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Ewelina Podgajna
ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1051-4078
Faculty of Political Science and Journalism, Maria Curie-Skłodowska University in Lublin, Poland

Selected social problems of rural areas in political thought of Wincent Witos

1. Introduction

The title of this article comprises three levels relating to the subjective scope, the temporal (chronological) aspect and the objective scope. The objective-scope level includes notion that merit explanation – political thought. Political thought is generally understood as "any form of reflection on political realities, irrespective of the degree of development, internal cohesion and systematization, and the level of theorization and concretization". Political thought comes into existence as a result of political thinking which manifests itself, inter alia, in the creation of ideas. If the reflection on political realities is well evolved and structured, and has a certain theoretical component, it can assume three stages in its development, namely, the stages of ideology, concept and program.

The temporal (chronological) plane of the article covers the end of the 19th century and first half of the 20th century. The article concerns some social problems in rural areas with particular emphasis on education and the situation of people in rural areas. The intent was also to show the living conditions and the difficulties faced by people living in rural areas. With a wide range of rights, Wincenty Witos devoted much attention to education. The most conscious part of the rural population understood that one of the causes of social impairment peasants was their little access to education. Therefore, the programs of political parties involved postulates regarding free education and support for adolescents who wanted to receive education. Poland received the legacy of a large number of illiterates. According to the census of 1921, the illiterate comprised approx. 38% of the rural population, sources of the political thought of Witos were centered around several reasons. First, it was the situation of peasants and rural Poland. Second, education played a very large role in socio-political transformations. It is what offered people a chance for social advancement, led to national consciousness and nationality. Owing to democratized education peasants could consciously participate in

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national life, educate the young generation in the spirit of patriotism and citizenship. Education and culture were considered by Witos the basis for the strength of the state and welfare of its citizens. They affected political issues of the state and the realization of responsibilities to the fatherland.

2. Education as the most important social problem

In the broad catalogue of laws, Wincenty Witos has given the most attention to education. His reflections related to education stemmed from his own life experiences and knowledge, which Witos gained as an autodidact. He perfectly understood that one of the reasons for the social handicap of peasants is their limited access to education[1]. Ideological ideas in educational projects resulted directly from the situation of peasants in Polish lands in various historical periods. At the time of the Partitions, there were three distinct socio-political mechanisms that influenced the sphere of education. The Second Republic of Poland put the attention of the rulers on the need to elaborate and undertake work towards the intellectual revival of citizens. Political programs of many folk groups reflected the demands of democratization of education, as well as free schools and help for impecunious youth that sought to be educated.[2]

Witos put education in one line next to the values of land and power. He believed that it was only through education that the Polish countryside could be reborn and experience full bloom. He referred to education as "the golden source, the fount of knowledge".[3] Witos treated education as a means of a socio-cultural change and a way for building a new social order, which was characteristic of the thought of agrarianism.[4] Witos inextricably connected the right to receive education with the socio-political changes leading peasants into the role of Poland's host. It was education that gave the population a chance for social advancement, led to nationalization and aroused national and state awareness. The necessity of popularizing education was seen by Witos through the prism of several strictly connected premises. The first was the understanding by peasants of the feeling of relationships with the native language, customs and culture or national identity. The second was undoubtedly the necessity to become aware of the need for a national rebirth: "The whole nation must act as one to create happi-

[1] Podgajna E., *Myśl polityczna Wincentego Witosa 1874–1945* [Political thought of Wincenty Witos (1874–1945)], Lublin 2018, p. 216–234.

[2] E. Podgajna, *Stronnictwo Chłopskie (1926–1931). Studium z dziejów myśli politycznej* [Peasant Party (1926–1931). Study of the history of political thought], Lublin 2011, p. 127.

[3] W. z Wierzchosławic, *Nasza bieda* [Our poverty], „Przyjaciel Ludu" 1893, issue no. 7, p. 4.

[4] A. Łuczak, *Społeczeństwo i państwo w myśli politycznej ruchu ludowego w II Rzeczypospolitej* [Society and the state in the political thought of the popular movement in the II Republic],Warsaw 1982, p. 20; W. Jamrożek, *Edukacja w procesie społeczno-kulturowych przeobrażeń wsi i kraju w świetle poglądów działalności ludowców w Drugiej Rzeczypospolitej* [Education in the process of socio-cultural transformations of the village and the state in the light of views of the activities of the peasants in the Second Republic], [in:] *Wychowanie a polityka. Mity i stereotypy w polskiej myśli społecznej XX wieku* [Education and politics. Myths and stereotypes in the Polish social thought of the 20th century], W. Wojdyło (ed.), Toruń 2000, pp. 69–70.

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ness for themselves and future generations, to astonish the world. Small nations have shown that they can; The great Polish nation will do it too, if it wants to, and one should want to do and must want to".[5] He emphasized in his speeches that Poland had fallen as a result of the darkness and backwardness of the great majority of its people. These words undoubtedly became valid during World War One, when Witos drew a vision of the future of the Polish state and saw a chance for the Poles to revive their own state in the global conflict: "We must not waste this historic moment under the threat of being cursed for generations. The Polish people are the foundation of our future, the people must take the right place and must persevere on it".[6] He stated that "Poland cannot and will not be the seat of medieval retrogression and backwardness".[7] Witos repeatedly stressed that "the rights for which the people have made a bloody sacrifice cannot be reduced, they can only be extended".[8] He demanded all equality for the peasants: "I can never agree that in Poland there are first and second class citizens, some have rights and others only obligations".[9] Education was, in his opinion, the best weapon in the struggle for freedom and independence, for prosperity, citizenship and peasants' rights.

