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Peasants and the Polish Countryside in German Propaganda within the General Government. Creation versus Reality

*Chłopi i polska wieś w propagandzie niemieckiej
na terenie Generalnego Gubernatorstwa. Kreacja a rzeczywistość*

ABSTRACT

The article discusses the role of the Polish countryside and its inhabitants in the Nazi propaganda within the General Government and the propaganda constructions of the social attitudes of the rural inhabitants towards the occupation authorities and the rest of society. The German occupation authorities sought to exploit to the greatest possible extent the rural population as a workforce, which resulted in the manipulation and propaganda influence on this group. In this context, an important role was played by the press addressed to the rural inhabitants, including the wall newspaper "Nowiny" and the weeklies "Siew" and "Rolnik" as well as publications concerning the problems of peasant and agricultural issues published in daily information newspapers. Particular attention is given to the use of propaganda means/methods and its social effects on rural communities. The article analyzes the press materials from newspapers published in the Radom and Lublin Districts between 1939 and 1944.

Key words: peasants, countryside, German propaganda, reptile (collaborationist) press

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STRESZCZENIE

Artykuł omawia rolę wsi i jej mieszkańców w propagandzie nazistowskiej w Generalnym Gubernatorstwie oraz propagandowe kreacje postaw społecznych mieszkańców wsi wobec władzy okupacyjnej i reszty społeczeństwa. Niemieckie władze okupacyjne dążyły do maksymalnego wykorzystania ludności wiejskiej jako siły roboczej, co prowadziło do manipulacji i propagandowego oddziaływania na tę grupę. W tym kontekście ważną rolę odgrywała prasa skierowana do mieszkańców wsi, w tym gazeta ścienna "Nowiny" oraz tygodniki "Siew" i "Rolnik" oraz publikacje dotyczące problemów chłopów i rolnictwa w dziennikach informacyjnych. W szczególności, uwaga skupia się na wykorzystywanych środkach oddziaływania propagandowego oraz ich skutkach społecznych. W artykule analizie poddane zostały teksty prasowe pochodzące z gazet wydawanych w dystrykcie radomskim i lubelskim w latach 1939–1944.

Słowa kluczowe: chłopci, wieś, propaganda niemiecka, prasa gadzinowa

The countryside and its rural inhabitants played a significant role in the General Government (so-called GG¹, formed from the central territories of the pre-war Poland) in shaping the propaganda image of the Nazi occupation reality². The German occupation authorities sought to maximally exploit the rural population as a workforce: consequently, that community became both the subject and the object of manipulation and propaganda influence. This had a direct impact on the development of the press addressed to the rural inhabitants: leading to the establishment of separate publications dedicated to this group. In the villages of the General Government the means of conveying basic information in the field of law and obligations of the peasants was the wall newspaper "Nowiny"³. Apart

¹ The problems concerning the forms of German occupation and administration of the Polish territories were dealt with in many studies. See inter alia: C. Madajczyk, *Polityka III Rzeszy w okupowanej Polsce*, vols 1–2, Warszawa 1970; M. Broszat, *Nationalsozialistische Polenpolitik 1919–1945*, Stuttgart 1961; W. Kozyra, *Okupacyjna administracja niemiecka na ziemiach Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej w latach 1939–1945*, "Annales Universitatis Mariae Curie-Skłodowska. Sectio G" 2013, 60, 1, pp. 35–51; T. Chinciński, *Niemiecka okupacja w Polsce 1939–1945. Stan i kierunki badań*, "Colloquium Wydziału Nauk Humanistycznych i Społecznych AMW" 2013, 3, pp. 7–24; W. Wichert, *Niemiecki system okupacyjny w latach 1939–1945. Zarys problematyki*, in: *Stan badań nad pomocą Żydom na ziemiach polskich pod okupacją niemiecką – przegląd piśmiennictwa*, eds. T. Domański, A. Gontarek, Warszawa–Kielce 2022, pp. 28–83.

² In the language of the so-called reptile (i.e. collaborationist) press the rural inhabitants were referred to as peasants, farmers, villagers, country persons (*chłopi, włościanie, rolnicy, and wieśniacy*). According to the information items published in the reptile press, 71 per cent of the population of the General Government lived in the country. See: "Nowy Głos Lubelski" [hereinafter: "NGL"] 1942, no. 49, p. 3.

³ This newspaper appeared from July 1940 to December 1943 as a biweekly. It was distributed mainly in commune (*gmina*) centers. See: W. Wójcik, *Niemiecka prasa w języku polskim dla Polaków wydawana w Generalnym Gubernatorstwie w latach 1939–1945 (Ogólna charakterystyka)*, "Rocznik Naukowo-Dydaktyczny" 1987, 110, pp. 179–180 and 199.

from this, two weeklies were published "Siew"⁴, and "Rolnik"⁵ classified by the scholars examining the so-called 'reptile' (i.e. collaborationist) press⁶ as professional periodicals with quasi-cultural elements because there was a literary section in each of them. It should be emphasized that the circulation of periodicals for rural communities was high; both "Siew" and "Rolnik" reached a circulation of 50 thousand copies, which matched the circulation of the "Ilustrowany Kurier Polski", regarded as the leading one among the quasi-cultural periodicals published in Polish in the General Government⁷. Moreover, the issues concerning the villages and their inhabitants occupied a significant position among the socio-economic problems brought up in daily informational press and in daily newspapers.

