

Ewelina Podgajna*

THE PRESIDENT, THE SUPERIOR, THE LEADER: THE HEAD OF THE STATE IN THE POLITICAL THOUGHT OF THE POPULAR MOVEMENT 1918-1939

Abstract

The problem of the position and role of the head of state was raised in the political thought of the people's movement. It was believed that the position of the head of state should be held with the utmost dignity and respect. The head of state, in the opinion of the ideologues of the people's movement, was an important organ of power. For the head of state, PSL "Wyzwolenie" proposed the name "the superior of the Polish Republic", PLS "Lewica" - "chief - president", PSL "Piast" - president. The subject of interest of the politicians of the people's movement was the political institution of the president, its constitutional location, procedure of appointment, powers, responsibility and relations with other organs of state authority. The assessment of the political reality included the characteristics of the persons holding the highest office in the state, their personalities and character traits, as well as their substantive qualifications. Despite concerns that the highest position in the state could be taken by an unwanted individual, the need to strengthen the head of state was constantly emphasized. Acceptance of strong executive bodies did not mean, however, absolute support for the concept of a strong presidency. To a large extent, such a position resulted from the conditions of the current political tactics. The peasants leaned towards a presidential system functioning in its classic form in the United States of America. In the mid-1920s, they were inclined to endow him with the right of legislative veto. The president was to act as a super-arbitrator in state affairs and be a factor of balance between the parliament and the government.

Keywords: political thought, people's movement, president, chief of state, superior

Introduction

The parties of the people's movement were an important force in the Polish political life of the Second Republic. They played a significant role in the history of Poland, being an important political factor and creative center of Polish political thought. The organizational core of the

* Uniwersytet Marii Curie-Skłodowskiej w Lublinie, e-mail: epodgajna@op.pl, ORCID: 0000-0002-1051-4078.

people's movement consisted of the PSL Wyzwolenie, PSL Piast, PSL Lewica, the Peasant Party (SCh), and, after unification in 1931, the People's Party (SL). The ideological contribution of the peasant movement to the achievements of Polish political thought was significant. It encompassed a broad complex of ideological, political, systemic, social and economic issues. The founders of the political thought of the people's movement developed a vision of many categories of what political thought is, including such key ones as: sovereign, state, political power, economy, society, attitude to the Roman Catholic Church and religion, the status of national minorities, foreign policy, security. In the interwar period in most European countries, one can see a tendency to modify Montesquieu's assumptions about the division of power into three types: legislative, executive, judicial. Adaptation of the earlier systemic solutions led in the direction of strengthening the executive power. Reflections on the nature of the executive branch led to the conclusion that it should guarantee the strength of power and its due authority. Constitutional solutions were advocated that would secure the permanence and constancy of the government and prevent too frequent changes of government, as the permanence of government was one of the main demands.

In the autumn of 1918, a new chapter in Polish history began. After 123 years of oppression, Poland became a sovereign state. The country was rebuilt, the political system was reconstructed, the necessary economic and social reforms were carried out, and Poland was integrated and brought into the European arena, built on democratic principles and ideas of security. Poland was reconstituted as a state whose republican form of government remained the core of the political system. The office of president symbolized a Poland reborn, free and sovereign. It became an important subject of Polish politics in the Second Republic.

The political thought of the popular movement addressed the problem of the position and role of the head of state. It was believed that the position of head of state should be endowed with the utmost solemnity and respect. The purpose of this article is to present views on the head of state, which, in the opinion of the ideologists of the people's movement, was an important governing body. The views of the most important political parties of the people's movement in the interwar period are presented. The focus of the politicians of the people's movement was the constitutional institution of the president, its constitutional location, mode of appointment, powers, responsibility and relations with other organs of state power. The assessment of political reality included the characteristics of those holding the highest office in the state, their personality and character traits, substantive qualifications. Despite concerns

that the highest office in the state may be held by an undesirable person, the need to strengthen the head of state was constantly emphasized. However, acceptance of a strong executive did not mean absolute support for the concept of a strong presidency. To a large extent, such a stance was the result of considerations of current political tactics.

Polish People's Party Wyzwolenie

PSL Wyzwolenie believed that the introduced changes should initiate a systemic reconstruction that would facilitate and accelerate these changes. The discussion in the party after regaining independence focused on the establishment of political institutions that would guarantee the takeover of power by the people in order to carry out the most important reforms in their interest. The most important institutions included representatives of the people gathered in the parliament and the office of the president and the main organs of executive power.

The views of PSL Wyzwolenie on the head of state were articulated in the draft constitution of 1919. The name of the Head of the Republic (*Naczelnik Państwa*) was proposed. The powers envisaged included: appointing the commander-in-chief of the armed forces, ambassadors, making peace or declaring war, ordering parliamentary elections, appointing a government in consultation with parliament, and the power of clemency. The head of the republic was to be elected for six years by popular vote. It was stipulated that he could hold office in the next term if one-third of the Sejm or half a million citizens did not put forward other candidates in the election. PSL Wyzwolenie took into account the attractiveness to other nations of the union with Poland. According to this, a Pole or a citizen of "nations more closely related to Poland" could be elected as the head of the Republic of Poland¹.

The party believed that the head of state should be the Head of State, elected directly by the whole nation, because the election of the highest dignitary in the state by parliament would not give him the due dignity and could lead to party disputes over this dignity. The name "Head of State" emphasized the ideological lineage dating back to Kościuszko's times, but also indicated sympathies with J. Piłsudski in the first years of free Poland, as the party expressed it in the resolution of 1920: "We would like to see Józef Piłsudski as the first Chief of State who effective-

¹ *Podstawa Ładu Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej*, Warszawa 1920, pp. 42-44; J. Jachymek, *Mysł polityczna Polskiego Stronnictwa Ludowego Wyzwolenie 1918-1931*, Warszawa 1982, pp. 100-101.

ly strengthened the power of Poland and should be entrusted with the command of the army"².

