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The Image of a Village and the Life of its Inhabitants on the Example of Selected Lublin Press in the Mid-1930s.

Obraz wsi i życia jej mieszkańców na przykładzie wybranej prasy lubelskiej w połowie lat trzydziestych XX w.

ABSTRACT

The interwar period (1918–1939) was a time of intense social, economic, and political transformations in Poland, including rural areas, and the Lublin press played a significant role in shaping the image of the countryside and the lives of its residents. Articles from that period depicted rural Poland as a space full of contradictions: on the one hand, marked by poverty, backwardness, and inequalities, and on the other hand, as a place of dynamic changes, growing awareness, and aspirations for modernization. The heterogeneity of the narrative stemmed primarily from the ideological differences between individual publications. Whereas left-wing and peasant newspapers highlighted socio-economic hardships, conservative and Catholic press emphasized the morality, religiosity, and patriotism of villagers. Regardless of the political line, the countryside remained a significant topic in public discourse, and its development and problems constituted an important element of the public debate. Articles analyzing the economic and social situation of the Lublin region in the 1930s point to numerous challenges faced by farmers. The economic crisis, the weakness of cooperative organizations, income inequalities,

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and absence of educated elites in rural areas were seen by their authors as key factors hindering the development of the countryside. At the same time, the writers recognized opportunities for improvement through the expansion of cooperatives, education, and more active participation of farmers in politics and rural economic management. They emphasized that only through conscious actions and organization could improvements be made in rural living conditions and an increase in its significance within the national economy be achieved.

Key words: press, village, interwar period

STRESZCZENIE

Dwudziestolecie międzywojenne to okres intensywnych przemian społecznych, gospodarczych i politycznych w Polsce, w tym także na terenach pozamiejskich, a prasa lubelska odgrywała istotną rolę w kształtowaniu obrazu wsi i życia jej mieszkańców. Artykuły z tamtego czasu ukazywały wieś jako przestrzeń pełną sprzeczności: z jednej strony naznaczoną biedą, zacofaniem i nierównościami, z drugiej – jako miejsce dynamicznych zmian, rosnącej świadomości i dążeń do modernizacji. Niejednorodność przekazu wynikała przede wszystkim z różnic ideologicznych pomiędzy poszczególnymi tytułami. Podczas gdy gazety lewicowe i ludowe eksponowały trudności społeczno-ekonomiczne, konserwatywna i katolicka prasa podkreślała moralność, religijność i patriotyzm chłopów. Niezależnie od linii politycznej, wieś pozostawała istotnym tematem publicystycznym, a jej rozwój oraz problemy stanowiły ważny element debaty publicznej. Artykuły analizujące sytuację gospodarczą i społeczną Lubelszczyzny w latach trzydziestych XX w. wskazują na szereg wyzwań, przed którymi stanęli rolnicy. Kryzys gospodarczy, słabość organizacji spółdzielczych, nierówności dochodowe oraz brak inteligencji na wsi to kluczowe w przekonaniu ich autorów czynniki hamujące rozwój wsi. Jednocześnie autorzy tekstów dostrzegają szanse na poprawę sytuacji poprzez rozwój spółdzielczości, edukację oraz aktywniejszy udział rolników w polityce i zarządzaniu gospodarką wiejską. Podkreślają, że tylko poprzez świadome działania i organizację można doprowadzić do poprawy warunków życia na wsi oraz zwiększenia jej znaczenia w gospodarce narodowej.

Słowa kluczowe: prasa, wieś, okres międzywojenny

INTRODUCTION

During the interwar period, the majority of Poland's population lived in rural areas, with the Lublin Voivodeship being particularly dominated by agriculture. For this reason alone, topics related to rural living conditions, land reform, poverty, illiteracy, and migration to cities were regularly covered in the media. Economic problems and land reform, exacerbated by the economic crisis of the 1930s, also contributed to a greater media coverage of these issues. But was that really the case? It is difficult to unambiguously answer such a posed question. It is clear that examining selected newspaper titles from the Lublin region in the interwar period, specifically in terms of their portrayals of the countryside and the

lives of its inhabitants, will not provide a definitive response. However, it may help to identify potential directions for research or the formulation of more detailed questions and research questionnaires. And these will form the core content of the present article. It seems, indeed, that identifying the dominant themes in publications related to the peasantry and rural life (e.g., economy, politics, culture, religion, customs) or the main motifs, stereotypes, and narratives concerning the countryside and its residents in press materials may allow for deepening knowledge not only in the context of living conditions of rural communities, but also (and perhaps above all), taking into account the socio-political context of the Second Republic of Poland, their impact on shaping the image of the countryside in the Lublin press, and thus also in social consciousness.

Identifying the socio-political conditions that influenced the way in which the countryside was portrayed, including linking rural imagery to current events, land reforms, social movements, and political developments of the time, can provide not only valuable data for a more detailed assessment of the situation of rural community during the interwar period or its social awareness, but also determine how the local press engaged in attempts to shape a specific attitude towards rural social issues. This, to a large extent, could be, and actually was, a distinct strategy in the political struggle. After all, it cannot be denied that political engagement, even among local publications, was one of the most distinctive features of the press market at the time. Therefore, identifying differences in portrayals based on the ideological orientation of the press, for example, by comparing the image of the 'peasantry' in newspapers of varying political lines (national, peasant, socialist, Catholic), seems to be one of the most obvious objectives not only for researchers of the Polish countryside but also for scholars of the interwar press. An analysis of how the Lublin press portrayed themes such as rural modernization, land reform, or urban-rural relations, along with a comparison of the depictions of the peasantry in newspapers of different profiles, can provide us with a broader insight not only into the involvement of individual press titles in political conflicts but also help to determine social expectations and the attitudes of urban populations toward the aforementioned issues. There is no doubt that the depiction of rural life and the solutions to pressing issues in the local press served two distinct purposes, just as is the case today. On one hand, it was about promoting political agendas and garnering support for specific parties – in other words, building a political constituency. On the other, it attempted to respond to social expectations. These issues, as well as identifying changes in portrayals over the years- i.e. an analysis the possible evolution of the image of the countryside and peasants in response to political and social shifts, should

become one of the primary concerns for researchers of the social history of this period. It seems that one possible approach could involve not only a broadly understood quantitative and qualitative content examination of articles but, above all, identifying the distinctive linguistic features and stylistic strategies employed in depictions of countryside and its residents, including idealizations or implicit prejudices. Examining the language and rhetoric used in reference to the 'peasantry', including, e.g., an analysis of evaluative terms, stereotypes, recurring metaphors, and other stylistic devices, as well as the symbolism associated with the countryside, alongside identifying the characteristics attributed to its residents (e.g., industriousness, religiosity, backwardness, patriotism, rebelliousness, etc.), can provide insights into both the attitude of the local press and its readers towards rural issues and expand our understanding of its social imaginaries. Ultimately, the conclusions drawn from this research may serve as a foundation for further studies on social history, rural culture, and the role of the press in shaping social consciousness (and perception of inhabitants of villages) during the interwar period.