⁴ "Siew" (Peasant Newspaper) – appeared from September 1940 to January 1945. The "Siew" explained at great length the directives of the occupation administration regarding agriculture and farming economy and offered practical advice in this field. Recruitment to work in Germany was actively advertized. From May 1944, even a version of this magazine was published to be circulated in the Third Reich. See: K. Woźniakowski, *W kręgu jawnego piśmiennictwa literackiego Generalnego Gubernatorstwa (1939–1945)*, Kraków 1997, pp. 101–119.

⁵ "Rolnik" (Illustrated Farmers' Weekly) appeared from May 1941 to December 1944. It was a magazine devoted to professional counseling in the field of farming practice. Works of fiction were also published in it. See: K. Woźniakowski, *Polskojęzyczna prasa gadzinowa czasów okupacji hitlerowskiej. Szkice i Studia zebrane*, Opole 2014, pp. 228–241.

⁶ The term 'reptile press' has fairly long connotations going back to the 19th century and the time of Otto von Bismarck, who established a secret press fund or 'Reptilienfond' (the fund of reptiles). The fund was used to pay for the publication of newspapers in the Kingdom of Prussia that supported the unification policy of Prussia and criticized all decentralist tendencies. During the First World War a classic reptile rag was the pro-German "Godzina Polski", contemptuously called 'a reptile' by the Poles. The best-known referent of this term is the press published openly in Polish by the German and Soviet occupation authorities during the Second World War (it was also called 'lousy rags' (*szmatławce*)). See: *Leksykon terminów medialnych, M–Z*, eds. K. Wolny-Zmorzyński et al., Toruń 2024, p. 217. For more on the 'reptile press' see: W. Wójcik, *Prasa gadzinowa Generalnego Gubernatorstwa (1939–1945)*, Kraków 1988; K. Woźniakowski, *Prasa, kultura, wojna. Studia z dziejów czasopiśmiennictwa, kultury literackiej i artystycznej lat 1939–1945*, Kraków 2005; T. Głowiński, *O nowy porządek europejski. Ewolucja hitlerowskiej propagandy politycznej wobec Polaków w Generalnym Gubernatorstwie 1939–1945*, Wrocław 2000; L. Jockheck, *Propaganda im Generalgouvernement. Die NS-Besatzungspresse für Deutsche und Polen 1939–1945*, Osnabrück 2006; L. Dobroszycki, *Die legale polnische Presse im Generalgouvernement 1939–1945*, München 1977; and in English: idem, *Reptile Journalism. The Official Polish-language Press under the Nazis, 1939–1945*, London 1994.

⁷ See the description of the "Ilustrowany Kurier Polski (Illustrated Polish Courier)". *Ibidem*, pp. 81–133.

The aim of the present article is to discuss and analyze the role of the rural areas and their inhabitants in the Nazi propaganda narratives as well as the means of influence employed for this purpose and their social and political effects. Special attention is devoted to the creation of social attitudes. The analysis is conducted in the context of the social and economic situation of the villages during the occupation. The source base will be publications from selected titles of the reptile press: "Nowy Głos Lubelski"⁸ and "Kurier Radomski"⁹/*"Dziennik Radomski"*¹⁰. The analysis thus covers the propaganda content addressed to the inhabitants of two Districts, which were presented as typically agricultural in the official propaganda. It should be noted that the level of agricultural development in the Radom District was described as low – the dominant type were 'dwarf' (i.e. very small) farms that often had difficulties with feeding the owning family¹¹. In contrast, the Lublin District was called the food reservoir of the General Government¹².

Note that on 12 October 1939 Hitler issued a decree on the administration of the occupied, unincorporated Polish territories, under which the territory of the General Government¹³ was established on 26 October

⁸ "Nowy Głos Lubelski" – appeared from January 1940 to July 1944. Initially it was published as a weekly. From May 1940 it became a daily newspaper. It was distributed in the whole Lublin District. See: P. Kamela, *"Nowy Głos Lubelski" 1940–1944*, "Rocznik Lubelski" 2010, 36, pp. 115–143.

⁹ "Kurier Radomski" [hereinafter: "KR"] – appeared from October 10, 1939, three times a week. The last issue of the paper appeared on March 1, 1940. On that day the first issue of "Dziennik Radomski" also appeared.