In the opinion of the PSL Wyzwolenie, the direct election of the head of state guaranteed the realisation of the principles of the republican-popular system, i.e. a state where the sovereign is the people, who not only elect the parliament, but also have a chance to express themselves in a referendum and participate in the work of broadly defined self-government: "you can only weave the people into the life of the nation if you give the people the opportunity to directly influence the course of state life"³.

The draft Constitution developed by the Constitutional Committee was presented to the Sejm on July 8, 1920. PSL Wyzwolenie in chapter III of the draft constitution, entitled executive power, proposed several amendments. One of them concerned the head of state. Article 39 stipulated that the president of the republic was to be elected for seven years by the National Assembly by an absolute majority of votes. It was a combination of the Sejm and the Senate, which was to be convened by the president in the last quarter of his term. PSL Wyzwolenie opted for the appointment of the Head of State, elected for a seven-year term by citizens with active voting rights from among two candidates selected by the parliament in the last quarter of the term of office. Each MP was to vote for one candidate, and two who received an equal number of votes were considered elected. In the event of an equal number of votes from three or more candidates, it was proposed to hold a vote between them, and if even this did not give a clear result, it was decided by drawing lots. The same would apply if one candidate received the most votes and the others received the same number of votes. After the election of the candidates, no later than three months before the end of the seven-year term, the Head of State was to order general elections, specifying the names of the candidates and the date of the elections in the relevant decree. The date of announcement of the decree in the Journal of Laws was the day of ordering the elections to be held in the electoral districts designated for parliamentary elections. Each voter could only cast one vote for one candidate. The winner was the one who received the most votes. The election results were approved by the Supreme Court⁴.

² 1920 czerwiec 6, Warszawa – Uchwały zjazdu chłopów zorganizowanego przez Zarząd Główny PSL Wyzwolenie, [in:] *Materiały źródłowe do historii polskiego ruchu ludowego*, V. II 1918-1931, ed. S. Giza, S. Lato, Warszawa 1967, pp. 43-46.

³ Sprawozdanie stenograficzne Sejmu Ustawodawczego (next: Ss. SU), pos. 174, 16 X 1920, pp. 12-15.

⁴ J. Jachymek, *op.cit.*, pp. 101-102.

PSL Wyzwolenie called for the head of state to be held accountable for treason, violation of the constitution or crimes (Article 52) by the parliament by a two-thirds majority with half of the votes entitled to vote. Finally, 3/5 votes were accepted. Tribunal of State was to consist of the First President of the Supreme Court and 12 members elected by the parliament. The proposals submitted by PSL Wyzwolenie were rejected, but a formula was adopted so that the constitution did not stipulate that the head of state must be a "Pole-Catholic"⁵.

The party advocated the creation of a people's republic where power would be divided between the parliament and the president, under the control of the people, the working people and especially the peasants. Political practice confirmed that the creation of a strong government in the political conditions of the time was unrealistic. Power was concentrated in the Sejm and the undemocratically elected Senate. PSL Wyzwolenie and parties of the parliamentary left leaned towards a presidential system modeled on the system of the United States of America, in which the president had strong power and position. He was elected by popular vote, was commander-in-chief of the army, and had veto power over legislation.

The dominance of the parliament, the existence of the senate, the weakness of the head of state, and the lack of lasting government were not favourable to the stabilisation of the state's internal situation. The PSL Wyzwolenie stressed that it could only support "sincerely popular governments, composed of representatives of the left side of parliament, and therefore those based on the working masses" and implementing social and economic reforms that would strengthen the state internally and internationally⁶. The Party was consistently in favour of the formation of a people's government, and it was therefore considered undesirable at the General Assembly on 7 March 1922 to participate in any government that would not be clearly radical - democratic in character."⁷

A parliamentary election was announced for November 1922. This brought to an end the office of Head of State, who, under the March Constitution of 1921, was to be replaced by a President elected by the National Assembly. The political face of the National Assembly was to

⁵ *Projekty Konstytucji Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej: projekt komisji konstytucyjnej Sejmu Ustawodawczego*, Warszawa 1920, pp. 23-27; Ss. SU, pos. 206 z 4 II 1921, pp. CCVI/30-51.

⁶ *1921 marzec 6, Warszawa – Program Polskiego Stronnictwa Ludowego Wyzwolenie*, [w:] *Materiały źródłowe...*, p. 49-58; „Wyzwolenie” (next: „W”), 13 III 1921, nr 11, pp. 112-114; Ss. SU, pos. 253 z 13 X 1921, pp. CCLIII/6-22.

⁷ *Doroczny Walny Zjazd*, „W”, 12 III 1922, nr 11, p. 111.

determine who would become head of state, whether a representative of the National Democrats or the left wing of the Parliament. The PSL Wyzwolenie called for "the election of Józef Piłsudski, a national hero beloved by the people, as the President."⁸

In autumn 1922, K. Bagiński, J. Poniatowski and J. Woźnicki paid a visit to Piłsudski, proposing that he accept a presidential candidacy. Piłsudski refused, stating that the new Constitution guaranteed rather modest prerogatives for the head of state. Piłsudski put forward Witos's candidacy, stating that 'the support of the state may be provided by the peasant class. It was not only the most numerous, but even more vital than other groups. It has much to gain in Poland. In order to bind the peasants more firmly to the state, a visible symbol should be given to them by electing one of them to the highest office of the Republic. For this, Witos should be elected the president.'⁹ The astonishment and reluctance of the leadership of PSL Wyzwolenie towards this proposal revealed divisions among the peasants. However, Witos did not intend to accept this honour and did not run for the office of President of the Republic of Poland. PSL Wyzwolenie was not prepared for such a turn of events and did not prepare an alternative idea. So it was difficult to find a candidate with equal popularity and authority. PSL Wyzwolenie therefore proposed that S. Thugutt put forward the candidacy, respected by Marshal Piłsudski, of Gabriel Narutowicz.

