

## POLISH WORKERS IN THE USA (1880–1925): PEASANTS – POLES – ETHNICS

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This paper discusses the active response of Polish immigrants to the social and political realities of industrial America. It considers cases where ethnicity coincided with class. It explores how Polish immigrants used elements of national or folk culture in their struggle to advance their social position. And it demonstrates that the use of such elements of ethnic culture enabled the Polish immigrant working class to appeal to the wider ethnic community, including the ethnic middle class, for support during strikes and other forms of protest.

Polish Americans creatively responded to living conditions in America. In their working protests one can trace many elements brought from the Old Country, and new behaviors. Among these was the attempt to create workers' organizations, or labor unions. Reducing my task to manageable proportions, I am limiting my remarks to immigrant participation in strikes and immigrant attitudes towards labor unions. This article analyses the relation between immigrant worker industrial protest and ethnic identity in the following, largely chronological sequences: 1. The use of European peasant cultural forms in workplace protests; 2. the creation of exclusively ethnic labor organizations as a form of worker self-defence; and 3. the emergence of a new identity as "American" workers among working class Polish Americans, an identity reinforced by middle class Polish American institutions and leaders.<sup>1</sup> However, these developments did not always follow a simple linear model, and even after a sense of Americanness had appeared at the end of World War I, Polish

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<sup>1</sup> Understood according to E. R. Barkan, "Race, Religion and Nationality in American Society: A Model of Ethnicity – From Contact to Assimilation," *Journal of American Ethnic History*, 14 (1995), no 2, pp. 54-55.

American workers were also concerned with raising the prestige of their ethnic group in American society.

To some extent this scheme parallels that of D. Lokwood who describes three types of images of American society prevalent among working class Americans: 1. a hierarchical or differential model; 2. a dichotomous/conflictual model "*associated with (...) work-based class solidarity and communal participation;*" and 3. a privatized model expressing "*instrumental perceptions of work and work roles, and in the primacy of home-family concerns.*"<sup>2</sup>

### 1. Immigration and work in America

It is estimated that before World War I about 2.5-3 million people from Polish lands arrived to the United States (90% of them peasants). At least 80% of them ended up working in industrial towns, employed as common laborers, because, to use the words of the economist Leopold Caro, "*the American workers did not undertake any low and menial jobs.*"<sup>3</sup> Another author in 1898 conceded 90% of Poles earned money "*doing the hardest and lowest paid jobs*"; in Johnstown, Pa., a typical company town, 87% of Polish men employed in steel plants worked as unskilled workers or common laborers; in Pittsburgh it was about 90%.<sup>4</sup> Jointly with other East European groups, Poles composed the lowest social stratas. We should agree with a socialist commentator who wrote: "*Differences in earnings between American and immigrant workers amount to differences in earnings between*

<sup>2</sup> I describe it after Ewa Morawska, "East European Labourers in an American Mill Town, 1890-1940: The Differential-Proletarian-Privatized Workers?" *Sociology*, 19 (1985), no 3, pp. 368-369.

<sup>3</sup> L. Caro, "Statystyka emigracji polskiej i austro-węgierskiej do Stanów Zjednoczonych Ameryki Północnej," *Czasopismo Prawnicze i Ekonomiczne*, 8 (1907), p. 275; cf. A. Graziosi, "Common Laborers, Unskilled Workers: 1890-1915," *Labor History*, Vol. 22, no 4 (1981), pp. 516-522, 534.

<sup>4</sup> J. J. Parot, "Ethnic versus Black Metropolis: The origins of Polish-Black Housing Tensions in Chicago," *Polish-American Studies* (1972), no 1-2, pp. 24-36. Piotr Panek, *Emigracja polska w Stanach Zjednoczonych A.P.*, Lwów 1898, p. 15; Caro, "Statystyka," p. 277; E. Morawska, "T'was Hope Here: The Polish Immigrants in Johnstown, Pennsylvania 1890-1930," in F. Renkiewicz (ed.), *The Polish Presence in Canada and America*, Toronto 1982, p. 33.

