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THE GRUNWALD TRADITION IN THE POLITICAL ACTIVITY OF THE WORLD POWER LEGION

The World Power Legion (Legia Mocarstwowa) was one of the few, if not the only, national organization linked to Józef Piłsudski that drew upon the tradition of Poland's victory in the Battle of Grunwald. It was a reflection on the World Power Work Union¹ (Związek Pracy Mocarstwowej) whose main goal was to promote "the spirit of generosity and the concept of the Polish World Power across all social strata"².

In an effort to pursue this goal, the Union organized lectures, meetings, reading rooms, libraries, community centers, educational and sports facilities for workers. It initiated and supported social, economic, cultural, educational and military training organizations. Hierarchy and discipline were highly respected values in the World Power Work Union. Its authorities, except for the High Committee, were elected by nomination.

The Union placed special emphasis on the World Power Legion whose members had to enlist for military training to learn "genuine military skills and become worthy successors to the knights who fought in Grunwald,

¹ The world power movement entered the Polish political scene after the coup d'état of May 1926. The "World Power Thought" academic association was established by Rowmund Piłsudski and Jerzy Giedroyc. Their ambition was to create a pan-national organization that would reach out to other youth communities in the Second Republic of Poland. This mission was entrusted to the World Power Work Union created in 1928. The union recruited supporters and expanded its sphere of influence through political organizations in various communities. The World Power Thought association united university students. The World Power Legion was a sports and educational organization open to all youths. Ref. T. Selimowski, *Polskie legalne stronnictwa polityczne*, Warszawa 1934, p. 25; D. Radziwiłłowicz, *Tradycja grunwaldzka w świadomości politycznej społeczeństwa polskiego w latach 1910–1945*, Olsztyn 2003, pp. 133–146; R. Tomczyk, *Mysł Mocarstwowa. Z dziejów młodego pokolenia II Rzeczypospolitej*, Szczecin 2008.

² *Związek Pracy Mocarstwowej. Jego zadania i cele*, Mocarstwowiec, 1929, No. 2, p. 5.

Chocim and Vienna, the heroes of Raclawice, Somosierra and Grochów, Polish soldiers of the Great War and the war over the eastern border”³.

The World Power Work Union proclaimed Piłsudski to be its leader, and it hoped to “actively support Him in His laborious, ongoing effort to lay the foundations for a powerful State”⁴.

The union deemed itself a successor of insurgent organizations. At the same time, it attempted to amalgamate diverse trends on the Polish political arena. Before Poland regained its independence, the nationalist camp and left-wing insurgents had received public acclaim. “Nationalism maintained Poland’s national identity, while socialism dampened the invaders’ spirits through subversive action”⁵, wrote *Mocarstwowiec*, a publication of the World Power Work Union.

The unionists claimed that the nationalist camp (representatives of National Democracy) and the Polish Socialist Party (PSP) became harmful for the state after Poland had regained its independence. The national democrats promoted slogans which distanced “Poles from their fellow countrymen of different nationality, preventing them from working in union for the good of the Nation”. They accused the PSP of promoting class struggle ideology that undermined the cohesiveness of the “Polish State” and argued that by succumbing to the influences of “the international union governed by German socialists, the PSP exposed Poland to its greatest enemies”⁶. According to the union, social and educational associations supporting nationalist or socialist ideology were unable to produce citizens that “Poland is in dire need of today”.

The World Power Legion was created to pursue that mission “that had not yet been fulfilled”. Its educational activities emphasized “the interests of the State are the supreme law to which the interests of all social classes and groups should be subordinated”. The unionists argued that owing to its critical location between two aggressive powers, Russia and Germany, Poland could maintain its sovereignty only by attaining the status of a world power. For this reason, the World Power Legion was a strong advocate of the Grunwald tradition. Poland’s victory in the Battle of Grunwald laid the foundations for the “Polish Intermarum” stretching from the Baltic Sea to the Black Sea. According to the unionists, the “world power” scheme could be implemented “only if the Polish society is permeated with the spirit of its fellow Slavs within the confines of one great State”⁷. Rowmund Piłsudski, Józef Piłsudski’s nephew, became the Chief Commander and Head of the World Power Legion⁸.

