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Selected peasant issues of the 1930s in the opinions of Warsaw literary magazine columnists (*Wiadomości Literackie*, *Prosto z Mostu*, and *Pion*)

Wybrane kwestie chłopskie z lat 30. XX wieku w opiniach publicystów warszawskich magazynów literackich („*Wiadomości Literackie*”, „*Prosto z Mostu*”, „*Pion*”)

Summary: In the press of the interwar period, among the group of Warsaw opinion-forming periodicals, the three largest literary and social weeklies dominated – the liberal *Wiadomości Literackie*, the pro-Sanacja *Pion* and the right-wing *Prosto z Mostu*. These periodicals shaped the artistic tastes and socio-political views of the progressive intelligentsia. They commented on the most important events of literary and social life, including those related to the activity of rural residents. The article contains the results of a comparative analysis of the speeches of critics and columnists of the capital's literary magazines in the 1930s, relating to selected forms of social, cultural and political activity of peasants (literary and diary works, as well as strike actions). The study deals with the main themes of press discussions and literary critical essays, referring to the constitutive features of peasant literature, the social image of the village (Jalu Kurek's novel *Grypa szaleje w Naprawie*), the living conditions of peasants (*Pamiętniki chłopów*) and their political attitudes (the Great Peasant Uprising). The interpretation of press materials allowed for the formulation of conclusions about the press image of a cruel and hungry peasant, culturally excluded, and deprived of a chance to change his living conditions. The demands for the social advancement of peasants put forward by columnists of Warsaw magazines were mostly declarative and conservative.

Keywords: literary press, peasants, Great Peasant Uprising (1937), *Wiadomości Literackie*, *Pion*, *Prosto z Mostu*

Streszczenie: Na rynku prasowym międzywojnia w grupie warszawskich pism opiniotwórczych prym wiodły trzy największe tygodniki literacko-społeczne – liberalne „Wiadomości Literackie”, sanacyjny „Pion” i endeckie „Prosto z Mostu”. Periodyki te kształtowały upodobania artystyczne i poglądy społeczno-polityczne postępowych kręgów inteligencji. Na ich łamach komentowano najważniejsze wydarzenia życia literackiego i społecznego, w tym związane z aktywnością mieszkańców wsi. Artykuł zawiera wyniki analizy porównawczej wystąpień krytyków i publicystów stołecznych magazynów literackich w latach 30. XX w., odnoszące się do wybranych form aktywności społeczno-kulturalnej i politycznej chłopów (twórczość literacka i pamiętnikarska oraz akcje strajkowe). W opracowaniu omówiono główne wątki dyskusji prasowych i esejów krytycznoliterackich związane z konstytutywnymi cechami literatury chłopskiej, społecznym wizerunkiem wsi (powieść Jalu Kurka *Grypa szaleje w Naprawie*), warunkami bytowymi chłopów (*Pamiętniki chłopów*) oraz ich postawami politycznymi (wielki strajk chłopski). Interpretacja materiałów prasowych pozwoliła na sformułowanie wniosków o prasowym wizerunku chłopu okrutnego i głodnego, wykluczonego kulturowo, pozbawionego szans na zmianę warunków życia. Postulaty awansu społecznego chłopów wysuwane przez publicystów warszawskich magazynów były w większości deklaratywne i zachowawcze.

Słowa kluczowe: prasa literacka, chłopci, strajk chłopski, „Wiadomości Literackie”, „Pion”, „Prosto z Mostu”

Introduction

In 1924, Mieczysław Grydzewski launched *Wiadomości Literackie* [Literary News], a modern “Warsaw-centric”¹ social and literary magazine. The periodical, created on the model of the Parisian weekly *Les Nouvelles Littéraires*, quickly gained recognition among the readers of the cultural press,² especially those coming from the circles of the liberal intelligentsia. Innovatively and dynamically edited³ for nearly a decade, it had no equals. Its dominance in the literary press market was only challenged by the establishment of the government literary and social weekly *Pion* [Vertical] in 1933. Its first editor was the head of the press department of the Prime Minister’s Office, Tadeusz Świącicki.⁴ The task of the pro-Sanacja magazine, referred to

1 M. Szpakowska, *Wiadomości Literackie prawie dla wszystkich*, Warszawa 2012, p. 30.

2 K. Sierocka, “Warszawskie czasopisma literackie, cz. 2: lata 1932–1939,” [in:] *Warszawa II Rzeczypospolitej (1918–1939)*, vol. 1, eds. E. Borecka, M. Drozdowski, H. Janowska, Warszawa 1968, p. 158.

3 K. Sierocka, “Czasopisma literackie,” [in:] *Literatura polska 1918–1975*, vol. 1: (1918–1932), scientific eds. A. Brodzka, H. Zaworska, S. Żółkiewski, Warszawa 1975, p. 113.

4 Tadeusz Świącicki served as editor-in-chief of *Pion* until November 1934. Later, the weekly was edited by W. Antoniewicz, L. Pomirowski, J. Czechowicz and R. Kołoniecki.

openly as *Anti-Literary News*, was to promote pro-state cultural policy and create public support for the political agenda of successive Colonels' cabinets.⁵ Two years later, the group of magazines that had an antagonistic attitude toward Grydzewski's paper expanded with the right-wing weekly *Prosto z Mostu* [Straight Shot], which evolved from the literary and artistic supplement to the daily *ABC* and was edited by Stanisław Piasecki, a representative of the "young" nationalists. In the 1930s, this "big three" took the lead among Warsaw's cultural periodicals, referred to – according to the nomenclature of the time – as literary and social journals.⁶ Their pages featured the most important literary and social discussions of the third decade of the century, whose participants were the most prominent critics of the interwar period: Tadeusz Boy-Żeleński, Antoni Słonimski, Karol Irzykowski, Jan Emil Skiński and Bogdan Suchodolski, as well as Stanisław Piasecki, Jerzy Pieterkiewicz, Wojciech Wasiutyński, and Jan Masdorf.

The purpose of this study is to determine how much the editors of the three ideologically different cultural periodicals were interested in peasant issues. Furthermore, it aims to reconstruct the social image of the countryside and its inhabitants presented in their pages. The source material was collected using the method of press content analysis. The search included seven full annuals of the weekly *Pion* from 1933–1939 in the original (paper) version from the resources of the Library of the University of Łódź (290 issues) and five annuals of *Prosto z Mostu* published in 1935–1939 (257 issues), deposited in the University of Warsaw CRISPA digital library. The content of *Wiadomości Literackie* was analyzed based on the bibliography of Jerzy Toporowski: *Wiadomości Literackie 1924–1933. Zestawienie treści, indeks ilustracji, pseudonimy i kryptonimy* (Warszawa 1939) and Adam Czachowski's *Wiadomości Literackie 1934–1939. Bibliografia zawartości* (Wrocław 1999). The analysis yielded 76 mentions of peasant issues (articles, reviews, letters to the editor), including 45 published in *Prosto z Mostu*, 22 in *Pion*, and 9 in *Wiadomości Literackie*. These numbers indicate directly the degree of interest of the respective journals in rural issues. For the purpose of the analysis, the most representative ones were selected on the constitutive features of peasant literature and on Jalu Kurek's novel *Grypa szaleje w Naprawie* [Influenza Ravages Naprawa] (Warsaw 1934) – recognizing it as an example of a unique creation

5 For more on this topic, see the monograph: M. Bańkowska, *Prasa, książka i polityka. Sanacyjny tygodnik Pion na tle czasopism literacko-społecznych II Rzeczypospolitej*, Kallisz 2022, pp. 61–67.

