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Regional and Local "New Liberation" (Nowe Wyzwolenie) PSL (Polish People's Party) Structures (Paying Particular Attention to Voivodeships in Central and Southern Poland)[1]

In 1946, a third people's party, "New Liberation" Polish People's Party, was created. The development opportunities of the People's Party seemed significant. When a growing number of activists from the Polish People's Party started to enter the "NL", the communists decided to hamper the Party's development on the local level.
Key words: *PSL "New Liberation", PSL, PPR, Poland 1946–1947.*

У 1946 р. в Польщі засновано третю народну партію – Польську селянську партію «Нове визволення». Її структури створено у понад 1/3 повітів. Діячі та члени селянської партії неохоче ставилися до домінації комуністів на політичній арені. Комуністи побоювалися втратити вплив на «Нове

визволення» і вирішили унеможливити розвиток Селянської партії на місцевому рівні.
Ключові слова: *ПСП «Нове визволення», ПСЛ, ППР, Польща 1946–1947.*

В 1946 году в Польше основана третья народная партия – Польская крестьянская партия «Новое освобождение». Ее структуры созданы в более 1/3 уездов. Деятели и члены крестьянской партии неохотно относились к доминации коммунистов на политической арене. Коммунисты опасались потерять влияние на «Новое освобождения» и решили сделать невозможным развитие Крестьянской партии на местном уровне.
Ключевые слова: *ПКП «Новое освобождение», ПСЛ, ППР, Польша 1946–1947.*

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In mid-1946, a third people's party, "New Liberation" Polish People's Party (in Polish: Polskie Stronnictwo Ludowe "Nowe Wyzwolenie", "NW"), was created in Poland. It claimed that the members of that party (in Polish: Ludowcy) were to be independent from the Polish Workers' Party (Polska Partia Robotnicza, PPR), carrying out Stalin's orders. On the other hand, it opposed any full-scale political confrontation of the major people's party, i.e. the Polish People's Party (Polskie Stronnictwo Ludowe, PSL) [for more information about it see: 30] with the Polish Workers' Party and its political allies. This article is aimed at describing the fate of "New Liberation" structures in Poland on the level of voivodeships, poviats and villages. The theme has been covered by few works, solely in the Polish language. Study results were published for the voivodeships of Krakow and Lublin [20–22; 28]. A synthetic description of Polish structures was included in a chapter devoted to that party's fate [26, pp. 55–62]. Also a version of a lecture devoted to that theme, held in 2015 [24], was published. In this text, attention is mostly devoted to problems not covered by the works on that field so far, based on archived materials concerning "New Liberation" structures, not used before.

The "NL" activists started their organizational activities in poviats in June 1946. At the same time, the Polish People's Party structures were first created by the Polish Workers' Party [15, p. 362; 25 p. 171]. It had a dependent people's party, or the People,s Party (PP) from Lublin [most extensive information

on it: 18]. Despite that, however, the Polish Workers' Party considered supporting "NL" to be an important component of its struggle with the major, and soon the only opposition party, i.e. the Polish People's Party.

The methods employed by the Polish Workers' Party were, however, entirely different from those of representatives of the Chief Implementation Committee (Główny Komitet Wykonawczy, GKW) of "NL". The threats of the Security Bureau (Urząd Bezpieczeństwa, UB) officers were decisive for acquiring the Polish People's Party members. For example, in a way unknown to the "NL" activists, the Security Bureau officers forced the president of the Polish People's Party in Łask, i.e. Czesław Grądzki, to meet an instructor of the Voivodeship Committee of the Polish Workers' Party in Łódź. The objective of that conversation was to create "NL" structures. At the same time, the Polish Workers' Party supported "NL" in other ways. The structures subordinate to the Ministry of Information and Propaganda were employed to exaggerate and publicize the fact of the Polish People's Party members' transfer to "NL" in poviats [7, p. 6; 6; 11; 24 IX, p. 3].

In mid-September, activities similar to the ones by the Polish Workers' Party were initiated by the Polish Socialist Party. It did not use any threats but also did not consider the "liberators" to be its equal partner. It wished to create a people's party dependent on itself (more information: 24). It believed that ultimately "if they wished to be free co-hosts of Poland, the peasants would have to leave their barnyards and stand

[together with workers] under a common banner" [13, p. 4].