The National Assembly convened on December 9, 1922. Five candidates were put forward. They were: Maurycy Zamoyski (national democrats, conservatives, Christian Democrats), Stanisław Wojciechowski (PSL Piast), Gabriel Narutowicz (PSL Wyzwolenie), Ignacy Daszyński (PPS) and Jan Baudouin de Courtenay (national minorities). To become a presidential candidate, you had to have the support of at least 50 members of the National Assembly, and to take office, a candidate had to win the support of an absolute majority of votes. In the final vote, Narutowicz, supported by all peasant parties, socialists and national minorities, won 289 votes and defeated Zamoyski (229 votes). Thus, he became the first President of the Republic of Poland. A week after the elections, on December 16, President Narutowicz was assassinated by the nationalist Eligiusz Niewiadomski. The new president was elected by the National Assembly on December 20th, 1922. His name was Stanisław Wojciechowski.

At the Congress of 21st March 1926, the PSL Wyzwolenie called for a strengthening of the executive and a precise definition of the powers of

⁸ *12 listopada głosujemy do Senatu „W”*, 12 XI 1922, nr 45, p. 544.

⁹ A. Garlicki, *Józef Piłsudski 1867-1935*, Warszawa 1990, pp. 247-248; Zob. J. Piłsudski, *Przemówienia, wywiady, artykuły 1926-1930*, Warszawa 1931, p. 35.

the President. It was believed that the head of state should be elected by popular vote for 5 years, have the right to dissolve the parliament before the end of the term and to call for elections. The government appointed by the president was to present its own programme to parliament, and only this programme should be the centre for the formation of a parliamentary majority¹⁰.

The May coup d'état carried out by J. Piłsudski on 12th May 1926 was supported by the PSL Wyzwolenie in the belief that it was a fight for "people's power", directed against the landowners. The party demanded that Parliament be dissolved, a left-radical government be formed, and the post of President be entrusted to Piłsudski. Guided by the good of the state, the party took the view that the government should pursue the interests of the majority of its inhabitants, i.e. the peasants. It therefore called for agricultural reform to be speeded up¹¹. PSL Wyzwolenie was in favor of granting the President the right to dissolve parliament and issue laws upon the request of the Council of Ministers. However, this right could not apply to: the constitutional act, the election law to the parliament and the senate, the ratification of treaties with foreign countries, the setting of the budget, the quota of conscripts, the authorization to declare war, changes in the local government system. PSL Wyzwolenie opposed any dictatorship "be it an individual or a handful of people jostling for power". It was emphasized that only a people's government, based on a parliamentary, peasant-worker majority, can lead the country out of the crisis and ensure the influence of society on the exercise of power¹².

At the end of 1926, opposition to Piłsudski's actions began to emerge more and more clearly, contrary to the changes announced before and during the coup. At the congress of PSL Wyzwolenie in June 1927, K. Bagiński expressed his disappointment with Piłsudski's conduct. He stressed that it was a mistake not to hold new elections immediately after the coup, which would have given the left an advantage. He believed that the chance to bind the peasantry to the state had been wasted, and that attacks on parliamentarism, hurting the peasantry and significantly influencing the politics and rule of the landowners, only deepened the divisions between the peasantry and the state power.

The leaders of PSL Wyzwolenie were aware of the crisis of parliamentary democracy and the general tendency to strengthen the executive

¹⁰ *Uchwały Walnego Zjazdu*, „W”, 28 III 1926, nr 13, pp. 2-9.

¹¹ *Stanowisko Wyzwolenia*, „W”, 4 VII 1926, nr 27, pp. 2-4; *O drogę ku lepszemu*, „W”, 27 VI 1926, nr 26, p.1.

¹² *Uchwała Klubu PSL Wyzwolenie w sprawie projektu zmiany konstytucji*, „W”, 4 VII 1926, nr 27, p. 2; J. Mężyk, *Jeszcze o demokracji*, „W”, 25 VII 1926, nr 30, p.5; J. Jachymek, *op.cit.*, pp. 113-114.

power. A draft revision of the Constitution was submitted by PSL Wyzwolenie, PPS and SCh on March 4, 1929. It proposed that the President of Poland should be elected by the entire nation from among candidates proposed by the National Assembly for seven years. It would consist of deputies in the number equal to twice the statutory number of deputies, elected in constituencies by citizens with active electoral rights, in accordance with the provisions of the parliamentary election law. Each constituency would elect twice as many members of the National Assembly as the number of deputies. Lists of candidates could be submitted by groups of at least 100,000 to the chairman of the District Electoral Commission. Elections would be ordered by the President 90 days before the end of the term of office, and in the event of a vacancy, the elections would be ordered by the Marshal of the Sejm¹³. A law passed by a majority of 11/20 votes in the presence of at least half of the statutory number of deputies could authorize the President to issue decrees having the force of law, at the time and to the extent specified by law, with the exception of amending the constitution, determining the size of the army, taking out a state loan, concluding with other countries and the temporary suspension of civil rights¹⁴.

PSL Wyzwolenie was not a fully independent political group and remained within Piłsudski's sphere of influence. Until 1926, the union was strong and the party participated in Polish politics, the camp was in favor of the concept of Jagiellonian Poland, a union or federation of Poland with Lithuania, Belarus and Ukraine. This policy was aimed at the National Democracy. Nevertheless, PSL Wyzwolenie never gave up on the idea of independence of the peasant movement, expressed in the slogan "themselves". For PSL Wyzwolenie, the strategy was a people's Poland, independent and reformed in the interests of the working people, especially peasants, which resulted in a gradual divergence of paths between Piłsudski and Liberation¹⁵.

Polish People's Party Piast

In the views of the Piast PSL, little space was occupied by the analysis of the powers of the head of state. However, one can find references to the problem of the position and role of the head of state. After 1918, the Piasts unequivocally decided that it could not be a monarch, as the

¹³ *Nasz projekt Konstytucji*, „W”, 21 IV 1929, nr 17, p. 4.

¹⁴ *1929 czerwiec 14, Warszawa – Rezolucje polityczne Zjazdu Delegatów Polskiego Stronnictwa Ludowego Wyzwolenie*, [in:] *Materiały źródłowe...*, p. 348.