THE LUBLIN PRESS IN THE INTERWAR PERIODAN ATTEMPT AT CHARACTERIZATION

The interwar period (1918–1939) was the time of intensive reconstruction not only of the country's structures, economy, and state institutions, but also of those areas and public spheres which, thanks to Poland's regained independence, were given new foundations and prospects for operation and development. One such area undoubtedly included broadly defined media, among which the press played a particularly significant role in the period of interest to us. And, as T. Kot rightly observes, although 'the development of the press and the readership market in interwar Poland was limited by the high percentage of illiteracy among the society'¹, and 'regular newspaper readers were primarily wealthy

¹ T. Kot, *Prasa codzienna w Lublinie w latach 1918–1939*, "Wschodni Rocznik Humanistyczny" 2010–2011, 7, p. 273. It is worth emphasizing here that the Lublin region was one of the areas with the highest level of illiteracy in Poland, which resulted from its agricultural character, poverty, and poorly developed educational infrastructure. According to data from 1921, the percentage of illiterates in the Lublin region was around 50%, one of the highest rates in the country, while in rural areas it reached as high as 70–80%. By 1931, the percentage of illiterates in the Lublin region had dropped, but it still remained high, at around 35–40%. A. Paczkowski notes that 'The 1921 general census showed that 38.1% of the rural population in Poland lacked the ability to read and write. [...] Over the 10 years

and educated urban residents, while in the countryside, it was the land-owning class², researchers specializing in press studies point to a rapid expansion of newspaper and magazine publications, in terms of both volume and variety. However, as Kot emphasizes, 'peasants and the urban poor, due to financial constraints and a lack of basic education, accessed daily newspapers irregularly. If they had access to any press titles, these were usually what is colloquially called «pass-along» copies – old, and thus providing outdated information'³. A similar opinion is expressed by Hanna Wojtysiak, who adds that 'postwar impoverishment, inflation, and the high illiteracy rate limited the number of people buying and subscribing to daily newspapers (according to statistics, illiteracy among the Polish population in the city of Lublin in the 1920s reached about 35%, in 1931 – about 21%, and in 1938 – approximately 17%)'⁴.

However, A. Paczkowski states in this context that 'illiteracy, as one of the indicators of educational levels, remains an important but not the sole determinant of the development of press readership in the studied social environment. The need for reading and acquiring publications felt by members of a given community is conditioned by a whole range of socio-cultural and economic factors. Here, one may point to such issues as participation in a supra-local commodity market, the extent and type of contact with national culture or the culture of urban centers'⁵. At the same time, according to Paczkowski, the densifying 'network of supra-local connections' and the development of education fostered interest in 'general issues' and 'the need for broadly understood information', leading to a desire to 'learn about the world'. In his view, it was 'contacts with the external world' – the supra-local world, and curiosity about the 'external world' that laid the foundations enabling 'the potential growth of press readership (by generating a demand for written communication and exposure to broader, external sources of information.)'⁶.

A. Notkowski argues that the Lublin press during the interwar period 'exhibited characteristics typical of all major local publishing centers in the central part of the country: it was relatively numerous and typologically

between the two censuses, the situation improved – the number of illiterates decreased (in overall numbers for the entire country) to 27.6%'. – A. Paczkowski, *Prasa polityczna ruchu ludowego (1918–1939)*, Warszawa 1970, pp. 23–24.

² T. Kot, *op. cit.*, p. 273.

³ *Ibidem*, p. 274.

⁴ H. Wojtysiak, *Lubelska prasa sensacyjna medialne obrazy codzienności międzywojennego Lublina*, "Folia Bibliologica" 2018, 60, p. 145.

⁵ A. Paczkowski, *op. cit.*, p. 26.

⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 27.

diverse, reflecting the most significant nationwide political divisions'⁷. A similar description is provided by A. Gromek, who adds that 'many interesting periodicals were published in Lublin. Alongside commercial press, the city saw the publication of dailies affiliated with various political factions: National Democrats, conservatives, Christian democrats, progressives. The pages of these newspapers often hosted battles over municipal council elections, investments, and more broadly – struggles for influence. The treatment of opponents frequently deviated from journalistic ethics'⁸.

Hanna Wojtyśiak further notes that in Lublin, 'the National Democratic press initially dominated, later was replaced by pro-government publications linked to BBWR (Non-partisan Bloc for Cooperation with the Government) and sensationalist press'. In her view, although at that time the primary aim of newspapers was political agitation and propaganda, they still played a crucial role in integrating the local community. Furthermore, they were not only one of the 'most important instruments for shaping political and social attitudes' but also a 'significant source of knowledge about the new reality [...]'⁹.

According to data from T. Kot, a total of eighteen daily newspapers were published in Lublin between 1918 and 1939, six of which were local editions of nationwide titles¹⁰. A. Notkowski, on the other hand, states that during the same period, a total of 152 Polish-language periodicals appeared in Lublin between 1918 and 1939¹¹. In his view, local press served the society not only as an important source of information about events in the city and its surroundings but also as a 'tool of political propaganda and agitation'¹², while simultaneously contributing to the development of 'social initiatives and fulfilling the cultural aspirations of the local

⁷ A. Notkowski, *Prasa lubelska na tle czasopiśmiennictwa polskiego Drugiej Rzeczypospolitej*, "Kwartalnik Historii Prasy Polskiej" 1983, 22, 4, p. 49.

⁸ A.K. Gromek, *Dzieje prasy lubelskiej w l. 1800–1939*, in: *Prasa Lubelska. Tradycja i współczesność*, eds. J. Jarowiecki, J. Myśliński, A. Słomkowska, Lublin 1986, pp. 32–33.

⁹ H. Wojtyśiak, *op. cit.*, p. 143.

¹⁰ T. Kot, *op. cit.*, p. 274.

¹¹ A. Notkowski, *op. cit.*, p. 11.

¹² In Notkowski's opinion, 'the development of the Lublin press was decisively influenced by the configuration of political relations in the city. It was a faithful reflection of the fundamental tendencies of the country's public life. All the major Polish parties and political movements had their regional offices in Lublin. Based on the analysis of parliamentary and local government election results, it can be concluded that the Polish Socialist Party (PPS), the National Democracy, and, after 1926, the Piłsudski camp had the greatest influence in Lublin. On the other hand, the activities of the Communist Party and related legal organizations were also clearly visible'. *Ibidem*, p. 9.

intelligentsia'. According to Notkowski, 'it actively participated in the promotion of education and the cultivation of interest in the region – its history, folk culture, stimulating local curiosity (geography and sightseeing). It held an important place in local economic life – it opened its pages to information and advertisements in this field and was itself a factor in the development of the printing industry'¹³.

Nevertheless, according to Wojtysiak, the press in Lublin during the interwar period developed dynamically, with a characteristic feature of this process being constant changes in the publishing market: 'Titles appeared and disappeared, some went bankrupt due to economic reasons, while others were systematically harassed by state administration for their opposition to the ruling groups'¹⁴. Nevertheless, in her opinion, despite the aforementioned upheavals, the Lublin press market continued to expand its influence on society. She adds that the dynamics of these changes resulted in a lack of stability and permanence of particular titles. During this period, only "Głos Lubelski", "Express Lubelski" (from 1931 "Express Lubelsko-Wołyński"), and "Lubliner Tugblatt" were published for an extended time, while the existence of other dailies was limited: "Ziemia Lubelska" (published intermittently until 1931), "Kurier Poranny Lubelski" (1928–1939), "Express Ilustrowany" (1932–1939), "ABC Lublin" (1926–1931), "Gazeta Lubelska" (1931–1937), "Dzień Polski" (1919–1923), "Polska" (1931), "Kurier Lubelski" (1932; 1937), "Codzienny Kurier Lubelski" (1926), "Dziennik Lubelski" (1925), "Echo Lubelskie" (1931), "Nowa Ziemia Lubelska" (1932–1933), and "Robotnik Lubelski" (1936/1937)¹⁵.