6 From the first issue, *Pion* was published with the subtitle *Tygodnik literacko-społeczny* [Literary and Social Weekly], while until 1938, *Prosto z Mostu* was published with the subtitle *Tygodnik literacko-artystyczny* [Literary and Artistic Weekly], and then as *Tygodnik literacko-społeczny*.

of the Polish countryside of the interwar period. Moreover, the subject of interest was the discussion of *Pamiętniki chłopów* [Memoirs of Peasants] from the years 1935–1936⁷ due to their outstanding factual and literary qualities. The last area of analysis was marked by the events of 1937, culminating in the Great Peasant Uprising, a politically momentous action, reflecting the social mood of the peasants and their political involvement. Due to the research perspective adopted, articles related to folk art and reviews of works of the peasant trend – other than those representative of the issues at hand – were omitted.

For the purpose of reconstructing the general ideological and literary context of the themes discussed, the most representative historical literary and press studies for the topic were used, including Maria Szpakowska's monograph *Wiadomości Literackie prawie dla wszystkich* (Warsaw 2012)⁸ and articles: Krystyna Sierocka's "Magazyny literackie dwudziestolecia międzywojennego. Przyczynek do charakterystyki,"⁹ Stanisław Jaworski's "Od Drogi do Pionu (O kształtowaniu się sanacyjnego programu 'upaństwowienia' literatury),"¹⁰ Paweł Strzelecki's "Literackie oblicze tygodnika *Prosto z Mostu*,"¹¹ and Marek Czernecki's "Narodowcy w kulturze dwudziestolecia międzywojennego. *Prosto z Mostu*: oblicze ideowe czasopisma."¹² For the reconstruction of the image of the interwar countryside, historical analyses of the peasant movement were also useful, including those published before 1989. The latter, despite their anachronistic approach, are still an important source in the study of the history of peasants in Poland.

7 In the 1930s, the Institute of Social Economy initiated massive campaigns to collect diary materials authored by workers (December 1931) and peasants (autumn 1933). These activities resulted in the publication of *Pamiętniki bezrobotnych* (Warsaw 1933) and *Pamiętniki chłopów* (vol. 1, Warsaw 1935; vol. 2, Warsaw 1936).

8 In the literature, there is no monographic (press research) study of the weekly *Prosto z Mostu*. The first attempt at a comprehensive analysis of the editorial formula and content of *Pion* was made by the author of this article in her book: *Prasa, książka i polityka. Sanacyjny tygodnik Pion na tle czasopism literacko-społecznych II Rzeczypospolitej*, Kalisz 2022.

9 K. Sierocka, "Magazyny literackie dwudziestolecia międzywojennego. Przyczynek do charakterystyki," *Kwartalnik Historii Prasy Polskiej* 1983, vol. 22, no. 1, pp. 119–130.

10 S. Jaworski, "Od 'Drogi do Pionu' (O kształtowaniu się sanacyjnego programu 'upaństwowienia' literatury)," *Rocznik Komisji Historycznoliterackiej PAN* 1967, pp. 105–148.

11 P. Strzelecki, "Literackie oblicze tygodnika *Prosto z mostu*," *Prace Polonistyczne* 1980, vol. 36, pp. 233–245.

12 M. Czernecki, "Narodowcy w kulturze dwudziestolecia międzywojennego. *Prosto z Mostu*: oblicze ideowe czasopisma," *Zeszyty Społeczne KiK* 2006, no. 14, pp. 83–87.

Cultural and creative peasants – a literary discussion

The National Democracy-Sanacja press polemic on peasant creativity, its cultural-creative dimension and artistic level was initiated in January 1934 in the pages of *ABC Literacko-Artystyczne* by Piasecki, who gave his article a meaningful title, “Chłopy idą” [The peasants are coming].¹³ The starting point for the bold theses of the future editor of *Prosto z Mostu* was the dichotomy of nomadic (urban, proletarian) and sedentary (rural, peasant) civilizations propagated by critics of the nationalist trend.¹⁴ In this context, the peasant dimension and the values cultivated by it, resulting from a close connection with the land,¹⁵ were seen by Piasecki as an opportunity for the cultural development of a reborn Poland. As a result, he considered the perpetuation of primordial values ingrained in the peasantry to be the constitutive features of peasant literature. Furthermore, in the artistic sincerity of such artists as Wincenty Burek and Stanisław Młodożeniec, he saw a path to changing the national mentality and strengthening self-awareness. He wrote with conviction, “With great strides, the peasants are coming out beyond the village fences into Polish public life. And this coincides with the increasingly rapid evaporation of the sources of nobility culture in the intelligentsia.”¹⁶

Noting a number of serious social barriers preventing the autonomous development of peasant creativity, Piasecki pointed to the lack of sufficient interest in the cultural activity of peasants and the government bodies’ passivity in this regard, especially of the Polish Academy of Literature (PAL).¹⁷ Representatives of the government camp reacted almost immediately to the radical theses about the creative

13 S. Piasecki, “Chłopy idą,” *ABC Literacko-Artystyczne* 1934, no. 2, p. 1.

14 Cf. M. Urbanowski, *Nacjonalistyczna krytyka literacka. Próba rekonstrukcji i opisu w II Rzeczypospolitej*, Kraków 1997, p. 102 et seq.

15 S. Piasecki, “Chłopy idą...,” p. 1.

16 “Chłopi wychodzą spoza wsiowskich oplotków wielką lawą w polskie życie publiczne. A zbiega się to z coraz gwałtowniejszym wysychaniem w warstwie inteligentkiej źródeł kultury szlacheckiej,” *ibidem*.

