

POLAND AS THE »PROMISED LAND«: POLISH-AMERICAN CORPORATIONS AND POLAND AFTER WORLD WAR I

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After World War I new slogans appealed to Polish American patriotism and self-interest simultaneously. Patriotic slogans exhorted Polish Americans to help reconstruct the homeland and simultaneously, marketing slogans portrayed Poland as an investment opportunity, a new »promised land.«¹ Polish Americans were dreaming: »If I could only save a few hundred, and perhaps two hundred for passage, then I would go back to the country and organize a business. I could do anything, I could buy and sell...« Many persons did so.² Echoes of the nineteenth-century tradition of patriotic »organic work« coexisted with dreams of amassing fortunes like those of the American millionaires. »Try, and you might be one as well.«³ Such was the propaganda emanating from various political circles and business groups in the Polish American community. Such was the picture presented by the Polish ethnic press after World War I.⁴

In the year 1923, at the end of post-World War I »return fever« Stanisław Łubieński went back to Poland. He wrote, »I focused on two problems: one was to propagate the idea of good work organization, the so-called scientific management, the other was [to impart] those things which one might have learned from America, and which here [in Poland] would bring material success and would help the Polish worker become more efficient and very useful.«⁵ In the same year however, Joseph Sawicki presiding at the IV Emigration Congress in Cleveland said that in 1918, »generously we all forgot about ourselves. We were altruists and patriots. Free Poland was our dream. Help given to the Polish people was our duty [...] It is now high time to think about ourselves. There is so much to do« in America.⁶

¹ H. Anielewski, *Wracamy do Polski*, in: *Album Stowarzyszenia Mechaników Polskich w Ameryce: Toledo–New York–Warszawa*, New York 1921, n.p.

² Władysław Orkan, *Listy ze wsi i inne pisma społeczne*, Warszawa 1934, p. 95; Kazimiera Zawistowicz-Adamska, *Spoleczność wiejska. Wspomnienia i materiały z badań terenowych, Zaborów 1938–1939*, Warszawa 1958, pp. 55, 177–178; *Pamiętniki emigrantów: Kanada*, Warszawa 1971, p. 328.

³ Mieczysław Szawleski, *Wychodźstwo polskie w Stanach Zjednoczonych Ameryki*, Lwów–Warszawa 1924, p. 414.

⁴ Adam Walaszek, *Reemigracja ze Stanów Zjednoczonych do Polski po I wojnie światowej*, Warszawa–Kraków: Zeszyty Naukowe UJ, Prace Polonijne, no 7, 1983, pp. 82–93.

⁵ Stanisław Łubieński to Waclaw Gąsiorowski, Gdynia, 24 Jan. 1935, Ossolineum Library, Wrocław, Manuscript Division, 15288/III, p. 245.

⁶ *Protokół Sejmu IV Wychodźstwa Polskiego w Ameryce, odbytego w dniach 16, 17, 18 kwietnia 1923 w Cleveland, Ohio*, Chicago 1923, pp. 3–4, 44–54.

The return migration of American Poles after World War I differed from previous return waves. Many American Poles continued to return after World War I for the same reasons which had prompted return migration in the past. Some people wanted to see the Old Country as quickly as possible, to help relatives with whom there had been no contact throughout the war, and to boast of their success in front of former neighbors. People were also disposed to return by the decline in industrial production in the USA and by the recession which had been deepest in the years 1920–21. The crisis was of course accompanied by a sharp decline in savings amassed by the immigrants.

But after 1919, new reasons also compelled immigrants to return. Patriotic propaganda helped assure that in the years 1919–1921 many people seriously thought about returning. To Polish migrants a specific image of future Poland was appealing: an image of a free, democratic, and just country. It was assumed, moreover, that their country, destroyed by the war and deprived of industry, awaited the emigrants' initiative. They viewed return to the homeland as almost a pioneer crusade of progress. Whereby simultaneously, »You will help Poland industrially, but will do not wrong to yourself either.«⁷ Political groups, business people, and the ethnic press all promoted a similar message. The enthusiasm for the reconstructed Polish independence,⁸ that – as emigrants were writing – »enormous joy« which each emigrant was feeling,⁹ caused a support for some economic initiatives.

This paper talks about one specific aspect of the post-war return migration: the corporations and cooperatives organized by Polish-Americans during this »return fever« and the failure of most such initiatives. Corporations and cooperatives aimed at bringing some help to Poland, to transfer capital to Poland where factories, banks and other enterprises would be created. Coinciding with the post-war »return fever« such plans and ideas contributed to the special post-war atmosphere in Polish communities in the USA.

EMIGRATION AND RETURN MIGRATION

In the emancipated villages of late nineteenth century partitioned Poland money was scarce. Yet, one had to meet debts, pay taxes, buy more land and cattle and take precautions against possible crop failures, etc. Money became a new reality and new value in Polish peasant's life. But it was difficult to acquire money in the countryside.

⁷ *Pamiętniki emigrantów: Stany Zjednoczone*, Warszawa 1977, Vol. 1, p. 153.

⁸ Cf. Walaszek, *Reemigracja*, chapter 1 and 4. Also Adam Walaszek, *Stowarzyszenie Mechaników Polskich w Ameryce. 1919-1945*, *Przegląd Polonijny*, 12 (1986), no 2, pp. 25–36; Adam Walaszek, *Polska Żegluga Morska i inne spółki okrętowe Polonii amerykańskiej po I wojnie światowej*, *Przegląd Polonijny*, 5 (1979), no 4, pp. 25–36; A. Walaszek, *Działalność przekazowo-pieniężna polskich konsulatów w Stanach Zjednoczonych w latach 1919-1922*, *Studia Historyczne*, 24 (1981), pp. 409–420.

⁹ *Pamiętniki: Stany*, Vol. 1, memoir 2, p. 153.

Thus, people started seeking it abroad.¹⁰ »Migration, like any other social phenomenon with an economic background, is conditioned by a rise of new needs among people, and by the knowledge that these needs can be fulfilled and how,« wrote Florian Znaniecki.¹¹ It is estimated that before 1914 about 2.5 million people left partitioned Poland for America. In the case of America a »positive motivation« always existed. People did not only flee deteriorating circumstances, but many felt a need and wish for social betterment. This advancement – a better future, prestige – was of course understood in the contexts of people's own culture. Economic expansion in the United States at the end of the century offered peasants an opportunity to fulfill »their aspiration for social rise defined by their own hierarchy of values«. They were saving, working like cattle, and submitting to industrial discipline in order to buy land.¹² Before World War I, »re-migration« and »circulation« were common phenomena. A significant proportion of Polish migrants, perhaps the majority of them, had intended their stay in America to be a temporary one.¹³

In their intention to return Poles were not different from many other groups migrating to America from Central, Eastern and Southern Europe in the 1880s, 1890s and ensuing years.¹⁴ Available data enable us to calculate that the returnees compri-

¹⁰ Cf. Adam Walaszek, Preserving or Transforming Role? Migrants and Polish Territories in the Era of Mass Migration, in: *People in Transit. German Migrations in Comparative Perspective, 1820–1930*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995, pp. 101–124.

¹¹ Florian Znaniecki, Wychodźstwo a położenie ludności wiejskiej zarobkującej w Królestwie Polskim, *Wychodźca Polski*, 1911, no 3 (December).