When characterizing the content of the local press, Wojtysiak states that 'in the 1920s, mass-circulation newspapers were dominated by sensational news, advertisements, and 'light' literature. In the 1930s, the sensationalism of dailies somewhat diminished, due to the political engagement of the editorial boards of those papers'¹⁶. She explains the 'sensationalism' of the press by the fact that 'people enjoy gossip because it stimulates their imagination just like unverified or shocking reports'. She illustrates these observations with the example of "Gazeta Lubelska" (1931–1934), which, in her opinion, targeted 'the least educated part of society (according to statistics, about two-thirds of the population of the Lublin region could barely read), driven by emotions, readers susceptible to external suggestions, preferring sensational and entertaining content. [...] The pages were dominated by gossip, sensationalism, and crime stories, although

¹³ *Ibidem*, p. 50.

¹⁴ H. Wojtysiak, *op. cit.*, p. 147.

¹⁵ *Ibidem*.

¹⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 151.

important information about political events in the country and abroad, economic situation, and technological novelties also appeared'. Local news primarily consisted of 'reports from court trials, announcements about assaults, crimes, robberies, fires, etc.' as well as current events, such as 'staff changes in the Lublin administration, results of stockbroker examinations, meetings of the Union of Chambers of Industry and Commerce, unemployment rates in Lublin, or increases in food prices'¹⁷. After the name change in 1935 ("Gazeta Lubelska" to "Mały Express Lubelski"), 'the character of the daily remained unchanged, except for one expanded section, devoted to the turbulent lives of movie stars and exotic places captured in black-and-white photographs'¹⁸.

THE PICTURE OF THE COUNTRYSIDE PRESENTED IN THE LUBLIN PRESS

During the interwar period, within the Lublin Voivodeship, a diverse range of press was published, both general-political and specialized titles, targeted particularly at rural residents, alongside the newspapers available in the city of Lublin itself. As Notkowski observed: 'nearly all district towns in the voivodeship had local pro-government periodicals – socio-political weeklies or biweeklies', which limited the reach of Lublin-based publications of this type and made it difficult for them to compete with local titles. The most numerous group of pro-government media in the Lublin region consisted of publications aimed at the countryside, which were intended to play a significant role in shaping the attitudes and awareness of peasants. One example was "Jedność Ludowa", published until autumn 1927 with a circulation of 1300–1500 copies which played an important role in promoting pro-government ideas in rural areas. After its closure (1927–1928), pro-Sanation (pro-Sanacja) secessionists from the Peasant Party (including Marian Cieplak and Karol Polakiewicz) began publishing the weekly "Życie Chłopskie" which also had a regional edition in Dubno titled "Chłop-Wołyński"¹⁹. Another notable publication was a rural version of the main BBWR (Non-Partisan Bloc for Cooperation with the Government) newspaper, "Gospodarz Polski" which appeared in Lublin as "Gazeta Gospodarcza Lubelskiego" (1933–1934) with a circulation of 500 copies. Its editor was Jan Chômiez, head of the Lublin County Council of the BBWR. Additionally, the Sanation-aligned Society of Agricultural Organizations

¹⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 159.

¹⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 161.

¹⁹ A. Notkowski, *op. cit.*, pp. 44–45.

and Circles (Związek Organizacji i Kółek Rolniczych) published the monthly "Wiadomości Lubelskich Organizacji Rolniczych" (1936–1937) with a circulation of 3500 copies, edited by Jadwiga Sękowska. The local branch of the Central Union of Rural Youth "Siew" also released several issues of the biweekly "Siewiarz Lubelski"²⁰ in 1934.

Alongside explicitly political publications, specialized titles were particularly prominent among the press aimed at rural communities. Examples include "Wiadomości Rolnicze" – a biannual journal of the Lublin Chamber of Agriculture (1934–1935), later replaced in 1936 by "Wiadomości Lubelskich Organizacji Rolniczych" and the beekeeping monthly "Pasieka" (1931). These publications served not only an informational function but also an educational one, providing readers with expert knowledge on farming. Though highly specialized, they contributed to broader press-driven efforts to modernize the rural areas and improve living conditions of their residents²¹.

The peasant press, both at the national and local levels, served numerous functions. As Paczkowski notes: 'Most peasant publications took the form of thematic «omnibuses»', combining goals imposed by party needs with the expectations of their readers. A defining feature of these publications was their extensive coverage of agricultural expertise, occupying a significant portion of their content. Editors provided space for expert lectures, listings of agricultural commodity prices, as well as advice on tax, inheritance, or construction law²². Furthermore, the organization of content in peasant press reflected the needs of its specific audience. In larger publications, especially national ones, extensive sections appeared dedicated to issues concerning, among others, women²³, youth,

²⁰ *Ibidem*.

²¹ *Ibidem*, p. 46.

²² A. Paczkowski, *op. cit.*, s. 172.

²³ For example: "Siewiarz Lubelski" 1934, no. 2, pp. 2–3. The text (submitted to a competition organized by the Rural Youth Union) not only depicted the realities of rural life but also drew attention to social inequalities and the need to improve the situation of women. It can be said that it is a model example of a description of women's work on rural farms and a comparison of their conditions with those of women living in cities. In the article, the author shares her observations from a visit to her cousin in the city, highlighting the disproportionate burden of duties placed on rural women. As we read: 'The urban lady told me that she has to get up in the morning and tidy up a few rooms, and then she has a lot of running around in the kitchen [...] And when everything is ready, the urban lady sits down on the sofa and does various handicrafts or reads the newspaper, or maybe goes for a walk, visits someone, or goes to the cinema'. Meanwhile, a rural woman, according to the account, rises at dawn to feed the poultry, prepare meals for the whole family, and often also tend to the cows in the barn. In addition, she must fetch water from the well,

members of agricultural circles and cooperatives, as well as local governance. Some major weeklies even featured academic and children's sections, yet local publications offered a narrower scope, with a primary focus on professional and administrative matters²⁴.

The peasant press also functioned as a 'political school', adapted to the realities of the political struggle in the interest of the party it represented. According to Paczkowski: 'Political content, whether programmatic, tactical, or manipulative, filled its pages to a considerable degree. This politicization often led, particularly during periods of extreme fragmentation within the peasant movement, to its transformation into a 'politicizing' press, where ad hominem and demagogic polemics set the tone of entire publications'²⁵.