³ Ibidem.

⁴ Ibidem.

⁵ *Ku czemu dąży Legia Mocarstwowa*, *Mocarstwowiec*, 1929, No. 3.

⁶ Ibidem.

⁷ Ibidem.

⁸ R. Juchnowski, *Rowmund Piłsudski 1903–1988. Koncepcje polityczne i społeczne*, Wrocław 2009; R. Juchnowski, *Koncepcje federalistyczne Rowmunda Piłsudskiego*, in: *Europa i integracja europejska w polskiej myśli politycznej XX wieku*, Wrocław 2003.

Similarly to the national democrats, the World Power Legion argued that Germany would always pose a threat to Poland. In anticipation of the unavoidable armed conflict with the Germans, the unionists wrote: "During the war, Germany will take no prisoners, and it will not make any allowances for the human feelings of any party to the conflict. Through its conduct in the war, Poland will take the world by surprise. It takes superhuman commitment and bloody sacrifice to wipe away the indignity and the suffering wrought on us by the Germans". Starting with the eight issue, the *Mocarstwowiec* monthly magazine was to be dedicated in its entirety to the war with Germany until the arrival of "the new Grunwald Victory Day"⁹.

According to Rowmund Pilsudski, by instilling the spirit of "world power thinking" into the nation, the generation of young Poles would "put an end to the culture of weakness, suffering and pain". The Polish society should draw the strength for its "work on behalf of the State" from "memories of the Polish Nation's inexhaustible strength, not its moments of weakness". The World Power Legion chose "the most important date in the history of Poland", the anniversary of the Battle of Grunwald, as the symbol of "faith in the glowing future of a resurrected Polish State"¹⁰. "Grunwald marked the birth of the Polish World Power, it was a triumph of peaceful coexistence between the Polish people and fellow Slavs within one great Polish State. Grunwald is the Nation's conscious desire to exercise undivided control of the Baltic. Grunwald is a symbol of a victorious Poland, not Casimir's Poland which was weak and thrown upon the mercy of German nobles. Grunwald means Polish leadership throughout all Slavic lands and protection from Germanic aggression. Bearing this historical testament in mind, the young generation of Poles can look into the future with optimism despite the adversities of the present day"¹¹.

The cult of the Grunwald tradition gave rise to several publications devoted to this victorious military event. Grunwald was perceived as the ideal example of military action that was untainted by "political foibles". "The granite foundations of Poland's powerful statehood have been chiseled by swords, not diplomacy – as it has always been the case throughout our history". This statement is a reflection on the essence of the conflict between Pilsudski's camp and the national democrats. Pilsudski's call for military action was juxtaposed against Dmowski's diplomatic measures: "It was not political small talk, but our soldiers' bloodshed that resurrected Poland". The World Power Legion stood in agreement with the national democrats only over a single matter, namely Poland's claim to the territories annexed by Prussia. "Just as it was the case more than 500 years ago, the foundations of a new Poland rest in the ruins of the Prussian empire. We are gathering our

⁹ *O ducha ofensywy*, *Mocarstwowiec* 1931, No. 9, 28 February.

¹⁰ *Na czasie*, *Mocarstwowiec* 1930, No. 8.

¹¹ *Ibidem*.

strength, and guided by the shining beacon of Grunwald, we know which road to take to turn the Republic of Poland into a global power”¹².

On the tenth anniversary of the referendum in Warmia and Mazury, the unionists declared that the Germans had committed “hideous fraud” during the plebiscite. In the ballots, the voters had to choose between:

“Poland”
“East Prussia”

According to the Legion, the people had voted to remain in East Prussia, not Germany. If “East Prussia” were replaced with “Germany” in the ballot, thousands of inhabitants from the region of Warmia and Mazury would have voted for Poland. The results of the referendum were not a reflection on the Polish people’s choice, therefore, they were not legally binding, claimed the unionists¹³.