¹² Ewa Morraska, Motyw awansu w systemie wartości polskich imigrantów w Stanach Zjednoczonych na przełomie wieku: O potrzebie relatywizmu kulturowego w badaniach historycznych, *Przegląd Polonijny*, 1978, no 1, pp. 61–67; Zawistowicz-Adamska, *Spoleczność wiejska*, p. 19; Krystyna Duda-Dziewierz, *Wieś małopolska a emigracja amerykańska: Studium wsi Babica powiatu rzeszowskiego*, Warszawa 1938, pp. 79–86, 109–116, 135; Ewa Morawska, Labor Migrations of Poles in the Atlantic World Economy, 1880–1914, *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 31 (1989), no 2, pp. 262–266; Walaszek, *Reemigracja*, pp. 5–14, 149–154.

¹³ Walaszek, Preserving, p. 106; Andrzej Brozek, *Polish Americans, 1854–1939*, Warszawa: Interpress, 1977, pp. 223–24. About the terms comp. Frank Bovenkerk, *The Sociology of Return Migration: A Bibliographic Essay*, The Hague 1974, pp. 9–10.

¹⁴ Dirk Hoerder, Immigration and the Working Class: The Remigration Factor, *International Labor and Working Class History*, 21 (1982, Spring); E. Morawska, Labor; Betty Caroli, *Return Migration from the United States 1900–1914*, New York 1973; Francesco P. Cerase, Nostalgia or Disenchantment: Considerations on Return Migration, in: *The Italian Experience in the United States*, ed. Silvano Tomasi, M. H. Engel, Staten Island 1970; Dino Cinel, Land Tenure Systems, Return Migration and Militancy in Italy, *Journal of Ethnic Studies*, 1984 (Fall); Keijo Virtanen, *Settlement or Return: Finnish Emigrants (1860–1930) in International Overseas Migration Movement*, Turku 1979; Reino Kero, American Immigrants as Bearers of Entrepreneurial Ideas and Technology during the Early Stages of Industrialization in Finland, in: *Finns in North America: Proceedings of Finn Forum III*, ed. Michael G. Karni, Olavi Koivukangas, Edward W. Laine, Turku 1988; Lars G. Tedebrand, Remigration from America to Sweden, in: *From Sweden to America: A History of the Migration*, ed. Harald Runblom and Hans Norman, Minneapolis 1976; Frances Krajlic, *Croatian Migration to and from the United States: 1900–1914*, Palo Alto 1978; Theodore Saloutos, *They Remember America: The Story of Repatriate Greek Americans*, Berke-

sed about 30 percent of the emigration rates. Pre-war returns to Poland were – to use Francesco P. Cerase's terms for Italians – those of failure, of retirement, and mostly conservative. People went abroad mainly to get money. And in the villages the inflow of money was the first effect of migrations. The sums from abroad were spent on immediate needs. They made it possible for families to plan small improvements, buy tools and fertilizer and stabilize their holdings which, in turn, affected the distribution of landholding. Before World War I »American« money helped accelerate parcelling of manorial farms and restrained the comminution of land; such influxes also stimulated the rise of land prices and wage scales.¹⁵ In the villages the number of smallest and biggest properties declined, the number of medium size grew. For peasants, the main indicator of social status was the amount of land possessed. In the villages from which people emigrated, the quantity of land available for purchase was limited.¹⁶ Thus, the wealthiest returnees and those who wanted to change their social position visibly and radically had to look for it elsewhere, hundreds of kilometers from the village.¹⁷ Ambitious return migrants were limited socially as well. They could only return to their previous social positions, and, at best, could strengthen the social roles they had played before in the village.¹⁸

POLAND

Migration contributed significantly to the rise of the national consciousness of migrants. In emigration, people broadened their knowledge about Poland, deepened their national feeling, internalized the national ideologies of the Polish gentry, and used symbols identical to the ones used in Poland. The ethnic press propagated natio-

ley 1956; Mark Wyman, *Round Trip to America: The Immigrants Return to Europe, 1880–1930*, Ithaca–London: Cornell University Press, 1993.

¹⁵ Zawistowicz-Adamska, *Spoleczność*, p. 19; Duda-Dziewierz, *Wieś*, pp. 79–86, 135; Franciszek Bujak, *Wieś zachodnio-galiczyjska u schyłku XIX wieku*, Kraków 1905, pp. 79–80; Władysław Grabski, *Materiały w sprawie włościańskiej*, Warszawa 1919, Vol. 3, p. 101–103; Anna Kowalska-Lewicka, *Badania etnograficzne na Podhalu*, *Etnografia Polska*, 1 (1958), p. 245; Emigracja, *Gazeta Lwowska*, May 17, 1903, p. 1; W sprawie emigracji, *Przyjaciel Ludu*, 24 (1912), no 14, pp. 24; Interpelacja posła Stapińskiego, *Przyjaciel Ludu*, 26 (1914), no 13, p. 3; Bp. Pelczar, *Dyskusja, Przegląd Powszechny*, 1912, p. 159.

¹⁶ Franciszek Bujak, *Kilka przyczynków i sprostowań do pracy dra St. Hupki o rozwoju stosunków włościańskich w Galicji Zachodniej (pow. Ropczyce)*, Warszawa 1913, offprint from *Ekonomista*, pp. 80–85, p. 84.

¹⁷ Bujak, *Wieś*, p. 30; Duda-Dziewierz, *Wieś*, pp. 46, 108–116, 135; Zawistowicz-Adamska, *Spoleczność*, pp. 223–224.

¹⁸ Irena Lechowa, *Tradycje emigracyjne w Klonowej (pow. Sieradz)*, *Prace i Materiały Muzeum Archeologicznego i Etnograficznego w Łodzi, Seria Etnograficzna*, no 3, Łódź 1960, p. 66; Maria Misińska, *Podhale dawne i współczesne: Wybrane zagadnienia*, *Prace i Materiały Muzeum Archeologicznego i Etnograficznego w Łodzi. Seria Etnograficzna*, no 15, Łódź 1971, p. 56.

nalism and national feelings.¹⁹ Different organizations competed »to rule the souls« of immigrants. Political elites – Polonia's leaders – established a catalogue of ideas and issues, to which peasant immigrants had to refer, and within which they were functioning.²⁰ Moreover, the regaining of Polish independence meant a heightened prestige for Polish ethnic groups in the USA and strengthened their position in American society. That is why during World War I so vibrant was the patriotic activity within Polish-American communities.

Equally important to the war effort was the support given by Polish-Americans to the Polish Republic after the armistice. The rebirth of Poland electrified and forced the Diaspora to redefine themselves. An appeal issued for people who would collect special Polish-American taxes in 1919 said: Poland would need »healthy and honest Polish hands and heads for its reconstruction«. The homeland called on Poles from abroad to return.²¹ During the post-war National Department Conventions, the slogans »Everything for Poland«, and »Let us help Poland first of all« prevailed. Interest in the Paris Peace Conference ran high and Polish Americans proudly followed the actions of Ignacy Jan Paderewski, the Polish representative, there. Many ethnic organizations tried to reach American authorities, and American delegates at the conference to positively influence their attitudes toward the shape of Polish borders.²² And post-war conflicts over borders, plebiscites, and the Polish-Soviet War intensified Polish-American unity in supporting the new Polish state.²³ An obvious consequence of such an atmosphere should have been a high rate of return.²⁴

But first people hesitated: »If not for this war I would have been at home a long time ago, but now, after this war a man doesn't know what to do, some people have already left for home and have returned«. ²⁵ Among emigrants »return to Poland is the

¹⁹ Ewa Morawska, *Changing Images of the Old Country in the Development of Ethnic Identity among East European Immigrants, 1880s–1930s: A Comparison of Jewish and Slavic Representations*, *YIVO Annual of the Social Science*, 29 (1994), p. 283; Witold Kula, Nina Assorodobraj-Kula, Marcin Kula, eds. *Listy emigrantów z Brazylii i Stanów Zjednoczonych. 1890–1891*, [Letters of Emigrants from Brazil and the United States 1890–1891], Warszawa: LSW, 1973, [hereafter quoted Kula, *Listy*], pp. 113–115.