Broadly speaking, the interwar Lublin press, including the titles targeting rural audiences, played a crucial role in shaping political, social, and economic attitudes. It was a multidimensional tool combining informational, educational, and propagandistic functions. Despite financial and organizational constraints, these publications became a vital part of public life in the Lublin region, influencing its development and residents. On one hand, government-aligned publications and the popular press served as a political school for rural communities, disseminating both broad programs and specific organizational directives. On the other hand, through expert materials and specialist advice, editors addressed practical needs of the readers while simultaneously building a specific thematic repertoire characteristic of regional press. This functional complexity meant that the press was not merely a source of information but also a consciously designed instrument for mobilizing and shaping local political and social identity.

tidy up the house, and during the agricultural season, join in the harvest, potato digging, or beetroot gathering. These tasks continue throughout the day, and in the evening, there still remains a whole range of other activities, such as laundry, butter-making, sewing, or mending. The article *The Work of a Rural Woman* aptly illustrates the role of the peasant press during the interwar period. Magazines like "Siewiarz Lubelski" not only provided current news but also sensitized readers to various aspects of social life, thus becoming a tool for shaping public opinion and attitudes. Furthermore, by organizing competitions and publishing texts submitted by readers themselves, the editorial teams strengthened the sense of community and encouraged social engagement.

²⁴ A. Paczkowski, *op. cit.*, p. 173.

²⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 184.

THE COUNTRYSIDE FACING CHALLENGES: POVERTY, ILLITERACY, AND INEQUALITY

The authors of most articles in the broadly understood Lublin press—in this case exemplified by the texts published primarily in “*Życie Lubelskie*”, address the dire situation of the Polish countryside and emphasize the urgent need for action to improve the living conditions of farmers. For instance, the article *Let’s Pay Attention—The Countryside Awaits Rescue*²⁶ (*Zwróćmy uwagę – Wieś czeka ratunku*) criticizes systemic neglect and the lack of effective reforms supporting rural communities. The author argues that the failure to invest in rural infrastructure, education, and healthcare has exacerbated civilizational backwardness. He stresses that the problem remains insufficiently recognized, that rural neglect is systemic, and that the lack of action only deepens the crisis: ‘The issue of the countryside, its material life and ideological stance, should become the foremost concern of the noblest minds. In the portrait of Polish reality, the countryside appears as a hopelessly dark stain’²⁷.

The article highlights the limited economic means of peasants, forced to economize on everything, which negatively affects their quality of life and the development of their farms: ‘The peasant reduces his personal expenses below the permissible and possible minimum. The figures are shocking in their stark brutality’²⁸.

The article further notes that reduced farm expenditure leads to stagnation and regression, while the lack of investment in rural infrastructure, education, and healthcare widens the urban-rural divide: ‘The current economic approach is selectively devastating, leading to the complete destruction of agriculture’²⁹.

The author warns that continued neglect of rural issues could have catastrophic consequences for both agriculture and the national economy, suggesting that further degradation will result in social and economic collapse, harming the entire nation: ‘Therefore, ignoring the peasantry may have far-reaching consequences’³⁰.

At the same time, the text emphasizes the need for investment, cooperative initiatives, and improvement of living conditions of peasants. By painting a dramatic picture of the situation in the Polish countryside, the author highlights its neglect and the consequences of underinvestment.

²⁶ “*Życie Lubelskie*” [hereinafter: “*ŻŁ*”] 1935, no. 18, p. 2.

²⁷ *Ibidem*.

²⁸ *Ibidem*.

²⁹ *Ibidem*.

³⁰ *Ibidem*.

He calls for urgent changes and reforms to ensure farmers a dignified life and the growth of their farms. His message is clear—if Poland fails to take care of its rural areas, it will face a serious socio-economic crisis³¹.

Meanwhile, the article *Lack of Intelligentsia in the Countryside* (*Brak inteligencji na wsi*) addresses the issue of the insufficient number of educated individuals in rural areas, which negatively impacts the socio-economic development of these regions. The author emphasizes that 'it is to be feared that no improvement in this regard will occur in the near future'. The causes of this phenomenon include limited access to education and the low interest of urban intelligentsia settling in rural areas. Then the author cites statistical data indicating significant disparities: 'out of 1851 lawyers, only 1.6% reside in the countryside', and similarly, 'out of 9244 doctors, only 46.7% have settled in non-urban areas'. The problem also affects children of farmers, of whom only 15.6% attend vocational schools, which increases the risk of socio-economic stagnation in rural areas, especially since 'educated young people often left the countryside, settling in cities'. The author indicates that this phenomenon has led to a shortage of personnel capable of modernizing agriculture and fostering social development. Consequently, the article advocates for the establishment of vocational schools in rural areas and incentives for young people to return by providing better working and living conditions³². The author presents statistics revealing a significant disproportion between the number of educated individuals in cities and rural areas. He emphasizes 'educational inequality' and the significant migration of young people from rural areas to cities. In his view, this fact demonstrates that those who receive higher education, due to a lack of opportunities, do not return to rural areas but rather settle in major cities. The author notes that even when rural youth pursue vocational education, they most often do not return to their hometowns. The absence of development opportunities and prospects for the intelligentsia in rural areas discourages the younger generation from seeing any value in returning and contributing to their local communities. The most striking issue highlighted in the article is the vast inequality in access to education between rural and urban children. The cited statistics show that: 'Out of 387 300 schoolchildren, only 55 800 – or 15.6% are children of farmers.' The author stresses that the lack of educated individuals in rural areas negatively affects agricultural development and farm modernization: 'it is no wonder that our small-scale farmers reject any progress in their work, applying methods from

³¹ *Ibidem*.

³² "ŻL" 1935, no. 18, p. 4.

100 or more years ago'. In his opinion, the low level of education is the reason for the farmers' lack of openness to innovation.

However, the article not only diagnoses the problem but also suggests possible solutions. The author argues that the key lies in establishing vocational schools in rural areas and encouraging young people to return by offering them better employment and living conditions. Otherwise: 'Under such circumstances, our countryside should not grow stronger, but we must ensure we do not lack anything'. To summarize, the article highlights a serious systemic issue—the outflow of intelligentsia from rural to urban areas and educational inequalities that hinder rural development. It draws attention to the necessity of investing in rural education and infrastructure in order to reverse this negative trend³³.

In another text from this period – *On the Intelligentsia Emerging from the Working Class (O inteligencji z ludu)*, the author also addresses the issue of access to education and the intelligentsia originating from the underprivileged social classes. The author criticizes the elitism of the educational system and emphasizes that rural development should be based on ensuring broad access to learning, which would foster the emergence of new intelligentsia drawn from the common people. This article was part of broader reflections on the possibilities of social advancement for peasants—a key topic in public debate during the interwar period. The author argues that education is a crucial factor enabling rural residents to improve their lives and gain greater influence on the future of the country. He refers, among other things, to discussions in the conservative and National Democratic press, which questioned whether those from rural backgrounds and lower social strata could achieve intellectual progress. The issue is not merely theoretical, as the countryside constantly struggles with limited access to education. As the author notes: 'Shouldn't education aim to combat inequality and guarantee equal opportunities for all?' He draws attention to the difficulties faced by rural youth seeking education, pointing to economic barriers and a lack of institutional support which often trap peasants within their own communities, with no opportunity for social mobility. The author suggests that these problems stem primarily from the economic crisis which has restricted educational opportunities even for wealthier families: 'The issue of the inflow of intelligentsia emerging from the countryside has already faced significant constraints, and the decisive role here was played by the economic crisis, which made it impossible for peasants, even the wealthier ones, to educate their children'. He adds that what matters more than the mere influx of intelligentsia from the common people is the general

³³ *Ibidem*.

development of intelligentsia and ensuring broad access to education. Society, he emphasizes, should not confine education to the elite but support the advancement of all citizens: 'Solving this issue is the necessity of the day, and thus it should become one of the symbols of the humble hospital room where thoughtful doctors from the common people gather'. In the concluding section, the author calls for equality in access to education and for active participation of people from all social strata in the intellectual life of the country³⁴.