17 Polska Akademia Literatury was founded in 1933 as a pro-government organization. Its purpose was to promote the development of literature and culture of the reborn state. In addition to the Prize for the Young, for authors under 30 years of age, the PAL also awarded Academic Laurels (Gold and Silver) for special contributions to the development of Polish literature (*Dziennik Ustaw Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej* 1937, nr 53, poz. 404, Ustawa z dnia 2 lipca 1937 r. o Polskiej Akademii Literatury; *Monitor Polski*, 1934, nr 74, poz. 113, Zarządzenie Ministra Wyznań Religijnych i Oświecenia Publicznego z dnia 21 lutego 1934 r. o odznaczeniu “Wawrzyn Akademicki”; A. Zawiszewska, “Niebezpieczne związki literatury i polityki na przykładzie Polskiej Akademii Literatury,” [in:] *Kultura i społeczeństwo II Rzeczypospolitej*, scientific eds. W. Mędrzecki, A. Zawiszewska, Warszawa 2012, pp. 233–254).

power of the Polish peasantry.¹⁸ Tadeusz Makarewicz retorted in *Pion* with an article entitled “Chłopy pana Piaseckiego”¹⁹ [Mr. Piasecki’s peasants], in which he criticized the equation of original peasant poetry with the official (high-brow) current. Makarewicz condemned vehemently branding artists of “allegedly peasant” origin as folk writers. As example, he cited Jan Brzuza (alias Władysław Burzjan) from Nowy Sącz, head of a department in the Ministry of Treasury, author of the collection of poems *W krzywym zwierciadle* [In the False Mirror]. He was equally critical of the achievements of other writers of the peasant trend – Młodożeniec and Wincenty Burchter. He derisively referred to them as self-made talents, incapable of co-creating “new Polish art.”²⁰

In an antinomic letter published in *Pion* at the end of March 1934, Antoni Olcha responded to Piasecki.²¹ Olcha took the position of defender of the cultural-creative potential of the peasantry and critically referred to the journalistic tendencies to “fabricate” peasant poets, especially to look for them among the representatives of the bourgeoisie. At the same time, he appealed to mainstream critics to notice the work of writers genetically connected with the land. In this context, he responded to Piasecki: “Save your breath, dear Mr. P., ‘peasants-literati’ exist, although neither you nor your opponent [Makarewicz – M.B.] know about it. And there are quite a few of us: ‘Jantek from Bugaj’ [...], J. Nocek, ‘Stach from around Wygiełzów’, R. Rydz, Kapuściński J., Fr. Macioł and many, many others.”²²

Olcha’s postulates were immediately countered by Makarewicz, whose reply appeared in the 12/1934 issue of *Pion*, side by side with Olcha’s letter. The governmental commentator on the “peasant issue” ironically expressed satisfaction at the wide interest in the discussion of peasant creativity in the “capital’s literary magazine,”²³ as he referred to the mother journal. For Makarewicz, the differences between high-circulation literature and folk literature were obvious and impassable, despite the artistic dependencies. Thus, he wrote: “It is a fortunate symptom that peasant-literati

18 The Sanacja camp presented a different conception of culture from that of the ND, i.e., subordinated to the affairs of the state and built with the participation of the political (Legion) elite. See: M. Bańkowska, op. cit. pp. 56–59).

19 T. Makarewicz, “Chłopy pana Piaseckiego,” *Pion* 1934, no. 3, p. 10.

20 Ibidem.

21 A. Olcha, “Chłopy idą, czyli pisanie o rzeczach, o których się nie ma pojęcia,” *Pion* 1934, no. 12, p. 12.

22 “Szkoda trudu, kochany panie P., ‘chłopy – literaly’ istnieją, mimo, że ani pan, ani pański przeciwnik [T. Makarewicz – M.B.] o tem nie wiecie. I jest nas nawet dosyć dużo: ‘Jantek z Bugaja’ [...], J. Nocek, ‘Stach z pod Wygiełzowa’ R. Rydz, Kapuściński J., Fr. Macioł i tylu, tylu innych,” ibidem.

23 T. Makarewicz, “Wywołanie wilka z lasu,” *Pion* 1934, no. 12, p. 12.

‘want to make acquaintance’ with the ‘official literary world.’ Such an acquaintance-ship will be beneficial to both sides, because everyone knows how much this ‘official’ Polish literature – poetry, as well as painting and graphics – owes to folk art.”²⁴

In April 1934, the discussion was joined by another chief critic at *Pion* J.E. Skiwski, who gave the polemic an ideological character.²⁵ The *Pion* critic categorically negated the thesis of the rebirth of national literature with the participation of peasant authors, and considered the claims made by the National Democratic circles about peasants invading literature to be unfounded. In the context of the widespread “fashion for the countryside,” he perorated: “Now again, several gentlemen are repeating rather monotonously that Polish literature will unquestionably be saved by the peasants. [...] The ground of this movement is most completely ‘evanescent,’ not justified by any carefully thought-out concept, not even by any interesting literary venture, not even by any vivid fashion of snobbery. A seasonal frenzy, taking place on a summer schedule.”²⁶ The artistic “shallowness” of the original peasant literature was contrasted by the author of *Na przelaj*²⁷ with the work of writers such as Jan Wiktor.²⁸

The first stage of the discussion on the role of the peasants in literary life was summarized in an article by Stanisław Czernik published in issue 9 of *Kamena*, titled “Najazd, którego nie było”²⁹ [The invasion that didn’t happen]. In it, Czernik called Skiwski “the general prosecutor in the initiated process [of peasant activity – M.B.]” and considered the polemics surrounding the literary activity of the peasants to be hollow and the result of faulty reasoning on the part of Warsaw critics. Pointing to the ideological basis of the dispute, he emphasized the limited socio-cultural significance of the peasants and denied the thesis of their creative competitiveness with the intelligentsia. From the perspective of an authenticist, he firmly rejected the tendency to create a myth of the upper class at the peasantry’s expense, and stressed that “the matter of unmasking this psychosis, of shattering the myth that

24 “To jest objaw radosny, że chłopi-literaci ‘chcą nawiązać znajomość’ z oficjalnym światem literackim. Takie zawarcie znajomości wyjdzie obu stronom na dobre, bo każdy o tem wie, ile owa ‘oficjalna’ literatura polska – poezji, a malarstwo i grafika, – sztuce ludowej mają do zawdzięczenia,” *ibidem*.

25 J.E. Skiwski, “Przemilczany najazd,” *Pion* 1934, no. 16, p. 2.

26 “Teraz znowu kilku panów powtarza dość monotennie, że polską literaturę stanowczo i bez gadania zbawi chłop. [...] Podłoże ruchu najzupełniej ‘doczesne,’ nie usprawiedliwione żadną przemyślaną rzetelnie koncepcją, nawet żadną ciekawszą przygodą literacką, nawet żadnym żywszym snobizmem mody. Sezonowy szal, odbywający się według letniego rozkładu jazdy,” *ibidem*.

27 J.E. Skiwski in 1935 published a collection of critical-literary essays titled *Na przelaj*.

28 Cf. J.E. Skiwski, “Inferioritätskompleks,” *Pion* 1934, no. 21, p. 9.

29 S. Czernik, “Najazd, którego nie było,” *Kamena* 1934, no. 9, pp. 167–168.

is being created, is perhaps the most important social issue of today.”³⁰ He reiterated these theses in a letter to the editors of *Pion* published in issue 25 from 1934.³¹

The discussion of peasant creativity highlighted the worldview differences of the editors of the capital’s magazines. Pro-Sanacja critics generally represented an attitude of moderate acceptance of the cultural involvement of the peasantry, without reference to their political involvement.³² Nationalists, on the other hand, saw the peasantry as a force capable of initiating major cultural changes. Representatives of liberal circles showed concern for the livelihood of the lowest class, while recognizing the intelligentsia as a force for constructive social reform.