The World Power Legion fully supported the incorporation of East Prussia into Poland. Already in 1930, it was one of the first Polish organizations to support the establishment of the national border on the Odra and Nysa Łużycka Rivers. The unionists looked to the Grunwald tradition in their quest for the new frontier. This notion was further explored by H. J. Szyszko in an article entitled “East Prussia for Poland”, published in *Mocarstwowiec*: “We know that an armed conflict with Germany is unavoidable. We have to gather momentum for this historical event! Our Lord, who has been guiding Poland in the last millennium, is on our side. The young generation is on a mission to give Grunwald a new name in Polish history. The Grunwald tradition will reign supreme in Berlin, bringing defeat to Germany and paralyzing the very heart of Prussia! Our goal is to seal Poland in the West along the natural boundary of the Odra and Nysa Łużycka Rivers, and to bring Prussian territory between the Spree and the Pregolya back into Poland! Thrust toward the West – is an absolute order for the Polish Nation!”¹⁴.

At the time, even the most radical factions of the nationalist camp did not have such a far-reaching territorial program. Even if Poland scored a victory over Germany, in 1930, such plans were considered to be a pipe dream, if not sheer madness.

The celebrations of the 520th anniversary of the Battle of Grunwald provided the World Power Legion and other organizations with an opportunity to popularize the Grunwald tradition. The festivities were organized by the World Power Work Union, the World Power Legion, the Legion’s factory workers’ clubs, the Union of People’s Groups of the Polish World Power and the Academic Union of World Power Thought. The campaign was advertised by posters in all Polish cities. *Polska Zbrojna*, the Polish Army’s daily news-

¹² Ibidem.

¹³ *Prusy Wschodnie dla Polski*, *Mocarstwowiec* 1930, No. 8, p. 8; *Drang nach Westen*, *Mocarstwowiec*, No. 7, 1930; *Krzyżacy*, *Mocarstwowiec* 1931, No. 12.

¹⁴ *Prusy Wschodnie dla Polski*, *Mocarstwowiec* 1930, No. 8.

paper, wrote that the initiative had been warmly welcomed "by all social groups, except for the national democrats and the communists who scheduled their own celebrations for that day..."¹⁵.

In Warsaw, unionist celebrations opened with a service in the Bernadine Church on Krakowskie Przedmieście. The sermon delivered by father Edward Detkiens carried a powerful message which promoted the Polish World Power. He appealed to the congregation to join their forces in pursuit of the Jagiellonian tradition, and he postulated that the Slavs and the Lithuanians unite "under the scepter of the Republic of Poland against the hostile avarice of the Teutons". He pointed out that the aggressor across the western border continued to pose a threat, and that Poland would face its enemy "when the moment of the new Grunwald arrives in a not so distant future"¹⁶.

The Grunwald meeting was the high point of the celebrations. The national anthem was played, and Rowmund Piłsudski delivered a speech. He postulated that the anniversary of the Battle of Grunwald should be a public holiday. "As the first fruit of Jagiellonian ideology promoting the establishment of a Slavic state under the reign of the Polish nation, Grunwald marks the birth of the Polish World Power," he said. Rowmund Piłsudski declared that the authorities of the World Power Work Union and the World Power Legion would celebrate the anniversary of the Grunwald Battle as an organizational holiday "to freshen the public's memory and give the event a pan-national status". The list of speakers was inclusive of Gustaw Orlicz-Dreszer who discussed the historical background of the Polish-Teutonic war¹⁷.

The World Power Legion ardently opposed German propaganda aimed against the Polish Pomerania and Poland's access to the Baltic. In retaliation, the Legion formulated postulates claiming the recovery of territories that had been part of Bolesław Chrobry's kingdom. The main emphasis was on reinstating Poland's access to the sea. The unionists cited the example of Jagiellonian Poland that had reigned over the Baltic coastline "stretching more than 1000 km from the Słupia River all the way to Parnu in the Gulf of Finland"¹⁸. The Legion also addressed Poles residing on German territory. It demanded that Polish schools in Germany be provided with textbooks covering in detail the history of "western Slavs, Silesia, Pomerania and Prussia, to ensure that German propaganda never taints youthful souls that have been forced to receive an education in German schools on those territories"¹⁹. Many publications were dedicated to the history of the Polabian Slavs who lived between the Elbe and the Oder. After centuries of German

¹⁵ *Obchód rocznicy zwycięstwa grunwaldzkiego*, Polska Zbrojna 1930, No. 190, 14 July.

