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## THE INTELLIGENTSIA OVER THE ONE HUNDRED YEARS OF THE EXISTENCE OF THE POLISH STATE

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### Abstract

The difficult path that the Polish intelligentsia has had to tread from its beginnings to modern times has taught it the strategy of survival. The cult of education, a sense of duty towards others and responsibility for the state enabled it to leave a permanent mark in the history of the struggle to maintain the national substance at different times. Although considerably weakened during the last war, in the years of the Polish People’s Republic, it managed to maintain its own identity and to become a role model for the ‘new’ intelligentsia. After 1989, under capitalism that was forming in Poland, it took the role of the so-called authorities – people worthy of public trust and able to think independently and, more often, very entrepreneurial. In a modern capitalist society there is both room and need (of which some may be unaware) for the intelligentsia to stand by its principles and values, which are to help the society to find itself in a constantly changing world.

**Keywords:** Polish intelligentsia, intellectual ethos, history, the Second Republic of Poland, Polish People’s Republic, the Third Republic of Poland

### Introduction

In Poland the intelligentsia appeared in the 19th century.<sup>1</sup> Threatened with social and cultural bankruptcy, petty and pauperised nobility came to cities, becoming the

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<sup>1</sup> The history of the Polish intelligentsia before regaining the independence is discussed in a three-part series, published in 2008, *Dzieje inteligencji polskiej do roku 1918* (Wydawnictwo Neriton, Warsaw 2008), which includes the following volumes: M. Janowski, *Narodziny inteligencji 1750-1831*; J. Jedlicki, *Błędne koło 1832-1864*; M. Micińska, *Inteligencja na rozdrożach 1864-1918*. This is the best, so far, study of

basis for the emerging new social class. This was especially visible after the fall of the January Uprising in the Russian Partition. Part of the nobility which engaged in the struggle for independence lost its property as a result of repressions. The confiscation of material possessions forced them to leave the countryside and seek employment in cities. Some made their living performing office work in the bureaucratic structures of the state apparatus, whereas others undertook the work of teachers-tutors and officials-officers in landowners' manors. Membership of this social stratum was granted on the basis of education and performing paid mental work. A characteristic feature of this class was the drive to maintain cultural and social identity. From the beginning, it was given a special role to fulfil an important social and national mission. The times of the partitions demanded actions which aimed at preserving the national identity and this was exactly what the intelligentsia was expected to do. It is, among others, thanks to such 'rebellious ones' ('niepokorni') that the ground for the struggle was prepared, and then the consequent reconstruction of the statehood occurred.<sup>2</sup>

## 1. 1918–1945

The year 1918, which brought Poland independence, for the intelligentsia meant an active involvement in the process of rebuilding the state and uniting the society around the state matters.<sup>3</sup> This class was aware of its own achievements in the struggle for independence and hoped to play a significant part in the newly created state. However, it did not become a separate political force that could influence the directions of political life in interwar Poland as the attempts to create one's own political

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the origins and fate of the Polish intelligentsia during the partitions. Krystyna Zienkowska also wrote about this in: *O prekursorach inteligencji polskiej uwag kilka*, [in:] *Inteligencja polska w XIX i XX wieku*, R. Czepulisi-Rastenis, (Ed.), vol. V, PWN, Warsaw 1987. Genealogy, differences and common problems of the Polish and Russian intelligentsia are the subject of the work by T. Zarycki, *Kapitał kulturowy. Inteligencja w Polsce i w Rosji*, Wydawnictwa Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego, Warszawa 2008. It is also worth mentioning here the work in the field of social comparative history: D. Sdvižkov, *Epoka inteligencji. Historia porównawcza warstwy wykształconej w Europie*, Instytut Historii PAN, Warszawa 2011. One of the chapters, *Znośna zbędność bytu. Inteligencja polska jako przykład heroizmu i anomalii*, is devoted to Poland's issues in the historical context.

<sup>2</sup> The term 'niepokorni' was used by Bohdan Cywiński in a collection of historical and political essays devoted to Polish intellectuals from the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries, who shaped the political thrust of the following decades: B. Cywiński, *Rodowody niepokornych*, Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, Warszawa 2010. The first edition of this book appeared in 1971.

<sup>3</sup> H. Domański, *Spółczeństwa klasy średniej*, Wydawnictwo Instytutu Filozofii i Socjologii PAN, Warszawa 1994, p. 226.

representation failed.<sup>4</sup> The only option left was to join the existing political groups or to assume the role of observers of the political scene. Parliamentarism, for which the intelligentsia fought, proved to be its political marginalization. Putting trust in Józef Piłsudski and supporting the May coup of 1926 by a large part of intellectuals – mostly radico-democratic as well as socially and morally liberal intelligentsia – was to be an opportunity for modernizing the country and for the civilization-cultural advancement of the society. The core leaders of the ruling class after 1926 came from the intelligentsia.<sup>5</sup>

The threats to democracy had not been noticed in time. The several years of Sanation rule greatly disappointed the intelligentsia, however, they had no other choice available as the nationalist camp did not enjoy support among its representatives from the beginning of the Second Polish Republic. Therefore, it remained faithful to its decisions and, as D. Nałęcz wrote, ‘The intelligentsia’s [...] mission was degenerated, transforming into a dictatorship of a bureaucratic-military caste, taking the form of a caricature of an earlier, authentic, government of souls.’<sup>6</sup>

Throughout the entire interwar period, the intelligentsia as a group of white-collar workers<sup>7</sup> and freelance professionals developed faster than the entire population of the country.<sup>8</sup> Over 18 years the population in Poland increased by less than a third, while the class of intelligentsia itself increased by two thirds.<sup>9</sup> This trend undoubtedly demonstrated educational progress because Polish secondary and higher education

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<sup>4</sup> Daria Nałęcz wrote about the hopes of the intelligentsia for playing a significant political part in independent Poland and for participation in power in: *Sen o władzy. Inteligencja wobec niepodległości*, PIW, Warszawa 1994.