¹⁵ J. Jachymek, *op.cit.*, p. 118.

emerging independent Poland was to be a republic with the sovereign role of the nation - the people. Wincenty Witos, the leader of the Piasts, expressed his conviction that the position of the head of state should be treated with the utmost seriousness and respect, because in his opinion it is an important organ of power. On the verge of independence, Witos was interested in the office of the President, his position in the Constitution, the mode of appointment, competences, responsibility and relations with other state authorities. The assessment of the political reality focused on those holding the highest offices in the state. Witos, drawing a vision of the future Poland as a republic with the sovereign role of the nation, emphasized that the president was to be at the head of the state. The election of the head of state should be made by the nation for a period of 5 years, which was supposed to foster the consolidation of democracy, but the rules of this election were not defined in detail. The president's main prerogatives included appointing the prime minister and overseeing the direction of the government, overseeing the legislative process, and dissolving parliament. With the adoption of the Constitution in March 1921, PSL "Piast" stood on the basis of the political principles enacted in the Constitution¹⁶.

In its 1926 programme, the party emphasised that it "opposes all attempts to settle conflicts by extra-parliamentary means, by rape and the imposition of dictatorship in Poland from any side." It was believed that the competences of the head of state, were not inferior to those political arrangements enshrined in the presidents of Western European countries. However, there was disagreement with the provision in the constitution that prevented the president from dissolving parliament. The constitution gave the president the right to dissolve parliament, but only once for the same reason, while the parliament was deprived of the possibility of self-dissolution.

The role of the president was not seen by the Piasts as direct decision-making, but as an influence on the way power was exercised. This included appointing the Prime Minister, supervising the direction of the government, the course of the legislative process, and dissolving the parliament. The role of the President was significant, especially in the Polish conditions, where the multiplicity of political parties, the instability of the balance of power in Poland, and the poor political orientation of society in political matters did not have a positive impact on reality. Witos stressed that an educated, experienced man with a thorough knowledge of state matters should be appointed to the post. The institu-

¹⁶ More: E. Podgajna, *Myśl polityczna Wincentego Witosa (1874-1945)*, Lublin 2019, pp. 136-150.

tion of head of state should belong to a person who would understand his duties with dignity to the good and interest of the nation. The manner in which the President was elected was also derived from these premises. The party stressed that the qualifications for such a high office should be decided by people who knew perfectly well the past and the predispositions of the candidate for that office. Witos fully accepted the provisions in the manner of electing the President that had found a place in the Constitution of March 1921. They opposed the proposal that the President should be elected by popular vote. This was in line with the widespread belief that the society of the newly revived Poland still presented a low level of political culture. It was pointed out that the election of the head of state should enjoy due respect and solemnity, and this was not guaranteed by a direct election¹⁷.

In a draft amendment to the Constitution submitted by the PSL Piast Club on June 22nd 1926, it was requested that the powers of the President of the Republic be extended by granting him the right to dissolve the parliament and senate at the government's request. In the draft amendments to the Constitution, the Piasts wanted to equip the President with the right to dissolve the Sejm and Senate at the request of the government and to issue regulations with the force of law, but only in the event of a 'state emergency' and to a limited extent, not including matters of self-government, the size of the army, conscription, borrowing, taxes, duties and state monopolies, the currency system, and parliamentary control over state debts. The parliament would approve or reject these ordinances by a qualified majority of 3/5 of the members. The draft constitution thus stood on parliamentary ground. It did not violate the main pillars of the parliamentary system, but strengthened the executive - the president and the government, which would be based on a stable governmental majority. The draft undoubtedly reduced the power of parliament, while increasing the powers of the President, but both these state institutions were democratically elected. Poland's situation required a more efficient executive. Absolute democracy, Witos believed, was a utopia nowhere to be realised, there was not and could not be one in inter-war Poland, in a state that had existed for only a few years, full of deep class and national contradictions, torn apart from outside and from within by powerful enemies. What was required here was the permanence, wholeness and security of the state, which had to be based on principles harmonising democracy and good governance, because, as Witos wrote: "Poland wants to exist not for the theories of the Roman-

¹⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 143; M. Wichmanowski, *Myśl polityczna Polskiego Stronnictwa Ludowego Piast 1913/14-1931*, Lublin 2017, pp. 168-173.

tics, or - worse still - for the underdogs or political crooks, but for the happiness of the nation and for its better future"¹⁸.

The May coup and the takeover of power by Piłsudski's camp prompted PSL "Piast" to clarify its position on the president's powers. He continued to point to the need to strengthen the constitutional position of the President. He called for increasing the President's powers to strengthen his authority¹⁹. At the Fifth Special Congress of the PSL "Piast" at the end of 1926, Witos, speaking on behalf of the party, recognised "the need to separate the legislative and executive powers, to ensure the latter's permanence and strength to the parliament, the legislative power and the right to control the government's activities, stated that the present position of the government towards the parliament does not lead to this and, moreover, destroys the dignity of the state and its power, reflecting negatively on our internal and external relations"²⁰. Witos did not associate the strengthening of presidential power with any individual, as did PSL Wyzwolenie and PPS, which postulated that Piłsudski should be given strong presidential power. Witos did not agree with this: "Socialists and liberationists demanded that Piłsudski be the commander-in-chief, not subject to any authority, i.e. a dictator. Our party upheld the principle of the inviolability of the Constitution and demanded that the commander of the army be subordinated to the authority"²¹.

The draft amendment to the Constitution submitted by BBWR in October 1928 and the issues it contained, concerning the executive bodies, did not receive the approval of the PSL Piast and Witos. The Piast Club, together with the ChD and NPR, submitted their own draft of changes to the Constitution on 25th January 1930. The President was to be elected by the National Congress, for a seven-year term, by an absolute majority. The Congress was to be composed of six hundred members elected for seven years by the citizens of the Republic who had the

¹⁸ Zarząd Główny PSL „Piast” do Braci Włościan z całej Polski, „Piast” (next: „P”), 11 VII 1926, nr 29, pp. 1-4, *Rządowy projekt zmiany konstytucji a projekt Klubu PSL „P”*, 11 VII 1926, nr 29, pp. 4-5; J. Borkowski, *Witos a Polska*, Chicago 1992, pp. 307-317.