¹⁰ "Dziennik Radomski" [hereinafter: "DR"] – Initially, i.e. from October 10, 1939 to March, 1940 it was published as "Kurier Radomski"; the name of the paper was subsequently changed into "Dziennik Radomski". From December 12, 1944 to January 6, 1945 it was merged with the "Kurier Kielecki" and was published under the joint title "Dziennik Radomski – Kurier Kielecki". Initially, it was regarded as a version of "Goniec Krakowski", however, as of December 2, 1941 it became an independent title. It was distributed in Radom and the 'poviats' (counties) of Starachowice, Opatów, Końskie and Tomaszów. Its circulation was 30 thousand copies. For more, see: M. Adamczyk, *"Gadzinowa" prasa na Kielecczyźnie w latach okupacji hitlerowskiej*, in: *Polska prasa konspiracyjna lat 1939–1945 i początek prasy w Polsce Ludowej*, eds. M. Adamczyk, J. Jarowiecki, Kielce–Kraków, 1979, pp. 171–178; idem, *Propaganda hitlerowska w dystrykcie radomskim*, "Rocznik Świętokrzyski" 1977, 6, pp. 215–218; S. Piątkowski, *Okupacja i propaganda. Dystrykt radomski i jego mieszkańcy w publicystyce polskojęzycznej prasy niemieckiej (1939–1945)*, Lublin–Radom 2013.

¹¹ "NGL" 1942, no. 49, p. 3.

¹² When describing the area under his administration, Governor of the Lublin District E. Zóner emphasized its markedly agricultural character, resulting in the surplus of agricultural production. See: "DR" 1940, no. 6, p. 1. See also: "NGL" 1940, no. 207, p. 4.

¹³ "KR" 1939, no. 7, p. 1.

of the same year. With the announcement of the decision to create the General Government, the German occupation authorities began to carry out their short- and long-term objectives that this administrative entity was intended to fulfill. As presented by the official propaganda, the territories not incorporated into the Third Reich would constitute the so-called patrimony of the Poles and would not be subject to Germanization¹⁴. The economic principles of the German invader were essentially contradictory, even at the conceptual level, can be assessed as impossible to implement. The overriding aim was to fully exploit local resources, make the General Government economically self-sufficient, and secure a supply of compulsory workforce for the needs of the Third Reich. These were agricultural areas, which, shortly before the war, had struggled with low productivity and remained dependent on the production surplus from other areas of Poland¹⁵. For the purposes of further analysis, it is also necessary to consider the aspects of Nazi cultural and population policies towards Polish society, suuwhich significantly impacted the functioning of rural communities during the occupation period¹⁶. According to *The Principles for the Treatment of the Population in the Former Polish Territories*, prepared by the NSDAP Race Policy Office as early as November 1939, the plan aimed to liquidate the Polish intelligentsia and clergy, including all persons with higher or secondary education.. It was planned that the peasantry would be the only population group – referred to as ‘primitive farm workers’ by the Nazi propaganda – that would survive the general extermination policy¹⁷. In practice, under the occupation, peasants generally retained their property and could continue cultivating the land. Most landowners also retained their estates¹⁸. Both groups were therefore al-

¹⁴ The Polish character of the General Government was stressed in the reptile press until the collapse of France. The promotion of the thesis about the national character of the created entity served inter alia to explain the mass influx of the Polish population resettled at that time from Poland's western territories incorporated into the Third Reich. An illusion was also created about the existence of the germ of the future Polish rump state. After the German victory in the Western Front, the maintenance of this illusion was no longer necessary. See: T. Głowiński, *op. cit.*, pp. 63–64.

¹⁵ See: S. Schwaneberg, *Eksploracja gospodarcza Generalnego Gubernatorstwa przez Rzeszę Niemiecką*, „Pamięć i Sprawiedliwość” 2009, 8, 1, pp. 134–135.

¹⁶ See: K. Jońca, *Żołędzenia hitlerowskiej polityki kulturalnej (i ich realizacja w stosunku do Polaków)*, in: *Inter arma non silent Musae. Wojna i kultura 1939–1945*, ed. C. Madajczyk, Warszawa 1982, pp. 243–244.

¹⁷ See: M. Napora, *Gadzinowe narracje. Mechanizmy i strategie kreowania propagandowego obrazu świata w „Dzienniku Radomskim”*, Warszawa 2017, pp. 26–27.

¹⁸ J. Kochanowski, *Życie codzienne w okupowanej Polsce, czyli o czym (nieraz) zapominają historycy*, „Kultura i Społeczeństwo” 2024, 68, pp. 26–29.

lowed to retain what was the most important to them – the land and its ownership. This fact could bring a kind of relief, a certain pacification of tensions in such volatile times. Undoubtedly, it was an encouragement to work and wait what would happen next¹⁹.

Economic and population policies subsequently evolved. Of crucial importance for Nazi economic policy was to implement the four-year plan already in 1940. Thus, instead of the previous strategy of ruthlessly plundering resources, the process of gradual economic unification of the General Government with the territories incorporated into the Third Reich was initiated²⁰. The overriding priority was to increase the production potential through the modernization of the Polish countryside, changes in the ownership structure by prohibiting further land parcellation, and through the consolidation of dwarf farms as well as the introduction of more efficient crop cultivation methods and wider use of artificial fertilizers. Given the exigencies of war situation demanded immediate results and the securing of deliveries of farm produce, a consumption-limiting system (ration coupon system) and a system of surplus acquisition (a levy system) were introduced. Special agricultural cooperation societies (cooperatives) were also established through which trading with farmers was to be conducted. At this point, it is relevant to ask how these processes were presented in the collaborationist press?