<sup>5</sup> J. Żarnowski, *Inteligencja w Polsce niepodległej, w epoce komunizmu i na progu transformacji*, [in:] *Inteligencja w Polsce. Specjaliści...*, op.cit., p. 83.

<sup>6</sup> D. Nałęcz, op.cit., p. 8.

<sup>7</sup> According to Polish legislation, the following were included among the white-collar workers: workers performing administrative or supervisory tasks (e.g. managers and managers of enterprises, engineers, technicians, constructors), professionals practising ‘liberal arts’, actors, musicians, filmmakers, journalists, doctors, dentists, veterinarians, qualified support staff, pharmacists, teachers and educators, merchant navy officers, clerks, telephone operators and shop sellers. In the last case, it was mandatory to possess adequate education, which included the so-called ‘mała matura’ (junior school leaving exam) or secondary vocational school. The condition for belonging to this group was having appropriate education: J. Żarnowski, *Struktura społeczna inteligencji w Polsce w latach 1918–1939*, PWN, Warszawa 1964, p. 117.

<sup>8</sup> Rafał Smoczyński and Tomasz Zarycki in the work *Totem inteligencki. Arystokracja, szlachta i ziemiaństwo w polskiej przestrzeni społecznej* (Wydawnictwo Naukowe Scholar, Warszawa 2017) have put forward a thesis, whose core is the treatment of aristocracy and landed gentry, serving from the times of regaining independence the role of the internal intelligentsia subelita, as a kind of a totem of the intelligentsia. The relationships between the descendants of well-known aristocratic and landowner families with the intelligentsia were to be a touchstone of intellectual claims for civic and moral leadership and for their own elitism. It seems that the thesis put forward by the authors is too far-reaching and overestimating the influence of aristocratic-landowners on the intelligentsia.

<sup>9</sup> J. Żarnowski, *O inteligencji polskiej lat międzywojennych*, WP, Warszawa 1965, p. 66.

provided more and more educated specialists. The majority of the intelligentsia was employed by the state in administration, education, the economic sector or the army. Many intellectual occupations were professionalized. This professionalization was to facilitate 'creating institutions and elaborating procedures for effective problem solving'.<sup>10</sup> These changes testified to the involvement of the intelligentsia in the process of modernizing Polish society and transforming it into a 'more modern, industrial society with the prospect of catching up with the leading industrial countries in terms of output and the standard of living'.<sup>11</sup>

The most numerous professional group were teachers. In 1935/1936, their number reached 100,000.<sup>12</sup> The group included university professors, secondary school teachers (junior high schools, general and vocational high schools), elementary school instructors, special needs school staff and employees of just a few kindergartens. In 1930, professional organizations of elementary school teachers and secondary school teachers merged into the Polish Teachers' Union (Związek Nauczycielstwa Polskiego). Teachers did not earn much. The average salary of a novice teacher in the 1920s was 200 PLN (without allowances) and in the 1930s – 130 PLN.<sup>13</sup>

Another most numerous group among white-collar employees were officials and employees of various state institutions, such as ministries, voivodship offices, district authority offices, tax offices, etc., which included 45,000 to 50,000 people. The range of their salaries varied depending on the category, pay group and service level. The wage gap was tremendous. According to the data from the end of the 1930s, the prime minister received a salary of 6,500 PLN, whereas a newly-employed official – with higher education – over 200 PLN and – with secondary education – no more than 130 PLN.<sup>14</sup>

In terms of salary, also physicians were a highly diversified part of the intelligentsia. In 1928 there were 3,500 doctors who did their private practice and 5,300 doctors working in various state institutions (the army, state railways, hospitals, health maintenance organizations). There were also those who combined private practice with work in e.g. health maintenance institutions. Their earnings fluctuated from the wretched salaries of rural doctors to an income of 2,000 PLN per month, earned

<sup>10</sup> P. Górski, *Polska inteligencja, jej pozycja i rola w społeczeństwie w świetle dyskusji nad inteligencją w okresie międzywojennym*, [in:] *Inteligencja. Między tradycją a wyzwaniem współczesności*, J. Mikułowski-Pomorski, (Ed.), Wydawnictwo AE w Krakowie, Kraków 2005, p. 57.

<sup>11</sup> J. Żarnowski, *Społeczeństwo Polski międzywojennej*, WP, Warszawa 1969, p. 115.

<sup>12</sup> J. Żarnowski, *O inteligencji polskiej...*, op.cit., p. 69.

<sup>13</sup> In 1930 1 kg of bread cost 0.43 PLN in Warsaw, in 1933–0.35 PLN; 1 kg of butter cost 5.87 PLN and 3.57 PLN, respectively; *ibidem*, p. 70.