¹⁹ W. Witos, *Czasy i ludzie*, Tarnów 1926, p. 6.

²⁰ *Wywiad z posłem Witosem. Z okazji obrad Gł. Zarządu „Piasta”, „Wola Ludu”* (next: „WL”), 5 IX 1926, nr 64, p. 432; *Wielka mowa prezesa Witosy wygłoszona na pierwszym plenarnym zebraniu V Nadzwyczajnego Kongresu w Krakowie*, „P”, 5 XII 1926, nr 50, p. 5-8; *Mowa prezesa Witosy wygłoszona na pierwszym plenarnym zebraniu V Nadzwyczajnego Kongresu w Krakowie*, „WL”, 12 XII 1926, nr 78, pp. 572-575.

²¹ *Olbrzymi zjazd Polskiego Stronnictwa ludowego we Lwowie*, „P”, 5 IV 1925, nr 14, pp. 12-13; A. Ajnenkiel, *Parlamentaryzm II Rzeczypospolitej*, Warszawa 1975, p. 222; *idem, Spór o model parlamentaryzmu polskiego do 1926 roku*, Warsaw 1972, p. 206.

active right to vote and were at least 24 years of age by universal, equal, secret and direct vote. Citizens at least 30 years of age would have the passive right to vote for the Congress. Elections to the National Congress were to be ordered by the President ninety days before the expiry of the term of office. The election would be held at the latest before the expiry of the term of the incumbent President. After the election of the head of state, the Congress would be closed. Members of Congress could not be MPs, senators, ministers in office on the day on which the deadline for submitting lists of candidates would expire²².

The reflections and insights on the institution of the President also provided an opportunity to comment on current political practice. Witos and the PSL "Piast" expressed their opinions on those holding the office of President in the Second Republic. In the final vote, Gabriel Narutowicz won against Maurycy Zamoyski. The PSL "Piast" Club's stance was determined by Witos's speech, in which he stated that "we cannot vote for Zamoyski. He is the greatest landowner and count. We must vote for Narutowicz. We can do it with a clear conscience. I know him well. He is an outstanding man, a good patriot and democrat"²³. Witos spoke highly of the first President of the Republic of Poland, Gabriel Narutowicz. In the pages of the Piast, it was written: "He is a European man in the whole sense of the word, with an established reputation abroad as an expert engineer. Apart from Polish and Russian, he speaks German, French, Spanish, Italian and English"²⁴. Explaining its position on the vote it stated: "For us people (...) it was clear that, given a choice between Count Zamoyski and Narutowicz, we had to vote not for the magnate but for the representatives of democracy." The rule of law position was strongly emphasised. However it happened, the election of Narutowicz as President was a legitimate fact. Every loyal citizen of the state must recognise this election as an accomplished fact, the hitching of which would be a fight against the constitution. The behaviour of the right-wing parties, who proclaimed that <<all power comes from God>>, the brawls and violence perpetrated by them, give us a foretaste of what would have happened if these parties had come to power. Revolvers,

²² *Wniosek Klubów Parlamentarnych: Polskiego Stronnictwa Ludowego „Piast”, Chrześcijańskiej Demokracji i Narodowej Partii Robotniczej w sprawie zmiany niektórych postanowień Ustawy Konstytucyjnej w trybie przewidzianym dla jej rewizji, Sejm II RP. II kadencja (1928-1930), Druk sejmowy, nr RPII/2/666.*

²³ S. Krzywoszewski, *Długie życie. Wspomnienia*, T. I, Warszawa 1947, p. 355; A. Zakrzewski, *op.cit.*, pp. 143-145; J. Dębski, *Jak doszło do zamachu majowego*, [w:] *Wspomnienia weteranów ruchu ludowego*, Warszawa 1968, pp. 152-153.

²⁴ *Gabriel Narutowicz nowym prezydentem*, „P”, 17 XII 1922, nr 51, pp. 1-2; Ed. *Nowy prezydent*, „P”, 17 XII 1922, nr 51, p.2.

sticks and stones are not arguments that can convince and compel them to do foreign will”²⁵. After the assassination of Gabriel Narutowicz the Piasts sharply stigmatised this crime, recalling: "there was no kingslaying in our history, that the nation never stained itself with the blood of God's anointed, with the blood of the head of state. (...) The crime became a fact, and its victim was an innocent man, a man who, like a righteous citizen, appointed by the will of the people to the highest position in the state, went to that position with the punishment of a soldier and, like a soldier at his post, was killed by a treacherous hand. We did not manage in four years to concentrate all the forces of the nation to work around the consolidation of the regained independence. The struggle for the basic character of the Republic assumed such proportions that the sons of one mother ceased to see each other as brothers, and went against each other like the fiercest enemies. The state suffered, the general public suffered”²⁶.

Witos spoke favorably of the new president, Stanisław Wojciechowski, because, as he claimed, "he was regarded as an exceptionally righteous and honest man, up to the position he held. He was also able to gain great respect from almost everyone in a short time." However, as Witos emphasized, Wojciechowski "was not free from certain allegations. On the right, he was accused of being too submissive to his former friends, especially Piłsudski. (...) The left accused him of bigotry and lack of firmness. "Piaśt" also wrote with appreciation about the second president of Poland: "a righteous man, deeply religious, democratic ideologue, noble character, great knowledge, great life experience, deep and sincere love for people - these are the qualities - which mean the new President of the Republic of Poland”²⁷.

After the May coup, which resulted in the resignation of the Witos government and the resignation of President Wojciechowski, Witos and his club were faced with the new task of electing the President. It was a difficult task, but Witos and his club recognised the actual and formal responsibility for further developments by stating: "always placing the interests of the state above those of the party, he decided not to oppose Marshal Piłsudski's candidature for President”²⁸. In practice, a significant proportion of the PSL Piaśt Party MPs cast their votes for the author of the May coup. Witos, assessing the event, stated that a large part of his

²⁵ *Do Braci Włościan*, „P”, 24 XII 1922, p. 5.