²⁰ Hearing sophisticated, contradictory arguments regarding the political place and role of the Diaspora, migrants often followed their local bosses, whom they trusted. Cf. Danuta Piątkowska-Koźlik, *Związek Socjalistów Polskich w Ameryce (1900–1914)*, Opole: Wyższa Szkoła Pedagogiczna, 1992, *Studia i Monografie*, no 199, pp. 29–30.

²¹ Quoted after Hieronim Kubiak, *Położenie społeczne i ewolucja świadomości narodowej ludności polskiej w USA w latach 1900–1918*, in: *Polonia wobec niepodległości Polski w czasie I wojny światowej*, H. Florkowska-Frančić, M. Frančić, H. Kubiak eds., Wrocław-Warszawa 1979, p. 58.

²² Andrzej Brożek, *Polonia w Stanach Zjednoczonych a kwestia zachodnich granic odrodzonej Polski (1916–1921)*, in: *Polonia wobec niepodległości*, pp. 89–113; T. Radzik, *Polonia amerykańska wobec Polski 1918–1939*, Lublin: Wydawnictwo Polonia, 1990, pp. 90–115.

²³ *Wiadomości Codzienne*, 16 August, 1920, p. 1.

²⁴ Wyman, *Round Trip*, pp. 109–110.

²⁵ A. S. Świątkowski to his wife, 11 June 1923, Kniola Travel Bureau, Western Reserve Historical Society, Cleveland, Ohio, Serie I, Cont. 3, fold. 23.

most popular topic for discussion and controversy,« informed the press.²⁶ American authorities awaited return migration with great anxiety.²⁷ On the other side of the Ocean some attempts were made to regulate the after-war return movement. Expectations were false. Only about 100,000 persons returned to Poland in the years 1919 to 1924.²⁸

»INNOVATIVE RETURNS«

After the war, Polish American journalists, ethnic leaders, politicians and, above all, entrepreneurs and organizers of cooperatives and corporations promoted the concept of »innovative return,« and linked this concept to the popular issue of Polish independence.²⁹ The rhetoric of »innovative returns« echoed the patriotic watchwords of the war years.

Polish villages lacked »knowledge, organizational skills« – it was said. The Alliance of Polish Farmers (Związek Farmerów Polskich), created in the USA, would help returnees who would decide to return to Polish agriculture exhausted by the war: »to reconstruct the country, to raise the productivity of Polish soil, to import new tools and cattle must be the first commandments of a Polish peasant in America«. Thus after the war one had to »collect and bring to Poland descriptions of American economy [...] and make countrymen in Poland familiar with them.« The plans were made to organize agricultural classes, experimental farms, and to print specialized publications.³⁰

The most often publicized type of return was, however, the one promoted in order to organize and/or construct Polish industry. This was the purest example of

²⁶ *Wiadomości Codzienne*, 19 May 1922, p. 2.

²⁷ In January 1919 an analyst foresaw in his memorandum that after the war 300–400,000 Italians, 100–150,000 Greeks, 400–700,000 Poles, Czechs, Jews, Russians, 300–400,000 Scandinavians (mainly Finns), 150–200,000 Hungarians would return to their homelands. The return, he argued, would cause unavoidable economic recession in the US – Typescript, January 1919, Records of the War Labor Policies Abroad, Industrial and Social Branch, NA; R. Hartt, Emigration from America, *Outlook*, 29 January 1919, pp. 186–87. In the city of Cleveland alone a federal inspector J.A. Fluckey argued that in 1919 35,000 foreigners would leave the city for Europe. Later a representative of the Chamber of Commerce said that 30 percent of Ruthenians, 40% of Slovaks, 35% of Ukrainians would return. »...for obvious reasons this [...] scarcity of so called common and unskilled labor is going to become a really serious problem« – Trend of Events, *Cleveland Citizen*, Aug. 2, 1919, p. 1.

²⁸ Walaszek, *Reemigracja*, chapters 1 and 2.

²⁹ Francesco P. Cerase, Expectations and Reality: A Case Study of Return Migration from the United States to Southern Italy, *International Migration Review*, 8 (1979), no 2, pp. 245–261; Francesco P. Cerase, A Study of Italian Migrants Returning from the USA, *International Migration Review*, 1 (1967), pp. 67–74; Walaszek, *Reemigracja*, pp. 82–93.

³⁰ *Wiadomości Codzienne*, 4 January, 1919, p. 2; 13 February, 1919, p. 2; 15 April, 1919, p. 2, 12 August 1919, p. 2.

Cerese's »return of innovation.«³¹ K. Duda-Dziewierz³² labelled such returns »group« or »organized« returns.

The argument here went that Poland was a country of poverty and indigence. Such was also the picture the return migrants communicated in their letters and correspondences to their compatriots in the USA: Poland was a devastated country, lacking everything.³³ Thus, in Poland »needed are working people« and »life has to be poured into her industrial development.«³⁴ The reconstruction and modernization programs appeared and were discussed in the ethnic press in 1919 and in the following years. In Poland – it was written – »we [the returnees] will face wild forests such as the one American pioneers were facing.«³⁵ Poland was described as a backward, destroyed, poor periphery lacking bread,³⁶ lacking »industrial life« and – thus – awaiting »working people.«³⁷ It also was the country of great possibilities, even »a promised land«; »...there are no merchants, neither industrialists.«³⁸ Backward periphery? The more bewitching field for activity, initiatives! The better for showing one's usefulness, experience and professional skill! »We believe that you too will fulfill duties of this historical moment.«³⁹

According to the scheme many cooperatives and corporations were organized to raise in the USA funds with an aim to reconstruct or modernize the country's industry. Their activity would then be transferred to Poland. At the same time, paradoxically, it was a promising field for activity, one could show his skills and capacities there. Patriotic »organic work« slogans were mixed with shiny visions of »fortune.«⁴⁰ Being in the country of difficulties returnees were supposed to become pioneers in the crusade of progress. Rebuilding of the mother country's landscape was to bring a satisfaction to those who would participate in fulfilling patriotic slogans (and – this seemed to be the most important reason why Polish emigrants supported these activities – a splendid image of profits and prosperity the shareholders would experience was displayed).

The advertising campaign resulted in the development of a specific personality pattern of a return migrant. People who should return to Poland ought to be indivi-

³¹ Cerese, *Expectations and Reality*, pp. 245–261; Cerese, *A Study of Italian*, pp. 67–74.

³² Duda-Dziewierz, *Wiś*, p. 150.

³³ »Now [being in Poland] I respect America« – *Wiadomości Codzienne*, 16 December, 1920, p. 2.

³⁴ *Wiadomości Codzienne*, 26 March, 1920, p. 2.

³⁵ Anielewski, *Wracamy do Polski*, n.p.