Wretched and animalized peasants – on the novel *Grypa szaleje w Naprawie*

The breakthrough moment in the “polemic on peasants”³³ was awarding of the 1935 PAL Prize for the Youth to Jalu Kurek for his novel *Grypa szaleje w Naprawie* (Warsaw 1934). The award, as well as the impressionistic, strongly naturalistic literary vision of the Podhale countryside, caused a stir in both National Democratic and government circles. Kurek’s work was simultaneously reviewed by Wasiutyński and Irzykowski in *Pion* and *Prosto z Mostu*. Writers from rural backgrounds – Wojciech Skuza and Olcha – also joined the discussion of the social novel of the “poser poet.”³⁴

The first to comment on the reportage about the misery of the Polish countryside was Wasiutyński in the pages of *Prosto z Mostu* in January 1935.³⁵ He assessed Kurek’s work as an “upsetting book,” but a valuable one, written with social and personal commitment. In his opinion, the writer’s naturalistic snobbery did not detract from the social significance of the work, in which: “The truly great question of Poland’s political system, even of Poland’s existence is combined [...] on one

30 “Sprawa demaskowania tej psychozy, rozbijania tworzącego się mitu jest najważniejszym może zagadnieniem społecznym czasów dzisiejszych,” *ibidem*.

31 S. Czernik, “O chłopów w polonistyce,” *Pion* 1934, no. 25, p. 12.

32 Sanacja politicians and ideologists (Walery Sławek, Adam Skwarczyński and others) showed tendencies to treat the peasants instrumentally as capable of pro-state action only under the leadership of the enlightened strata. Cf. J. Hampel, “Sanacja wobec strajku chłopskiego w 1937 r.,” [in:] *Bądźcie solidarni! Wielki Strajk Chłopski 1937 r.*, eds. J. Gmi-truk and D. Pasiak-Wąsik, Warszawa 2007, p. 50.

33 S. Czernik, “Najazd, którego nie było...,” p. 167.

34 W. Wasiutyński, “Głodne Podhale,” *Prosto z Mostu* 1935, no. 3, p. 4.

35 *Ibidem*.

level with the question of hungry male sex.” Noting the powerful social message of the novel, he pointed to realism far removed from Tetmajer’s and Kasproicz’s projections, revealing the truth about the village, where “there is no salt, no kerosene, no matches, no soap, the grain goes to the sequestrators, and the doctor is called only to some of the dying.”³⁶

A completely different reading of the novel’s message was offered by Skuza, who condemned the falsification of the image of the Polish countryside³⁷ and negatively assessed the bias in the creation of the characters of peasants, who are presented as “mindless and helpless animals.”³⁸ He contrasted the literary vision of the Krakow avant-gardist – a dirty, boorish, and animalized village – with the social and cultural involvement of the peasantry. He appealed with urgency: “Let no one slander the countryside and warp today’s social truth.”³⁹ He added: “at one point, the literati were making money on this ‘miserology’ of the working masses – now they’re doing the same with the countryside.”⁴⁰

Also Olcha, a participant in the cultural and educational events organized by the Naprawa residents, strongly defended rural circles and highlighted the processes of intellectual revival of the Podhale countryside. From his account, a picture of a socially active village emerged, with the economic and educational cooperative “Jutrzenka” [Dawn] operating in the mid-1930s and a small library. He wrote: “Babia Góra, Luboń, Turbacz and Giewont reverberate with the militant rhythm of the new countryside, shaking off the dust of slumber, ripping off the shackles of darkness and submissiveness to the miserable fate.”⁴¹

36 “Prawdziwie wielkie zagadnienie ustroju Polski, zagadnienie nawet bytu Polski mie-sza się [...] na jednym poziomie z zagadnieniem głodnej płci męskiej. Wskazując na potężne, społeczne przesłanie powieści, zwracał uwagę na realizm daleki od Tetmajerowskich i Kasproiczowskich projekcji, odsłaniający prawdę o wsi, w której? Soli nie ma, nafty nie ma, zapalek nie ma, mydła nie ma, zboże idzie do sekwestratorów, doktora wzywają tylko do niektórych konających,” *ibidem*.

37 W. Skuza, “Nagrodzony paszkwił na wieś. O książce Jalu Kurka *Grypa szaleje w Naprawie*,” *Prosto z Mostu* 1935, no. 7, p. 2.

38 *Ibidem*.

39 “Niech nikt nie ciska oszczerstw na wieś i niechaj prawda społeczna dzisiejszych czasów nie będzie paczona,” *ibidem*.

40 “Był czas, że literaci robili interesy na tej ‘nędzologii’ mas robotniczych – obecnie zaczyna się ta sama historia ze wsią,” *ibidem*.

41 “Pod Babią Górą, Luboniem, Turbaczem i Giewontem dudni bojowym rytmem nowej wsi, która otrząsa z siebie pył snu, rwie kajdany ciemnoty i uległości wobec sobaczego losu,” A. Olcha, “Oblicze żywej Naprawy. Lisy z mojej wsi,” *Prosto z Mostu* 1935, no. 13, p. 2.

Skuza's opinions overlapped with the assessments of the representative of PAL, Irzykowski,⁴² who explained the verdict of the academics by emphasizing the high stylistic qualities of the work, and justified the reprisal against the writer as stemming from personal animosities between Kurek and the authors associated with the titular Naprawa.⁴³ Despite his appreciation of the novel's artistry, he saw the source of the conflict and the cause of the press criticism in the writer's lack of creative integrity. He concluded: "I won't stand in the way of the editors of *Wieś* going after Mr. Kurek [...], because if the author is opting for integral realism, or 'authenticity'; if he is describing Naprawa in the municipality of Jordanów in such detail, he'd better describe it *cum boris et graniciebus*, along with its grocery stores, cooperatives, societies and papers."⁴⁴

In the governmental *Pion*, the unofficial PAL tribune, Irzykowski referred to the artistic and social values of the work⁴⁵ in a much more balanced tone. He assessed the writer's reportage skills as follows: "Although here and there, he uses so-called avant-garde techniques, [the novel – M.B.] is nice and simple in the old fashion. It is filled with reportage about the poor Podhale village of Naprawa near Jordanów, chronicling the life of the local peasantry and intelligentsia."⁴⁶

The novel was favorably received in the Skamander⁴⁷ circle. In the pages of *Wiadomości Literackie*, Emil Breiter referred to Kurek's work as an exemplification of the poor Polish countryside.⁴⁸ In the literary study presented, the critic pointed

42 K. Irzykowski, "W obronie laureata. Spowodu (!) artykułu W. Skuzy 'Nagrodzony paszkwil na wieś' w nr. 7 *Prosto z Mostu*", *Prosto z Mostu* 1935, no. 8, p. 2.