Witos was well aware that knowledge and access to education, including political rights and land rights, had to be made real in order for the peasants to be able to pretend to the role of the landlord and tie them to a future state permanently. This thought was undoubtedly seen as progressive. He repeatedly stressed that he "witnessed poverty and deprivation of the Galician peasant".[10] One of the ways leading to the exit from backwardness was the development of education. He pointed out that firstly, education should be universal, giving opportunity of an equal start to all children, and secondly, emphasize the need to change curricula that did not include national elements: "Many of our teachers are diligently teaching children to read and write, and to count and even geography, grammar and other subjects, telling them about China and Japan, and not mentioning Poland. It is not enough for a student to go to school only to not be illiterate […] but it is imperative that the student leaves the school as a Pole".[11]

In 1908, during a speech at the Sejm, he said: "School and education are the foundation of all progress and prosperity." He stressed that in thousands of villages there were no schools, and in those where schools could be found, the governing Poles had done nothing "to make the peasant feel a Pole". Children learned from Austrian textbooks and books of Austrian history and not Polish. He argued that the folk schools

[5] W. Witos, *Co wojna u nas zmienić powinna?* [What should the war change in us?], „Kalendarz Piasta na rok Pański 1916", pp. 18–20.

[6] *Ibidem*.

[7] W. Witos, *Do braci chłopów* [To peasant brothers], „Ludowiec" 15 VII 1920, issue no. 22, p. 2.

[8] Idem, *Zjednoczenie ludu koniecznością* [Unification of the people as a necessity], "Piast" 25 II 1917, issue no. 8, p. 2.

[9] Idem, *Do braci chłopów* [To peasant brothers], „Ludowiec" 15 VII 1920, no 22, p. 2.

[10] Idem, *Moje wspomnienia* [My memories], T. I, Paris 1964, p. 287.

[11] Idem, *Z Tarnowskiego (Szkoły ludowe, wiece patriotyczne)* [From Tarnowski (folk schools, patriotic rallies], „Przyjaciel Ludu" 10 IX 1898, issue no. 26, pp. 6–7.

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did not teach such subjects as Polish grammar and geography, and yet they prepared for the work of future councilors, commune heads and even deputies. Witos in his reflections on education emphasized, "the present school system creates national illiterates because they do not tell children what every citizen of the should know about his history".[12]

As Andrzej Zakrzewski noted, the existing system and curriculum blamed Witos for the low level of national awareness of the peasants, which many times even led them to deprivation of their national identity.[13] The peasants looked at Poland through the prism of social affairs. The living memory of the serfdom obscured its picture, since "Peasants knew about Poland as it was: indecent, villein, belonging to nobility, vulgar, unjust, trembling with mortal fear of its return". Concerns on the subject education, at the end of the war, became an integral part of the concept of the vision of the future system of the revived Poland. Witos preached on the pages of "Piast", that the road to free Poland leads through the establishment of a democratic right to vote, agricultural reform and popularization of education. Witos considered education to be a lever of national progress, an attitude of moral rebirth of the state, and the possibility of transforming peasants into fully-fledged decision makers on the nation's destiny. In the expose presented to the Sejm on 24 September 1920 he stated, "the war has enabled, or at least hindered, the proper functioning of schooling, to which the government draws urgent attention, understanding that the strength and prosperity of the state depend on education".[14] These were not empty words because Witos was the prime minister who devoted most attention to education.[15]

Being a self-taught person, Witos had very strong feelings about the lack of systematic education. The issues of education were treated in a special way and attempts were made to combine it with other aspects of social and political life. Therefore, education and especially political education were seen as highly important. Witos put forward a previously under-valued postulate of raising awareness and implementing popularizing activity by the political party: "A peasant must become not only equal but the decisive factor in the state. He must acquire the right, the power and education".[16] The education of a new human being actively contributing to the political, social and cultural life at various levels and aiming to shape society in the spirit of democracy was

[12] Idem, *Wybór pism i mów* [Selection of writings and speeches], Lviv 1939, pp. 45–46.

[13] A. Zakrzewski, *Wincenty Witos, chłopski polityk i mąż stanu* [Wincenty Witos, peasant politician and statesman], Warsaw 1977, p. 24.

[14] Sprawozdanie stenograficzne z posiedzeń Sejmu Ustawodawczego (further referred to as Ss. SU) [Stenographic report from the Legislative Sejm meetings], item 167 of 24 IX 1920 v. 18.

[15] J. Szablicka-Żak, *Szkolnictwo i oświata w pracach Sejmu Ustawodawczego II Rzeczypospolitej* [Education in the work of the Legislative Sejm of the II Polish Republic], Warsaw 1997, pp. 47–48.

[16] Archiwum Zakładu Historii Ruchu Ludowego (further referred to as AZHRL), Zbiory Wincentego Witosa, *Z odezwy trzech przywódców SL, emigrantów* [On behalf of the three SL leaders, emigrants], vol. 9.