³⁶ *Wiadomości Codzienne*, 16 December, 1920, p. 2; 2 December, 1920, p. 2; 13 November, 1920, p. 2; 10 July, 1922, p. 2; Walaszek, *Reemigracja*, pp. 54–58.

³⁷ *Wiadomości Codzienne*, 26 March, 1920, p. 2; 9 April, 1920, p. 2; 22 July, 1920, p. 2; 26 March, 1920, p. 2; 15 July, 1920, p. 1.

³⁸ S. Jakiel, *Praca a handel i przemysł*, *Ekonomia*, 5 (1920), October 4, pp. 1–2.

³⁹ *Wiadomości Codzienne*, 9 April, 1920, p. 2, 22 July, 1920, p. 2, 26 March, 1920, p. 2, 15 July, 1920, p. 1.

⁴⁰ *Wiadomości Codzienne*, 26 March, 1920, p. 2, 9 April, 1920, p. 2, 22 July, 1920, p. 2; Stanisław Osada, *Jak się kształtowała polska dusza wychodźstwa w Ameryce?*, Pittsburgh 1930, p. 173; *Palatyniec*, 1921, no 1–2, p. 3.

duals full of initiative, experienced in American business and possessing significant capital. Since returning »Americans« should have investment capital at their disposal, the role of »organized returns« was all the more important.⁴¹

But »from the broader perspective hundreds of times more important than the influx of dollars [...] is the actual return of people, experienced in America; the person coming back to Poland might bring the most precious achievement: clear mind, realistic vision of life and a willingness for work.«⁴² The Old Country was awaiting »people who have learnt in America how to work, how to save, how to think independently,« solid people.⁴³ Only those who would go to Poland conscious and aware of the hard work which awaited them there »would avoid disappointments.«⁴⁴ »...one had to go to Poland humbly. The awards and satisfactions from the job done would come later, after a long, long time of work.«⁴⁵ Return migrants' satisfaction would always be their own (thus the most glorious one) and that would be the main source of personal pride: »Do not count on profits! Our expedition bears enormous responsibility.«⁴⁶ Thus – »come with us together to Poland [...] to Polish villages, towns, and cities, to create our headquarters in big towns to exemplify how to organize affiliated posts of our work in Poland, how to run them and how to build economic independence.«⁴⁷ The returnees would share with the others their experience: »a craftsman from America will teach a craftsman in Poland how to work more efficiently and with greater profit. A tradesman and industrialist will teach a tradesman and industrialist in Poland how to run a business,« wrote Jan Wedda, an officer of the Polish National Alliance.⁴⁸

What these schemes and programs made clear was a conviction about the enormous power of patriotic appeals.⁴⁹ An exemplification of such argumentation could

⁴¹ S. Jakiel, *Uwagi, Ekonomia*, 5 (1920), no 3, p. 11; O powrót rzemieślników do Polski, *Dziennik Związkowy*, no 185, August 8, 1919.

⁴² Z. Dębicki, *Za Atlantykiem: Wrażenia z pobytu w Stanach Zjednoczonych Ameryki Północnej*, Warszawa–Kraków 1921, pp. 233–234; also: Jeśli wrócimy to jacy, *Straż*, September 18, 1919; Jakich Polaków z Ameryki ojczyźnie potrzeba, *Gwiazda Polarna*, no 12, March 20, 1920.

⁴³ Jaka powinna być nowa Polska, *Straż*, April 10, 1919.

⁴⁴ J. Prażmowski, Czy jechać do Polski i jak?, *Głos Narodu*, (Jersey City), no 29, July 27, 1922, p. 8.

⁴⁵ Jakiel, *Praca a handel*, pp. 1–2.

⁴⁶ Anielewski, *Wracamy*, n.p.

⁴⁷ S. Radło, Polacy w Ameryce, *Ameryka Echo*, no 28, December 9, 1922, p. 11. The word comes from the brochure *Wspólny powrót* published by the corporation Skup. In November 1917 in the leaflets of Polish populists in the USA stated: that the aim of the just created Polish Peasant Industrial-Economic Society was »to prepare for the reconstruction of our Homeland, reconstruction of villages and cities [...] one has to collect money and knowledge, and to rise the sentiments towards the country, to unite hearts and influences« – Archiwum Act Nowych, Warsaw (hereafter quoted AAN), Polish Socialist Party Collection (hereafter quoted PPS), 305/III/53/pt 2, p. 26, 25 November, 1917.

⁴⁸ *Protokoły z posiedzeń Zarządu Centralnego ZNP*, Protocol XL from 22 I 1920, p. 41; J. Wedda, *Reemigracja*, article for Warsaw press.

⁴⁹ »...each Pole should think about bringing to Poland prosperity« – Voivodship of Kraków Archi-

be a brochure of Stanisław J. Zaleski *Powrotna fala* [Returning wave]. Zaleski cited the resourcefulness of migrants, their knowledge of American realities, which could be so useful during the reconstruction of the Homeland. The return of people without skill would not be tolerated. »Our Homeland expects from us not the mindless hands but warm hearts and civic brains.«⁵⁰ Or as some other author said: »Become a member of the Polish Mechanics Association which will provide you with an independent existence in Poland... there you will build a fortune for yourself and your brothers.«⁵¹

The agitation of the Palatine Association provides a very interesting example of a program of »organized returns«. It was summarized in the words: »People will raise Poland. Palatiners will raise the people [...] Thousands of educated and experienced Palatiners will soon come to Poland, will disperse in the cities, towns, settlements and villages and they will organize cooperatives [...] factories.«⁵² The Palatine corporation was organizing educational programs teaching those who intended to return to Poland some skills. The *Palatyniec* weekly wrote, »The uncultivated land awaits us. And beneath that land there is a mine. You are such a mine! [...] How can you know what potential is inside you if you have not dug? [...] Dig!«⁵³ In other appeals, such rhetoric and metaphors were replaced by even more simple argumentation: »If you return to Poland then your knowledge about American trade will value \$10,000, the others will learn from you,« because in Poland people »more and more cling to education.«⁵⁴ Thus, »in Poland now needed are only returnees who as emigrants have acquired some education.«⁵⁵ The returnees were also reminded of stories about American millionaires' fortunes: »Try, maybe you will be one of those!« Organizers tried to dazzle their audience by alluding to the profits and the many activities proposed. »Just listen! The corporation will be active in the textile industry in America and Poland [...] it will produce wood and metal products, it will sell, buy and exchange bonds and mortgages between Europe and the United States.«⁵⁶

Some journalists and organizers were skeptical. Return migrants – wrote Sta-

ve, Sąd Okręgowy Karny Krakowski (hereafter quoted SOKK), no 33, p. 643; F. Cieszyński, *W sprawie wychodźstwa*, Poznań 1919, pp. 67–73.

⁵⁰ S. J. Zaleski, *Powrotna fala*, Chicago 1919, passim. Zaleski's brochure included the slogan »patronize your own« and some clearly antisemitic tunes. One of the corporations created at the time – *Rozwój* [Development] – built its program exclusively on that slogan. It was organized in the USA in April 1920 – cf. a periodical *Rozwój*, 1920–1921; *Straż*, December 16, 1920; A. Roman, *O potrzebie organizowania polskich korporacji handlowych*, *Gwiazda Polarna*, no 29, July 19, 1919. Some other corporations (Polish Mechanics Association and navigation corporations among them) included such tunes as well: J. U. Biernacki, *Triumf idei*, *Nowy Świat*, no 76, March 18, 1921.