¹⁶ *Ibidem*.

¹⁷ *Ibidem*.

¹⁸ *Kto zwycięży*, Mocarstwowiec 1930, No. 8.

¹⁹ *Ibidem*; *Zagadnienie morskie*, Mocarstwowiec 1930, No. 9; *Walka gospodarcza o dostęp do morza*, Mocarstwowiec 1930, No. 9.

campaigns, Polabian territories were turned into “a huge cemetery of the Slavic peoples”²⁰.

Germany’s anti-Polish campaigns and propaganda opposing the creation of a Polish “corridor” significantly contributed to the rise of the active nationalist movement in the legion. The legion postulated that Poland had to “give up its policy of defensive protest. We will not surrender the land of our fathers. The inviolability of treaties should no longer be used as an excuse. The great Polish Nation can no longer seek the humiliating assistance of international institutions”. Rowmund Piłsudski wrote: “Europe is growing weary of our complaints, and it is beginning to believe that those whose only salvation rests with treaties that had been made by others are in the wrong. Moreover, they regard us as very oppressive “friends”, and they fear that they could be forced to shed blood in our defense. Poland can no longer be a nation of eternal martyrs and gloomy psalmists”²¹.

According to R. Piłsudski, German aggression could not be counteracted by passive resistance, “and if we do not answer to their demands with equally ruthless postulates, if the diplomatic battles of today and the armed conflicts of tomorrow are waged only over the Polish territories in Pomerania and Silesia and not thousands of our oppressed brothers in Germany, that battle will surely be lost”²². R. Piłsudski made fervent appeals to the young generation who, in his opinion, were Poland’s only salvation. According to R. Piłsudski, members of the young generation who felt unrestrained by obstacles “of a diplomatic nature, who were bursting with pride to be part of the Nation that emerged victorious in Płowce and Grunwald [...], would pick up the Teutonic gauntlet and defend not only their own borders, but also liberate the territories that have always been a part of Poland – Warmia, Mazury and Opole Silesia”²³. Active nationalism had a number of positive aspects. Above all, it spurred various publications dedicated to Slavic territories occupied by Germany over the past millennium²⁴. It turned the public’s attention to the fate of Poles living in the Reich, and it warned them of the German threat. On the negative side, active nationalists were biased in portraying the “eternal foe” as purely evil. The legion’s publications relied on the following expressions to describe the Germans: “uncivilized strangers from the north, deadly enemies of the Slavs and the pan-European culture – Germans”, “uncivilized, bearded and dirty barbarians who occupy the lowest strata of civilized society and thrive on robbery”, “Teutonic bandits”, “the attacks staged by Nordic muggers poisoned Europe with a bloody vapor”, “the poisonous blood of the Teutonic beast”, “Teutonic spawn”, “Nordic bar-

²⁰ *Na zachód od granic Rzplitej*, Mocarstwowiec 1931, No. 9, 23 February.

²¹ *O ducha ofensywy*, Mocarstwowiec 1931, No. 9, 28 February.

²² *Ibidem*.

²³ *Ibidem*.

²⁴ *Morze Wendyjskie*, Mocarstwowiec 1931, No. 9 and No. 28.

²⁵ *Ibidem*.

barians”²⁵. The purpose of such language was to incite negative connotations, even hatred, to instill “an aggressive spirit” in the nation and turn the future Polish-German war into the second Grunwald victory.