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a necessary condition for the realization of the political and social concepts embodied in the idea of the People's Republic of Poland.[17]

PSL "Piast" in the 1919 program emphasized the need to provide all citizens with adequate education. It emphasized the right "to education from the lowest to the highest, according to their abilities". The peasants demanded the introduction of universal, free, compulsory education and the ability to continue their education in secondary and tertiary education. The curriculum was to be designed in such a way that every "citizen of the state could be educated generally and professionally. Science will be universal, compulsory and free, religion education - compulsory".[18]

Witos advocated a fair education system so that every child had the opportunity to study at all levels, regardless of wealth, background, religion or nationality, claiming, "the cost of teaching in all schools will be covered by state funds".[19] However, PSL "Piast" was in opposition to the over-democratization of school self-government by increasing the participation of the factors chosen by the public. Witos opted for solutions that would lead to the removal of barriers hindering or often preventing peasant children from accessing knowledge. He advocated the introduction of universal, free, compulsory teaching for all children in the general school, with the possibility of continuing education in secondary and tertiary education. He emphasized that education shapes modern, bright citizens who are consciously and willingly participate in state life. He also pointed to the need to educate young people in the spirit of patriotic values, in love for their homeland, to be the best citizen and serve the Polish state as best as possible. It was Witos who came up with the idea to promote such an educational model that would combine individual needs and values with social ones. Their nurturing and development in everyday life was a guarantee for the rebirth of a state in which full rights, freedoms, taking up own initiatives through hard work could be realized. Thanks to education, a socio-political departure from political marasmus became possible. It was important to introduce an instruction of compulsory Polish language education in the Polish lands and the possibility for Polish children to attend schools of different types[20].

[17] M. Strzelecki, *Rola wychowania w myśli społeczno-politycznej ruchu ludowego w Drugiej Rzeczypospolitej* [The role of upbringing in the socio-political thought of the popular movement in the Second Republic], [in:] *Polityka a wychowanie. Szkice z historii wychowania społecznego II Rzeczypospolitej* [Politics and upbringing. Sketches from the history of social education of the II Polish Republic], edited by A. Wojtas, Toruń 1994, p. 89.

[18] *1919 czerwiec 29, Warszawa – Program Polskiego Stronnictwa Ludowego Piast* [1919 June 29, Warsaw – Polish People's Piast Party Program], [in:] *Programy stronnictw ludowych. Zbiór dokumentów* [People's Party Programs. Collection of documents], compiled by S. Lato, W. Stankiewicz, Warsaw 1969, p. 166.

[19] *Ibidem*.

[20] Thanks to this, during the interwar period the number of schools of different types, including universities, increased. See further in: S. Mauersberg, *Wpływ oświaty na integrację społeczeństwa w II Rzeczypospolitej 1918–1939* [The influence of education on the integration of society in the Second Republic 1918–1939], [in:] *Drogi integracji społeczeństwa…* [Roads of social integration…], p. 106.

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The development of education and culture was of great importance for shaping national consciousness. Providing children with access to knowledge gave the opportunity to shape modern and wise citizens who are consciously involved in state life.

The educational idea developed by W. Witos was based on the principles of patriotism. The necessity to awaken national feelings, love and close ties with the homeland, the inviolability of state goods were all considered the priority. He emphasized that through education, it would be possible to develop and deepen moral, ethical and honest values. Witos supported shooting organizations adapting the youth to an armed struggle for independence: "special care will be provided by the PSL shooting organizations and will endeavor to consolidate them in all Polish villages by permanently providing them with moral, political and material assistance".[21] He formulated the thesis that the state would exist thanks to its bright and self-aware citizens, through the love of freedom and respect for the law: "We will attach great importance to education, especially folk as the school must educate and bring up the new Polish generation, wise, industrious, persevering, civic and sacrificial."[22] He paid particular attention to the knowledge of the nation's own history, for through this knowledge it was possible to create a bright citizen, with a deep sense of responsibility for the fate of the state, prepared for active participation in the collective life, actively working for the homeland and having the most profound respect for work. He stressed that "at school a student should learn about all the great Polish men, about Poland and its greatness, about the fall and the partitions, he should feel hot love for his country and the willingness to sacrifice for it".[23]

Witos emphasized the role of the school in educating young generations of citizens, also for rural and local communities, and preparing them for participation in the process of rural transformation. Witos emphasized the close link between schools and the local community. The school was supposed to participate in the life of the pupils to a much wider extent than would be expected from their typical tasks related to education. He believed that the school should also conduct widely understood non-school education for the immediate environment. The designation of such a school role was related to the fact that in most rural areas the school was only a cultural and educational institution. Especially in work with the youth, Witos turned his attention to educational activities intended to promote the development of general and agricultural knowledge, owing to which they would progress in their quest to become fully-fledged and aware citizens.[24] Witos emphasized that the school was supposed to familiarize

[21] W. Witos, *Rezolucja posła Wincentego Witosa, uchwalona jednomyślnie na I kongresie PSL "Piast"* [Resolution of deputy Witold Witos, passed unanimously at the First Congress of the PSL Piast], "Piast" 8 II 1914, issue no. 6, pp. 5–7.

[22] Ss. SU, 22 II 1919, item 4, v.130.

[23] W. Witos, *Z Tarnowskiego (Szkoły ludowe, wiece patriotyczne)* [From Tarnowski (folk schools, patriotic rallies], „Przyjaciel Ludu" 10 IX 1898, issue no. 26, pp. 6–7.