skilled and unskilled workers.”<sup>5</sup> Their work was hard – how many times did they stress it in letters, writing “*For in America Poles Work Like Cattle*” – neither was it stable nor safe.<sup>6</sup> Supervising personnel belonged to different ethnic groups which had arrived earlier in the nineteenth century. In Nanticoke, Pennsylvania, the name of the first Polish foreman was remembered as late as 1922, so unusual was the fact that a Pole had held the supervisory post fifty years earlier.<sup>7</sup> When explaining the firing of Poles from factories in Chicopee Falls, Mass., the Polish weekly *Zgoda* blamed it on the fact that there was “no single Polish boss, but Yankees, Irish, French.”<sup>8</sup>

## 2. Immigrants: “communal response”<sup>9</sup> and defence

### 2.1. Neighborhoods and ethnic institutions

In contrast to older historical analyses which stressed the trauma and apthology of the immigrant experience, recent theories have demonstrated that Poles successfully adapted their European heritage to meet the challenges of the American environment. The first response to the urban industrial order was a “communal response”. The formation of neighborhoods and ethnic communities was chronologically the first such strategy. These ethnic communities would become very useful during workplace struggles. Members of extended families offered help not only in initiating and organizing “chain migration” but in helping relatives find and keep jobs. Polish communities were so extensive that a young mountaineer who had arrived to Mount Pleasant in 1899 recalled: “*Dear God, we’re here as one family.*”<sup>10</sup> “*This is not America! It’s Tarnów, Stanisławów!*” a journalist exclaimed

<sup>5</sup> R. M[azurkiewicz], *Zagadnienie migracji do Stanów Zjednoczonych*, n.p. 1913, p. 22.

<sup>6</sup> A. Walaszek, “‘For in America Poles Work Like Cattle’: Polish Peasant Immigrants and Work in America 1890-1891”, in M. Debouzy ed., *In the Shadow of the Statue of Liberty. Immigrants, Workers and Citizens in the American Republic 1880-1920*, Saint Denis 1988, pp. 95-105.

<sup>7</sup> *Niedzielnny Gornik*, May 7, 1922, p. 12.

<sup>8</sup> *Zgoda*, March 26 1908, p. 8.

<sup>9</sup> D. Pacyga, *Polish Immigrants and Industrial Chicago: Workers on the West Side, 1880-1922*, Columbus 1991, p. 111.

<sup>10</sup> J. Bukowski, “*Życiorys tułacza syna Podhala*,” manuscript, Memoirs of Village Social Activists Collection, in *Szkoła Główna Handlowa, Instytut Gospodarstwa Społecznego* (Warszawa).

with great astonishment once in America.<sup>11</sup> Every family member contributed labor or wages to the family economy. Women who did not work outside home, were keeping house and taking in lodgers or boarders; children worked as well.<sup>12</sup> Such practices were in accord with traditions brought from Polish lands. Families kept animals, grew vegetable gardens, collected wastes from city dumps, or coal which had fallen from wagons. A saloon, the magnet for men, was a social, political center, a plebeian club where one could confide in others, ask for advice, and form opinions about current affairs, while drinking a glass of vodka or beer. The tavern marked the beginnings of social organizations. The parish committee had met here in order to decide how to found a church. It was here that strikers and union members met. Leo Krzycki's father's saloon in Milwaukee served as a Knights of Labor club.<sup>13</sup> Even people of different roots enjoyed themselves together. Not knowing another language was not an obstacle. "We were using a sign language," recalled a Polish smelter.<sup>14</sup>

In ethnic districts various institutions were established (not necessarily known from Polish lands) offering financial help in case of sickness or death. These institutions also served as information centers. The Polish National Alliance (PNA) founded for some time a Labor Secretariat to "collect information and numbers about working conditions which industries are currently running."<sup>15</sup> Parishes, offering a broad range of help, were than religious institutions. In many cases pastors were helping workers to find jobs.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> E. H. Dunikowski, *Wśród Polonii w Ameryce*, Lwów 1893, p. 41.

<sup>12</sup> S. Nowicki, "Back of the Yards," in A. S. Lynd (ed.), *Rank and File. Personal Histories by Working Class Organizers*, Princeton 1973, p. 69.

<sup>13</sup> E. Miller, "Leo Krzycki - Polish-American Labor Leader", *Polish American Studies*, (1976), no 2, p. 52.

<sup>14</sup> David Brody, *Steelworkers in America. The Nonunion Era*, New York - San Francisco 1960, pp. 120-121, 246-247, 260-261; Coroner Files, cases 931, 937, 1417, 1737, 4046, 4554, 5015, Cuyahoga County Archives, Cleveland, Ohio.