²⁶ *Prezydent Narutowicz zamordowany*, „P”, 17 XII 1922, pp.1-2.

²⁷ *Gabriel Narutowicz nowym...*, p. 1-2; *Nowy prezydent*, „P”, 31 XII 1922, nr 53, p. 4.

²⁸ *Wybór prezydenta*, „WL”, 4 VI 1926, nr 45, p. 309.

party colleagues 'absolved Piłsudski of his violence and crimes'²⁹. After Piłsudski's refusal, Ignacy Mościcki's candidacy for President was put forward. Witos did not join in the discussion, as the protocols indicated. He was afraid of a split that the faction opposing him might cause. He expressed his disapproval of this step indirectly in a resolution adopted at the board of the Lesser Poland PSL Piast, expanded to include a delegation from the Lwów, Silesia and Poznań voivodships: "The congress takes note of the fact that the PSL in the vote at the election of J. Piłsudski and then I. Mościcki as President of the Republic was motivated solely by a desire to save the country from the catastrophe of civil war and ultimate anarchy, and that this vote in no way prejudiced the club's position (...) on the crime of the coup"³⁰. Witos spoke of President Mościcki only occasionally, in a negative manner: "... what to think of Mr President, about whom so much dishonourable news is circulating in Poland, passed on as sensation from mouth to mouth"³¹.

From the mid-1920s onwards, the Party expressed its conviction that the parliament had overstepped its powers, that the executive branch needed to be strengthened and that it was effective. However, it opposed the authoritarian system of government that had become established after the May Coup of 1926³².

Polish People's Party Left-wing

The PSL Left expressed its general view of state power including the head of state in its programme of 1st June 1919. It emphasised that "at the head of the state it wants to have a party elected for a certain period of time-period (about 5 years) by the general public a Commander-in-Chief - President"³³.

²⁹ W. Witos, *Dzieła wybrane t. 2 Moje wspomnienia...*, t. 2, p. 293; *idem, Kochani Bracia Włościanie, Przyjaciele i Współpracownicy*, „P”, 30 V 1926, nr 23, pp. 1-3; *idem, Kochani Bracia Włościanie, Przyjaciele i Współpracownicy*, „WL”, 2 VI 1926, nr 44, pp. 3-4.

³⁰ *Nasze stanowisko. Posiedzenie Zarządu Okręgowego PSL „Piast” w Krakowie*, „P”, 20 VI 1926, nr 26, pp. 3-4.

³¹ W. Witos, *Dzieła wybrane, t. 2 Moje wspomnienia...*, t. 2, p. 294.

³² *Odezwa Prezesa PSL Piast W. Witosy w sprawie polityki Stronnictwa i zamachu majowego, Kraków 23 maja 1926*, [in:] *Materiały źródłowe...*, t. 2, pp. 204-208; *Odezwa pięciu stronnictw Centrolewu w sprawie sytuacji politycznej w Polsce, Warszawa 10 września 1930* [in:] *Ibidem*, pp. 373-377; J.R. Szaflik, *Polskie Stronnictwo Ludowe Piast 1926-1931*, Warszawa 1970, p. 86.

³³ *1919 czerwiec 1, Kraków – deklaracja i program Polskiego Stronnictwa Ludowego Lewica*, [in:] *Materiały źródłowe...*, v. 2, p. 20.

The Party promoted slogans for Józef Piłsudski to be elected the first President of the Republic, arguing: 'Let the one who won the state, who was martyred and imprisoned for it, stand at the head of it - and that is none other than Józef Piłsudski.' Nevertheless, the leader of the PSL Left (Lewica), Józef Sanojca, was aware that "the President would be unable to do anything without parliament", so he believed that this was a misguided proposal, as Piłsudski was too strong and ambitious a politician to accept it and it should have been treated as a good will or expression of respect. In autumn 1920, in Kraków, the Supreme Peasants' Council voted for the Commander-in-Chief to be elected by delegates chosen by universal suffrage. It also called for a popular referendum to be held on the most important issues for the state.

Following the election of Gabriel Narutowicz as the President, the press organ of the PSL Left published articles devoted to the new President and also pointed to his prerogatives. It was emphasised that Gabriel Narutowicz was a supporter of Józef Piłsudski, which could guarantee the implementation of his policies. It was stressed, however, that 'Piłsudski himself is the author and executor of his convictions and resolutions and Gabriel Narutowicz possesses neither that energy nor decisiveness, he will only be an echo of Piłsudski. We do not consider this to be beneficial for the state'³⁴. It was emphasised that the best choice for the office would have been Piłsudski himself, and he could have been persuaded to do so. The PSL Lewica also thought that General Władysław Sikorski would have been a good candidate. After the assassination of Poland's first President, the PSL Left strongly criticised the National Democrats, blaming them and recognising that earlier attacks had led to the tragedy³⁵. The election of Stanisław Wojciechowski as the President was met with approval and recognition by the PSL Left. His experience in politics, patriotism and unquestionable links with Piłsudski were emphasised³⁶.

The Peasant Party

The SCh sought to develop such political and legal institutions that would enable the people to seize power to pursue their interests. The most significant institutions in the state included, in addition to the par-

³⁴ *Gabriel Narutowicz*, „Przyjaciół Ludu” (next: „PL”), 17 XII 1922, nr 51, pp. 1-2.

³⁵ J. Sanojca, *Prezydent Gabriel Narutowicz zamordowany przez endecką Eligiusz Niewiadomskiego*, „PL”, 24 XII 1922, nr 52, pp. 1-3; *Pierwszy występ faszystów endeckich w Warszawie*, „PL”, 24 XII 1922, nr 52, pp. 4.-5.