Meanwhile, in another article, *The Pressing Issue* (*Palące zagadnienie*), the problem of migration of rural youth to cities and its consequences for rural development is addressed. The text draws attention to the negative effects of this phenomenon, both for rural areas and the young people themselves. The author emphasizes that young individuals who acquire education in cities often remain there, weakening rural social and economic structures: 'An observer of Polish rural life cannot overlook the damaging phenomenon: rural youth who complete secondary or higher educational institutions, often at the cost of unspeakable material effort on the part of their parents, actually become entirely lost to the community from which they came'. He notes that this process not only harms the countryside but also exacerbates the problems of the urban intelligentsia proletariat. According to the author, educated young people who cannot find jobs matching their qualifications are forced to undertake low-paying employment, which leads to frustration: 'This is adding to the swelling ranks of the urban intelligentsia proletariat, which, due to the ongoing economic crisis, is deprived not only of the opportunity to properly utilize acquired knowledge but is also economically condemned to long hours of menial labor'. The author questions whether it is truly necessary for rural youth to leave their hometowns if there are no viable prospects for them there: 'We wonder whether these young people must necessarily seek their place, often merely a means of subsistence, beyond the city cobblestones?' He also points to the problem of a lack of appropriate institutions and job opportunities in rural areas that could retain young people. In his opinion, it is crucial to create mechanisms enabling their employment and active participation in the local social and economic life: 'During various discussions on agriculture, the issue of improving farm profitability through the establishment of cooperatives exporting agricultural products is often raised'. In his view, the absence of proper structures in rural areas makes it impossible for young people to find employment or develop their skills there. The article also emphasizes the importance of economic and political organizations in the countryside

³⁴ "ŻŁ" 1935, no. 8, p. 6.

that could help to resolve this challenge, pointing to the need for strengthening local institutions. The author suggests that one potential solution to this problem might be the development of economic and political organizations in rural areas that would help young people to find jobs and engage in local community life. The text draws attention to the negative consequences of migration of rural youth to cities. In the author's view, instead of becoming the intellectual capital of the countryside, educated youth often end up in cities where they cannot utilize their skills. The author emphasizes the need for rural development through creating jobs and establishing appropriate organizational framework that would allow young people to remain in their home regions³⁵.

MODERNIZATION OF RURAL AREAS: 'HEALTHY SYMPTOMS' AND DEVELOPMENT OF COOPERATIVES

The analyzed materials indicate an economic crisis that particularly severely affected agriculture, which was reflected in the income disparity between industry and rural areas. For example, according to statistics cited by one of the authors³⁶, per capita income in industry amounted to 5687 zlotys, while in agriculture it was only 1025 zlotys. These vast inequalities led to the deepening pauperization of farmers: 'The countryside was formerly a consumer of industrial and craft products, today, only the rural sector can help to achieve economic harmony by enabling the revival and renewal of industrial and craft producers'³⁷.

In the Lublin press, numerous articles appeared in this context – on one hand, drawing attention to the fact that the development of the country's entire economy depended on improving the situation in rural areas, on the other, pointing to the necessity of changing economic policy and increasing support for farmers, as well as emphasizing progress and modernization of rural areas. The article *Healthy Symptoms*³⁸ (*Zdrowe objawy*) highlighted positive transformations – the growing awareness of peasants, their initiatives to improve economic conditions, and increased interest in modern agricultural methods. The article portrayed rural residents as people striving to modernize their lives, engaging in cooperative activities, and undertaking educational and organizational efforts. It was emphasized that those

³⁵ "ŻL" 1935, no. 9, p. 4.

³⁶ "ŻL" 1935, no. 20, p. 6.

³⁷ *Ibidem*.

³⁸ "ŻL" 1935, no. 8, p. 2.

changes were not solely the result of the government actions but also the effect of grassroots initiatives of rural communities.

Similar reflections could be found in the article *Social Advancement*³⁹ (*Awans społeczny*) which discussed the growing aspirations of rural residents. According to the author, an increasing number of peasants sought education, actively participated in political and social life, and migrated to cities in search of better living conditions. Both texts depicted the countryside as an environment open to change and modernization, where residents ceased to be merely passive participants in economic life and began to influence the fate of the state.

In another article – *The Starting Point for Rural Development*⁴⁰ (*Punkt wyjścia rozwoju wsi*), which analyzed the situation of the Polish countryside in the interwar period and attempted to define its paths of development, the author notes both the difficulties and the potential inherent in the rural population. He draws attention to the poverty, crisis, and lack of prospects for farmers, but simultaneously recognizes their determination in seeking solutions: 'The present-day face of the rural landscape looks intriguing. Its mental attitude, its intentions, its will, shaped under a heavy hammer of poverty, mistakes, and everything that is today commonly called crisis – on the one hand, expresses itself in the rejection of the current state, in disappointments and rebellion, and, on the other hand, in the search for positive ways out of an extremely difficult situation'⁴¹.

The author identifies key problems hindering rural development: lack of organization and effective management. In his view, farmers lack strong self-help structures that could effectively counteract the crisis, while the existing organizations are insufficient and poorly managed. Political neglect and lack of state support, he believes, stem from the fact that politicians fail to recognize the potential of rural areas and do not implement effective reforms, while peasants themselves are not sufficiently active in political life, which leads to poor representation of their demands. The author emphasizes that one of the most important steps to improve the rural situation is education and intellectual development of peasants: 'To thrive, the countryside requires strong organization, proactive solidarity-based initiatives, and full mobilization of its core resources. Through educational work, folk culture promoted by Village Youth Circles, Agricultural Schools, People's Houses, Folk High Schools, through activity within professional agricultural organizations – be it in Agricultural

³⁹ *Ibidem*.

⁴⁰ "ŻŁ" 1936, no. 10, p. 5.

⁴¹ *Ibidem*.

Circles, Rural Housewives' Circles, or Cooperatives – a healthy rural movement is to be built'⁴².

In his conviction, rural development should be based on education encompassing both agricultural schooling and grassroots initiatives, like economic circles or cooperatives, as well as better organization within rural communities. The author advocates creating various associations and cooperatives that would help farmers manage their resources and production: 'The peasants will occupy all those positions that give them strength, create a platform where their participation in state affairs can influence political organization, as the economic development is like the culmination of their hard work–beneficial both for the countryside and the entire state'⁴³.

The author indicates that politicians often neglected rural issues, while peasants themselves were not always active in pursuing changes. He criticizes both the mistakes of those in power and the overly passive attitude of rural residents: 'The consequences are now evident for the political factions that ignored the need to develop and enhance all facets of rural life. The lack of a real foundation for these political groups, beyond mere politicking and demagogy, has negated all their efforts'⁴⁴.