<sup>14</sup> J. Żarnowski, *Struktura społeczna...*, op.cit., p. 74.

by private practitioners in large cities.<sup>15</sup> The same held true about lawyers or other legal professions. In this group notaries, who were appointed by the Minister of Justice and constituted several hundred members of the legal profession, boasted quite a remarkable income.

In interwar Poland there were few engineers. At the end of this period they constituted a group of about 13,000 individuals. In 1930, the average engineer's salary was 850 PLN.<sup>16</sup> They found employment mainly in industry, both private and state. Some had private technical offices and worked as freelancers.

Moreover, distinctive intellectual professional groups included journalists, officers and clergy. Journalism began to be regarded as a separate profession. In 1939, the number of journalists reached 3,500, a third of whom worked in Warsaw. Their earnings were rather modest: less than 300 PLN in the capital and 80 PLN in the province.<sup>17</sup> Officers and clergy were considered to be a very important part of the intelligentsia, too. In most cases they did not have higher education. Both groups constituted quite closed environments, subjected to specific rules of work and life. Strictly connected with the state structures, officers formed a team of around 18–19,000 people throughout the entire 20-year period. The clergy were a numerically similar group. In the interwar period they were characterised by great religious diversity. The majority was Roman Catholic priests – 10,000, apart from whom, there were 2,500 Greek Catholic priests, over 3,000 Orthodox clergymen, several hundred Evangelical pastors and several hundred rabbis.<sup>18</sup> Adding to this the clergy of other religions, nuns and lower church personnel, one could notice a powerful group of individuals who were more numerous than high school teachers, doctors, lawyers and engineers all together. Due to the powerful influence exerted on society, they played a really significant part.

In addition to the most numerous professionals mentioned above, there were less numerous groups such as: pharmacists, veterinarians, officials of local government institutions or technicians. A separate group was established by writers and artists, or a team of various creative professions, which included – in addition to the previously mentioned – journalists, writers, musicians, actors and fine artists. Most of the pre-war intelligentsia had a humanistic education and was associated with teaching or legal practice, i.e. worked in occupations that had no direct connection with production. About 60% of its members were dependent on the state and resources from the budget.

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<sup>15</sup> Ibidem, p. 263.

<sup>16</sup> J. Żarnowski, *Spółeczeństwo Polski międzywojennej*, op.cit., p. 79.

<sup>17</sup> J. Żarnowski, *O inteligencji polskiej...*, op.cit., p. 88.

<sup>18</sup> Ibidem, p. 9.

The interwar intelligentsia was very diverse internally in terms of professions, income and political views. Differentiation also concerned nationality. Poles prevailed in this mixed national composition, with Roman Catholics accounting for three quarters of white-collar workers and about 45% of freelancers. Jews and Jewish intelligentsia played a very important part in freelancer professions, too. In 1931, they constituted 16% of the entire intelligentsia class.<sup>19</sup> The interwar period saw the actual assimilation of the largest number of Jewish intellectuals in the Polish intelligentsia.<sup>20</sup>

The intelligentsia as a social class was distinguished from other classes, especially lower ones, in terms of education, job, lifestyle and commitment to public affairs. In intellectual circles, great attention was paid to propriety, observance of social norms and active participation in cultural life: 'The intelligentsia was considered a class that creates culture, art and science, sets the tones for social life, imposes the proper way of conduct, lifestyle, entertainment, even nutrition.'<sup>21</sup>

Active development of the intelligentsia in the interwar period and its participation in various forms of public activity resulted from the huge needs associated with the unification of the country after the period of partitions and with the construction of its structures. Participation in a political, economic and cultural life marked its growing presence. Undoubtedly, it continued the traditions of the intelligentsia of the period of partitions, becoming engaged in the development and promotion of culture in the society and shaping the national identity of the rebuilt state. The interwar period was the time of the greatest authority and role of the social intelligentsia.<sup>22</sup>

The period of World War II proved to be a tough test and a great tragedy for the intelligentsia. It suffered enormous losses and scattered around the world. The fall of the Polish state in 1939, to which the intellectuals owed their social position and authority, exerted a significant influence on this social stratum.<sup>23</sup> Faced with the new situation, it underwent material degradation. In order to survive, many of its representatives had to undertake physical work, which usually was far from the job they performed before the war. In this respect, the most severe situation occurred in the Polish territories incorporated into the Reich, where the intelligentsia could work only physically. General Governorship, however, offered a chance to pursue one's pre-war profession, which was the case for some groups of teachers or pre-war officials

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<sup>19</sup> J. Żarnowski, *Spółeczeństwo i klasy*, [in:] *Polska odrodzona 1918-1939. Państwo, społeczeństwo, kultura*, J. Tomicki, (Eds.), WP, Warszawa 1988, p. 273.

<sup>20</sup> On the genesis and problems of the Polish intelligentsia of Jewish origin cf: E. Bauer, *Problemy polskiej inteligencji żydowskiej*, <http://wiadomosci.onet.pl/kiosk/problemy-polskiej-inteligencji-zydowskiej/jpc5m> [retrieved on 15/09/2017].

<sup>21</sup> J. Żarnowski, *O inteligencji polskiej...*, op.cit., pp. 146-147.