[24] A. Wójcik, *Oświata w myśli ludowej na przełomie XIX i XX wieku* [Education in the folk thought at the turn of the 20th century], [in:] *Wkład ruchu ludowego w przeobrażenia oświaty i szkolnictwa na wsi. Materiały z konferencji naukowej, która odbyła się w Kielcach w dniach 8–9 kwietnia 2012 r.*

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them with the rights and duties of an individual towards the state and society, to understand the values of the state, to familiarize them with its needs, and to prepare them for creative work for the state. In 1921, the PSL "Piast" program called for the establishment of such a teaching and education system that, by developing the harmonious forces of youth, would educate it in the knowledge of the country and the needs of the nation, teach creative work and prepared for giving one's strength to his homeland."[25] Witos critically referred to the ideas propagated by the Piłsudski camp, aimed at shaping attitudes affirming the policy of the ruling camp.[26]

W. Witos was in the position to fight against all inequalities and social injustice. This was due to the conviction that it was necessary to eliminate the age-old backwardness of the rural population. He wanted to develop a new type of a peasant – a citizen who would be aware of his rights and duties, actively participate in the political and cultural life of the country while being attached to the folk tradition and guided by the principles of Christian ethics, knowingly assuming responsibility for the state. Witos emphasized his peasant origin and wanted peasants to be aware of the cultural distinctness of the village and its importance to preserve Polishness in the past and in the present. He promoted all forms of activity aimed at cultural and social growth of his environment. Knowledge, according to Witos, was the key to a good, fruitful change. He claimed, "Homeland will someday be grateful for raising the masses of citizens to a new life. Not one great talent and heart awaits under the coats, you have to wake up those who are sleeping so the harvest time can come fast".[27] The value of non-school skills in acquiring knowledge, skills and qualifications was considered in the context of taking a conscious place in the society and state of the citizen, being able to make his own decisions and understand the reality surrounding him.

In the political thought of Witos we can see the impact of the concept of national upbringing on the demands of education. At the source of approval for its individual parts was the conviction of the need for development and integration of the nation that Witos had taken from the thought of Boleslaw Wysłouch.[28] The idea of the nation, which was a constituent part of the educational ideal of national pedagogy, was exposed in the democratic and civic direction of the educational ideology influenced by

[Contribution of the peasant movement to the transformation of education and schooling in rural areas. Materials from the scientific conference held in Kielce on 8–9 April 2012], edited by S. J. Pastuszka, Kielce 2002, pp. 35–41.

[25] *1921 listopad 20, Warszawa Program Polskiego Stronnictwa Ludowego Piast* [1921 November 20, Warsaw Program of the Polish People's Party Piast], [in:] *Programy stronnictw ludowych* [People's Party Programs]…, p. 207.

[26] W. Witos, *Z przemówienia na posiedzeniu Rady Naczelnej SL* [From the speech at the meeting of the Supreme Council of SL], „Zielony Sztandar" 24 IX 1933, issue no. 70, pp. 2–3.

[27] Idem, *Z Tarnowskiego* (*Szkoły ludowe, wiece patriotyczne)* [From Tarnowski (folk schools, patriotic rallies], „Przyjaciel Ludu" 10 IX 1898, issue no. 26, pp. 6–7.

[28] *[1886 styczeń – czerwiec], Lwów – Bolesław Wysłouch, Szkice programowe* [[1886 January – June], Lwow – Boleslaw Wysłouch, Program sketches], [in:] *Programy stronnictw ludowych* [People's Party Programs]…, pp. 37–48.

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the popular peasant movement. It was concerned primarily with the extension of the notion of the nation, and thus the issue of the development and deepening of national consciousness became valid. In this context, the development and dissemination of Polish education and the direction of educational influences have become extremely important. Witos's primary task was to provide knowledge about the history of the nation, to promote sacrifice and love for the homeland.[29] In the PSL "Piast" program of 1921, one of the most important objectives of the folk movement was to create, nurture and multiplicate values of the national culture, to develop moral and mental powers of the people, to ensure material conditions for ideological work.[30] As noted by Michał Strzeclecki, the objective of the formulated concepts was to indicate the enormous role of intelligence in the process of creating national cultural values and developing national consciousness. Hence, the postulate of ensuring living and working conditions for this group that would allow it to undertake creative and educational work. The shaping of the "new man" by the peasants' party was combined with participating in the creation of values of national culture. It was among the layers of working classes that the main decks of talents allowing for the regeneration and enrichment of the sources and development of national culture were found. Physical work could not be an obstacle in the interest in the values of culture and active participation in its various forms. Witos acknowledged that building People's Poland requires a comprehensive enrichment of the attitudes of man, the creator of the new reality. The reconstruction of social, economic and political relations could not be carried out effectively without the improvement of a man, his morality and spirituality.[31]

[29] M. Strzelecki, *Wychowanie w myśli społeczno-politycznej ruchu ludowego w Drugiej Rzeczypospolitej* [Educating in the socio-political thought of the popular movement in the Second Republic], [in:] *Polityka a wychowanie. Szkice z historii wychowania społecznego II Rzeczypospolitej* [Politics and upbringing. Sketches from the history of social education of the Second Republic of Poland], edited by A. Wojtas, Toruń 1994, pp. 99–101.

[30] *1921 listopad 20, Warszawa Program Polskiego Stronnictwa Ludowego Piast*, [in:] *Programy stronnictw ludowych…* [1921 November 20, Warsaw Program of the Polish People's Party Piast, [in:] People's Party Programs…], pp. 197–198; W. Jamrożek, *Edukacja obywatelska w poglądach wychowawczych i działalności ludowców Drugiej Rzeczypospolite* [Citizenship education in the educational views and activities of the peoples of the Second Republic], [in:] *Wychowanie a polityka. Miedzy wychowaniem narodowym a państwowym* [Education and politics. Between national and state education], edited by W. Wojdyło, Toruń 1999, p. 115.