The aforementioned articles combine an analysis of socio-economic problems with a clear appeal for greater peasant involvement in the development of their communities. Their authors call for education, organization, and self-help, and simultaneously criticize politicians for the lack of concrete actions to support rural areas. Alongside analyses highlighting the economic hardships faced by rural residents, the authors of these texts proposed constructive solutions to overcome these challenges and emphasized the positive changes occurring in rural areas.

ECONOMIC PROBLEMS AND STRUGGLE FOR A BETTER FUTURE

A number of journalistic analyses emphasized the economic difficulties experienced by rural communities. For example, the article *Farmers in the Future Sejm /Parliament*⁴⁵ (*Rolnicy w przyszłym Sejmie*) highlighted the issues related to the profitability of agriculture and the need for farmers to actively engage in politics to ensure that their interests were effectively represented. It indicated that merely waiting for government action

⁴² *Ibidem*.

⁴³ *Ibidem*.

⁴⁴ *Ibidem*.

⁴⁵ "ŻŁ" 1935, no. 8, p. 3.

was insufficient and that establishing agricultural organizations and cooperatives was necessary to better fight for the rights of rural communities.

The issue of farmers' debt, in turn, was the subject of the article *Attention Farmers! Relief for State Debtors*⁴⁶ (*Uwaga rolnicy! Ulgi dla dłużników Skarbu Państwa*). It outlined the government measures aimed at assisting farms through partial debt forgiveness and easier repayment of remaining obligations. The article stressed that the new regulations were a step toward improving the economic situation in rural areas, though they did not solve all the problems faced by peasants who still had to struggle with the economic crisis. The author cites regulations issued by the Ministry of Agriculture and Land reform based on a decree by the President of the Republic of Poland of October 24, 1934, concerning the conversion of agricultural debts. Their main objective was to support farmers by canceling part of the debt and facilitating the repayment of the remainder. According to the author, the relief measures were intended particularly for those who had taken out loans for farm development: 'in particular for the benefit of (livestock) breeding and plant production (orchard farming and horticulture)'. The author emphasizes that the relief includes, among other things, 'full forgiveness of all unpaid loans', as well as a 50% debt cancellation for Housing Cooperatives. Additionally, remaining debts could be spread over installments and partially discharged depending on the financial situation of the debtors. The article also notes that, in exceptional cases, the repayment period could be further extended with the approval of the Ministry of Agriculture. It was also mentioned that administrative costs related to loan interest rates were reduced from 3% to 2%, further facilitating repayment. The article concludes that the new regulations represent 'another step by the government toward rural debt relief and improving the situation of farmers' who were struggling with economic hardships⁴⁷.

Meanwhile, the article *Healthy Symptoms*⁴⁸ (*Zdrowe objawy*) is focused on positive transformations taking place in the countryside. Although in previous decades rural areas were mainly perceived through the lens of backwardness and difficult living conditions, the author draws attention to the growing strength and awareness among peasants. He writes about 'decent innovations' and efforts to improve economic and social conditions. The article suggests that the countryside is emerging from the crisis not only due to temporary external aid but also due to the independent initiatives of local communities, which is a significant sign

⁴⁶ "ŻL", 1935, no. 7, p. 7.

⁴⁷ *Ibidem*.

⁴⁸ "ŻL" 1935, no. 8, p. 2.

of development: "In recent times, rural areas have clearly grown in significance and strength [...] Well-considered innovations and new approaches demonstrate their solid potential for development'.

Such 'healthy symptoms', according to the author, may indicate a growing interest in modern agricultural methods, increased activity in self-help organizations (e.g., cooperatives), or the involvement of young people in various forms of associations. The article also emphasizes the need for constant improvement and maintaining the trend of change to avoid a relapse into crisis⁴⁹.

The article *Social Advancement*⁵⁰ (*Awans społeczny*), addresses the transformations in rural areas, focusing on the possibility of improving the social status of their residents. The author argues that peasants should play an important role in the political and economic life of the country, not just as a labor force but also as conscious citizens: 'The state and its institutions neglected the needs of the countryside in the past, but today, the peasants themselves increasingly strive for education, participation in public life, and acquiring new skills'⁵¹. In this way, the press highlighted the growing aspirations of rural residents: the pursuit of education, interest in politics, and even migration to cities in search of better conditions⁵².

Both *Healthy Symptoms* and *Social Advancement* demonstrate the crucial role played by the interwar press in shaping and promoting ideas of modernization and social activation in rural areas. It not only reported on events and changes⁵³ but also served as a tool for: building identity among rural residents, encouraging self-governance and public engagement, and strengthening educational and economic aspirations. At the same time, such publications functioned as a kind of manifesto—signaling that the countryside had no intention of trailing behind and that its residents were increasingly boldly demanding better living conditions. Press materials reveal the positive dynamics of change in the Polish countryside during the interwar period. On the one hand, they speak of 'healthy symptoms': new initiatives, innovations, and growing awareness among peasants—on the other hand, they emphasize the issue of 'social advancement': the pursuit of education, greater participation in public life, and improved living standards.

⁴⁹ *Ibidem*.

⁵⁰ "ŻŁ" 1935, no. 8, p. 2.

⁵¹ *Ibidem*.

⁵² *Ibidem*.

⁵³ For example: *ibidem*.

COOPERATIVISM AS A RESPONSE TO RURAL PROBLEMS

In the context of seeking solutions to socio-economic challenges in rural areas, the authors of the articles highlight the role of the cooperative movement. Cooperatives were meant to be not only a means of organizing trade and distribution but also a tool for modernizing and educating rural communities: 'Only through joint effort and solidarity-based cooperation of all working people can better forms of life and material prosperity be achieved'⁵⁴.

Cooperatives were intended to enable more efficient distribution of goods, increase economic efficiency, and educate farmers in modern methods of cultivation and livestock breeding. They were also seen as a key element in overcoming the economic crisis and strengthening the economic independence of the countryside. It was emphasized that they played a pivotal role in enhancing agricultural trade, especially as the 1920s saw dynamic growth in agricultural and dairy cooperatives in the Lublin region. 'The Lublin countryside found itself within the structures of the cooperative movement', with every district operating cooperatives such as "Rolnik" or those dedicated to trading pigs and cattle⁵⁵. However, the articles also mention the problems these organizations faced due to the economic crisis of the 1930s which led to the dissolution of many cooperatives and a return to older forms of trade through intermediaries and small-scale traders. Some articles pointed to the need for reorganizing the agricultural market and better training for personnel involved in cooperative trade and management. 'Today, the cooperative movement in the Lublin region requires far-reaching changes', implying the necessity of centralization and tighter oversight of these organizations⁵⁶.

The author of the article *Adapting the rural environment to cooperative farming practices*⁵⁷ (Przystosowanie spółdzielcze na wsi) focuses on the role of cooperative organizations in modernizing and integrating rural communities. He notes that 'this phenomenon is an undeniable proof that the awareness of the bankruptcy of existing socio-economic forms is deepening'. The article emphasizes the importance of youth organizations that introduce new models of cooperation based on cooperative principles. The role of cooperativism is particularly highlighted in the context of education and preparation for modern agriculture. The author indicates that 'only through joint effort and the united cooperation

⁵⁴ "ŻL" 1936, no. 10, p. 8.