⁵¹ PPS 305/III/53/pt. 4, a leaflet of the Association of Polish Mechanics.

⁵² Osada, *Jak kształtowała się*, p. 173.

⁵³ *Niewykorzystana kopalnia*, *Palatyniec*, 1921, no 1–2, p. 13.

⁵⁴ W. Starowicz, *Moje wrażenia z Polski*, *Palatyniec*, 1921, no 1–2, p. 19; Osada, *Jak kształtowała się*, p. 173.

⁵⁵ J. Mierzyński, *Wielka nowa praca*, *Palatyniec*, 1921, no 1–2, p. 3.

⁵⁶ Szawleski, *Wychodźstwo*, pp. 414–415.

nisław Jakiel, the president of Economy Corporation created to build prefabricated housing in Poland – were losing much of what they had acquired in America. When returning they were buying small parcels of land, thus they were returning to the old, pre-migratory existence. »In Poland [...] one needs to build [...] in industry our future.«⁵⁷ B. Kułakowski, a socialist supportive to the SMP hoped that »honest workers who sincerely desired to aid a collective enterprise« would participate in the scheme, not those attracted by the possibility of profiting from the fluctuating post-war exchange rates.⁵⁸

The basic maxim for returnees was that, »one should not, one must not to come back to the old, conservative way of life in the country.«⁵⁹ Thus the appeals for work: »if here people would work like in America ... we would create wealth in Poland.«⁶⁰

In order to explain the success of »innovative return« initiatives one more element might be recalled: in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century one could observe among peasants a growing fascination with the city. The city attracted and amazed, while at the same time »the spirit of the gentry« repelled them. Years spent in the cities during the migration enlarged that peasant fascination. Some venturesome migrants could not be satisfied with the limits imposed by traditional village society. Many returnees moved to the cities and bought properties there, mainly tenement houses, believing these invested their savings best.⁶¹

But, the innovative return scheme materialized in the creation of associations, cooperatives and corporations. The shares were sold among the Polish-Americans. The organizers were often creating splendid offices, were issuing luxurious brochures and leaflets. Organized meetings where speakers propagated the idea of return were an important part of the promotion. The meetings provided patriotic rhetoric, and at the end of the meetings, shares were sold to the audience.

At least one hundred such corporations and cooperatives were created. They included navigation, transportation, oil refining, construction, and banking corporations, as well as enterprises producing machinery, textiles, bricks, and shoes. Some corporations even promoted the construction of garden suburbs near cities such as Warsaw. Except for a very few, all of them went bankrupt sooner or later.⁶²

I will present here two cases visibly different in many respects: the case of dubi-

⁵⁷ S. Jakiel, Polacy z Ameryki w Polsce, *Ekonomia*, 7 (1922), no 4, pp. 73–74

⁵⁸ B. Kułakowski, *Mechanikom Polskim, Nowy Świat*, no 69, March 11, 1921, p. 2.

⁵⁹ S. Jakiel, Bogactwa kraju i ich użytkowanie, *Ekonomia*, 7 (1922), no 2, pp. 9–10; also B. Kułakowski, *Mechanikom Polskim, Nowy Świat*, no 69, March 11, 1921.

⁶⁰ Odpowiedź Redakcji p. Luczakowi z Nowego Jorku, *Ekonomia*, 7 (1922), no 3, p. 23.

⁶¹ Jan Borkowski, Problemy badawcze historii chłopów polskich w epoce kapitalizmu, *Dzieje Najnowsze*, 8 (1976), no 1, p. 64; Duda–Dziewierz, *Wieś*, p. 108; W. Witos, *Jedna wieś*, Chicago 1955, p. 40; Walaszek, *Preserving or Transforming*, p. 116.

⁶² Walaszek, *Reemigracja*, Annex; Adam Walaszek, *Światy emigrantów: Tworzenie polonijnego Cleveland, 1880–1930*, Kraków 1994, pp. 70–71. Similar actions took place among the other nationals: Slovak businessmen joined in founding a million dollar company, the Czechoslovak Commercial Corporation. Ján Pankuch, *Dejiny Clevelandských a Lakewoodsých Slovákov*, Cleveland: Pankuch Printing, 1930, pp. 163–64.

ous Polish navigation companies, and the relatively successful SMP, which, at least as far as the organizers are concerned, was deeply rooted in idealism.

POLISH NAVIGATION CORPORATION AND THE OTHER SHIP CORPORATIONS OF AMERICAN POLONIA AFTER WORLD WAR I⁶³

Among the corporations created after World War I were also ship companies, the first seriously planned of those being the Polish American Navigation Corporation initiated in the first half of 1919 by some Polish petty bourgeois from the Eastern US states (T. Niklewicz, J. Borkowski, A. Roszkowski). It was linked with the Poland-America Line already existing in Chicago. Six ships were purchased which were to keep a direct connection between New York and Gdańsk (and that was to serve the predicted heavy return movement). The corporation gained a concession from the Polish government. PANC collected 3 million dollars from 20,000 shareholders. A drop in fees for shipped goods made it impossible for the corporation to pay the installments for the ships purchased. Therefore, they had to be detained in New York.

In 1919, in Wilmington, Delaware Michał Szymański initiated the establishment of another company, i.e. Polish Navigation Corporation (founded by J. Strzelecki, M. Szymański).⁶⁴ Rev. J. P. Chodkiewicz was the chaplain of the Corporation.⁶⁵ The publicized program of the PNC was quite dynamic. Arguing that about 300,000 Poles from the USA would return to the Old Country⁶⁶ PNC planned to establish regular service between New York and Gdańsk harbor, to arrange broad services for returnees (in New York, Gdańsk and Warsaw establishing »emigration stations«), and regular water communication on the Vistula River between Gdańsk and the rest of Poland. PNC also announced plans to buy coal mines.⁶⁷ The corporation was to have a »populist« character.⁶⁸ The PNC purchased two ships (»Józef Piłsudski« renovated in Kiel, and »New York«),⁶⁹ but a shortage of funds determined the fate of the PNC. »New York« was sold far below its value, »Józef Piłsudski« was detained in Kiel as the

⁶³ The detailed history of Polish-American ship companies cf. Adam Walaszek, *Polska Żegluga Morska i inne spółki okretowe Polonii amerykańskiej po I wojnie światowej, Przegląd Polonijny*, 1979, no 4, pp. 25–36.

⁶⁴ J. Strzelecki, *W sprawie Polskiej Żeglugi Morskiej, Nowy Świat*, no 17, January 17, 1922.

⁶⁵ AAN, Polish Embassy in Washington (hereafter quoted WAS), no 180, pp. 1–2, Polish Consulate General in New York to Polish Legacy in Washington, typescript December 19, 1921; WAS 1685, pp. 31–32, J. Chodkiewicz to the Polish Legacy in Washington, October 17, 1920.

⁶⁶ *Jedność-Polonia*, (Baltimore), no 33, August 14, 1920, p. 2; some other advertisements cf. AAN WAS, no 1685, pp. 8, 124–128.

⁶⁷ *Gwiazda Morska: Przez handel morski do dobrobytu*, New York: Tow. Polskiej Żeglugi Morskiej, 1920.

⁶⁸ Library of the Polish Academy of Sciences, Kraków, mss. 2548, pp. 19–21, Chodkiewicz to Ostaszewski, June 5, 1920.