43 Along with Kurek, Olcha – editor of the literary magazine *Wieś – Jej Pieśń* [The Countryside – Its Song] – was also associated with Naprawa, a village located near Jordanów and Chabówka. The magazine's editorial office was located in Olcha's home in Naprawa. See: T. Bujnicki, M. Stępień, "Wieś – Jej Pieśń 1933–1934," [in:] *Literatura polska w okresie międzywojennym*, vol. 1, eds. J. Kądziała, J. Kwiatkowski, I. Wyczańska, Kraków 1979, p. 388.

44 "Nie mam nic przeciwko, żeby redaktorzy *Wsi* wyłoiili skórę p. Kurkowi [...], bo jeżeli autor puszczą się na realizm integralny, czyli na 'autentyzm', jeśli tak szczegółowo opisuje Naprawę ad Jordanów, to powinna być opisana *cum boris et graniciebus*, i ze swoimi sklepikami spożywczymi, kooperatywami, stowarzyszeniami i redakcjami," K. Irzykowski, op. cit., p. 2.

45 The nature of these evaluations was also influenced by the regard Piłsudski's elite had for Kurek's work, which was manifested, among other things, by the publication of fragments of the novel in the pages of *Droga* (11/1933) in 1933.

46 "Chociaż tu i owdzie stosuje t.zw. zdobycze awangardowe, [powieść – M.B.] jest po staremu ładna i łatwa. Wypełnia ją reportaże o ubogiej wsi podhalańskiej Naprawie, położonej koło Jordanowa, kronikarskie obrazki z życia tamtejszego chłopstwa i inteligencji," K. Irzykowski, "Naprawa nagrodzona," *Pion* 1935, no. 7, p. 2.

47 A Polish group of experimental poets founded in 1918 by Julian Tuwim, Antoni Słonimski, Jarosław Iwaszkiewicz, Kazimierz Wierzyński and Jan Lechoń.

48 E. Breiter, "Powieść o nędzy wsi podhalańskiej," *Wiadomości Literackie* 1935, no. 4, p. 3.

to the realism of the novel and the social message, recognizing them as the main manifestation of the author's artistry. Braiter emphasized: "Thanks to [...] directness and truth, Kurek's latest book is bound to cause a ferment that any sincere social impulse provokes."⁴⁹ He also hoped that the novel's anticipated readership success would pique public interest in rural issues and strengthen the writer's position in Warsaw's literary circles.

The emotional dispute over the realism of Kurek's novel had a clear socio-political context. The accusatory tone of the work, reinforced by the iconoclastic tragedy of the decline in the peasantry's morals and living conditions, was linked to the post-May government. As a result, the exaggerated image of Naprawa,⁵⁰ marked by moral degeneration and impasse, along with its "unwoke" populace and its depraved behavior, poverty and narrow-mindedness, grew in the opinion of Warsaw intelligentsia circles to become a symbol of "all the poorest villages of the Republic of Poland" and became a cry "for the repair of the system."⁵¹ This cry was reinforced by the egodocuments created by the peasantry's literate representatives.

Hungry peasants pleading for rescue – the realism of *Pamiętniki chłopów*

In the fall of 1933, the Institute of Social Economy (IGS)⁵² announced a competition for memoirs on rural themes, modeled on the competition for *Pamiętniki bezrobotnych* [Memoirs of the Unemployed] held two years earlier.⁵³ Information about the literary initiative addressed to peasants appeared in the first issue of *Pion*, along with an extensive excerpt from the IGS's call for submissions.⁵⁴ It encouraged the

49 "Dzięki [...] bezpośrednio i prawdzie ostatnia książka Kurka musi wytworzyć dookoła siebie ferment, jaki wywołuje każdy szczerzy odruch społeczny," *ibidem*.

50 The name of the village (Naprawa – Eng. Repair) also gave rise to associations with the Union for the Repair of the Republic, formed in May 1926, which put forward demands for land reform and strengthening the economic position of the small peasantry (J. Pietrzak, "Program polityczny Związku Naprawy Rzeczypospolitej," *Acta Era-smiana* 2014, vol. 8, p. 342).

51 K. Irzykowski, *op. cit.*, p. 2.

52 *Pamiętniki chłopów. Nr 1–51*, Warszawa 1935, p. XXI. Available on-line: <https://pbc.gda.pl/dlibra/publication/72508/edition/65800/content> [accessed on: September 12, 2022].

53 *Pamiętniki bezrobotnych. Nr 1–57* was published in Warsaw in 1933. Available on-line: <https://rcin.org.pl/dlibra/doccontent?id=66646> [accessed on: September 12, 2022].

54 Information about the competition was also printed by periodicals of the peasant movement, including *Zielony Sztandar* and cooperative magazines (*Przewodnik Gospodarczy*, *Spolem*), as well as *Gazeta Grudziądzka*, *Wyzwolenie*, *Gospodarz Polski*, *Gazeta*

villagers to create detailed descriptions of their living conditions, possessions, family size, educational opportunities for their children, membership in associations, etc. The following appeal was made:

Each of you who wants to contribute to the creation of a picture of how a peasant with no land or insufficient land lives in Poland today should make such a confession of his life, such a description of his struggle with poverty, and send it by December 1, 1933 to: Institute of Social Economy in Warsaw, Warsaw, 20 Czerwonego Krzyża Street.⁵⁵

The contest, with cash prizes for “good descriptions” ranging from 25 to 100 zloty, was met with a wide public response. There were 498 submissions from all over Poland, most from the central (252) and southern (139) provinces; the participants were between 15 and 80 years old. The aftermath of the contest was the first volume of *Pamiętniki chłopów*, published in 1935, presenting 51 works, preceded by an introduction by the IGS head Ludwik Krzywicki (entitled “Awaiting the dawn”) and a statistical and demographic analysis of the Polish peasantry (land ownership status, amount of debt, size of families, etc.). Among the supplementary materials was the full text of the IGS’s address regarding the competition.

The publication of *Pamiętniki* was noted by Maria Milkiewiczowa in *Wiadomości Literackie*.⁵⁶ The critic, writing about the appalling poverty of peasants, pointed to the unfavorable economic situation, the indebtedness of rural farms and the decline in prices of agricultural produce. Furthermore, she stressed the need for the social and economic transformation of the Polish countryside.⁵⁷ In reconnoitering the living conditions of the Polish peasantry, she referred to Kurek’s descriptions and Jerzy Michałowski’s sociological research, conducted in the Rzeszów region and published in the report “Wieś nie ma pracy”⁵⁸ [No jobs in the countryside]. What emerged from it was a grim picture of the village pestered by hunger and disease:

Chłopska, Chłopska Prawda, Głos Nauczycielski, and Kobieta Współczesna (Pamiętniki chłopów..., p. XIX).