<sup>22</sup> J. Żarnowski, *Inteligencja 1918-1945...*, op.cit., p. 83.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 166.

who were employed in the occupation administration. Over time, the clerical ranks in the occupation institutions became more numerous than the pre-war bureaucracy.<sup>24</sup>

From the beginning of the war, both occupying powers began implementing a policy of repression against the intelligentsia, as they perceived its influence on the rest of Polish society as the greatest threat. In the Polish territories incorporated into the Reich, in September 1939, the so-called Intelligenzaktion was launched. These operations meant genocide acts in which, in the period from September 1939 to April 1940, about 50,000 representatives of gentry, freelancers, teachers, priests, social and political activists as well as retired military men were shot. In addition, about 50,000 people were deported to concentration camps, where the vast majority lost their lives.<sup>25</sup>

In the occupied territories, the equivalent of this operation was the so-called AB-Aktion (Außerordentliche Befriedungsaktion – Extraordinary Operation of Pacification), under which in the period from May to July 1940, at least 6,500 Poles were murdered, 3,500 of whom were representatives of the Polish political and intellectual elites. The symbol of this operation was a series of mass executions in Palmiry.<sup>26</sup> The Polish intelligentsia of Jewish origin found themselves in an extremely difficult situation, compounded by the general policy of special repression and extermination towards the Jewish population. Those individuals who were assimilated and managed to avoid closure in the ghettos were forced to hide their origin, identity, profession and social status. The Polish intelligentsia experienced numerous forms of repression also in the Polish lands incorporated into the Soviet Union, including arrests, forced displacements and deportations to Soviet labour camps.

Despite the constant threat from the occupants, the intelligentsia took on the task of maintaining the continuity of intellectual life and Polish culture. A network of secret teaching was developed, secret culture flourished and many social, cultural and scientific institutions operated illegally. Thanks to such involvement, the occupying powers failed to interrupt the Polish cultural life.<sup>27</sup> This social stratum also gave rise to members of political conspiracy and of the armed struggles, resulting in its great tribute in blood, which would have its consequences in the post-war period. A large part of the intellectuals remained outside the country after the war. At that

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<sup>24</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>25</sup> Cz. Łuczak, *Polityka ludnościowa i ekonomiczna hitlerowskich Niemiec w okupowanej Polsce*, Wydawnictwo Poznańskie, Poznań 1979, pp. 71-74.

<sup>26</sup> Ibidem, pp. 77-78.

<sup>27</sup> On the functioning of various cultural institutions during the occupation: P. Majewski, *Wojna i kultura. Instytucje kultury polskiej w okupacyjnych realiach Generalnego Gubernatorstwa 1939-1945*, Wydawnictwo Trio, Warszawa 2005. On the subject of secret teaching cf. J. Krasuski, *Tajne szkolnictwo polskie w okresie okupacji hitlerowskiej 1939-1945*, PWN, Warszawa 1977.

time the number of people with higher education in Poland was fewer than 40,000.<sup>28</sup> With regard to the educated classes, the war cost Poland: 39% of doctors, 33% of lower-level teachers, 30% of scientists and university lecturers (including 700 professors), 28% of priests and 26% of lawyers.<sup>29</sup> These losses had a negative impact on the process of reconstruction and the new organization of the Polish state after the war in the newly changed political and socio-economic conditions.

## 2. 1945–1989

Devastated during World War II and scattered abroad, the pre-war intelligentsia tried to position itself in the new conditions of real socialism. Even if it had wanted to cooperate with the system of government, because of its size, it would have not been able to respond to the personnel demands of the ever-expanding tasks of the party and its state apparatus. In addition, as Andrzej Borucki wrote: ‘Regardless of the views and activities over the twenty years of the interwar period, almost every member of the intelligentsia was heavily stigmatized as an outsider due to the connections – even if only indirect – with the classes ruling before the war. [...] Pre-war intelligentsia, even when willing to join the mainstream of the new transformations, often encountered numerous difficulties.’<sup>30</sup> The post-war period is primarily the time of the “new” intelligentsia, whose emergence resulted from the direct policy of the authorities. It was supposed to be, to some extent, a substitute for the old intelligentsia and, despite the qualitative difference, to fill the gap in the social structure shaped by war, migration and repression.<sup>31</sup> Its image was shaped by the representatives of workers and peasants, who flocked en masse to the positions previously occupied by the intelligentsia, and lower-ranking white-collar workers. Personnel was needed to fill positions at party institutions and state authorities, above all in the army, the judiciary and the police apparatus. One became an intellectual as a result of mass structural displacements, but also by the will of the authorities (from the so-called ‘granting’) just for the origin

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<sup>28</sup> According to estimates, 37% of individuals with higher education died during the war, which meant 16% of the entire pre-war population: *Od inteligencji do postinteligencji. Wątpliwa hegemonia*, Wydawnictwo Naukowe Scholar, P. Kulas and P. Śpiewak, (Ed.), Warszawa 2018, p. 27.

<sup>29</sup> S. Sieradzki, *Niemiecki koń trojański*, <https://www.wprost.pl/49330/Niemiecki-kon-trojanski> [retrieved on 15.09.2017].