⁶⁹ J. Strzelecki, *W sprawie*, p. 2.

corporation could not afford to pay for its renovation. Financial claims of the crew multiplied the difficulties.⁷⁰

In the opinion of contemporaries the fall of the PNC was caused by a lack of adequate professional training, ignorance of the market situation and rules that governed trade in the first years after the war.⁷¹ The failure of these corporations with such a large number of shareholders upset the Polish-Americans deeply. Numerous attempts were undertaken to save the capital amassed. Shareholders of the PNC established two companies – White Eagle Line (captain Kowalski and Adamowicz) and American Steamship Corporation (captain Dorsen). White Eagle Line was soon changed into United Polish Lines (headed by Adamowicz, Kowalski, Chodkiewicz and captain Górski) and as such was to save the capital of shareholders of all bankrupt corporations as well as to regain the requisite ships.⁷²

In a desperate attempt to save whatever had already been achieved UPL together with the newly organized company Liga Handlowo-Przemysłowa (Trade Industry League) sent out to the former shareholders 45,000 messages, in which they requested a payment of six dollars and offered new shares in return.⁷³ This attempt did not bring the expected result either. Another attempt was undertaken by Chrześcijańska Spółka Akcyjna dla Żeglugi Handlu i Przemysłu (Christian Joint Stock Company for the Shipping Trade and Industry), and Defiance Transportation and Trading Co., incorporated in New York State (its equivalent in the USA), founded by the Chodkiewicz brothers.⁷⁴ The corporation was ridiculed (particularly for the highly religious rhetoric used in advertisements).⁷⁵ The weekly *Ameryka Echo* wrote in this respect: »one must not link religion, politics and sentiments with the enterprise.« »This enterprise seems to be a priests' toy, a poor joke from Polish society.«⁷⁶

The last attempt at saving Polish shipping corporations was undertaken by Mr. Niezychowski – his proceedings concerned the PANC. He presented the »Memorandum...« to the Trade Commission of the Congress of the US. Jan Sosnowski, a well-known Polish American politician who became a spokesperson for the project, tried

⁷⁰ *Ameryka Echo*, (Toledo), no 37, December 11, 1921, p. 11; S. Radło, Polish Navigation Co., *Ameryka Echo*, no 47, November 20, 1921, p. 11.

⁷¹ AAN WAS, no 180, pp. 5–13, typescript.

⁷² AAN Polish Consulate in Buffalo, no 100a, p. 15, Consulate General New York to Polish Foreign Ministry, July 13, 1922; also p. 9, *Ibidem*, Consulate General New York to Consulate In Chicago, April 11, 1922; Consulate General New York to Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, April 24, 1922; *Ibidem*, p. 22, 26 August, 1922; p. 25, Consulate Detroit to Consulate General in New York, April 13, 1926.

⁷³ AAN Polish Consulate in Buffalo, no 100a, p. 16–17, 20, Consulate General New York to Consulate Buffalo, September 1, 1922.

⁷⁴ Szawleski, *Wychodźstwo*, p. 415; AAN WAS, no 1685, pp. 101–102, Ministry of Industry and Trade to the Polish Foreign Ministry, June 2, 1922.

⁷⁵ AAN Polish Consulate in Buffalo, no 100a, pp. 4–6, Consulate General New York to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, April 24, 1922; AAN Wasz 1683, p. 84, Consulate Detroit to Polish Legacy in Washington, June 1, 1922.

⁷⁶ S. Radło, Polacy w Ameryce, *Ameryka Echo*, no 15, April 9, 1922, p. 11.

to obtain a discount of the total sum of two million dollars, which would enable the release of the four ships. These endeavors likewise met with failure.⁷⁷ The bankruptcy of shipping companies played a prominent part in shaping attitudes of Polonia towards the action of creating Polish corporations – it met with a negative response not to mention the heavy financial loss.⁷⁸

POLISH MECHANICS ASSOCIATION IN AMERICA

Activists from the Alliance of Polish Socialists and from the Committee of National Defence (KON, a moderate leftist political umbrella organization) played a key role in promoting the concept of »innovative return«.⁷⁹ For Polish-American socialists⁸⁰ return migration programs expressed a synthesis between socialist and patriotic concerns. The Polish Mechanics Association (Stowarzyszenie Mechaników Polskich – SMP)⁸¹ was probably the most serious attempt of all to return to Poland and fulfill the modernization task.

The project was first introduced in 1918 in Toledo, Ohio by an engineer Aleksander Gwiazdowski, a former member of the Polish Socialist Party. Emigrating to the US during the 1905 revolution, he settled in Toledo where, sometime later, he became a teacher of mechanical engineering.⁸² In 1919 Gwiazdowski with some followers organized the first small machine shop of the SMP. By the end of the year, the whole project was widely advertised and the SMP had accumulated a capital of \$100,000. The SMP's organizers believed the organization had to return to Poland because »it is bad, very bad« there. The return to Poland was a great responsibility: in returning »we want to serve Poland, not to live off of Poland.«⁸³ The members must »...create wealth [...] Produce enough for your civilized life and first of all to produce enough to lift Poland as the whole towards happiness.«⁸⁴ To produce, meant to transfer from America to Poland »a system«. Skilled returned migrants coming back with some savings and familiarity with the advanced industrial society would teach their countrymen how to work »in the American fashion«.⁸⁵ This would cure the economy of the coun-

⁷⁷ Walaszek, *Polska Żegluga*, p. 35.

⁷⁸ S. Radło, *Polacy w Ameryce*, *Ameryka Echo*, no 40, October 5, 1924, p. 11.

⁷⁹ Among them S. Rayzacher, B. Kułakowski, K. Żurowski, A. Dębski, H. Anielewski, A. Gwiazdowski, W. Kosicki.

⁸⁰ M. Cygan, *Political and Cultural Leadership in an Immigrant Community: Polish American Socialism, 1880–1950*, Ph. D. Diss., Northwestern University, 1989, pp. 125–128.

⁸¹ The SMP activity is summarized in Adam Walaszek, *Stowarzyszenie Mechaników Polskich w Ameryce, 1919–1945*, *Przegląd Polonijny*, 1986, no 2, pp. 25–36.

⁸² T. Dereń, *Wspomnienia*, in *Album Stowarzyszenia*.

⁸³ Anielewski, *Wracamy*, n.p.

⁸⁴ B. Kułakowski, *Polskim Mechanikom*, in *Album Stowarzyszenia*, n.p.

⁸⁵ S. Sierostawski, *Z czym przychodzi do Polski i do czego dąży SMP*, *Nowy Świat*, no 21, January 21, 1921, no 22, January 23, 1921, no 24, January 25, 1921.

try, it would reconstruct what »Germans hurt [...] what was destroyed by Russian fire«. ⁸⁶ The arguments went on: »We Americans must show the Poles how to do 'business'.« ⁸⁷ »What no doubt Poland will profit enormously by the massive return of strong, idealistic and democratic forces,« wrote a socialist journalist Bronisław Kułakowski. ⁸⁸ The SMP sought investment from the Polish-American community. Unlike the other enterprises, though, the founders of the SMP believed that investors should be dedicated to long-range cooperative goals which might require self-sacrifice. The SMP introduced another element to the image of return migrants – a political one – returnees would bring knowledge of American democratic ideals. A journalist from »Straż« described the goal of emigrants as »To bring to new Poland by returnees the ideals which in America are the basis for freedom and democracy«. ⁸⁹ Henryk Anielewski wrote: »our dividends will be a People's Poland, prosperous and happy.« ⁹⁰ »The Mechanics« (as they called themselves) aimed to create in Poland factories with workers' self-management: »We come back to Poland to work in our own workshops.« ⁹¹ The factories – »the duchies of work« – would serve the returnees and the country. Primary schools for workers' children would also exist in the factories and workers would benefit from many privileges. The idea of industry's reconstruction, of self-management, hard work for the benefit of the country, the propaganda of »democratic idea of trade and industry with the people, through the people and for the people«, ⁹² the populist slogan »knowledge for the people and power for the people« ⁹³ were openly supported by the Committee of National Defence and by the Alliance of Polish Socialists (APS).