The starting point for the propagandistic construction of rural communities' image was an assessment/evaluation of rural conditions in Poland in September 1939. The assessment covered first of all the condition of farming, living standards and access to education. Striving to subjugate and exploit the Polish rural population, the German occupation authorities presented a strongly biased picture of the Polish villages as backward, economically inefficient and in need of being 'healed' under the control of the Third Reich²¹. In an account of Hans Frank's inspection tour of the Warsaw District, during which reconstruction of some war-damaged buildings was underway, it was briefly remarked: 'At the same time it was observed that in former Poland little attention was paid to utilizing the treasures of the land, to increasing agricultural produce, and to enhancing other areas of production. Therefore, it is in this direction that

¹⁹ On the information chaos in the early period of war and occupation, see: M. Napora, *Lightning War and Lightning Chaos... The Polish Campaign of 1939 in the Collaborationist ('Reptile') Press (In the Context of Psychological and Information Warfare)*, "Res Historica" 2024, 58, pp. 665–668.

²⁰ See: "KR" 1939, no. 23, p. 3; no. 26, p. 2.

²¹ "KR" 1940, no. 20, p. 1; "NGL" 1942, no 49, p. 3.

the planned work of the General Governor and his associates is aimed'²². It was promised that the German rule would introduce modernization and improve the peasants' living conditions in all aspects: from material and sanitary to cultural and educational²³. When giving another interview, Hans Frank stated: „[...] agriculture, despite being the most important factor in the economic life of this country, is grossly neglected. Consequently, appropriate directives have been issued to better equip farmers with necessary machines and artificial fertilizers”²⁴. A temporary measure intended to improve the nutritional situation was to bring to the General Government at the turn of 1939 and 1940 about 130 thousand tons of grain from the Polish the western Polish territories annexed by the Third Reich²⁵.

The peasants themselves were presented in the Nazi propaganda in two main contexts: as representatives of traditional values, upholding the customs of local communities²⁶, and as a reservoir of cheap labor.

In the first propaganda narrative their attachment to the land was emphasized, which compelled peasants to remain on their farms and work even 'under a hail of bullets'²⁷.

Furthermore, the peasants' respect for social hierarchy and their diligent work was highlighted, reflecting the ideal of a compliant and stable rural society. The occupiers thus created the image of 'a good farmer', grateful to the German administration for the 'opportunity' to work on the land. This narrative was consistently developed throughout the German occupation. In the subsequent period, a rhetorical figure of a 'model farmer' and 'exemplary farms' was introduced, intended as examples to imitate²⁸. The propaganda also emphasized the supposed advantages of submission to the German authorities, suggesting that under their supervision the rural areas could develop and farms could achieve greater productivity. The German Nazi propaganda expanded on this theme by constructing a narrative of the rural community as naturally destined for submission and obedient labor for the New Order (*Neue Ordnung*). The propagandists took advantage of the fact that under the conditions

²² "DR" 1940, no 3, p. 1.

²³ See: "NGL" 1942, no. 146, p. 3; 1943, no. 9, p. 3; no. 10, p. 3; no. 11, p. 3; no. 12, p. 3; no. 13, p. 3; no. 14, p. 3, "NG" 1942, no 100, p. 3; "NGL" 1943, no. 264, p. 3; no. 291, p. 3; 1944, no. 164, p. 3.

²⁴ "KR" 1940, no. 20, p. 1.

²⁵ *Ibidem*.

²⁶ "NGL" 1942, no. 115, p. 3; 1943, no. 44, p. 3; no. 123, p. 3.

²⁷ "DR" 1940, no. 72, p. 2.

²⁸ "NGL" 1940, no. 209, p. 4; 1941, no. 2, p. 4.; 1942, no. 183, p. 3; no. 218, p. 3; 1943, no. 10, p. 3; no. 196, p. 3; no. 206, p. 3.

of Nazi occupation the position of peasants significantly rose in the social structure. Especially in the initial period this may have been particularly significant potentially encouraging acts of retaliation for the historical depreciation of peasants and their labor in interwar Poland.

Consequently, in the reptile (i.e. collaborationist) press press presents examples of attitudes considered acceptable by the Nazi occupiers, adopted by peasants towards the authorities and other social groups, especially towards the town inhabitants. Despite the fact that in the occupation reality, these attitudes were complex, diversified and often ambiguous²⁹, the dominant attitude in the press narratives was opportunistic. It involved adapting to the conditions imposed by the German occupation authorities in order to avoid reprisals or to gain personal benefits.