In at least two cases, a parallel agitation activity of "NL" activists and the Polish Workers' Party covered the entire voivodeships. The most serious problems were encountered by the Polish Workers' Party in the Voivodeship of Łódź. With the assistance of the Security Bureau, they managed to appoint a Voivodeship Management Board, and "elicit" activists in 9 poviats (Łódź, Łask, Brzeziny, Sieradz, Końskie, Piotrków, Skierniewice, Rawa and Opoczno). However, it could not change the fact that the Voivodeship Management Board approved by the Chief Implementation Committee had a greater impact and also created boards (e.g. in Łask, Wieluń and Kutno) [7, p. 38; 8, p. 68].

In the Voivodeship of Silesia (Katowice), the communists created their own management board, besides the Voivodeship Management Board appointed by the central authorities of "NL", led by Władysław Włodarkiewicz [24, p. 450]. This is why on 24 October, a uniform Temporary Voivodeship Management Board, led by Włodarkiewicz, was appointed during a voivodeship conference. The conference was attended by about 30 people. The compromise concerning the choice of people was set off by the Polish Workers' Party by obtaining, as could be supposed, a crucial influence on the wording of the resolution adopted by that Management Board [15, p. 362].

In October 1946, voivodeship conferences were organized all around Poland. Temporary Voivodeship Management Boards and Poviat Management Boards were elected there. For example, the conferences in Łódź and Warsaw were held on 13 October. Thanks to the endeavours of the authorities of the People's Party, Polish Workers' Party and Polish Socialist Party, most participants were poviat activists. The majority of them were not, however, elected in local elections. In many voivodeships, the moods of the participants were far from what had been expected. Frequently, "certain shyness and disinterest was felt among the [several dozen] participating Polish People's Party members" [2, p. 2].

Similar attitudes prevailed during many poviat conferences. This is not surprising, given the frequent official presence of the Security officers in the conference room. It is even known that a Security Bureau officer was the first contributor to the discussion [7, p. 7, 32]. It should be stressed, however, that some presented a different stance at that organizational stage. For example, on 10 November in Kalisz (Greater Poland), 4 out of 23 conference participants openly voted against creating the "NL" structures, and one of them abstained from voting [4, p. 256].

Serious disputes took place also at the lowest level. The founding "NL" meeting in Ryputowice gathering (voivodeship of Łódź), led by a former president of the Polish People's Party club, Leon Firaś, may be an example here. The secretary of the Polish Peo-

ple's Party club, Sobczyk (member of the Poviat Management Body of the Polish People's Party) protested firmly and left the room; thanks to this move, the entire club was taken over [7, p. 14].

Most people recruited for "NL" by the Polish Workers' Party were not appreciated by the communists. An example may be the leader of the "liberators" in Biała Podlaska, Bolesław Horczyński. According to the Security Bureau, he was to accumulate in the "NL" "people disreputed by cooperating with the [anti-communist] underground" [10, p. 35]. The Security Bureau officers acquired knowledge on the "NL" structures emerging in poviats and people involved in them through agents [7, p. 8].

It was possible to organize some poviat assemblies (e.g. in the Voivodeship of Łódź). Their number, however, turned out insufficient to hold a voivodeship assembly campaign in Poland. Yet the appointment of the Voivodeship Management Boards in all regions of Poland was not a propaganda activity only. All of them met the constitutional condition, and had structures operating in at least three poviats [26, pp. 328–329].

It was important to recruit some activists from the Young Poles' Union from Rural Areas (Związek Młodzieży Wiejskiej Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej), called "Wici". This referred both to a voivodeship level (e.g. the president of "Wici" in the Voivodeship of Wrocław, Witold Oleszczak), [26, p. 96 footnote 512]), and to a poviat level (e.g. the President of the Poviat Management Board of "Wici" in Biała Podlaska, Bolesław Horczyński [9, p. 56]) and also on the level of communes and villages, (e.g. in Markuszowa, Voivodeship of Lublin). It was also vital to recruit some of People's Party activists on the poviat or commune level who distinguished themselves when fighting the Nazi occupant 27, p. 174–175; 10, p. 39].