55 “Každy z was, kto chce przyczynić się do stworzenia obrazu, jak żyje dzisiaj w Polsce chłop bez roli i chłop na niedostatecznym kawałku gruntu, niech robi taką spowiedź z życia swego, taki opis swego zmagania się z biedą i prześle do dnia 1 grudnia 1933 roku pod adresem: Instytut Gospodarstwa Społecznego w Warszawie, Warszawa, ulica Czerwonego Krzyża 20,” “Konkurs na *Pamiętnik chłopów*,” *Pion* 1933, no. 1, p. 10.

56 M. Milkiewiczowa, “Wolny chłop w wolnej ojczyźnie,” *Wiadomości Literackie* 1936, no. 15, p. 1; eadem, “Wieś polska ginie,” *Wiadomości Literackie* 1936, no. 20, p. 2.

57 *Ibidem*.

58 *Ibidem*.

“Everything is hungry in the countryside: people, horses, cattle, fowl, even the land,”⁵⁹ Milkiewiczowa wrote.

The second series of memoirs was published in 1936, with a foreword by Krzywicki and Maria Dąbrowska. Dąbrowska’s text was reprinted in issue 35 of *Wiadomości Literackie*.⁶⁰ The second volume consisted of 10 memoirs, each of which, as the author of *Noce i dni* wrote, deserved “a separate and thorough examination.”⁶¹ Dąbrowska referred primarily to the literary layer of *Pamiętniki* and called them “works of art,” written down by representatives of circles that “until now [...] have been silent, [...] at most kneeling, praying and singing.”⁶² According to the writer, the artistry of peasant works was embedded in the affirmation of simple life, which she expressed with the words: “The most general testimony to the distinctively modest beauty of these works is that they are filled with the love of a life endured. And such a love always has the characteristics of poetry or religion.”⁶³ Dąbrowska also saw in the peasant accounts a yearning for positive social reforms and argued for their documentary value.

The second volume of *Pamiętniki chłopów* was recognized by the editors of *Wiadomości Literackie* as the most outstanding book of 1936. As a result, in March 1937, the weekly published photos of the winners of the competition.⁶⁴

Neither volumes one nor two were commented on by the editors of *Prosto z Mostu* and *Pion*. The former explicitly boycotted the research supervised by the socialist, preacher of historical materialism, Krzywicki, but did not shy away from issues related to peasants’ livelihood problems. Around the time when the *Wiadomości* columnists presented the IGS’s *Pamiętniki*, Piasecki published articles on the state of the Polish countryside by Władysław Frącz from Ostrowiec (*powiat* of Kielce),⁶⁵ Władysław Tylka from Kościelisko,⁶⁶ and Józef Majkut from Izbica on the Wieprz

59 M. Milkiewiczowa, “Wolny chłop w wolnej ojczyźnie...,” p. 1.

60 M. Dąbrowska, “Chłopi o sobie,” *Wiadomości Literackie* 1936, no. 35, p. 1.

61 Ibidem.

62 J. Michałowski, *Wieś nie ma pracy. Wywiad społeczny w powiecie rzeszowskim*, Warszawa 1935.

63 “Najogólniejszą legitymacją swoistego skromnego piękna tych prac, będzie jeśli powiem, że wypełnia je miłość życia przecierpianego. A taka miłość ma w sobie zawsze znamiona poezji albo religii,” M. Dąbrowska, “Dokument i literatura. O *Pamiętnikach chłopów*,” *Wiadomości Literackie* 1937, no. 38, p. 2.

64 “Echa nagrody literackiej *Wiadomości Literackich* za najwybitniejszą książkę r. 1936. Autorzy *Pamiętników chłopów*,” *Wiadomości Literackie* 1937, no. 13, p. 8.

65 W. Frącz, “Wieś, czy szopka?,” *Prosto z Mostu* 1936, no. 11, p. 1.

66 W. Tylka, “Chłop a religia,” *Prosto z Mostu* 1936, no. 11, p. 2.

River⁶⁷ (under the collective title “Głosy ze wsi i o wsi” [Voices from and about the village]), as well as poetic works by Stanisław Stefan Gębala (“Zew” [Calling], “Strajk” [Strike], and “Odpowiedź ‘czerwonemu’ koledze” [Response to a ‘red’ comrade]) and Stanisław Nędza Kubiniec (“Gromada” [Band]). These materials – revealing the truth about the hard-working, miserable and hungry peasants – were an expression of opposition to the “lucrative” sentimentalism promoted by the urban “dames” and “lively gentlemen with potbellies,” as Frącz wrote.⁶⁸ Two years later, Wasiutyński discussed the first volume of the rural activists’ memoirs published by the Institute of Rural Sociology – *Wiejscy działacze społeczni: życiorysy włościan*⁶⁹ [Rural Social Activists: Biographies of Landowners].

Additionally, the silence of *Pion*’s editors on materials exposing the spiritual and material poverty of the Polish countryside in the 1930s concealed obvious considerations. Sanacja, after the first peasant protest actions, undertook wide-ranging measures to limit the influence of the peasant movement and adopted an “anti-PP” narrative.⁷⁰ At the same time, a system of repression calculated to block access to information exposing the weakness of Sanacja’s social and political program was strengthened. Thus, the initial editorial objectivity, manifested by the publication of the IGS’s call was replaced by a silent attitude towards peasant documents. Furthermore, at that time, peasants undertook intensive actions against the government of Sławoj Felicjan Składkowski, which ended with the organization of the Great Peasant Uprising.

Rebellious and cruel peasants – in the context of the Great Peasant Uprising

In the mid-1930s, the Polish countryside was painfully affected by the world economic crisis and the authoritarian rule of the Sanacja regime. The difficult socio-political situation in the country fueled discontent and intensified the opposition activities of rural communities. Their most prominent manifestation was the boycott of the September 1935 parliamentary elections and local strikes. In the atmosphere of anti-government protests in May 1936, the People’s Party (SL) organized a celebration of the People’s Day in Nowosielce.⁷¹ The rally in Nowosielce was mentioned by

67 J. Majkut, “Po siedmiu oddziałach szkoły powszechnej,” *Prosto z Mostu* 1936, no. 11, p. 1.

68 W. Frącz, “Wieś, czy szopka?...”

69 W. Wasiutyński, “Pamiętniki działaczy wiejskich,” *Prosto z Mostu* 1938, no. 9, pp. 1–2.

70 J. Hampel, op. cit., p. 53.

71 Edward Śmigły-Rydz was invited to the ceremony. The People’s Party members handed the marshal a resolution with demands to change the constitution and dissolve the

Słonimski in *Wiadomości Literackie's* "Weekly Chronicle" in July 1936. Discussing an article published in *Kurier Poranny* (by "Mr. Radziwiński"), the poet referred to the bloody figure of Szela and commented on the political and press abuse of the image of the ruthless peasant as follows:

On the occasion of the Nowosielce rally, the famous 'chain that must be pulled until the bones creak' resurfaced in the phraseology. I don't think we should insist on this expression. The chain is too closely associated with shackles, and the pulling of the chain with bourgeois misery, which put together is a rather unfortunate slogan. The Prime Minister's lapidary, soldierly expressions have their defenders in the press.⁷²

Escalating tensions, growing peasant protests and repression by the authorities⁷³ led the SL authorities to begin preparations for a nationwide strike in the spring of 1937.⁷⁴ This was preceded by a bloody crackdown on participants during the celebration of the anniversary of the 1794 Battle of Racławice and the August 15, 1937 Peasants' Day holiday.⁷⁵ According to the information contained in an official statement by the Prime Minister, 41 people were killed and 34 wounded in clashes with the police in the second half of August 1936.⁷⁶ The government side described the action

Sejm and Senate. The government of Gen. Sławoj Felicjan Składkowski did not respond to the demands. As a result, in the following months, there were numerous clashes in the southeastern provinces between demonstrating peasants and the police (J. Kowal, "Działalność Stronnictwa Ludowego w latach 1936–1937," [in:] *Dwudziestolecie wielkiego strajku chłopskiego 1937–1957. Praca zbiorowa*, ed. J. Kowal, Warszawa 1957, pp. 20–23).

72 "Przy okazji zjazdu w Nowosielcach powrócił znowu do frazeologii wiecowej słynny 'łańcuch, który ciągnąć trzeba aż kości będą trzeszczeć.' Nie sadzę, aby się należało upierać przy tym wyrażeniu. Łańcuch za bardzo kojarzy się z kajdanami, a ciągnięcie łańcucha – z dolą burlacką, co wszystko razem nie stanowi najszczęśliwszego hasła sztandaru. Lapidarne, żołnierskie wyrażenia p. premiera mają swoich obrońców w prasie," A. Słonimski, "Kronika Tygodniowa," *Wiadomości Literackie* 1936, no. 31, p. 7.

73 In July 1936, one of the most tragic strike pacifications with seven fatalities took place in Krzeszowice (J. Kowal, op. cit., pp. 20, 24).

74 M. Sioma, "Strajk chłopski w Małopolsce w ocenie rządu i *Gazety Polskiej*," *Annales Universitatis Mariae Curie-Skłodowska. Sectio F* 2002, vol. 57, p. 229.

75 It is worth noting that on August 15, 1937, the largest Polish cities (Warsaw, Lviv) solemnly celebrated Soldier's Day and commemorated the anniversary of the victory of the "Polish arms" over the Bolsheviks in 1920. See: "1937 sierpień 30, [Warszawa]. Oświadczenie premiera Felicjana Sławoj-Składkowskiego w sprawie strajku chłopskiego i pacyfikacji na terenie Małopolski," [in:] *Strajk chłopski w 1937 roku. Dokumenty archiwalne*, compiled by W. Matuszewska i S. Leblang, intro. and ed. W. Matuszewska, vol. 2, Warszawa 1960, p. 158.

76 *Ibidem*, p. 157.

as fraudulent and criminal⁷⁷ and took steps to silence the issue. This was reflected in the number and content of press reports.⁷⁸ The first details about the protests appeared in the pages of Piasecki's weekly only after the publication of "Prime Minister Felicjan Sławoj-Składkowski's statement on the peasant strike and pacification in Małopolska." The September 5, 1937 issue contained the following information:

All we know about the peasant incidents in Central Małopolska is what was announced in two official communiqués, which were quite sparing with words and facts. We know that the riots took place in the context of an agricultural strike proclaimed by the People's Party, and we know that dozens of people were killed and injured. It is impossible to give a more detailed account of the events on the basis of the scant material available. But one thing is clear: for ninety years, since the days of Szela, bloody peasant uprisings have been breaking out in this very area of Central Małopolska. This is the part of the country where the fragmentation of the land and the misery of the peasants is the greatest. This was the case years ago and is no different today.⁷⁹

On the same day, the Christian Democratic *Zwrot* [Turn] published an article reviewing the press commentaries on the peasants' action, including in *Polska Zbrojna* [Polish Armed Forces], *Warszawski Dziennik Narodowy* [Warsaw National Daily] and *Czas* [Time].⁸⁰ In a reckoning tone, the author codenamed R.S. assessed negatively the attitude of the government press, which "did not disown the effects of lies and acting on low instincts, fear, egoism and hatred." The columnist from Katowice was equally unsympathetic to the right-wing narrative, characterized by a "persecution

77 Ibidem.

78 Information about the protest action was mainly published by periodicals of the People's Party and the Communist Labor Party, as well as magazines associated with the Polish Socialist Party, including *Robotnik*. See: J. Gójski, "Strajk chłopski w opinii prasy krajowej," [in:] *Dwudziestolecie wielkiego strajku chłopskiego 1937–1957*, ed. J. Kowal, Warszawa 1957, p. 98.

79 "O zajściach chłopskich w Małopolsce środkowej wiemy tylko tyle, ile ogłoszono w dwóch oficjalnych komunikatach, dość oszczędnych w słowa i fakty. Wiemy, że zaburzenia powstały na tle proklamowanego przez Stronnictwo Ludowe demonstracyjnego strajku rolnego, wiemy, że padło kilkudziesięciu zabitych i rannych. Nie sposób na podstawie szczupłych materiałów komentować obszerniej wydarzeń. Jedną jednak rzecz narzuca się uwadze: że już od lat dziewięćdziesięciu, od czasów Szeli, właśnie na tym samym terenie Małopolski Środkowej wybuchają raz po raz krwawe zaburzenia chłopskie. Jest to połać kraju, gdzie największe jest rozdrobnienie ziemi i największa nędza chłopska. Tak było przed laty i nie inaczej jest dzisiaj," "Na marginesie. Na ziemi Szeli," *Prosto z Mostu* 1937, no. 41, p. 2.

80 R.S., "Echo i wnioski," *Zwrot* 1937, no. 5, p. 3.

complex from communism.” The article also referred to Jakub Szela as a figurehead of the Polish peasantry.

The editors of *Prosto z Mostu* reacted strongly to the text. The following commentary appeared in the September 12 issue:

The Katowice-based *Zwrot*, which often implies that it is close to the peasant movement in Poland, is highly indignant that, when discussing the recent bloody events in Central Małopolska, the name of Szela is mentioned in the press. It is a pity that none of *Zwrot*'s editors came into closer contact with the Wici⁸¹ movement and its academy in Gać Przeworska. He would have learned that Szela is the figurehead of Wici, that there is no Wici meeting without reciting excerpts from Jasiński's *Song of Jakub Szela*, and that, finally, in the area where the recent events took place, the project of erecting a Szela monument or mound was widely discussed in the Wici circles. Unsurprisingly, if one knows about it, this name immediately comes to one's mind when discussing events in Central Małopolska.⁸²

The opposition press, including *Prosto z Mostu*, for fear of reprisals, usually spoke in “blanks of seizures,”⁸³ “remained benevolently silent,” or published succinct notes.⁸⁴ On the other hand, government periodicals, both daily and opinion-forming, marginalized the issue of the strike⁸⁵ in accordance with imposed directives, and some

81 Związek Młodzieży Wiejskiej Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej “Wici” – Union of Rural Youth of the Republic of Poland “Wici” was a youth organization founded in 1928. It was engaged in educational, cultural and sports activities.