The opportunist attitude – in actual fact – one balancing between the fulfillment of imposed duties and striving to gain economic benefits, was particularly revealed in the context of attitudes towards town inhabitants, who had to contend with food provision problems. In response to these difficulties, peasants began to dictate the prices of farm produce, taking advantage of their privileged position as the main food suppliers. In many cases this led to the development of the black market, where trading was conducted outside the official channels, and access to food depended on the financial capacity of buyers and the network of connections. For that reason, already in early 1940, actions were taken to normalize the situation by setting maximum prices for farm produce, the system of obligatory food supply, and by fighting against profiteering and usury through severe penalties – disobedient farmers could forfeit all their property, be sent to a work camp for farmers, and even lose their lives³⁰. From the beginning of the collaborationist press, verbal forms of coercion were thus present, taking the form of appeals to pay taxes and deliver grain quotas. These appeals testified both to the occupation character of the German regime and to the limits of opportunism that the rural population could adopt in the face of the imposed obligations.

Trying to force peasants into obedience, the authorities formulated directives appealing the sense of moral responsibility for the fate of starving town inhabitants³¹. Contrary to the discernible shortages of provisions,

²⁹ On the attitudes of rural inhabitants, see: K. Przybysz, *Chłopi polscy wobec okupacji hitlerowskiej 1939–1945: zachowania i postawy polityczne na terenach Generalnego Gubernatorstwa*, Warszawa 1983.

³⁰ "DR" 1940, no. 321, p. 3; 1942, no. 18, p. 3; "KR" 1940, no. 11, p. 1; no. 12, pp. 1–3; no. 16, p. 1.

³¹ *Ibidem*.

Governor Hans Frank assured that 'food will be provided'³². The Nazis attempted to explain the behavior of peasants to town inhabitants by using the elements of the stereotype of a peasant as a lost person, unaware of the situation, partly cut off from information, and ignorant of the law. There were even appeals to educate peasants, which, in practice, could however result in further exacerbation of the village-town relationship³³. The process of polarization of attitudes and sentiments was advantageous from the standpoint of the occupation authorities, as a conflict-ridden and divided society is easier to control.

At the same time, already in early 1940 the collaborationist press wrote about the improvement of the economic situation of the peasantry, and even in the Radom District at that, which, it should be reminded, was regarded as backward and economically inefficient³⁴. It appeared that in light of press propaganda neither the outbreak of the war nor its course and consequences, i.e. the exodus of the population or relocations had a negative effect on the life and work of the peasants. On the contrary, despite difficult wartime conditions, certain aspects of their existence in fact improved, obviously owing to the German organization of economic life³⁵ and successful education concerning effective farming³⁶. This explanation, however, was a far-fetched, biased oversimplification. The phenomenon of the 'rural communities getting richer' did occur, but it resulted from a combination of factors that cumulatively enhanced the material situation of some peasants. Primarily, peasants benefited from the wartime conditions and the difficulties towns faced in securing food supplies. Furthermore, one can mention the porous system of supervision over food trade, owing to which a black market could develop³⁷. Subsequently, some peasants also benefited from taking over the property of landowners and Jews, or from trading with the German occupiers. Those who maintained favorable relations with the occupiers were able to obtain additional financial profits. The situation of the peasantry markedly deteriorated from 1942, when the quotas of compulsory deliveries were increased and the control over the delivery of crops on time was tightened, after the police and the Wehrmacht became then jointly

³² "DR" 1940, no. 203, p. 1.

³³ "DR" 1940, no. 50, p. 3.

³⁴ "KR" 1940, no. 8, pp. 3–4.

³⁵ "KR" 1940, no. 13, p. 3; "DR" 1940, no. 3, p. 3; no. 133, p. 3.

³⁶ See: for instance: "KR" 1940, no. 5, p. 5; no. 27, p. 3, no. 135, p. 3; no. 140, p. 3.

³⁷ "DR" 1940, no. 150, p. 3.

responsible for the collection of crop levies³⁸. At that time, the press campaign was also intensified, which may indicate the growing resistance among peasants, who found it increasingly difficult to meet the imposed levy quotas while simultaneously providing food for their family and farm animals³⁹. The collaborationist press obviously failed to mention the fact that increased compulsory provisions in kind were not intended to improve the food supplies to towns but served primarily the Wehrmacht, SS, police forces, and German civilians. In order to achieve maximum effects, various forms of behavioral inducements were employed, ranging from requests and promises, to appeals to authority, and to warnings and demands. 'Farmer! Whoever delays the delivery of levies is liable for punishment. That is why fulfill your obligation within the prescribed deadline'⁴⁰. Directives were worded in a complex form, using both implicit (implied threats) and imperative forms, which are reflected in the following sentence 'Farmer! By delivering your full levy and on time, you will earn the protection of the authorities, while the profiteer will face a harsh but fair punishment'⁴¹. The imperative mood and the complex structure of the sentence, in which there is both a promise ('you will earn protection') and a warning ('a just punishment'), clearly demonstrate that its overriding goal was to exert pressure and compel obedience⁴². Arguments of emotional-moral nature were also employed: 'Therefore if the authorities see to it that the farmer could, within the existing possibilities, obtain his necessary articles at regular prices, then, on the other hand, they rely on him to deliver his products so that he could obtain farming implements. In this way there is a guarantee that the agricultural produce, supplied by the farmers and stored in appropriate storage rooms, will be sold to consumers at normal prices'⁴³. In this case the authority of the Catholic Church was also invoked: the press published the appeals