[31] A. Wójcik, *Idea wychowania obywatelskiego w polskiej myśli ludowej 1918–1939* [Idea of civic education in Polish folklore 1918–1939], [in:] *W kręgu historii, politologii i edukacji. Studia i szkice dedykowanie Profesorowi Witoldowi Wojdyle* [In the circle of history, politics and education. Studies and sketches dedicated to Professor Witold Wojdyla], edited by Z. Karpus, G. Radomski, M. Strzelecki, Toruń 2012, p. 625; W. Jamrożek, *Edukacja obywatelska w poglądach wychowawczych i działalności ludowców Drugiej Rzeczypospolitej* [Citizenship education in the educational views and activities of the peoples of the Second Republic], [in:] *Wychowanie a polityka. Między wychowaniem narodowym a państwowym* [Education and upbringing. Between national and state education], edited by W. Wojdyło, Toruń 1999, pp. 120–121.

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The core of the curriculum and the organization of the school was based on Christian values. It was undoubtedly an element of the idea of national education that proved the necessity of observing the principles of Christian ethics in private, state and social life. Such a position did not only arise from national needs that consider religion an important ingredient of nationality. It was determined by peasants' strong attachment to faith, resulting not only from a deep theoretical-philosophical reflection, but from an emotional acceptance of the hopeful message that after a life full of effort and humiliation, peace, harmony and eternal life would come.[32] In the National Sejm, Witos emphasized the role and importance of the Roman Catholic Church in the life of peasants, its deep attachment to the Catholic religion, its importance for the formation and renewal of national identity, education, peaceful and coherent human coexistence, and the propagation of the idea of peace. He firmly emphasized the need for national unity based on the Catholic religion, claiming, "The Polish people are Catholic and deeply religious. The Catholic faith educates in the clearest rules of humanity, which has become the basis of modern civilization, and that the violation of faith can weaken in humankind the noblest ideals of love of neighbor, sacrifice for others, fraternity and social justice".[33] PSL "Piast" recognized that the leading role in the life of the nation and its upbringing was to be played by the Church and the Catholic religion. Consequently, the stance adopted by the Party regarding the Catholic religion led to education on all levels being handed over under the influence of the clergy. The Concordat signed with the Holy See in 1925, which was supported by the PSL "Piast", enabled the Catholic clergy to significantly influence education of young people.[34]

An important role in the educational process was attributed by Witos and PSL "Piast" to family. They emphasized that the life of a rural family is filled with religious content. They underlined that education is a process that lasts for years, and parents are the only and the most important educators in the first several years of a child's life. The main elements included education, comprehensive development, an in-depth exploration of religiosity, shaping moral attitudes and building one's own value system, evoking love for the soil and working with it. Witos believed that civic education in the family from an early age equips man with the attributes needed for a meaningful

[32] M. Strzecelcki, *Źródła norm wychowania społecznego w interpretacjach polskiej myśli politycznej przełomu XIX i XX wieku* [Sources of norms of social education in the interpretations of Polish political thought at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries], [in:] *Wychowanie a polityka. Cele polityczne jako czynnik determinujący oddziaływanie wychowawcze* [Education and upbringing. Political goals as a determinant of the educational impact], edited by G. Radomski, K. Kalinowska, Toruń 2003, pp. 21–22; J. R. Szaflik, *O rząd chłopskich dusz* [The government of peasant souls], Warsaw 1976, pp. 22–25.

[33] W. Witos, *Dzieła wybrane* [Selected works], t. I, s. 23, 67–77.

[34] *1926 listopad 29, Kraków – Program Polskiego Stronnictwa Ludowego "Piast"* [1926 November 29, Cracow – Polish People's Party Program "Piast"], [in:] *Programy stronnictw ludowych* [People's Party Programs]…, p. 170; J.R. Szaflik, *Polskie Stronnictwo Ludowe "Piast"* [Polish Peasant Party "Piast"]…, p. 79.

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participation in social and political life. The family should shape a man conscious of his membership in a given community with the desire to actively participate in its life for the general good. It was invariably important to develop the love of native history, to learn and cultivate the memory of national heroes, to educate young people in the spirit of the needs of the nation and of the homeland. Witos emphasized that the family has certain obligations in relation to the state and the state power, such as taxes, military service, peace-time social services, and civic education. The parents' approach to these duties is important. In the atmosphere of family life, the child learns about civic virtues, respectful and loving treatment of others. It maintains the social and moral attitudes that build all the relationships in community life. In the family community, a new generation of Poles is emerging that will build the society of the coming centuries. Only children brave in the practice of truth and sensitive to respect of good will be able to responsibly undertake duties on every position. Children raised in such a way will also be able to rebuild the authority of power in crisis. It was important to involve children together with parents in state ceremonies with parents, on the scale of a child's perception, explaining to him or her why they participate and what is being celebrated. Educational purposes also served to cultivate traditions, customs and rituals. In this way interest in history was developed, the roots of the native culture were emphasized, and the sense of pride in its work was developed. It is worth noting that many of them, despite their pagan origins, were religious.[35]

In the PSL "Piast" program of 1926, the family was recognized "as the basic unit of social life on which the health of the nation depends". A commitment was made to provide it with proper care from the state and society, appreciating its educational value.[36] A similar resolution was incorporated into the SL program of 1931, opposing all factors that could compromise family ties as a result.

The Piast supporters believed that teaching should be based on the principles of universality, compulsory schooling, a free and unified system of education with compulsory religion classes. PSL "Piast" and Witos attached great importance to the education about religion. Witos considered the Roman Catholic religion a source of morality and the foundation in matters of faith and morality. However, he was always against infringing religious tolerance. At the 1926 Congress in Cracow, a new program of PSL "Piast" was presented. It was emphasized that the party supports constitutionally protected religious freedom of all denominations, because "the masses of the Polish people are deeply attached to the Catholic religion and recognizing the importance of the Catholic Church in the life of the Polish people. "Piast" PSL condemns all attempts

[35] M. Strzelecki, *Rola wychowania w myśli społeczno-politycznej ruchu ludowego w Drugiej Rzeczypospolitej* [The role of upbringing in the socio-political thought of the popular movement in the Second Republic], [in:] *Polityka a wychowanie. Szkice z historii wychowania społecznego…* [Politics and education. Sketches from the history of social education…], p. 102.