The SMP established a machine tool works and a trade school in Pruszków, near Warsaw, ⁹⁴ two brickworks in Bydgoszcz (employing 75 people), a cardboard and button factory »Jakor« in Warsaw, purchased shares of the factory in Poręba in Silesia with a foundry and a cookware plant (employing 743 people). The new school was directed by Henryk Anielewski. SMP had also purchased a coal mine and a large farm near Poręba, and finally an agricultural equipment plant in Wyszaków. ⁹⁵ Altogether

⁸⁶ J. Kaden-Bandrowski, *Wasza myśl*, in *Album Stowarzyszenia*.

⁸⁷ A. Fiderkiewicz, *Dobre czasy: Wspomnienia z lat 1922–1927*, Warszawa 1957, p. 8.

⁸⁸ B. Kułakowski, Stanowisko 'Nowego Świata' wobec SMP, *Nowy Świat*, January 5, 1923, p. 2.

⁸⁹ Jaka powinna być nowa Polska, *Straż*, April 10, 1919.

⁹⁰ H. Anielewski, *Wracamy*, n.p.; L. Lesicki, Chłop się zbudził to i wstanie, *Oświatowiec*, 1 (1917), no 1; L. Lesicki, Nie potrzeba ci chłopie giętkości karku, ale siły, *Oświatowiec*, 1917, no 2; F. H., Jaka Polska, *Straż*, no 44, October 23, 1920.

⁹¹ J. U. Biernacki, Triumf idei, *Nowy Świat*, no 76, March 18, 1921, p. 17.

⁹² S. Rayzacher to J. Z. Dodatko, November 5, 1921, p. 1, J. Piłsudski Institute, New York, Papers of J. Z. Dodatko.

⁹³ *Dziennik dla Wszystkich*, June 18, 1922.

⁹⁴ Polish Academy of Sciences Archive, Warsaw, J. Piotrowski Papers, III-110/56, p. 23, typescript, Memorandum, November 6, 1927; Skierniewice Archive, Żyrardów Branch, collection Stowarzyszenie Mechaników Polskich, fold. 33, p. 17, typescript Gymnasium, September 5, 1945.

⁹⁵ S. Rayzacher, Poręba, *Nowy Świat*, no 311, November 9, 1922, no 313, November 11, no 314, November 12, no 317, November 16; J. Piotrowski, Poręba, *Nowy Świat*, December 3, December

20,000 Polish emigrants in the USA invested in SMP.⁹⁶ SMP bought some shares of the New York newspaper *Nowy Świat* [New World]. In Warsaw SMP bought a bank. Many prominent Polish politicians also supported the ideas of expanding SMP's businesses – creating the shops, factories, and the Warsaw trade center which would distribute and advertise the machines produced by the SMP.⁹⁷

The SMP's main problem was undercapitalization. The cooperation's investment never reached planned levels. The plants were unable to produce at full capacity. Some shareholders had serious hopes for short-term profits and started to complain. Gwiazdowski was criticized by the press, and later even by some socialists and Piłsudskiites.⁹⁸ Shareholders criticized the SMP for false management, which – for them – ended only with losses.⁹⁹ After a reorganization in 1923, the SMP's main manager was Jan Piotrowski, an engineer educated in St. Petersburg with experience as a constructor in Warsaw. Piotrowski had been the general engineer of the SMP factories in Pruszków and Poręba. Piotrowski and the new board of directors reorganized the SMP under the name of the Association of Polish Mechanics from America (Stowarzyszenie Mechaników Polskich z Ameryki, SMPA). SMPA started to operate in a different manner. By 1927 it began to count on the Polish state bank to make up needed funds. Although it continued to expand into the 1930s (and some of its plants continued to exist after World War II), it eventually lost its connection with the Polish American community.¹⁰⁰

The fact that the SMP survived despite various crises of the 1920s and 1930s did not mean the success of return migrants. The money invested by emigrants was lost (the dividends were not paid and SMP shares had no real market value). However, the SMP operating in Poland was one of very few corporations, if not the only one, established by Polish-Americans which in practice succeeded in realizing the original program of »innovative returns«. The machines produced in Pruszków counted among the most modern and highly esteemed outside Poland as well. The SMP succeeded in attracting very good specialists both in the school and in the factory, and managed to educate new ones. Thus, the ideals of founders like Gwiazdowski were fulfilled, though indirectly.

21, December 22, 1922; *Mechanik*, no 1, 1921, p. 4; A. Gwiazdowski, *Nasze zadania*, *Mechanik*, 1921, no 1, pp. 79–80.

⁹⁶ Walaszek, *Stowarzyszenie*, p. 29.

⁹⁷ Centrala Handlowa SMP z Ameryki, *Ziemia Sieradzka*, no 22, May 29, 1921, p. 2.

⁹⁸ *Wyzwolenie*, no 30, July 24, 1921, pp. 289–291.

⁹⁹ Ze Zjazdu SMP w Ameryce, *Nowy Świat*, January 21, 1922, January 22, 1922; Sprawozdanie Komisji Rewizyjnej, *Ibidem*, February 5, 1922; W. Kogut, *Echa Zjazdu Mechaników Polskich w Toledo*, *Ameryka Echo*, February 19, 1922, p. 14.

¹⁰⁰ Cf. Walaszek, *Stowarzyszenie*, pp. 32–36.

CONCLUSION

The idealized returnee did not materialize. When the proudly declared ideas were confronted with practice it turned out that the shareholders, and supporters of the corporations expected mainly one – fast and high dividend. The great majority of shareholders stayed in the USA. Out of 18,343 members of the SMP only 1,000 had left for Poland by 1921.¹⁰¹

Many persons became convinced that a return to Poland (either individually or with a cooperative or corporation) might mean material success, a rescue of their savings.¹⁰² And they were partly influenced by the general atmosphere of pilgrimage to their native land, abandoned years before. What they had not realized was what it meant to return. It soon became evident that the imagined Poland and the real one were not one and the same. The history of return migration from America to Poland after World War I is a history of the sudden failure of a myth which had originated in and was created among the Polish communities in America. It was a dream of an affluent peasants' or workers' Poland, of a modernized, »America-like« country. Attempts to transplant innovations from America to the Old Country failed. In reality neither the returnees nor the inhabitants of Poland were prepared and able to fulfill such a task. The great majority of them went bankrupt or disappeared – schemes to help the homeland after independence met with moderate success at best.¹⁰³ The organizers of these initiatives, speakers, journalists, and politicians overestimated the level of patriotic engagement. The ethos of the return migrant was not the nineteenth century positivist ethos nor the ethos of »organic work«.¹⁰⁴ In the stormy years after 1918 in practice great majority of those who returned to Poland acted from the same attitudes which characterized the peasants who returned before World War I. The ethos of the return migrant remained the ethos of the peasant.