³⁸ The change in the economic policy was related to the outbreak of the German-Soviet war and the deteriorating military, political and provisioning situation from mid-1942. In practical terms, for Polish agriculture this meant a transition from a preferential policy to a predatory system. In 1943, the occupation authorities announced a provisioning reform; however, it also failed to improve the food situation.. For more see: C. Łuczak, *Praca przymusowa Polaków w Trzeciej Rzeszy*, Warszawa 1999, p. 398; J. Gapys, *Postawy społeczno-polityczne ziemiaństwa w latach 1939–1945 (na przykładzie dystryktu radomskiego)*, Kielce 2003, pp. 108–114.

³⁹ "NGL" 1942, no. 201, p. 3; no. 204, p. 3; no. 211, p. 3; no. 227, p. 3; no. 236, p. 3.

⁴⁰ "NGL" 1942, no. 211, p. 3. See also: "NGL" 1943, no. 10, p. 3.

⁴¹ "DR" 1943, no. 195, p. 3.

⁴² See: M. Napora, *Gadzinowe*, p. 222.

⁴³ "DR" 1942, no. 212, p. 3. See also: "DR" 1942, no. 216, p. 3; no. 253, p. 3.

of church hierarchs calling upon the people to fulfill the Nazi-imposed obligations in the spirit of solidarity and social responsibility⁴⁴.

The German occupation authorities sought to reinforce pragmatic attitudes by offering additional benefits for the punctual fulfillment of levy obligations: improved access to scarce goods, the possibility of obtaining additional food rations or preferential access to farming implements⁴⁵. These measures were intended not only to increase the effectiveness of levies but also to mitigate potential resistance against the occupation policy and to evoke the impression that cooperation with the German occupation authorities might generate measurable material benefits for the peasants⁴⁶. Among the benefits offered by the Nazi authorities there were goods regarded as potentially attractive. These included all kinds of beverages and stimulants: beer, vodka and cigarettes⁴⁷, since during the German occupation the Polish villagers did not, in light of press reports, shun entertainment⁴⁸. Highly boozy village parties sometimes ended in brawls⁴⁹. This provides insight into the deliberate, propagandistic construction of the mentality of rural inhabitants. The descriptions of 'highly boozy village parties that ended in brawls' are part of the picture of the old rural culture, in which communal revelry and alcohol consumption constituted a significant element of social life. This may indicate strong attachment to old customs, that persisted even during the war. Furthermore, this may also reflect the social consequences of the Nazi occupation and the natural need to alleviate the tension of the difficult wartime reality. However, such press reports presenting peasants as eager to revel and to party, may have distorted the actual dimension of peasants' existence. In reality, life in the rural areas was characterized by significant sacrifices, hard work and constant struggle to survive. Thus, such descriptions could both report the realities of rural life and illustrate how the German propaganda sought to portray peasants – as people easily yielding to temptation and as a group susceptible to manipulation by the German occupier, who (peasants) obediently carried out all commands in exchange for vodka and cigarettes.

While the press did not directly write negatively about the peasants' drunkenness as a social problem, one of the presented negative features

⁴⁴ "DR" 1942, no. 216, p. 3. See also: "NGL" 1942, no. 217, p. 3; no. 224, p. 3.

⁴⁵ "NGL" 1943, no. 211, p. 3; "DR" 1942, no. 181, p. 3; no. 198, p. 3.

⁴⁶ "NGL" 1942, no. 214, p. 3; 1943, no. 178, p. 3; no. 185, p. 3; no. 236, p. 3.

⁴⁷ "DR" 1942, no. 200, p. 3; 1944, no. 70, p. 3.

⁴⁸ "NGL" 1942, no. 65, p. 3.

⁴⁹ "NGL" 1942, no. 94, p. 3; no. 192, p. 3; 1943, no. 257, p. 3.