[36] *1926 listopad 29, Kraków – Program Polskiego Stronnictwa Ludowego "Piast"* [1926 November 29, Cracow – Polish People's Party Program "Piast"], [in:] *Programy stronnictw ludowych (People's Party Program)…*, p. 258.

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at breaking the spiritual and religious unity of the people, as harmful for them and for the state".[37] Aleksander Łuczak noted that the hostility of the Piast proponents towards free-thinking and non-denominationalism stemmed from the conviction of the enduring value of the Catholic moral teaching, unchangeable under the influence of the economic and social transformations of every human being and formulating the postulate of destroying all hatred of individuals, social classes or nations.[38] The importance of religion according to Witos was not to be overestimated in the difficult historical history of the Polish state. Religion, in addition to the whole system of rituals, rites and beliefs, fulfilled very important social functions, was a very important force in education, allowing to bind society and providing meaning to life. It contained answers to fundamental questions about humanity and the meaning of human existence. It defined the goals and values that a man must follow in order to be allowed to enter Paradise after death. So, religion was an integrative link that attempts to find answers to all fundamental questions both about temporal life with all its aspects and death. It also introduced some social control due to its moral dimension.

An important part of the 1920 educational program of the PSL "Piast" that Witos supported with all diligence was the demand for education for adults: "we will support the development of knowledge and organize all cultural and educational institutions (folk universities, educational societies, community centers, agricultural clubs etc.) bringing true knowledge to the people.[39] Out-of-school agricultural education played an important role in this regard. Farm adjustment was the only form of agricultural

[37] *Ibidem*.

[38] A. Łuczak, *Społeczeństwo i państwo w myśli politycznej ruchu ludowego* [The society and state in the political thought of the popular peasant movement], Warsaw 1982, p. 145.

[39] These demands were not new, for their sources must be sought early in the founding of the people's movement. Already at that time, the peasants put the issues of education, both general and professional in the first place. Interest was also expressed in all other forms of knowledge formation in the countryside. Among the duties of the peasantry were: the development of reading and rental facilities in the countryside, work in educational societies and systematic reading of the folk and agronomic press. A. Wójcik, *Praca organiczna jako droga realizacji polskiej myśli politycznej na przełomie XIX i XX wieku w ujęciu wybranych ruchów* [Organic work as a road to the realization of Polish political thought at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries in the context of selected movements], [in:] *Wizje i realia. Studia nad realizacja polskiej myśli politycznej XX wieku* [Visions and realities. Studies on the realization of Polish political thought in the 20th century], edited by W. Paruch, K. Trembicka, Lublin 2002, pp. 110–111; S. Michalski, *Wkład ruchu ludowego w rozwój koncepcji demokratycznego systemu edukacji w latach 1918–1945* [Contribution of the popular peasant movement to the development of the concept of the democratic education system in the years 1918–1945], [in:] *Ruch ludowy w najnowszych dziejach Polski* [Peasant movement in the recent history of Poland], edited by Z. Hemmerling, Warszawa 1988, pp. 183–186; M. Strzelecki, *Wychowanie jako instrument budowy demokratycznego panstwa w mysli społeczno-politycznej ruchu ludowego w latach 1918–1947* [Education as an instrument for the construction of a democratic state in the social-political mind of the peasant movement 1918–1947], [in:] *Wychowanie a polityka. Tradycje i współczesność* [Education and politics. Traditions and the present], edited by W. Wojdyło, M. Strzelecki, Toruń 1997, p. 147; *1920 luty 15, warszawa – Program Polskiego Stronnictwa Ludowego*

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education in the Second Republic of Poland that provided the potential possibilities for a wider spread of professional knowledge among farmers. Witos saw publications regarding ideas and education as important for educational purposes. The PSL "Piast" programs have demonstrated the need to undertake various initiatives for wide development of social life and to promote the physical, moral and health culture of rural areas such as: setting up folk libraries, free reading rooms to promote reading, folk high schools, exhibitions, agricultural competitions, choirs, bands, sports societies, orphanages, medical clinics, homes for the elderly and incurably sick people, etc.[40] Witos and the Piast advocates attached great importance to the growth of cooperative societies, manufacturers and tradesmen. Their significance and role were not overestimated in economic or educational terms. They were perceived as institutions of self-reliance, organizational and cooperative work.

In the program of November 1921, the PSL "Piast" proposed the organization of vocational education, especially agricultural schools, and also called for the organization of vocational courses and general education at public schools. In addition to the duplicated educational content of 1919, the new postulate was the idea of a school of work at all levels of science. They demanded the creation of a legal basis for enabling talented young people to pursue higher education without formal certification. The party also demanded that the program of the last three classes of the seven-year-high school be in line with the program of the first three classes of secondary school. The Piasts, however, have shown no consistency in achieving full uniformity in striving to full uniformity of education on a basic level and the democratization of the whole school system. They emphasized that every citizen has the right to education of all degrees according to his aptitudes, and agreed at the same time to the temporary preservation of the manifestations of multi-track character at a primary school level. They accepted, among others maintaining middle school and basic education of a junior high school level at a seven-graded general school – when the most common type of school in Poland and predominating in rural areas were single-unit schools (realizing a four-branch program) and dual-classes (mostly based on the five-branch program) enabling peasant children to educate on higher levels of the education system.[41]

Piast (1920 February 15, Warsaw – Polish People's Piast Party Program), [in:] *Programy stronnictw ludowych* [People's Party Programs]…, p. 180.