<sup>30</sup> A. Borucki, *Kariery zawodowe i postawy społeczne inteligencji w PRL 1945–1959*, Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich, Wrocław–Warszawa–Kraków 1967, p. 17.

<sup>31</sup> H. Palska, *Nowa inteligencja w Polsce Ludowej. Świat przedstawień i elementy rzeczywistości*, Wydawnictwo Instytutu Filozofii i Socjologii PAN, Warszawa 1994, p. 20.



or political activity.<sup>32</sup> Through social advancement, it was possible to appoint for intellectual positions people who did not consider themselves intellectuals. Thanks to political qualifications, they filled positions they perceived as tasks entrusted by the party, in contrast to the pre-war intelligentsia, who treated their work as a task fulfilled on behalf of and for the nation.<sup>33</sup>

According to Hanna Palska, three groups emerged advancing to the intelligentsia after the war:

- a) 'people of the revolution', occupying intellectual positions in the apparatus of power – they entered this group because of their participation in the revolution or the party's past activities;
- b) the so-called 'ones at the forefront' ('wysunięci') that is, people recruited from the working class (often of peasant origin, who came to the city from the countryside), who were promoted to managerial and administrative positions in workplaces, lacking proper education or obtaining it outside the school system;
- c) the youth of mostly working class and peasant origin, educated en masse by high schools and universities.<sup>34</sup>

It was the members of the first and the second group that, above all, lacked education. Thus, the authorities created an ad-hoc system of education, based on a few months' courses for party activists; the central party school; preparatory courses; schools and courses for the socially advanced and, finally, special pseudo-tertiary schools for the preparation of judicial and prosecuting personnel.<sup>35</sup> They made it possible to obtain a certificate equivalent of the secondary school-leaving certificate yet in a shortened time. They also had special conditions of admission to study courses which were under the control of the authorities and the party. The intention of such activities was to ensure adequate political and social composition of students, who were under political and material protection. Around 1970, Poland had over 600,000 people with higher education, whereas in 1988, as many as 1,800,000<sup>36</sup>. In the 1950s and 1960s young university graduates began to join professional and social life, recruited mostly from non-intellectual backgrounds and educated according to the new models. In the 1970s, a new generation of the intelligentsia was spawned, which consisted of children of the intellectuals socially advanced in the previous years.<sup>37</sup> Since then, the 'new' intelligentsia had already formed the majority of the

<sup>32</sup> H. Domański, *Spółeczeństwa klasy średniej*, op.cit., p. 236.

<sup>33</sup> J. Szczepański, *Inteligencja i społeczeństwo*, KiW, Warszawa 1957, p. 43.

<sup>34</sup> H. Palska, *Nowa inteligencja...*, op.cit., p. 55.

<sup>35</sup> J. Żarnowski, *Inteligencja 1918–1945...*, op.cit., pp. 85, 87.

<sup>36</sup> At the end of the interwar period in Poland, there were about 100,000 of such people, ibidem, p. 89.

<sup>37</sup> Ibidem, p. 88.

intelligentsia in general, to a large extent, taking over the family and environmental traditions of the pre-war intelligentsia.<sup>38</sup>

This new intelligentsia lacked not only education – these individuals also represented a different mentality and culture as well as a different approach to the tradition and history of their own nation.<sup>39</sup> With time, however, some of them aspired, for example, to the lifestyle of the pre-war intelligentsia, which, in spite of everything, provided a kind of a model for them. As it tended to change its views and values, the features identifying it with the original environments were gradually fading. In 1981 Hubert Kozłowski wrote critically: ‘Elements of integration between the ‘old’ and ‘new’ part of this social stratum [of the intelligentsia – A.P.M.] began to appear. The latter, however, instead of bearing the most precious values derived from the working class or the countryside, began to succumb to petty-bourgeois moods. The cases of ideological void, parvenu, greed, so far from the rigourism of the first half of the 1950s, were not uncommon. [...] The place previously occupied by »quotationology« based on classical authors was now being indiscriminately taken over by many elements of bourgeois thought and culture as well as transferring »trends« to the Polish context’.<sup>40</sup>

The distinctive feature of the intelligentsia membership was the type of job. The division into white- and blue-collar workers had been introduced before the war. Among the former, in the last pre-war years only the group of people with higher education was treated as the intelligentsia. In the labour legislation this division had remained until 1972. Being a white-collar worker, whose job was perceived as intellectual, was very beneficial. Treated in a uniform way, they had common labour rights (e.g. paid holidays) and higher social benefits.<sup>41</sup> For this reason, the temptation to retrain from a labourer to a white-collar worker was strong, and, additionally, supported by the state through organizing accelerated secondary school courses.<sup>42</sup> The state put a lot of effort into developing adult education. In the school year 1980/1981, about

<sup>38</sup> In the 1970s 70% of the intelligentsia originated from the class of workers and peasants. In 1982, only 21.7% of specialists and managers came from the group of people possessing an ‘intellectual’ father. Most of them were recruited: H. Domański, *Formowanie się „nowych” struktur społecznych*, [in:] *Fenomen „Solidarności” i zmiana ustroju. Polacy 1980–2011*, Wydawnictwo Instytutu Filozofii i Socjologii PAN, W. Adamski, (Ed.), Warszawa 2014, pp. 363–364.