of the Polish peasantry was their aversion to all farming innovations⁵⁰. Consequently, why compulsory farming education targeted rural youth, who were tasked with transforming their fathers' farms from extensive to intensive systems. The argument put forward was that 'for intensive farming it is not enough to be diligent and hard-working, which undoubtedly characterizes the farmers of the Miechów 'powiat' (county); such farming also requires working skills and a wide range of professional knowledge'⁵¹. The reptile (collaborationist) press estimated that as many as 98 percent of peasant women and men relied on farming practices inherited from their parents, which was regarded as the reason for difficulties in modernizing agriculture. It was pointed out that the lack of formal agricultural education hindered the introduction of new methods of crop cultivation and animal breeding, thereby slowing down the process of intensification of agricultural production, which was one of the crucial goals of the German occupier's economic policy. Moreover, it was estimated that the rural youth, who until then had lacked proper supervision and support, came to recognize the great opportunity offered to them by the German authorities, and regarded compulsory schooling as an opportunity to acquire valuable knowledge and skills necessary to run a modern farm⁵². The Nazi propaganda suggested that, as a result, the young generation of peasants would be better prepared to work on the land and fully obey the new economic directives imposed by the Nazi occupier⁵³. In light of the collaborationist narratives it was only then, due to the policy of the Nazi authorities, that the slogan coined in the 1930s by Prime Minister Leon Kozłowski – 'Turn towards the countryside' (*Frontem do wsi*) was finally realized"⁵⁴. This was expected in turn to translate – immediately, as it were – into tangible results: increased productivity of farms, and thereby the ability to feed all residents of the General Government⁵⁵. On the opposite pole of the mainstream narrative was the previously mentioned model of the peasant-farmlaborer, whose principal task was to support the German agricultural economy not only by supplying food but also by performing labor for the needs of the Third Reich. In this context, rural youth were particularly targeted by propaganda encouraging them to volunteer for farm work in the Third

⁵⁰ "NGL" 1941, no. 26, p. 3.

⁵¹ "NGL" 1941, no. 1, p. 5; no. 8, p. 3, 1942, no. 52, p. 3; 1943, no. 6, p. 3; no. 63, p. 3.

⁵² "NGL" 1943, no. 186, p. 3.

⁵³ "NGL" 1942, no. 93, p. 3.

⁵⁴ "NGL" 1943, no. 88, p. 3.

⁵⁵ "NGL" 1942, no. 182, p. 3; no. 189, p. 3; no. 209, p. 3.

Reich⁵⁶. The German occupation authorities, obligated to provide workforce for agricultural work in the Third Reich, conducted large-scale propaganda campaigns⁵⁷. Departures to the Reich for work were presented as an opportunity to improve living conditions, acquire new agricultural skills on modern German farms, and the possibility of receiving higher wages⁵⁸. An additional incentive was supposed to be also the possibility of sending earnings to the families remaining in the General Government⁵⁹, as well as granting them special allowances and priority in obtaining food, clothing, or work tools⁶⁰. In the initial period of the occupation, the results of the agitation campaigns – according to the official propaganda – were satisfactory. Once again, the rural community was presented as compliant and loyal to the Third Reich⁶¹. Over time, however, it became impossible to sustain the narrative of farm laborers voluntarily departing for the Reich and the collaborationist press began reporting on the consequences for those who evaded going to work in Germany. Intimidation rhetoric was increasingly employed, emphasizing harsh penalties for the evasion of work obligation⁶². The Nazi propaganda also emphasized the ‘moral obligation’ to the German farmer⁶³. Farm labor was also presented as a solution to the overpopulation of Polish villages⁶⁴. The actual situation of Polish farm laborers bore no relation to propagandistic constructions. Thanks to the numerous studies on forced labor for the Third Reich in Polish historiography⁶⁵ and memoir literature⁶⁶, it is known, that forced laborers were subjected to exploitation, long working hours, malnutrition and severe punishments for the slightest offenses. Promised

⁵⁶ “KR” 1940, no. 12, p. 7. See also: S. Piątkowski, *Młodzież polska w propagandzie prasy gazdiniowej*, “Pamięć i Sprawiedliwość” 2011, 17, 1, pp. 34–38.

⁵⁷ “KR” 1940, no. 13, p. 2.

⁵⁸ “DR” 1942, no. 32, p. 3; no. 85, p. 2; no. 181, p. 3; 1944, no. 130, p. 3.

⁵⁹ “DR” 1942, no. 65, p. 3; “KR” 1940, no. 17, p. 6.

⁶⁰ See: “DR” 1942, no. 91, p. 3; 1944, no. 15, p. 4; no. 143, p. 3.

⁶¹ “KR” 1940, no. 18, p. 3.

⁶² “DR” 1940, no. 54, p. 1.

⁶³ “DR” 1940, no. 54, p. 1; 1942, no. 91, p. 3; 1944, no. 15, p. 4; no. 143, p. 3.

⁶⁴ “NGL” 1943, no. 288, p. 3.

⁶⁵ At this point, at least the following studies should be listed: *Praca przymusowa Polaków w Trzeciej Rzeszy w latach 1939–1945*, ed. S. Nawrocki, Poznań 1995; J. Kranz, *Praca przymusowa w III Rzeszy. Fakty i refleksje po 50 latach*, Warszawa 1998.

⁶⁶ See for example: *Gdy byliśmy literą „P”. Wspomnienia wywiezionych na przymusowe roboty do III Rzeszy*, prep. Z. Bigorajska, W. Pietruczuk-Kurkiewiczowa, Warszawa 1979; K. Bartoszewska, J. Kaczmarek, *Tak było. Z dziejów robót w Niemczech 1940–1945*, Kalisz–Łódź 1996; C. Kupisiewicz, *Okruchy wspomnień. Lata wojny i pracy przymusowej*, Warszawa–Ryki 1998.

wages were often symbolic or not paid at all, and the possibility of returning home was severely restricted – contrasting sharply with the image of ‘voluntary and beneficial’ work propagated by the Nazi occupiers.