The structure creation was facilitated by various functions of the "liberators" in national councils, cooperatives or organizations like the Society of Fighters for Freedom and Democracy (Związek Bojowników o Wolność i Demokrację), an example being its Poviat Management Board President from Biała Podlaska) [10, p. 111].

The contacts with the Polish Workers' Party and the Polish Socialist Party were sometimes promoted by family ties. For example, the father and brother of the "NL" leader in Wrocław belonged to the Polish Workers' Party [6, p. 5. However, we must mention that the dates of his membership in the party are unknown].

In November and December 1946, and in early January 1947, thousands of members were recruited from the legal opposition groups. That phenomenon was far from being a mass one. The ideas of the Polish People's Party were not popular enough with peasants. This was aggravated by the scale of the Security Bureau's involvement in the creation of "NL" structures. Appealing to "keep away from the Security Bureau and the Polish Workers' Party, [...], to live well

with them, but from away" [7, p. 40] was absolutely impractical.

At the same time, in the country many local Polish People's Party activists were considered careerists [26, p. 74; 29, p. 229–230] "always struggling to get a seat" [7, p. 15].

An important factor was the perception of the "NL" by the Polish Workers' Party. For it, the alliance of "workers and peasants" meant open recognition of the constant dominance of communists in political life. However, the members and activists of the Polish People's Party often wished solely to hide in the "NW" from repressive measures. Starting from late October, the Polish Workers' Party changed its attitude towards the "NL". The local and voivodeship activists entering the Polish People's Party [26, pp. 71–72] started to be harassed or arrested by the Civic Militia (Milicja Obywatelska, MO) and the Security Bureau [7, p. 22]. The censors started to intervene which lead to decreased presence of the Polish People's Party on the political scene [e.g. 2, p. 5–6]. The support of the Polish Socialist Party and the declarations of the poviat assemblies of "NL" and those entering their group concerning their intent to support the Polish Workers' Party and its allies "when building strong frames of the peasants' and workers' Poland" were insufficient [8, p. 68].

In the late 1946 and early 1947, "NL" was active in close to one half of Polish poviats. It can be estimated that before the Parliamentary election in January 1947 the Poviat Management Boards were created in more than 100 out of 299 poviats all around Poland. At the same time, attempts were made at appointing Management Boards in other 70 poviats [the calculations and estimates based on: 26, pp. 328–329]. In many regions of Poland, the Poviat Management Boards were, however, the only structure of the Polish People's Party. That was contrary to the statutes. According to the statutes, the Poviat Management Boards could be appointed solely where at least 5 clubs were active [14, p. 199]. The latter were appointed in 20–30% of Polish poviats. In some of them, several clubs were created. Probably, there were also poviats with over a dozen clubs. According to the voivodeship state administration structures of the Security Bureau and the Polish Workers' Party, "NL" had over a dozen thousand members in January 1947.

The conflict of the "NL" leaders, between scarce advocates of connecting with the People's Party and the remaining members of the Chief "NL" Council in February 1947, mentioned frequently in the reference works [17, p. 520] was not an internal problem of the People's Party. The poviat activists of the People's Party were informed that the "Chief Council blamed [the deputy minister of justice, Tadeusz] Rek for his dictatorship and not following the adopted resolutions of the Chief Council. […] After [Rek and some of his followers] left the room, the meeting went on […].

Having left the meeting [of the Chief Council], Rek was to secure the premises of the [Chief] Leading Committee, the printing office publishing the *Nowe Wyzwolenie* weekly, and the premises where the [Chief Council] meeting was held with the Security officers and with Militia officers [7, p. 18 quoted information received by the "NL" in Łęczyca].

It was obvious that the decisions to use the Security Bureau and the Militia were made by the authorities of the Polish Workers' Party. They decided to liquidate the "NL". There were plans to employ its activists to develop local structures of the People's Party. The Security Bureau forced to combine the "NL" structures with the management boards of the People's Party on a mass scale on the voivodeship, poviat and village levels [16, p. 126; 1; 15, p. 374]. The unofficial talks with the People's Party leader of that time, Bolesław Drzewiecki, and deputy Michał Rękas, who belonged to "NL" leadership, with the authorities of the Polish Workers' Party and the Polish Socialist Party were of no help [5, p. 96].