The legion’s fervent attempts to pursue the Grunwald tradition gave rise to the Grunwald Swords plaque. The medal symbolized the struggle against Germany as well as the other oppressor, the heir to Russian imperial ideology which collaborated with Germany – the USSR. This issue was clearly addressed by an appeal published in *Mocarstwowiec*: “Two Grunwald swords, straight swords that passed from Teutonic to Polish hands, swords pointing to the West and the East will be your sign, a symbol of expansion to the West and the East, a sign that we will courageously face up to the German challenge, that we will fight until the last German soldier leaves Poland’s ancient lands, until the Mongolian culture on Polish territories occupied by Russia no longer taints red Slavic blood, until all Slavic souls are freed from German captivity and the Polish World Power prevails. This is the true meaning of the plaque forged in black iron, a symbol that you will wear with pride”²⁶.

The World Power Legion also looked to the Grunwald tradition as an instrument in “leveling the differences in development between Germany and Poland. The legion’s leaders were fully aware of Germany’s technical supremacy over Poland, and they promoted the «fighting spirit» theory to boost morale before the prospective military conflict”.

According to the legion, Poland would score yet another Grunwald victory by relying on the “fighting spirit of the knights” which had always “played a decisive role in armed struggle” and, as demonstrated during World War I, “its role would continue to grow” with civilizational development. By resorting to a simplified analogy, the legion compared Piłsudski’s Poland to King Jagiełło’s Poland. The civic education principles instilled by Jagiełło and Zawisza Czarny in their knights were portrayed as nearly identical to the contemporary educational measures. “The principles instilled in young knights by Zawisza Czarny’s academy have survived until this day in military training and physical education classes”²⁷. The “fighting spirit” that brought victory in Grunwald would lay the ground for Poland’s “power of expansion”, its mission as a world power and the hope that good would prevail²⁸. Above all, the World Power Legion looked to Grunwald as a political reference for the future, as Jagiełło’s historical testament, a symbol of Poland’s mission in the West and an important lesson in history for the State²⁹.

In 1931, the unionists staged particularly festive celebrations of the Grunwald anniversary. In addition to festivals in the World Power Legion’s

²⁶ *Grunwaldzkie miecze*, *Mocarstwowiec* 1931, No. 12.

²⁷ *Czego nas uczy Grunwald*, *Mocarstwowiec* 1931, No. 12.

²⁸ *Ibidem*.

²⁹ *Ibidem*.

148 local divisions, the main celebrations in Pomerania were divided into two parts:

1. Grunwald Race – a cycle race down the historical route marking King Jagiełło's march to Malbork;

2. A convention of the World Power Legion's divisions in Uzdowo, Pomerania, in the immediate vicinity of the Grunwald battlefield. The convention featured sports competitions and military training³⁰. A monument dedicated to the battle of Grunwald was unveiled in Uzdowo³¹.

The main Grunwald day celebrations were held in Działdowo on 11 and 12 July. They were attended by delegations from across Poland.

The example of the World Power Legion shows that some members of Piłsudski's camp went to great lengths to address the German threat and uphold the Grunwald tradition. But not all of them recognized the full magnitude of the German threat. *Droga* (The Road), a monthly magazine linked to Piłsudski's camp, wrote in 1931 that Germany's alleged march to the East "is merely a reflection on our irrational fears [...]. The future of Germany does not lie east of the Elbe, its future is on the Rhine [...]. Germany's main focus is on the Rhine [...]. Germany no longer has anti-Polish interests, the German people's fear of Poland is a much greater cause for concern [...]. Drang nach Osten is coming to an end"³².

It is difficult to resist the impression that the World Power Legion's program did make a reference to national democratic ideology, although its theories were not consciously emulated. The legion's publications and activities in the following years fully support this observation. The organization explored nationalist ideas that had been objectified and validated by political developments. The World Power Legion never weakened the cult of Józef Piłsudski as the father of independent Poland³³.

³⁰ *Święto Mocarstwowe*, Mocarstwowiec 1931, No. 12.

³¹ Archives of New Records, Pomorskie Regional Office. Legionists' Union. Ref. 273/III-22, p. 20.

³² *Z powodu książki Romana Dmowskiego*, Droga 1931, No. 11, pp. 912–913.

³³ *Na czasie*, Mocarstwowiec 1930, No. 8.