³⁶ *Stanisław Wojciechowski*, „PL”, 31 XII 1922, nr 53, pp. 1-2.

liament - with its leading role as national representation - the legislature, a two-tier executive, i.e. the office of the President (head of state) and the council of ministers - the government. When the Peasant Party was formed in January 1926, following the secession from the PSL 'Wyzwolenie', its leaders and activists criticised the government and put forward demands for subsequent ones, the fulfilment of which they made conditional on their support.

The May coup was carried out under the slogans of the fight against the "Chjeno-Piast" government, abuses and corruption, and the destruction of the public administration apparatus. Its aim was to heal the country's economic and political relations. There was intense agitation in support of Piłsudski. The coup was presented as a crackdown on the right, land ownership and oppression in the countryside. The main demands concerned the establishment of a peasant-workers government, the appointment of a marshal as president, the dissolution of the parliament and the senate, the calling of new elections, the expropriation of large land estates without compensation, the liquidation of corruption and abuses in the state administration³⁷.

The Party's hopes, however, turned out to be illusory. Piłsudski had no intention of sharing power with left-wing parties and did not appoint their representatives to the government formed by Kazimierz Bartel, and distanced himself from the social program of the parliamentary left. At the June session of the Sejm, J. Dąbski's speech showed a clear opposition to the government, especially regarding the provisional budget for the third quarter of 1926. J. Dąbski demanded a reduction in the budget and opposed the proposed 10% tax increase. He was also against any changes to the Constitution, with the exception of granting the President the power to dissolve parliament³⁸.

In the first half of July 1926, the parliament began working on a government project to amend the Constitution. The draft envisaged strengthening the executive bodies. The Peasant Party was in favour of granting the President the right to dissolve the parliament and to decree laws at the request of the Council of Ministers. Decreeing laws could not, however, concern: the constitution, electoral regulations for the parliament and senate, ratification of foreign treaties, setting the budget, recruitment quotas, changes to the local government system and declaring war. The party's leaders were aware of the deepening crisis of par-

³⁷ E. Podgajna, *Stronictwo Chłopskie (1926-1931). Studium z dziejów myśli politycznej*, Lublin 2011, pp. 74-75.

³⁸ A. Więzikowa, *Stronictwo Chłopskie 1926-1931*, Warszawa 1963, p. 60.

liamentary democracy and the general trend towards strengthening the executive. Peasant Party MPs criticised BBWR's ideas, which aimed to give the President excessive powers. They included the appointment and dismissal of the government, the dissolution of the Sejm, the right to decree, supreme authority over the armed forces, the ability to raise taxes by 10% at the close of each session, the appointment of one-third of senators, the ability to invalidate parliamentary mandates, the cancellation of a sentence before the end of a case, the appointment of judges, the right of veto - suspending a law for a year until the next session, and should the Sejm pass a law a second time, he could then dissolve the Chamber.

According to the Peasant Party, the President would be given supreme and unlimited power. MP S. Wrona also highlighted a very important aspect. "The President would take the oath of office in the Cathedral Church. This innocuous provision included coronation pomp, a church parade, an alliance with Rome and a return to the Middle Ages, when power came from God and was conferred on monarchs by the Roman Pontiff" . Here, the SCh's firm position on the separation of the Roman Catholic Church from the state and the maintenance of worldview neutrality becomes apparent.

The Peasant Party expressed precise opinions on the constitutional shape of the state, including the executive organs. It remained faithful to democratic forms of state power, in which the executive organs would have a two-tier structure: President and Council of Ministers. The Party advocated the election of the President by the people by popular vote. It called for the head of state to be equipped with the right to dissolve parliament. It consistently promoted the idea of fighting for a 'peasant-worker' government, based on popular, worker and democratically-minded intelligence groupings.

The People's Party

The unification of the people's parties took place on the 15th March 1931 and the People's Party (the SL) was established. The programme of the SL, adopted by the unification congress, brought systemic and political matters to the fore. It was emphasised that the SL "was a political organisation of the rural people of the Polish peasantry", to which people of manual and intellectual labour could belong. The Party set itself the objective of defending agriculture, the educational and economic and political uplift of farmers, winning for it its rightful position in the state

and social organisation, and striving to consolidate the political and economic independence of the Republic of Poland³⁹.

The SL advocated a republican system, based on a democratic parliamentary system. The programme condemned "the violence and imposition of any kind of dictatorship in Poland", and expressed the readiness of the People's Party to amend the March Constitution in the direction of strengthening executive power, while retaining the cardinal principle of "parliamentary control over government activity".

Witos was critical of the provisions contained in the 1935 Basic Law that replaced the hitherto binding principle of the nation's sovereignty with the idea of the state. In the new Constitution, the Piłsudski camp chose a different model for the office of the President - as the holder of a uniform power of the state and the executor of sovereignty ascribed to the state, answerable to no one for his actions⁴⁰. Witos considered it essential for the President to be actively involved in the work of the government, which was to strengthen his position and influence the political situation in the country: "Does the responsibility for what is happening, fall only on the government and those who support that government? Not at all! First and foremost it falls on the President, as he has the right and the possibility to change the government"⁴¹. The SL's 1935 programme stated that the constitution was intended to provide 'the President of the Republic with the power to dissolve the chambers and to secure the permanence of the government by protecting it against accidental or reckless bring down.'⁴² The inference here is that, following the downfall of the Sanacja government, SL planned to return to the basic provisions of the March Constitution, reformed in the spirit of Witos's 1926 postulates, i.e. with strengthened powers of the President and government.

The SL's 1935 programme stated that the constitution was intended to provide 'the President of the Republic with the power to dissolve the chambers and to secure the permanence of the government by protecting it against accidental or reckless deposition.'⁴³ The inference here is that, following the collapse of the Sanacja government, the SL planned to

³⁹ J. Borkowski, *Ludowcy w II Rzeczypospolitej*, cz. 2, Warszawa 1987, p. 203.

⁴⁰ W. Paruch, *Myśl polityczna obozu piłsudczykowski 1926-1939*, Lublin 2005, pp. 250-263.

