się Polski do totalitarnej krawędzi. Czy do tego by doszło? Jakie formuły by tworzono? Chyba nie będzie można nigdy w pełni odpowiedzieć na te pytania. Jedno jest pewne, do 1 września 1939 r. krawędzi tej nie osiągnięto"; W. T. KULESZA, op.cit., p. 291.

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