<sup>15</sup> *Zgoda*, January 14, 1904, p. 1; a column "Komisja Przemysłu i Handlu", in *Zgoda*, 1907-1908. A. Walaszek, *Polscy robotnicy, praca i związki zawodowe w Stanach Zjednoczonych Ameryki, 1880-1922*, Wrocław-Warszawa 1988, pp. 69-71.

<sup>16</sup> A. Kolaszewski to Bishop R. Gilmour, 4 November 1890, pp. 1-6, St. Stanislaus Parish Records, Archive of Diocese Cleveland, Cleveland, fold. 1872-1892.

## 2.2. Protests

In the period of “communal response” immigrants were neither submissive nor docile strikebreakers and often resisted the economic and social system they had entered. Soon after their arrival to the US, even if they had previously promised not to join such actions, immigrants participated in workers’ protests, initiated them, and often decided their outcomes. Their culture facilitated their actions. Migrant workers’ behaviors and slogans might have had ethnic connotations, but their goals and the logic of the struggles were not ethnic. People came to America from territories where conflicts between manors and villages were still alive (although experiences may have differed from region to region);<sup>17</sup> R. Kantor reminded us recently that immigrants were bringing with them only some elements of their “cultural luggage”.<sup>18</sup> That is, at the end of the 19th century there were already generations of people unfamiliar with serfdom, more independent and less humble. And these traits characterized their activity in the United States.

Strike activity was accompanied by rituals of religious, cultural significance. During the 1902 coal strike, miners gathered in city parks streaming union flags and banners which read “Long life to the union,” and music was played by Our Lady of Czestochowa parish band.<sup>19</sup> During the steel strike in Hammond, Ind., in a dark hall “A candle stuck in a bottle was placed on a platform. One by one the men came and kissed the ivory image on the cross, kneeling before it. They swore they would not scab.” The strike proved, writes D. Brody, immigrants “were effective strikers because they were peasants.”<sup>20</sup>

Immigrant strikes at the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century were most often caused by changes in conditions of workers, such

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<sup>17</sup> Cf. Julianna Puskas, Inge Blank, Horst Rössler, Cvetka Knapic-Khren, “Rural and Artisanal Protest in Western East Central and Southeastern Europe from the Early 19th Century to World War I”, in: Dirk Hoerder, Horst Rössler (eds.), *Roots of Transplanted*, Boulder 1993, Vol. 2, pp. 16-30.

<sup>18</sup> Ryszard Kantor, *Między Zaborowem a Chicago. Kulturowe konsekwencje istnienia zbiorowości imigrantów z parafii zaborowskiej w Chicago i jej kontaktów z rodzinnymi wsiami*, Wrocław-Warszawa 1990.

<sup>19</sup> *Wielkopolanin*, July 22, 1909, p. 1, September 23, 1909, p. 4.

<sup>20</sup> *Sun* (Pittsburgh), quoted after Brody, *Steelworkers*, pp. 139-140.

as wage reductions, discriminatory treatment, or speed-ups etc. In the summer of 1885, during the strike in Cleveland Rolling Mill Co., workers heard in Polish and Czech: "They are not treating us like men and the load is too heavy for us to bear." "This is a battle for bread and honor and we must behave like honest and brave working men." During this, as during so many other strikes, the marches of angry workers from mill to mill reminded one of marches during protests in Polish villages,<sup>21</sup> which ended in front of the porch or at the manor. During revolts in Russian or Austrian Poland, agricultural workers armed with clubs would march to the manors with their demands. Later, during the night, they left for the next manor, and hundred of others would join them on the way. During three or four days the marchers would visit about ten manors. These protests were called "migrating strikes".<sup>22</sup> In 1885 in Cleveland about 15,000 people preceded by drummers and the American flag marched to City Hall and the National Bank Building, where a workers' committee had talks with W. Chisholm.<sup>23</sup> These marchers echoed those of agricultural workers to the manor house.

European protests were supported by village solidarity. Women were particularly active. In one Galician village in the 1880s, armed with fire hooks and pokers, they defended their men resisting sequestration. Agricultural workers and peasants reacted violently against any break of group solidarity. Those who manifested the intention to work were driven away by stones, clubs, and scythes. They were warned "not to dare to come again, because then they will be knocked on their heads."<sup>24</sup> In America, immigrant strikes were supported by the solidarity of families, communities, and ethnic neighborhoods. People reluctantly tolerated

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<sup>21</sup> *Cleveland Leader and Herald*, 9 July 1885, 8 July 1885, 6 July 1885.