<sup>39</sup> As a follow-up on this issue cf.: B. Szacka, *Przeszłość w świadomości inteligencji polskiej*, Wydawnictwa Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego, Warszawa 1983; B. Szacka, A. Sawisz, *Czas przeszły i pamięć społeczna. Przemiany świadomości historycznej inteligencji polskiej 1965–1988*, Instytut Socjologii, Uniwersytet Warszawski, Warszawa 1990.

<sup>40</sup> H. Kozłowski, *Dylematy polskiej inteligencji*, KAW, Warszawa 1981, p. 58.

<sup>41</sup> R. Turski, *Dynamika przemian społecznych w Polsce*, WP, Warszawa 1961, p. 161.

<sup>42</sup> A. Buchner-Jeziorska, *W poszukiwaniu klasy średniej – Przekształcenia postsocjalistycznej struktury społecznej*, [in:] A. Buchner-Jeziorska, *Socjologiczna historia polskiej transformacji. Wybór tekstów*, Wydawnictwo U Ł, Łódź 2013, p. 80.

370,000 students studied in various types of schools for working people: in primary schools – 18,500, in general high schools – over 69,000, in basic vocational schools – 11,300, in secondary vocational schools – over 231,000, in colleges (post-secondary schools) for working people – over 39,000.<sup>43</sup> As a result of social advancement, labourers and peasants ‘stroved to meet the requirements, entering the arduous path of adapting to the new conditions’.<sup>44</sup>

Despite various circumstances, higher education was a synonym and a way of social advancement, although it was not always associated with high remuneration. Yet education was regarded even higher than income, especially among people aspiring to secondary and higher education. In addition to the so-called freelancers, which were not numerous in the People’s Republic of Poland, the intelligentsia worked as wage workers. Often, it was not possible to choose a place of work because until the mid-1970s the so-called planned employment system for university graduates had been in place. A decade later, students graduating from universities were given the opportunity to set up and run their own businesses.<sup>45</sup>

Despite various turbulences associated with the differentiation of the ranks of intellectuals in real socialism, they were still perceived as part of the society which had a special social mission (ethos) of leading other members of society. This perception intensified especially in the 1980s, with the process of creating a mass social movement of NSZZ ‘Solidarity’, which refreshed and strengthened the idea of the intelligentsia’s mission. As a result, the intelligentsia managed to dominate the structures of the democratic opposition and gain influence on shaping the vision of the systemic transformation of the state and the path leading to it.<sup>46</sup>

### 3. After 1989

The turn of the 1980s and 1990s started a new chapter in the history of the intelligentsia. The economic changes transformed it internally. On the one hand, the process began of transforming certain occupational categories, belonging to the

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<sup>43</sup> M. Dąbrowa Szeffler, *Polityka edukacyjna w latach 1956-1980*, [in:] *Elity władzy w Polsce a struktura społeczna w latach 1956-1981*, Polskie Towarzystwo Socjologiczne, Warszawa 1994, pp. 404-405.

<sup>44</sup> H. Domański, *Spółczeństwa klasy średniej*, op.cit., p. 236.

<sup>45</sup> A. Buchner-Jeziorska, *W poszukiwaniu klasy...*, op.cit., p. 82.

<sup>46</sup> The strengthening of the intellectual habitus in the 1980s and the increasing pressure of the intellectual elite of society at the end of this period was discussed by: A. Bartoszek, *Habitus polskiej inteligencji w społeczeństwach realnego socjalizmu i rynkowej transformacji*, [in:] *Inteligencja w Polsce. Specjaliści...*, op.cit., p. 76.

intelligentsia, into groups of specialists-professionals.<sup>47</sup> Their capital was their education and skills valued and sought in the market economy, thanks to which they had a chance to find a well-paid job in the newly transformed reality. Having quickly adapted to a new economic reality, they became valued and highly paid wage workers or moved to the business sector and set up their own companies<sup>48</sup>. On the other hand, for example, civil servants found themselves in a difficult situation. The end of the welfare state posed a very real threat to their existence. Under the laws of the market, they had to face the problem of actual wages and level of employment. Some found out what it meant to be unemployed. As Emil Mokrzycki wrote in 1991: ‘The greatest threats to the intelligentsia due to the reform is associated with the planned rationalization of organizational structures and the disappearance of soft money in science, art and culture, the latter of which is dangerous for two reasons. First of all, it will reveal staff overgrowth and low competence of employees in many institutions grouping the intellectual and artistic elite of the country. Even worse, it may question the existence of many of these institutions. Secondly, in Poland there are neither well-developed institutions and mechanisms for the hard financing of science, art and culture nor tradition to refer to.’<sup>49</sup>

Despite the hardships experienced by some part of the intelligentsia, it was perceived as a ‘winner’ of the transformation. Due to the market position and the working situation of a large number of its members, Polish intellectuals were treated primarily as the local equivalent of the already mentioned specialists-professionals. This social stratum gave rise to educated professionals, occupying jobs in new offices, whose emergence was one of the main elements of the change of social structure in Poland.<sup>50</sup> Specialists from the telecommunications, electronics, IT and other industries were educated at state universities and at a growing number of private universities. As their

<sup>47</sup> An important position in the group of specialist-professionals was taken by managers.