⁴¹ *Witos o demokracji. Wybór przemówień, pism i rozmów Wincentego Witosa, compiled and introduction, essay on Witos*, Warszawa 1995, p. 340.

⁴² *1935 grudzień 8, Warszawa – Program Stronnictw Ludowego*, [w:] *Programy stronnictw ludowych...*, p. 313.

⁴³ *Ibidem*.

return to the basic provisions of the March Constitution, reformed in the spirit of Witos's 1926 postulates, i.e. with strengthened powers of the President and government.

Conclusion

The reflections on the role of the Head of State of the political thought of the party of the people's movement in the interwar period allow two conclusions to be drawn. Firstly, the President's role in the political system stemmed from the need to organise his competences, which included appointing the commander in chief of the armed forces, ambassadors, declaring war and making peace, calling elections to parliament and appointing the government in consultation with parliament, and the right of clemency. Adopting different names for the Head of State was in fact a reference to the tradition and allusion to Poland's first Commander-in-Chief, who was Kościuszko; in independent Poland, the peasants thus wanted to reward Józef Piłsudski. Secondly, the solutions concerning the role of the President proposed by the parties of the people's movement fell between the parliamentary and presidential systems of government. The Populists leaned towards the presidential system operating in its classical form in the United States of America. The strength of presidential power was expressed in equipping it with the right of legislative veto. In the mid-1920s, they were inclined to equip the President with the right of legislative veto. The President was to act as a super-arbitrator in matters of state and be a balancing factor between the parliament and government.

Bibliography

- Ajnenkiel A., *Parlamentaryzm II Rzeczypospolitej*, Warszawa 1975.
Ajnenkiel A., *Spór o model parlamentaryzmu polskiego do 1926 roku*, Warszawa 1972.
Borkowski J., *Ludowcy w II Rzeczypospolitej*, część 2, Warszawa 1987.
Borkowski J., *Witos a Polska*, Chicago 1992.
Garlicki A., *Józef Piłsudski 1867-1935*, Warszawa 1990.
Jachymek J., *Myśl polityczna Polskiego Stronnictwa Ludowego Wyzwolenie 1918-1931*, Warszawa 1982.
Krzywoszewski S., *Długie życie. Wspomnienia*, t. I, Warszawa 1947.
Materiały źródłowe do historii polskiego ruchu ludowego, V. II 1918-1931, ed. S. Giza, S. Lato, Warszawa 1967.
Paruch W., *Myśl polityczna obozu piłsudczykowski 1926-1939*, Lublin 2005.
Piłsudski J., *Przemówienia, wywiady, artykuły 1926-1930.*, Warszawa 1931.
Podgajna E., *Myśl polityczna Wincentego Witosa (1874-1945)*, Lublin 2019.

- Podgajna E., *Stronnictwo Chłopskie (1926-1931). Studium z dziejów myśli politycznej*, Lublin 2011.
- Podstawa Ładu Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej*, Warsaw 1920.
- Programy stronnictw ludowych*
- Projekty Konstytucji Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej: projekt komisji konstytucyjnej Sejmu Ustawodawczego*, Warszawa 1920.
- Sprawozdanie stenograficzne Sejmu Ustawodawczego.
- Szaflik J.R., *Polskie Stronnictwo Ludowe Piast 1926-1931*, Warszawa 1970.
- Wichmanowski M., *Myśl polityczna Polskiego Stronnictwa Ludowego Piast 1913/14-1931*, Lublin 2017.
- Więzikowa A., *Stronnictwo Chłopskie 1926-1931*, Warszawa 1963.
- Witos o demokracji. Wybór przemówień, pism i rozmów Wincentego Witosa, compiled and introduction, essay on Witos*, Warsaw 1995
- Witos W., *Czasy i ludzie*, Tarnów 1926.
- Witos W., *Dzieła wybrane, t. 2, Moje wspomnienia*, Warszawa 1990.
- Wspomnienia weteranów ruchu ludowego*, Warszawa 1968.
- Zakrzewski A., *Wincenty Witos 1874-1945*, Warszawa 1977.

Prezydent, przełożony, przywódca: głowa państwa w myśli politycznej ruchu ludowego 1918-1939

Streszczenie

W myśli politycznej ruchu ludowego podejmowano problem pozycji i roli głowy państwa. Uważano, że stanowisko głowy państwa powinno być otoczone najwyższą powagą i szacunkiem. Głowa państwa, w opinii ideologów ruchu ludowego, stanowiła ważny organ władzy. Dla głowy państwa PSL „Wyzwolenie” proponowało nazwę „zwierzchnik Rzeczypospolitej” a potem „naczelnik państwa”, PSL „Lewica” – „naczelnik-prezydent”, PSL „Piast” – prezydent. Przedmiotem zainteresowania polityków ruchu ludowego była instytucja polityczna prezydenta, jej konstytucyjne usytuowanie, tryb powoływania, uprawnienia, odpowiedzialność oraz relacje z pozostałymi organami władzy państwowej. Ocena rzeczywistości politycznej obejmowała charakterystykę osób sprawujących najwyższy urząd w państwie, ich osobowości i cechy charakteru, merytoryczne kwalifikacje. Mimo obaw, że najwyższe stanowisko w państwie mogłoby objąć niepożądana jednostka, nieustannie podkreślano konieczność wzmocnienia głowy państwa. Akceptacja silnych organów wykonawczych nie oznaczała jednak bezwzględnej poparcia dla koncepcji silnej prezydentury. W dużej mierze takie stanowisko wynikało z uwarunkowań bieżącej taktyki politycznej. Ludowcy skłaniali się ku systemowi prezydenckiemu funkcjonującemu w klasycznej postaci w Stanach Zjednoczonych Ameryki. W połowie lat dwudziestych skłonni byli wyposażyć prezydenta w prawo weta ustawodawczego. Prezydent pełnił funkcję superarbitra w sprawach państwowych i być czynnikiem równowagi między parlamentem a rządem.

Słowa kluczowe: myśl polityczna, ruch ludowy, prezydent, naczelnik, zwierzchnik