<sup>22</sup> S. Kalabiński, F. Tych eds., *Walki chłopów Królestwa Polskiego w rewolucji 1905-1907*, Vol. 3, pp. 682-83, 693-95; S. Kalabiński, F. Tych, *Czwarte powstanie czy pierwsza rewolucja? Lata 1905-1907 na ziemiach polskich*, Warszawa 1969, pp. 110-112, 363-365; W. Najdus, *Szkice z historii Galicji*, Vol. 1, Warszawa 1958, pp. 262, 266.

<sup>23</sup> H. B. Leonard, "Ethnic Cleavage and Industrial Conflict in Late 19th Century America: The Cleveland Rolling Mill Company Strikes of 1882 and 1885", *Labor History* (1979), no 4, pp. 546, 536-541.

<sup>24</sup> Najdus, *Szkice*, Vol. 1, pp. 266-267; S. Kalabiński, "Walka chłopów guberni suwalskiej w rewolucji 1905-1907 ze szczególnym uwzględnieniem ziemi sejnenskiej", in: *Materiały do dziejów ziemi sejnenskiej*, Prace Białostockiego Towarzystwa Naukowego, nr 1, Białystok 1963, pp. 330-332; Walaszek, *Polscy*, pp. 82-83.

individualistic behaviors, and, particularly in extreme situations, reacted jointly. To be a scab could mean an exclusion from the group. Men, women, and children attacked factories and strikebreakers in July 1885. "Female friends of the strikers were arriving on the scene with their aprons full of bricks and other missiles which were cast."<sup>25</sup> In 1899 women led by Maria Waszkiewicz threw black paper into the eyes of those walking to work. When their leaders were arrested, the women at first tried to rescue them, and later went to Wilkes Barre to pay bail.<sup>26</sup> In Cleveland whoever broke a streetcar boycott rule during a strike in 1899, even if elderly, risked of being beaten when stepping into a car. The community pressure was enormous. A letter published in a Polish weekly testifies to this. "Mr. Edmund Szczyglinski publicly admits the mistake which he made with relation to Mrs Sawicka, the owner of a clothing shop in Fleet Street, about whom he had spread rumors that she had ridden on a streetcar driven by scabs. The foregoing turned out to be untrue."<sup>27</sup> Ethnic organizations were providing direct help to the fighters and strikers, collecting donations<sup>28</sup> and organizing medical centers for the wounded.<sup>29</sup> The reaction of American Polonia to the Lattimer massacre was among the strongest.<sup>30</sup>

### 3. "Communal response": Workers' organizations

In the United States, class formation occurred simultaneously among different groups of ethnic workers who were creating their own workers' cultures. The exclusive character of trade unions also supported "segmented class formation" in

<sup>25</sup> Leonard, "Ethnic", pp. 531, 537-539; *Cleveland Leader and Herald*, 6, 7, 9, 11, 15-17 July, 1885.

<sup>26</sup> *Polonia w Ameryce*, Sept. 30, 1899; V. R. Greene, *The Slavic Community on Strike. Immigrant Labor in Pennsylvania Anthracite*, Notre Dame 1968, pp. 141-144. Other examples, Walaszek, *Polscy*, pp. 88-89.

<sup>27</sup> *Polonia w Ameryce*, 10 August, 1899.

<sup>28</sup> *Zgoda*, July 18, 1894, p. 4, August 15, 1894, p. 4, October 30, 1902, p. 2; S. Osada, *Historia Związku Narodowego Polskiego*, Chicago 1957, Vol. 1, p. 544.

<sup>29</sup> *Zgoda*, October 21, 1885, p. 2, October 30, 1902, p. 6, April 30, 1908, p. 7.