<sup>48</sup> This group was characterized by the largest occupational mobility and a frequent change of jobs. Professional (and financial) careers in this group were quite fast. H. Palska called its representatives ‘pioneers of Polish capitalism in the nineties’. She also cited numerous examples of such careers, related by their heroes themselves, e.g.: “The Round Table [...], I returned to Poland, I chose Poland [...]. And I started work in advertising. First, I started working for a film studio on the script of TV series. [...] After that I retrained for advertising scenario and for work in advertising. [...] First, I worked as a freelancer, and then I appeared in T. agency, in which I started to work as a copywriter, but very soon, very quickly, I managed to present and sell some interesting projects. And the owner did not make any obstacles for me to become a creative director, that is, he really took care of the entire creation of the agency [...]. Then for many years, almost five, we have been working on developing this agency, creating one of the strongest local agencies in our market “: H. Palska, *Poverty and Abundance. On new styles of life in Poland in the late nineties*, Publisher of the Institute of Philosophy and Sociology of the Polish Academy of Sciences, Warszawa 2002, p. 120.

<sup>49</sup> E. Mokrzycki, *Dziedzictwo realnego socjalizmu, interesy grupowe i poszukiwania nowej utopii*, [in:] *Przełom i wyzwanie. Pamiętnik VIII Ogólnopolskiego Zjazdu Socjologicznego Toruń 19-22.09.1990*, Wydawnictwo Adam Marszałek, Warszawa-Toruń 1991, pp. 56-57.

<sup>50</sup> H. Domański, *Polska klasa średnia*, Wydawnictwo Naukowe UMK, Toruń 2012, p. 118.

work entailed constant improvement of qualifications they honed their knowledge and skills on additional training. They started working for branches of well-known foreign enterprises springing up across Poland since the mid-1990s. The characteristic feature of this group was professional mobility, and its main goal – seeking the best conditions for professional development and high earnings. Work for foreign companies created opportunities to familiarize oneself with a different ethos and culture of work, which, in turn, along with high earnings, shaped their own style of living.

The intelligentsia encompassed educated and enterprising owners of some of the businesses that were created in the 1990s, representatives of freelancer professions (e.g. doctors, lawyers or architects, whose new economic reality opened up prospects for self-employment) and creators of culture (writers, musicians, fine artists, actors) and of science (academic teachers, and, in particular, highly esteemed according to social surveys – professors of higher education<sup>51</sup>).

The most numerous members of the intelligentsia were employees of the public sector (inf. ‘budżetówka’), who handled the new situation with greater or lesser success. For teachers, nurses and civil servants the 1990s meant a period of change that was not always welcomed with joy. The younger were more likely to take advantage of the new opportunities but the elder often gave in to the old habits, routine and the mood of inability. The state office sector included representatives of the civil service created from scratch. In 1991, the National School of Public Administration was established, which was supposed to educate civil servants professionally prepared for public service. A number of graduates of various MA studies were recruited. The condition for admission was the possession of a diploma of higher education. From the very beginning, it also organized training for the clerical staff, who were to raise qualifications and adapt to perform clerical work in the changed political and legal realities.<sup>52</sup>

The traditional intellectual ethos did not exactly match the values identified with the middle class being formed in Poland. H. Palska, basing on the conducted research, which was discussed in the text published in 2009, collated the main features characterizing the intelligentsia, its way of thinking and the professed values with the features defining the middle class.<sup>53</sup> It turned out that there was a conflict on all levels, from the very beginning of the transformation. What was called the

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<sup>51</sup> Even before the breakthrough it had appeared from nationwide surveys that among various professional positions, the university professor enjoyed the highest prestige. This trend continued also later: H. Domański, Z. Sawiński, *Wzory prestiżu a struktura społeczna*, Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich, Wrocław-Warszawa-Kraków 1991, p. 141.

<sup>52</sup> H. Domański, *Polska klasa średnia*, op.cit., p. 124.

<sup>53</sup> H. Palska, *Casting off the coat of Konrad: Polish intelligentsia in the era of system transformation*, “Studies in East European Thought” no. 61, 2009, pp. 249–269.

mission of the intelligentsia, namely involvement in the public sphere, patriotism and responsibility for others, collided with the extreme preoccupation of the middle class with performing jobs focused solely on profit. The intelligentsia's sense of community contrasted with ostentatious individualism. The attitude towards higher education had also changed. Intellectuals treated it 'aesthetically', as a value in itself, even if it was not the basis of a well-paid job. The middle class presented an instrumental approach to higher education, valuing only the education that could provide a better commercial future. The same was true of the approach to culture, in which 'the aesthetic' reception of culture (as in the case of higher education) clashed with the instrumental one. The middle class, in general, was thought to treat cultural events in terms of their potential usefulness for one's career, income or perception by others. The intelligentsia's lack of respect for the value of money and hard work, and frequent contempt for capitalism as a system in which the real test of an individual's value is the state of their account was juxtaposed with the middle-class's entrepreneurship and work focused on profit. This feature also resulted in frequent criticism of the intelligentsia concerning the impractical approach to life. The activities undertaken by the intelligentsia for the protection of cultural heritage, respect for national and family traditions were treated as 'retrogression', which contrasted with, characteristic of the middle class, the so-called forward thinking, focusing on planning the future.