For example, in the Voivodeship of Silesia, first the President of the Voivodeship Management Board convened a voivodeship conference of activists for 16 March. He had planned to discuss the situation of the "NL" during the conference. Soon, the meeting of the Voivodeship Management Board was convened for 23 March. Probably, those convening it wished it to prove "NL" activity. Under the pressure of the Polish Workers' Party, following long night-time deliberations, in the morning, the Voivodeship Management Office declared connection to the People's Party [15, pp. 374–375]. Similar endeavours to retain the structures were made also in other voivodeships. For example, in Poznań, "in connection with a gossip published in some dailies" [4, p. 25], the Voivodeship Management Board announced convening the voivodeship conference on 24 February. It was expected that the secretaries and presidents of the Poviat Managements Boards would attend it. The conference date, 16 March, was determined by the Chief Implementation Committee. However, due to the pressure from the Security Bureau, its results were contrary to the ones assumed.

Despite high expectations vis-a-vis the authorities of the Polish Workers' Party, the attempts at improving the influence of the party in the village had only limited results. The Polish Workers' Party reduced pressure on liquidating the existing "NL" structures. Several dozen percentage of the poviat management boards and clubs were left (e.g. in the Voivodeship of Łódź [7, p. 16] and Krakow). They enjoyed the support of members and socialists. Also, the aversion of the local "NL" workers to the Polish People's Party's activists was frequent. At least some of poviats in the voivodeship of Łódź and Lublin may serve as examples here [20; 7, p. 26].

In those circumstances, with the support of the Polish Socialist Party, "NL" recreated some of its voivodeship, poviat and communal structures [26, pp. 61–62]. However, the attempts at manifesting their existence by the People's Party entailed a threat of repressive measures. For example in Katowice, the participation of the Polish People's Party's representation during the 1 May parade led to arresting its participants by the Security Bureau officers for a short time, and then preventing the appointment of the Voivodeship Management Board in the poviat of Będzin, and detention of its president Władysław Adamczyk [e.g. 15, p. 375 with footnote 471].

Under the pressure from communists, in May and June many activists of all levels and many local management boards swapped for the Polish People's Party [23, p. 10]. To a lesser extent, the attempts at liquidating the local structures of that party were taken by the Security Bureau also in the summer (e.g. in the Voivodeship of Lublin) [7, p. 15]. Increasing harassment made the remaining "NL" management boards to reduce and then, in September, to terminate their activity. However, by late October, most voivodeships had their voivodeship authorities.

In that situation, financial problems played an important role. Mid-year, under the pressure from the Polish Workers' Party, the grant of the Inner Cabinet was reduced drastically (to 1 million zlotys) [26, p. 84, 86; 3, pp. 35, 38, 41]. In the short term, it would be a good solution to increase the existing debt of the Polish People's Party. By confidential negotiations, the Polish Socialist Party promised to pay 4 million zlotys to cover it. Actually, it paid 2 million by 28 October 1947 [5, p. 105]. Faced with harassment from the Polish Workers' Party, that was too little to renew the structure activity on a larger scale.

The date of the forced liquidation of the Polish People's Party structures in poviats and communes (November and early December 1947) was conditional on the resilient policy of the Polish Socialist Party towards the Polish Workers' Party and liquidation of the legal opposition [compare 19, pp. 112, 125].

The activists recruited to the Polish People's Party at that time were sometimes appointed for important poviat positions. On the voivodeship level, probably the highest position was taken by the former leader of the Voivodeship Management Board in Wrocław, deputy Witold Oleszczak. After his loyalty was verified in mid-1948, he was appointed secretary in the Voivodeship Management Board of the Polish People's Party in the voivodeship of Pomerania [6, p. 7].

In Autumn 1946, many local people's activists entered the "NL". In the political situation of Poland at that time, the development opportunities of the People's Party seemed significant. The policy of the Polish Workers' Party was decisive for further fate of field "NL" structures. The communists were aware that the moods in the Polish People's Party were far from willingness to subordinate to the Polish Workers' Party. They did not trust the poviat and local "NL" activists. The realized that if the Polish People's Party developed, they would lose the influence on its structures. When a growing number of activists from the Polish People's Party started to enter the "NL", faced with terror, the communists decided to hamper the Party's development on the local level. It seems that further studies will enable the analysis of those problems on the level of villages and poviats in particular voivodeships in detail.

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