⁵⁵ "ŻL" 1936, no. 6, p. 4; no. 9, p. 5.

⁵⁶ *Ibidem*.

⁵⁷ "ŻL" 1936, no. 10, p. 8.

of all working people can better forms of life and material prosperity be achieved'. A crucial aspect here is also the organizational structure of cooperatives which requires a controlled management system and education of the community in new farming methods⁵⁸.

In another text *The Development of Cooperativism and the Progress of the Countryside* (*Rozwój Spółdzielczości a postęp wsi*)⁵⁹, the author emphasized the significance of cooperativism as a tool for rural modernization. He criticized traditional methods of trade which often led to low prices and abuse by intermediaries, and advocated for the creation of agricultural cooperatives that could increase the income of farmers. The article highlights the need for economic education and better organization of the agricultural market, which was expected to improve the material situation of rural areas. Focusing on economic issues concerning the Polish countryside, the author emphasizes the importance of cooperativism as a tool for both economic and social development. He also draws attention to one of the biggest challenges that farmers faced – the sale of agricultural produce. He writes: 'For hundreds of years, rural areas have grown accustomed to selling their products individually, at local markets and fairs or to traveling merchants. This is the most irrational form of distribution'. At the same time, he highlights the difficulties arising from the lack of sales organization and the negative effects of individual trade, which often resulted in low prices and exploitation by intermediaries. The author argues that the development of cooperativism should be a key factor in improving the material situation of rural areas: 'The cooperative model represents a more advanced form of processing and sales, as it handles all procedures and responsibilities that exceed the capabilities of an individual farmer'⁶⁰.

The article also criticizes the role of intermediaries who often took advantage of the farmers' limited economic awareness: 'Particularly in Poland, small-scale agriculture falls victim to organized middlemen and processors in the form of various associations, such as butchers, slaughterers, bakers, and the like'. According to the author, farmers should establish their own processing plants and cooperatives to gain independence from profiteers. The text also highlights other initiatives, such as the organization of agricultural stores which enabled farmers to increase their income and become independent from external economic entities: 'In 1932, I proposed establishing a small agricultural circle store in our commune, which received strong support... and with cash in hand, we set up the

⁵⁸ *Ibidem*.

⁵⁹ "ŻŁ" 1935, no. 17, p. 2.

⁶⁰ *Ibidem*.

store which I manage to this day when writing this account'⁶¹. The author adds that in the 1930s, as the economic crisis intensified, many of these cooperatives collapsed. The lack of adequate state support and economic difficulties led to the liquidation of numerous organizations, resulting in a return to older, less efficient forms of sales through intermediaries and small-scale traders: 'The liquidation of some Agricultural-Trade Cooperatives "Rolnik" undermined the trust among conscious members not only in local cooperatives but also in the very idea of cooperation'⁶².

Meanwhile, the text *Current Tasks of the Agricultural Self-Government*⁶³ (*Aktualne zadania Samorządu Rolniczego*) focused on the difficult situation of agriculture caused by falling prices of agricultural products and decreasing incomes of farmers. The author emphasized economic problems (declining animal productivity, reduced livestock and crop production, high production costs, lack of investment capital, difficulties in obtaining loans) and proposed solutions (increasing productivity through mechanization, developing animal husbandry, improving the quality of agricultural products). The article points to the crucial role of agricultural organizations (local governments should support farmers, e.g., by establishing cooperatives to facilitate sales and processing). The author stresses that the future of agriculture depends on self-organization of farmers and their ability to adapt to new economic conditions. However, he noted that without systemic support and better resource management, the crisis would deepen⁶⁴.

In another article – *The Organization of the Sale of Agricultural Produce in the Lublin Region* (*Organizacja zbytu płodów rolnych w Lubelszczyźnie*), the author presents the history and then-current problems of organizing the sale of agricultural produce in the Lublin region. The author emphasizes that even before regaining independence, Polish farmers attempted to independently organize the sale of their products, drawing inspiration from Western European models: 'The issue of organizing and streamlining the distribution of agricultural produce in Poland, as early as a dozen or so years before regaining independence, was attempted to be solved by the producers themselves- the farmers'⁶⁵.

⁶¹ *Ibidem*.

⁶² "ŻL" 1936, no. 6, p. 4; no. 9, p. 5.

⁶³ "ŻL" 1935, no. 22, p. 3.

⁶⁴ *Ibidem*.

⁶⁵ "ŻL" 1936, no. 6, p. 4; no. 9, p. 5.

SOCIAL AND POLITICAL ASPIRATIONS OF RURAL RESIDENTS

The Lublin press also drew attention to the growing social and political aspirations of rural residents. In the article *Social Advancement*⁶⁶, the author emphasized that peasants were increasingly striving to acquire education, participate in public life, and improve their social status. The author noted that rural areas had no intention of falling behind and were becoming more assertive in demanding better living conditions. The press played a crucial role in this process by reporting on changes and encouraging self-governance and civic engagement.

The author of the article *Farmers in the Future Sejm / Parliament* addresses the issue of agriculture and its role in Polish politics and economy. He emphasizes that restoring the profitability of agriculture was one of the most significant economic challenges, although not an easy one, as the economic crisis affected not only Poland but the entire world. The article points to the mutual dependence of global economies and the difficult situation of farmers who faced numerous hardships. The author draws attention to the need for joint action by farmers, the government, and society as a whole to improve agricultural conditions and prevent the catastrophic effects of the crisis. He criticizes passive waiting for government intervention, indicating that political decisions by themselves are insufficient, unless backed by strong public engagement. The second part of the article focuses on the role of farmers in the future Sejm. The author notes that political parties often compile candidate lists without considering whether the nominees have real connections with agriculture. He believes that without adequate representation of farmers in parliament, their interests may be neglected in national policymaking. He also highlights the necessity of electing individuals who truly understand rural issues and will advocate for them. The article calls for the creation of agricultural and cooperative organizations that could more effectively represent farmers' interests and influence political and economic decisions. It concludes with the observation that only active involvement of farmers in politics and local governance can improve their situation, and that parliamentary elections present an opportunity to genuinely shape national agricultural policy⁶⁷.

The countryside in politics and media – an object of manipulation or a conscious actor?

⁶⁶ "ŻŁ" 1935, no. 8, s. 2.

⁶⁷ *Ibidem*.