82 “Katowicki *Zwrot*, dający często do zrozumienia, że jest bliski ruchowi ludowcowemu w Polsce, oburza się wielce, iż przy omawianiu ostatnich krwawych wydarzeń w Małopolsce Środkowej, pada w prasie przypomnienie nazwiska Szeli. Szkoda, że któryś z redaktorów *Zwrotu* nie zetknął się bliżej z ruchem wiciowym i jego akademią w Gaci Przeworskiej. Dowiedziałby się wówczas, że właśnie Szela – to sztandarowa postać dla wiciarzy, że nie ma wieczorku wiciowego bez recytacji fragmentów *Pieśni o Jakubie Szeli* Jasińskiego, że wreszcie na terenie, na którym rozegrały się ostatnie wydarzenia, szeroko był w kołach wiciowych dyskutowany projekt wystawienia Szeli – pomnika czy kopca. Nic więc dziwnego, że każdemu kto o tym wie, narzuca się wprost to nazwisko, gdy wypadnie omawiać wydarzenia w Środkowej Małopolsce,” “Na marginesie. Szela,” *Prosto z Mostu* 1937, no. 42, p. 2.

83 R.S., “Echo i wnioski...,” p. 3.

84 The press began reporting on the strike only in the last days of August 1937 (J. Gójski, op. cit., pp. 86, 88). The Prime Minister of the Government of the Republic, S.F. Składkowski (who was outside Poland at the time of the strike) issued official statements on the matter on August 30, 1936 (1937 *sierpień* 30, [Warszawa]..., pp. 156–158).

85 This is evidenced by sparse mentions in *Gazeta Polska* (M. Sioma, op. cit. p. 235 et seq.) and the government-run *Kurier Poranny*. The editors of the latter did not go beyond

of them, such as *Pion*, even ignored the peasants' actions. The few mentions of the strike in the literary and social press were dominated by reflections on the image of the cruel peasant in the style of Jakub Szela.

Conclusion

What emerges from the materials printed by the capital's literary magazines in the 1930s is a stereotypical image of the Polish countryside and its inhabitants. It is marked by hunger and cruelty, as well as social and cultural exclusion. In addition to these schematic portrayals, there is also a noticeable concern for the living conditions of the rural population, in line with the belief at the time that there was an urgent need to "raise the standard of living" of the peasants.⁸⁶

Piasecki's weekly *Prosto z Mostu*, the second most popular opinion-forming magazine in the capital, played a significant role in sensitizing the public to the manifestations of social and cultural activity of peasants as citizens with equal rights.⁸⁷ The extraordinary journalistic talent of the editor and the clear program made the magazine not only interesting but also an important source of information about the cultural and political involvement of the peasantry. This was determined, among other things, by the editorial policy of announcing peasant debuts and "first-hand" reportage material, understandably, to the extent allowed by the Sanacja censors.⁸⁸

The editors of *Pion* were less explicit about the participation of the peasantry in public life. A reader of the pro-Sanacja weekly, a representative of the bourgeoisie and the so-called "new class,"⁸⁹ was presented with the vision of a peasant striving for social advancement in the halls of the university.⁹⁰ However, this did not mean

publishing the Prime Minister's statement on the events in central Małopolska and propaganda reports on the objections of the population of the Jarosław powiat to the protest action ("Oświadczenie premiera gen. Sławoj-Składkowskiego o wypadkach w Małopolsce centralnej," *Kurier Poranny*, July 31, 1937, no. 241, p. 1; "Ludność powiatu jarosławskiego przeciwna tzw. 'strajkowi chłopskiemu,'" *Kurier Poranny*, July 31, 1937, no. 241, p. 2).

86 W. Mich, "Słowo o chłopach (1922–1939)," [in:] *Egoistyczna klasa, czy odpowiedzialni współobywatele. Problematyka chłopska na łamach prasy w Polsce od końca XIX stulecia do 1939 roku*, scientific eds. E. Maj, W. Mich, M. Wichmanowski, Lublin 2010, p. 111.

87 P. Strzelecki, op. cit., p. 245.

88 The circulation of *Prosto z Mostu* was confiscated on average once a year. For more on this subject, see: M. Bańkowska, op. cit. p. 46.

89 The term was used in the 1930s to describe white-collar workers, mostly of working-class background. Cf: T. Brzeski, "Narodziny nowej klasy," *Pion* 1935, no. 13, pp. 1–2.

90 S. Czernik, "O chłopów w polonistyce..." p. 12; J.E. Skiwski, "Krajowe prolet-mity," *Pion* 1934, no. 23, pp. 1–2.

recognizing the value of works of peasant origin.⁹¹ Sanacja's ideological assumptions overlapped more with proletarian literature and culture.⁹² In the 1930s, Piłsudski's media continued to search for an answer to the question posed a decade earlier in *Droga* [The Way]: "Is the people the source of the nation's cultural development, or the ground on which culture will be developed?"⁹³ The answer remained ambiguous and official government policy made it impossible to objectively assess the character and importance of the peasantry, which the ruling elites still regarded as an unenlightened, easily manipulated mass.

Grydzewski's team adopted a clearly distanced attitude towards the recognition of the peasantry's participation in political and cultural life. Until the mid-1930s, this issue was practically absent from the pages of *Wiadomości Literackie*. Later, literary and sociological analyses, free of ideological elements, appeared occasionally. A reader of *Wiadomości Literackie* could therefore view the peasant as the "weakest link" of an independent state, without indication on how to activate the strength inherent in them.

Critics from the capital did not present a united front in their assessment of peasant activity. Depending on their political sympathies and the program of the magazines they represented, they preached different, often ideologically removed postulates on the importance of the peasant class in the reborn Poland: from the apotheosis and subjective perception of peasants in *Prosto z Mostu*, through the conservative attitude toward their social importance in *Wiadomości Literackie*, to the ambivalent approach (from tolerant to negative) to their role in cultural and political processes in *Pion*.

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91 The exceptions were the works of Jan Wiktor and Jalu Kurek, as well as the lesser-known Juliusz Kędzior, author of the novel *Marcyna*, reviewed by the critics of *Pion*. See, e.g., K. Czachowski, "Świat książek," *Pion* 1937, no. 4, p. 8.

92 J.E. Skiwski, "Krajowe prolet-mity..." pp. 1–2.

93 "Czy lud jest źródłem rozwoju kulturalnego narodu, czy też gruntem, na którym kultura ma być rozbudowana?" [b.a.], "Ankieta w sprawie 'duszy chłopskiej,'" *Droga* 1925, no. 10, p. 5.

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