Another difference was related to the attitude to one's own achievements and successes, which the intelligentsia accepted with humility, often even downplaying them. The middle class, however, due to its belief in the independent shaping of one's career and professional future, made them their asset and pride, which was often-times connected with flaunting this success. Both the intelligentsia and the middle class were characterized by certain types of snobbism. The snobbery of the intelligentsia, however, was based on a sense of superiority, mainly related to education and ethos attributed to it. The middle class's snobbery manifested itself in showing off one's status, especially the material one.<sup>54</sup> The social status of the middle class was built on a strong culture of consumerism, sometimes referred to as the 'supermarket culture'.<sup>55</sup> In Poland in the 1990s, there was an abundance of various consumer goods that could be acquired by the beneficiaries of the transformation, who thus manifested their social status. It became a permanent feature of their lifestyle and value system. Thanks to consumption, the financial operations sector developed.

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<sup>54</sup> Ibidem, p. 252.

<sup>55</sup> H. Domański, *Spółczeństwa klasy średniej*, op.cit., p. 221.

‘Plastic money’, i.e. debit cards, appeared, with credit cards in particular becoming the element of the middle class.<sup>56</sup>

It seemed that the intelligentsia would not find themselves in the new reality. The traditional intellectual ethos did not fit the bourgeois values represented by the middle class. However, opinions appeared that the presence of the intelligentsia in the ranks of the middle classes could prevent the emergence of such a middle class in Poland that would only become a faithful copy of traditional bourgeoisie. Its aspirations and values, patterns of behaviour and consumption may positively influence the emergence of new standards defining the middle class.<sup>57</sup>

The reality of the free market economy, however, pushed the intelligentsia to discover in itself features which it had been unaware of and triggered various adaptation mechanisms. Capitalism began to enforce changes in the intelligentsia’s philosophy of life. Gradually, it began to take over the characteristics of the middle class. The style of this social stratum was becoming attractive. Its members were taking increasing responsibility for their lives and choices. There were active and had individualistic attitudes towards professional career and life plans, which were increasingly displacing the intelligentsia’s sense of mission. The profitability of using one’s own educational capital was recognized in order to ensure better material status, ‘managers and the intelligentsia overtook business owners in the income hierarchy’.<sup>58</sup> Already in 1993, it was the intelligentsia, alongside private entrepreneurs, that declared ‘the relatively largest access to market mechanisms and economic liberalism’.<sup>59</sup> This phenomenon began to intensify after 2004 when, after Poland’s accession to the European Union, the labour markets of other countries that could benefit the intelligentsia opened up.

## Conclusion

The difficult path that the Polish intelligentsia had to tread from its very beginnings to modern times has taught it the strategy of survival. The culture of education, a sense of duty towards others and responsibility for the state allowed it to make a permanent mark in the history of the struggle to maintain the national substance at various times. Even severely weakened during the last war, in the years of the Polish

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<sup>56</sup> Ibidem, p. 222.

<sup>57</sup> G. Matuszak, *Inteligencja a nowa klasa średnia w Polsce*, Oficyna Bibliofilów, Łódź 1994, p. 194.

<sup>58</sup> H. Domański, *Hierarchie i bariery społeczne w latach dziewięćdziesiątych*, Wydawnictwo Instytutu Spraw Publicznych, Warszawa 2000, p. 161.

<sup>59</sup> H. Domański, *Spółczesność klasy średniej*, op.cit., p. 261.

People's Republic, it managed to keep its own identity and become a role model for the 'new' intelligentsia. After 1989, under the newly-forming capitalism, it took the role of the so-called authorities – individuals worthy of public trust and able to think independently and, more often, in a very entrepreneurial manner. What does the future hold for this social stratum? It seems that one can concur with Jerzy Snopek, who a few years ago wrote: '[...] in the social structure, even now, there is a place for a modern variant of the traditional intellectual ethos, yet still maintaining its basic principles and values. There is, therefore, room for the ethos intelligentsia that will find itself in the labyrinth of the new world, regain prestige, guard imponderables and create beautiful patterns of the society of humanity. It is difficult today to demand a pathetic sacrifice in the style of Judym and Mocaczka, although many of their modern incarnations are among us of their own free will and spiritual need. [...] there is currently and will be in the future no shortage of tasks and challenges for such a social class maintaining high standards of professionalism.'<sup>60</sup> In a modern capitalist society there is room and a need (of which some may be unaware) for the intelligentsia to stand by its principles and values, which are to help the society to find itself in a constantly changing world.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> J. Snopek, *Czyścić czy piekło? Miejsce polskiej inteligencji po 1989 roku na tle jej dziejów*, [in:] *Inteligencja w Polsce. Specjaliści...*, op.cit., p. 126.

<sup>61</sup> Piotr Kula's research shows that the young Polish intelligentsia is cut off from the lifestyle of the middle class with its materialism and the cult of money. Reluctantly, it also refers to the traditional intellectual ethos. Its members perceive themselves as educated professionals who feel responsible for their immediate surroundings, family and work. According to the author, irrespective of self-identification and genealogy, its intellectualism resurfaces as if automatically. It reveals itself in a way of life and ethos, because the sense of existence has always been the things that characterized the intelligentsia from its beginnings: P. Kula, *Inteligencność zaprzeczona. Etos i tożsamość młodych inteligentkich elit*, Wydawnictwo Naukowe Scholar, Warszawa 2017.



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