The reptile (i.e. collaborationist) press also highlighted the problem of crime, which posed a serious challenge in Polish villages⁶⁷. Organized gangs stole food, livestock and agricultural tools, which further exacerbated provisioning difficulties and destabilized local communities⁶⁸. The scale of the problem can be illustrated by quoting an excerpt from the alleged letter published in the Lublin collaborationist newspaper: ‘Dear Editors. I believe I express the views of the whole of landed gentry and farmers. [...] There is hardly a manor house, or a larger or smaller peasant homestead in the Radzyń, Janów, Puławy ‘poviats’ (counties) and in others, that have not fallen victim lately to an attack by an armed gang [...]. I believe it would be high time to raise this issue and point out the ways to combat this scourge, which not only inflicts material losses on the population but also disrupts the progress of harvest work, and often leads to reprisals from the authorities for failure to report such incidents in time or for neglecting to undertake protective measures against banditry’⁶⁹. Some of these groups acted independently, motivated by profit, while others were linked to partisan formations, for whom robbery a means of obtaining necessary food. The German propaganda exploited this problem by portraying partisans as common bandits, while the occupation authorities applied brutal reprisals against entire villages accused of supporting them. As a result, the inhabitants found themselves caught between the two sides of the conflict, trying to maintain neutrality and protect their own farms from looting and retaliatory actions by both German forces and the partisans.

Propaganda efforts aimed at the rural population continued until the very end of the Nazi occupation. At the end of 1943, the authorities announced plans for further intensification of agricultural production⁷⁰. In the summer of 1944, the press propaganda continued to report on the progress of fieldwork and harvests⁷¹ and, through a bonus sys-

⁶⁷ See: S. Piątkowski, *Bandytyzm i inne formy przestępczości kryminalnej na obszarach wiejskich Generalnego Gubernatorstwa w początkach okupacji niemieckiej (październik 1939-czerwiec 1941 r.)*, in: *Polska pod okupacją 1939–1945*, vol. 1, Warszawa 2015, pp. 64–122.

⁶⁸ “DR” 1940, no. 126, p. 3; no 181, p. 3; “NGL” 1940, no. 131, p. 4; no. 163, p. 4; 1941, no. 12, p. 3; no. 43, p. 3.

⁶⁹ “NGL” 1942, no. 203, p. 3.

⁷⁰ “NGL” 1943, no. 297, p. 3.

⁷¹ “NGL” 1943, no. 169, p. 3; 1944, no. 165, p. 3.

tem, encouraged peasants to fulfill their obligations⁷². Furthermore, agricultural counseling was provided⁷³. Despite the German authorities' strenuous efforts throughout the entire occupation period, these measures failed to increase agricultural productivity. During the crop failure of 1942/1943, per-hectare grain yields declined relative to pre-war levels, and even in the comparatively better harvest of 1943/1944, they barely reached pre-war standards⁷⁴. With the collapse of the Eastern Front and its approach to the borders of the General Government, the situation in Polish villages became even more difficult. Intensified terror and the looting of all food supplies threatened mass starvation, while reprisals against the civilian population, accused of supporting partisans, grew stronger⁷⁵.

Despite attempts to impose – through the press – the model of a submissive peasant characterized by an opportunistic attitude, many rural inhabitants demonstrated resistance to the occupier. Some peasants consciously sabotaged the delivery of levies, hid food surpluses, or supported partisans by providing them with food and shelter. Others, although forced to cooperate with the occupier, tried to minimize their losses and avoid excessive involvement in activities for the Germans. The reality of the occupation was far more complex than the reptile (collaborationist) press attempted to depict. Superficial compliance was often merely a survival strategy under the harsh conditions of Nazi rule.

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⁷² "DR" 1944, no. 169, p. 3; no. 172, p. 3; no. 180, p. 2.

⁷³ "DR" 1944, no. 169, p. 3.

⁷⁴ S. Schwaneberg, *op. cit.*, p. 136.

⁷⁵ For more see: R. Gieroń, *Półmrok. Procesy karne w sprawie przestępstw okupacyjnych popełnionych przez chłopów wobec Żydów w województwie krakowskim*, Kraków 2020, pp. 53–79. On the subject of terror in the Polish countryside, see also: A. Jankowski, *Pacyfikacja i terror na wsi w Kieleckim: 1939–1945*, Kielce 1986; J. Fajkowski, *Wies w ogniu. Eksterminacja wsi polskiej w okresie okupacji hitlerowskiej*, Warszawa, 1972; J. Fajkowski, J. Religa, *Zbrodnie hitlerowskie na wsi polskiej 1939–1945*, Warszawa, 1981.

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