[40] *1920 luty 15, Warszawa – Program Polskiego Stronnictwa Ludowego Piast* [1920 February 15, Warsaw – Polish People's Piast Party Program], [in:] *Programy stronnictw ludowych…* [People's Party Programs...], p.180; *1921 listopad 20, Warszawa – Program Polskiego Stronnictwa Ludowego Piast* [1921 November 20, Warsaw – Polish People's Piast Party Program], [in:] *Programy stronnictw ludowych…* [People's Party Programs…], p.208; *1926 listopad 29, Kraków – Program Polskiego Stronnictwa Ludowego "Piast"* [1926 November 29, Krakow – Polish People's Party Program "Piast"], [in:] *Programy stronnictw ludowych…* [People's Party Programs…], pp. 260–261.

[41] W. Jamrożek, *Poglądy ludowców na koncepcję szkoły powszechnej i jej rolę w systemie szkolnym Drugiej Rzeczypospolitej* [The views of the peasants on the concept of the common school and its role in the school system of the Second Republic], [in:] *Oświata, szkolnictwo i wychowanie*

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Witos's devoted special attention to the teaching staff. The profession of a teacher was of great importance for social life, therefore Witos opted for respect, protection and the provision of the necessary privileges. He announced the necessary care for a high level of education of teachers, he defended its professional interests and remuneration so that they could be fulfilled in this profession without any sacrifices and renunciation. The material situation of the teachers was difficult, mainly because of low wages. Witos announced taking over the care of teachers in 1914, "particular care should be given to the layer of teachers, as the educator of the folk masses whose fortune organically connected with the fortune of the folk."[42] Tts material rank was supposed to correspond to the social rank of the profession. Witos demanded to bureaucratize education by reducing the number of curators, clerks in school boards, visitors, inspectors and the complete removal of deputy inspectors. The money saved in this way was intended for the development of general and vocational education.

Witos pointed to the social attitude and personality of the teacher, who in his opinion played a key role in the education process. He appealed not to hire unqualified teachers in schools. At every level of teaching, teachers should have the highest qualifications, the same pay, and be covered by a uniform employment law, regardless of whether it is a common school, secondary or higher one. He emphasized that "the school must educate and bring up the new Polish generation, we will try to ensure the existence of teachers, because it is up to us to educate our people."[43] The specificity of the impact of civic education, especially in the area of caring for human social utility, imposed specific obligations on the school and other educational establishment as well as education and care institutions, i.e. on teachers and institutional pedagogues as responsible for shaping pro-social attitudes of young people. Teachers were supposed to have the proper knowledge and skills in forming civic personalities: people knowingly exercising their rights and performing their duties, active and committed communities. Witos thought that it was their great duty and the basic task of the education system.

After the coup of Jozef Pilsudski in 1926, the situation of teachers was very difficult, not only due to material reasons, but primarily political ones. In the spring of 1928, a decree was issued by the President on the subordination of school authorities to the authorities of the political administration. Teachers were transferred in business to remote areas not only for personal reasons, but clearly for political reasons. Transitions were held for activities in opposition parties, as well as in province and municipal councils.[44] Such a policy of the authorities was unfavorable not only for education but

w latach II Rzeczypospolitej [Education and upbringing in the Second Republic of Poland], edited by K. Poznański, Lublin 1991, p.103

42 W. Witos, *Rezolucja posła Wincentego Witosa, uchwalona jednomyślnie na I kongresie PSL "Piast"* [Resolution of the Member of Parliament Wincenty Witos, adopted unanimously at the 1st Congress of the PSL "Piast"], "Piast" 8 February 1914, issue no. 6, pp.5–7.

43 Ss. SU, item 47 from 6 June 1919, v.XLVII-12-XLVII-32.

44 J. Jachymek, *Myśl polityczna Polskiego Stronnictwa Ludowego "Wyzwolenie"* [Political thought of the Polish Peasant Party "Wyzwolenie"], Lublin 1982, p. 158.

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primarily for the state. Witos and PSL "Piast" together with other parties, among others with PSL "Wyzwolenie" postulated the amendment of the Presidential Decree and the restoration of the principle of independence of education from the state administration.

Witos paid attention to the working conditions of teachers, and those in which children and young people gained knowledge. Among other things, the finances from the state budget for the expansion and renovation of schools were observed. Unfortunately, the deepening economic crisis in Poland caused the reduction of money for the construction of schools, boarding houses, dormitories, and apartments for teachers. The party criticized the educational policy of the ruling camp. The budget for education in 1928 amounted to 5 million – in the scope of construction of common schools, while 26 million PLN was allocated for the maintenance of all denominations. The disproportions were therefore blatant. In the meantime, the costs could be returned very quickly, because they would have influence on the development of the society, on improving its qualifications.

On the one hand, Witos understood the process of acquiring knowledge through the successive stages of education, secondly, in an extraordinary way, i.e. works for the self-government, in various social and cultural organizations, agricultural circles and cooperatives. Witos attributed a particular role to socioeconomic and self-education courses. He was therefore bringing in a thought to exploit all possibilities of self-development and to work for various institutions, associations and organizations, since it was still in the thirties, when illiteracy was not fully abolished. The argument that science played an important role was that through knowledge people can live in the community, be independent and skillfully use the help we receive from others.