A number of texts from the period, such as *Peasants – People’s Party – Elections*⁶⁸ (*Chłopi – Stronnictwo Ludowe – Wybory*), focused on the issue of political manipulation during the election periods, particularly on how opposition press portrayed the situation of the peasantry. According to the author, certain newspapers, including tabloids, deliberately exaggerated the economic hardships of rural areas to gain support for opposition groups. They painted an overly bleak picture of ‘peasant poverty’ to emphasize the negative aspects of the government’s economic policies towards the countryside: ‘Foreign opposition press, even of a distinctly tabloid nature, publishes articles depicting peasant misery in grim colors, with particular emphasis on the negative aspects of the current economic situation in Polish villages’⁶⁹. The author argues that these publications do not aim to genuinely improve peasants’ lives but serve as a tool in a political game. The real concern for peasants is absent – it is all about political manipulation: ‘This press does not reach the peasantry, and thus articles about peasant poverty are not aimed at making an impact on rural populations who know their own situation better than the esteemed editors of daily newspapers’. The opposition press suggests that the government is to blame for the economic struggles of rural areas, allegedly leading peasants to boycott elections and support opposition parties like the National Party or PPS (Polish Socialist Party). In his view, these newspapers address their content not to rural residents themselves, but to urban public opinion, implying that peasants are collectively boycotting elections due to the difficult economic situation: ‘Readers are led to believe that peasants are supposedly boycotting elections – as if 72% of the population, the entire rural community en masse, suddenly supports the opposition, the National Party, or PPS’⁷⁰. The author firmly opposes this distorted narrative, arguing that this press fails to understand the real issues facing rural communities: ‘This press does not reach the peasants, so articles about peasant poverty are not aimed at making an impact on the rural population who know their own situation better than the esteemed editors of daily newspapers’. The concluding part of the article points to the earlier disregard of the peasants by the same newspapers that now suddenly claim to be ‘concerned’ about them. Previously, they were inclined to mock rural residents, suggesting that they were backward and unfit for modern life, only to suddenly claim to be ‘concerned’ about them: ‘No one talks about pianos used as storage for clutter or threadbare armchairs holding potatoes anymore, but the malicious remarks about peasant

⁶⁸ “ŻŁ” 1935, no. 7, p. 2.

⁶⁹ *Ibidem*.

⁷⁰ *Ibidem*.

profiteering remain'. The article exposes how opposition media exploit rural issues for political gain. According to the author, real problems of peasants are ignored, while their situation is deliberately exaggerated to weaken the government and increase support of the opposition. The message is clear: rural residents are not naive and can assess their own circumstances without the propaganda disseminated by urban journalists. The text aims to unmask the instrumentalization of rural issues by the opposition, emphasizing that the countryside is far more aware of its situation than 'urban commentators' might assume⁷¹.

Another article, while presenting the history of the Polish countryside and drawing attention to its civilizational backwardness, diagnoses that these stem from centuries of serfdom and a lack of political independence. According to the author, for centuries, rural areas remained in a state of dependency, which led to a low level of social organization. The criticism of peasant parties which, in the author's view, failed to effectively act in favor of land reforms, and the absence of a unified political program resulted in chaotic and inconsistent rural policies. In view of this, the author calls for greater involvement of farmers in politics, local governance, and the economy, arguing that only in this way can real change be achieved⁷².

CONCLUSIONS

It might seem that the broadly understood Lublin press of the interwar period would extensively cover rural issues and the situation of its residents, given that the Lublin region was largely agricultural, and thus the countryside and its problems constituted a significant element of socio-economic life. Meanwhile, the local press, whether peasant, national, or leftist in orientation, did indeed address issues related to rural life, but this was more often linked to the measures taken by the authorities, such as the land reform, rather than the problems faced by peasants: poverty, rural overpopulation, unemployment, or technological backwardness, although these issues undoubtedly should have been a significant public concern. The topic of 'land reform', being one of the fundamental political issues of the era, did appear in the press, but it was rather a tool of propaganda on the part of the patrons of these newspapers (the National Democracy movement, the peasant movement, or the left) or the authorities, than an authentic show of concern

⁷¹ *Ibidem*.

⁷² "ŻŁ" 1936, no. 7, p. 11.

for rural communities. Discussions about improving rural conditions or advocating for peasants' rights, as well as calls for modernization, emerged mainly in publications tied to the peasant movement—although even there, they often served as elements of political agitation and struggle. In this role, although to a lesser extent, the press addressed broader social issues plaguing rural Poland, such as illiteracy, limited or nonexistent access to education and healthcare, as well as broadly understood infrastructure. Articles on folk culture, rural traditions, or the role of peasants in shaping national identity appeared sporadically. To a somewhat greater extent, although this does not mean such articles were a common feature in the press, local newspapers of the time portrayed Polish rural life through largely stereotypical narratives. On the one hand, these stories did highlight the unique role of the countryside in preserving traditions and moral values. On the other hand, they emphasized rural backwardness and poverty. One can say that the articles and mentions in the Lublin press were more interested in presenting the socio-economic problems of the countryside in the context of current events and should be viewed as elements of political struggle rather than genuine attempts to shape social awareness and policy. It was primarily the social and political tensions of the time, and during the 1920s and 1930s peasant issues were frequently subjects of public debate, that determined the presence (or absence) of topics related to rural conditions and the lives of village residents. Economic problems, land reform, and associated political demands were key components of this narrative, especially in the newspapers linked to the ruling camp and the peasant movement. In this context, the press primarily featured articles about the need to modernize agriculture, raise the level of rural education, and combat illiteracy. Rural cooperatives were also promoted as a means to enhance the economic situation of peasants. Broadly speaking, while the interwar Lublin press did address rural issues, the manner in which these topics were presented depended on the ideological profile of a given title. Several main narrative trends can be identified in this regard:

- the countryside as an area of poverty and backwardness (particularly emphasized in leftist and peasant press, emphasizing the difficult living conditions of peasants, hunger, poverty, technological backwardness, lack of access to education and healthcare; literacy problems and insufficient number of schools in villages were underscored, while the press associated with the peasant movement also pointed to the inadequate results of land reform);
- the countryside as a bastion of traditional values (primarily prominent in the Catholic press, e.g., *"Głos Lubelski"*, and national press,

portraying rural areas as a stronghold of religiosity, patriotism, and Christian morality);

- the countryside facing economic problems and land reform (including difficulties in repaying agricultural loans, high taxes, and the effects of the 1930s economic crisis; attention was drawn to issues with access to agricultural market and competition from cheap foreign import; while national and conservative press expressed concerns that the division of landed estates led to the weakening of national economy.);

- social and political tensions in rural areas (leftist and peasant press publicized peasant protests and strikes, criticizing police brutality during pacifications; conflicts between peasants and landowners, as well as the struggle of the peasantry for greater in political life were described; whereas conservative and pro-government press often depicted peasant movements as a threat to the public order);

- rural modernization and peasant education (articles promoting technological progress in agriculture, the development of rural cooperatives, and efforts to educate peasants; pro-government press praised state policies toward rural areas, highlighting the construction of new schools and roads, also electrification of certain regions);

- the cultural image of the countryside (primarily texts on folklore, rural customs, and religious traditions of the Lublin region).

In conclusion, it should be emphasized once more that the Lublin press of the interwar period presented a heterogeneous image of rural life. On the one hand, its problems were emphasized: poverty, illiteracy, and social tensions, while on the other hand, the countryside was portrayed as the foundation of national identity. The framing depended on the political stance of each publication: leftist and peasant press highlighted hardships and injustice, whereas conservative and Catholic press focused on religiosity, morality, and patriotism of the peasants. The articles served not only an informational role but also an educational and mobilizing one, encouraging modernization, self-governance, and civic engagement in public life. The press became a crucial tool in shaping rural identity, demonstrating that the countryside did not intend to be left behind and increasingly demanded its place in the social, economic, and political life of the nation.

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