»The earnings and savings of many years of hard work were gone« – wrote a historian of Polonia.¹⁰⁵ Memoirists recalled them with anger: »What was left were only [bitter] recollections and curses of people who had been hurt, from whom money was stolen. Millions of dollars of workers disappeared.«¹⁰⁶ Everyone was blamed: the Polish government, Polish diplomatic agencies, the investors themselves, and, most of all, those who created the corporations. Promoters of associations and corporations, even those with honest intentions, faced ruined lives and even criminal charges.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰¹ Sprawozdanie z działalności SMP, *Nowy Świat*, February 19, 1921.

¹⁰² Cf. Walaszek, *Reemigracja*, chapter 1 and 4. Comp. Walaszek, *Stowarzyszenie*, pp. 25–36; Walaszek, *Polska Żegluga*, pp. 25–36; Walaszek, *Działalność przekazowo-pieniężna*, pp. 409–420.

¹⁰³ Kula, *Listy emigrantów*, pp. 110–112; Tadeusz Radzik, *Spoleczno-ekonomiczne aspekty stosunku Polonii amerykańskiej do Polski po I wojnie światowej*, Wrocław–Warszawa 1989, pp. 146–155.

¹⁰⁴ The term »organic work« was used in *Nowy Świat* from May 21, 1921, p. 4 in the advertisement.

¹⁰⁵ K. Wachtl, *Polonia w Ameryce*, Philadelphia 1944, p. 185.

¹⁰⁶ *Pamiętniki: Stany*, Vol. 1, p. 175, Vol. 2, p. 138.

¹⁰⁷ Who was the director of the Polskie Przedsiębiorstwo Handlowo-Przemysłowe i Bank Romana

The real reasons for the failure of these initiatives were: the returnees' total ignorance of Polish reality, their ignorance of managerial skill and technology, the lack of capital, chaotic investment patterns, over-optimism, untempered ambition, and the nervousness of shareholders (expecting fast and easy income) when the dividends were not provided. In addition, the dishonesty of some corporation officers also contributed in certain cases.

The failure of return migration (broadly understood) had a significant impact on the rise of new ideological programs among Polish-Americans. The post-war events, the failure of »innovative returns«, the echoes of various other events from Poland also rather discouraged people from return. Those who had returned described their difficult and hard way back; thefts, swindels, omnipresence of rampant bureaucracy stupidity, poverty, filth, despotic priests irritated people. Thus, many returned to the USA – »sad, depressed, disillusioned people«. The fact that leaders and politicians very popular among Polish Americans remained outsiders in the Polish political scene also had an impact. In Poland, Joseph Piłsudski became the leading political figure; in the US his political friends lost. Paderewski and many Polish American leaders supported Piłsudski's opposition, the National Democrats. Poland and American Polonia »were out-of-synchronization. This incompatibility helps explain why Polonia so rapidly lost interest in Polish affairs after 1919,« writes Mieczysław B. Biskupski.¹⁰⁸

It was the ideology of ethnicity and the slogan »Wychodźstwo dla Wychodźstwa« (Emigrants for themselves) which finally prevailed in the Twenties. It was declared by the leaders that the Polish-American interests lay in concentrating on internal affairs in America, in participating in American political and social life, in defence of the Polish language and culture. In 1925 during an Emigration Congress, Jan W. Śliwiński said firmly, »we must take care of our own businesses here in this country.« Poles as American citizens should »participate in American life equally with other groups«. These words were not a postulate: they characterized a current situation.¹⁰⁹

Wandzla = cf. SOKK 33, 34; SOKK W.O. 6/25; AAN WAS, no 2406; also R. Wandzel, *Kart kilka z życia mego oraz w świetle prawdy pp. Franciszek Klimczak, Tadeusz Srokowski i dr. Mieczysław Wyrwał...*, Kraków 1924; R. Wandzel, List otwarty do Pana Prezydenta Najjaśniejszej Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej w sprawie Polskiego Banku Handlowo-Przemysłowego Sp. Akc., *Naprzód*, no 135, June 16, 1924, p. 9.

¹⁰⁸ Mieczysław B. Biskupski, *American Polonia and the Resurrection of Independent Poland, 1914–1919*, The Fiodorczyk Lecture, Polish Studies Center, New Britain: Central Connecticut State University, 1989, p. 8.

¹⁰⁹ *Kongres Wychodźstwa Polskiego w Ameryce: Odezwy, mowy, referaty, rezolucje, uchwały oraz urzędowy protokół odbyty w dniach 21–23 V 1925 w Detroit, Mich.*, Chicago 1925, p. 16.

POVZETEK

POLJSKA KOT »OBLJUBLJENA DEŽELA«: POLJSKOAMERIŠKE
KORPORACIJE IN POLJSKA PO PRVI SVETOVNI VOJNI

Adam Walaszek

Nove parole, ki so se po prvi svetovni vojni razširile med ameriškimi Poljaki, so nagovarjale njihov patriotizem, hkrati pa so godile tudi njihovemu osebnemu gmotnemu interesu. Domoljubni slogani so spodbujali poljske izseljence, naj pomagajo pri obnovi domovine, komercialne parole pa so slikale Poljsko kot obetajočo priložnost za investicijo, kot nekakšno novo »Obljubljeno deželo«. Mnogo Poljakov se je res vrnilo. Odmevi tradicije delovanja v skupno korist so znova zaživel skupaj s sanjami o ogromnem bogastvu, s kakršnim se ponašajo ameriški milijonarji. Takšno propagando so v poljskoameriški skupnosti širili različni politični in poslovni krogi.

Povratniška mrzlica po prvi svetovni vojni se je končala leta 1923. Joseph Sawicki, predsedujoči na IV. izseljenskem kongresu v Clevelandu, je izjavil, da »smo leta 1918 vsi zanemarili sami sebe. Bili smo altruisti in domoljubi. Naše sanje so bile svobodna Poljska. Pomoč poljskemu ljudstvu je bila naša dolžnost [...]. Zdaj je skrajni čas, da začnemo misliti nase. Še toliko dela nas čaka« v Ameriki.

Povratništvo ameriških Poljakov po prvi svetovni vojni se je razlikovalo od prejšnjih povratniških valov. Mnogi ameriški Poljaki so se sicer tudi tedaj vračali iz istih razlogov, kot so bili značilni za vračanje v preteklosti. Nekateri so se želeli čim prej vrniti, da bi pomagali sorodnikom, s katerimi v času vojne niso imeli stikov, in da bi se pohvalili s svojim uspehom pred nekdanjimi sosedi. Dodatna dejavnika, ki sta pospešila vračanje, sta bila padec ameriške industrijske proizvodnje in gospodarska recesija, ki je dosegla vrhunec v letih 1920–21. V času krize so se seveda znatno zmanjšali tudi prihranki izseljencev. Zato je v dvajsetih letih prevladala ideologija narodnosti s parolo »Izseljenci zase«. Njihovi voditelji so zdaj izjavljali, da so poljskoameriški interesi dejansko znotraj ZDA, v usmerjenosti k ameriškim notranjim zadevam, sodelovanju v ameriškem političnem in družbenem življenju, obrambi poljskega jezika in kulture (v ZDA). Na izseljenskem kongresu v Detroitu leta 1925 je bila podana odločna izjava: »Poskrbeti moramo zase, tu, v tej deželi.« Poljaki morajo kot ameriški državljani »sodelovati v ameriškem življenju enako kot druge skupine«. Te besede pa niso bile postulat, temveč so dejansko že odražale tedanje stanje.