3. Final conclusions

The analysis of the political thought of Wincenty Witos leads to the conclusion that education was an important category that was often referred by him. Witos concentrated of some social problems in rural areas, with particular emphasis on education and the situation of people in rural areas. The intent was also to show the living conditions and the difficulties faced by people living in rural areas. With a wide range of rights Wincenty Witos devoted much attention to education. The most conscious part of the rural population understood that one of the causes of social impairment peasants was their little access to education.

The importance of knowledge gained in this way was considered to be an investment of the nation for the future, "this education will determine Poland's position among other countries and nations. […] education is the best way to equalize life chances". Witos directed his appeal especially to the peasants, pointing to knowledge as an indispensable factor enabling their achievement of a co-host position in the state. These concepts undoubtedly widened the agrarian conception of the role of education in building the future of Poland, both in the economic and social aspects as well as in the improvement and modernization of mankind. The education process played an important role in shaping the aspirations of individuals and of the society as a whole.

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Educational actions led to the formation of a citizen with a deep sense of patriotism, a conscious and active participant in collective life, capable of fulfilling personal, family and work responsibilities, and taking responsibility for the fate of the state. In the opinion of Witos, they translated into the organization of individuals' lives, the entrepreneurial attitudes of the whole society. Educated was supposed to prepare people to adapt in changing circumstances so that they could reasonably influence the structures that will be subject to transformation in the future. It was to awaken and maintain a strong relationship with the homeland, its attachment to land, language, culture and customs. Equalizing educational opportunities as one of the greatest social problems in the village was associated with minimizing social exclusion among the widest social groups.

Abstract: The article concerns some social problems in rural areas with particular emphasis on education and the situation of people in rural areas. The intent was also to show the living conditions and the difficulties faced by inhabitants of rural areas. With a wide range of rights Wincenty Witos devoted much attention to education. The most conscious part of the rural population understood that one of the causes of social impairment peasants was their little access to education. Therefore, programs of peasant political parties resounded loudly demands the democratization of education be free education and support for young people who wants to educate the indigent. Poland received the legacy of a large number of illiterates. According to the census in 1921, illiteracy concerned about 38% of the rural population, sources of the political thought of Witos were centered around several reasons. First, this was due to the situation peasants and rural Poland were in. Second, education played a significant role in socio-political transformations. This provided people with a chance for social advancement and has sparked national consciousness and a sense of nationality. With the democratization of education, peasants could consciously participate in the life of the state, educate the young generation in the spirit of patriotism and citizenship. Witos considered education and culture as the basis for the strength of the state and welfare of its citizens. This enabled an impact on the political affairs of the country and the implementation of obligations to the homeland.
Keywords: political thought, Wincenty Witos, rural areas, peasant movements.

Wybrane problemy społeczne obszarów wiejskich w myśli politycznej Wincenteg Witosa

Streszczenie: Artykuł dotyczy niektórych problemów społecznych na obszarach wiejskich, ze szczególnym uwzględnieniem edukacji i sytuacji ludzi na obszarach wiejskich. Chodziło także o pokazanie warunków życia i trudności, jakie napotykali ludzie mieszkający na obszarach wiejskich. Dzięki szerokiemu zakresowi praw Wincenty Witos poświęcił wiele uwagi edukacji. Najbardziej świadoma część ludności wiejskiej rozumiała, że jedną z przyczyn upośledzenia społecznego chłopów był ich niewielki dostęp do edukacji. Edukacja odegrała bardzo dużą rolę w przemianach społeczno-politycznych. Ludzie mieli szansę na awans społeczny, a także stopniowo wzrastała ich świadomość narodowa. Dzięki edukacji chłopi

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mogli świadomie uczestniczyć w życiu narodowym, wychowywać młode pokolenie w duchu patriotyzmu. Edukację i kulturę Witos uważał za podstawę siły państwa i dobrobytu jego obywateli. Działania państwa w zakresie edukacji doprowadziły do ukształtowania się obywatela o głębokim poczuciu patriotyzmu, świadomego i aktywnego uczestnika życia zbiorowego, zdolnego do wypełnienia obowiązków osobistych, rodzinnych i zawodowych oraz wzięcia odpowiedzialności za los państwa.
Słowa kluczowe: myśl polityczna, Wincety Witos, obszary wiejskie, ruch ludowy, dwudziestolecie międzywojenne.

Избранные социальные проблемы сельской местности в политической мысли Винсента Витоса

Аннотация: В статье рассматриваются некоторые социальные проблемы в сельских регионах, с акцентом на образовании и позиции людей в сельской местности. Речь шла также о показе условий жизни и трудностей, с которыми сталкиваются люди, живущие в сельской местности. Благодаря широкому спектру прав Винсенты Витос уделяет большое внимание образованию. Наиболее осведомленная часть сельского населения понимала, что одной из причин социальной отсталости крестьян был их низкий доступ к образованию. Образование сыграло очень важную роль в общественно-политических изменениях. У людей был шанс на социальное развитие, и их национальная осведомленность постепенно увеличивалась. Благодаря образованию крестьяне могли сознательно участвовать в народной жизни, воспитывать молодое поколение в духе патриотизма. Витос считал образование и культуру основой силы государства и благосостояния его граждан. Деятельность государства в сфере образования привела к формированию гражданина с глубоким чувством патриотизма, сознательного и активного участника коллективной жизни, способного выполнять личные, семейные и профессиональные обязанности и брать на себя ответственность за судьбу государства.
Ключевые слова: политическая мысль, Винсенты Витос, сельская местность, крестьянское движение, межвоенный период.

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