<sup>30</sup> Greene, *The Slavic*, pp. 141-42; *Dziennik Chicagoski*, October 14, 1897, p. 1, September 15, 1897, p. 1, Sept. 18, 1897, p. 1, September 21, 1897, p. 1; *Gazeta Polska w Chicago*, September 16, 1897, p. 1, 4; *Kurier Nowojorski i Brooklyński*, September 18, 1897, p. 4; A. Brozek, D. Piątkowska, "Prasa polska o masakrze robotników w Lattimer, Pensylwania (1897)", *Zaranie Śląskie* (1978), no 2, pp. 259-267.

the nineteenth century. The American Federation of Labor (AFL) effectively barred "new" immigrants from access to their unions of skilled workers.<sup>31</sup> Most "trade unions believed that only skilled workers could provide the foundation for a stable, effective organization;" only skilled workers and helpers were accepted as members.<sup>32</sup> The Knights of Labor were one of the very few labor organizations which, ignoring lack of skill, attracted some recent immigrants into their ranks including relatively large groups of Poles.<sup>33</sup>

### 3.1 Polish organizations and workers' struggles

In the 1880s the Polish press discussed industrial conflicts. Reactions varied, but comments published in the Polish American press usually regarded such protests as hampering the effort to win international prestige for Polish culture, if not to achieve Polish national independence. Intellectual and political leaders of Polonia from New York led by Erazm Jerzmanowski stated in the year 1886: "*Horried by the news that in the riots in Chicago and Milwaukee, which happened in the day of the Constitution of the Third of May, Poles could participate actively, we energetically protest against any riots, revolts, violations of public order either under any excuse, and with deep regret and sadness in our hearts we feel we have to publicly protest against those among our compatriots who with blood and iron dishonored the anniversary of the Consitution of the Third of May.*" Participation in the riots could "*disgrace the honor and good name of the homeland.*" Also: "*Your material stand here (...) doubtlessly is better than in the Old Country, where your language and*

<sup>31</sup> *Ameryka*, 20 June 1896, p. 1; A.T. Lane, "American Labor and European Immigrants in the Late Nineteenth Century," *Journal of American Studies*, 11 (1977), pp. 241-260; A. T. Lane, "American Trade Unions, Mass Immigration, and the Literacy Test: 1900-1917", *Labor History*, 25 (Winter, 1984), pp. 5-25.

<sup>32</sup> Leonard, "Ethnic", pp. 529, 543-544.

<sup>33</sup> Cf. Antoni A. Paryski, *Zycie, praca czyny 1865-1935*, Toledo 1945, pp. 13-14; K. Groniowski, "Socjalistyczna emigracja polska w Stanach Zjednoczonych (1883-1914)", *Z Pola Walki* (1977), no 1, pp. 3-4; *Gazeta Polska w Chicago*, 22 April 1886, p. 1, 17 March 1887, p. 3; *Zgoda*, 2 March 1887, p. 8, 16 March 1887, 4 May 1887, p. 5; *Ameryka*, 20 June 1896, p. 1; J. Garlock, *Guide to the Local Assemblies of the Knights Labor*, Westport 1982, p. 68, 75, 436; New York State, Bureau of Statistics of Labor, *Third Annual Report*, Albany 1886, pp. 489, 491.

faith are persecuted (...) Brother Compatriots, not under the red banner of blood, murder, fire should you unite and follow the path of perverted socialists and anarchists. Oh no, Countrymen – let us be faithful to our old Polish flag.”<sup>34</sup> Strikes were understood as anti-Polish activity; they were immoral and anti-religious as well. Though the Polish American press admitted that workers’ lives were often tragic, the only solution however was seen in voluntary agreements between workers and employers, not in workers’ revolts or strikes.<sup>35</sup> The Rev. A. Kolaszewski warned parishioners from the pulpit: “Don’t seek the advice of insane agitators who would ruin you, but make up your minds tomorrow morning... to go to work like men and redeem your place in the confidence of the people that you have lost by your foolish acts.”<sup>36</sup>

By the end of the century the press more often justified participation in strikes. New controversy focused on the form of protest, the degree of organization and the style of leadership. By 1888 *Polak w Ameryce* did not criticize Poles for joining strikes but for fighting with the police.<sup>37</sup> The Polish National Catholic Church (PNCC) which broke away from the Roman Catholic church at the end of the nineteenth century tried to educate immigrant workers. Eventually, as this church increased its support for strikers and unions – particularly for the United Mine Workers organizing in Pennsylvania – its social program began to resemble a socialist one. The PNCC’s weekly *Straż* (The Guard) advised Poles to participate actively in American democracy. It also argued that labor unions should formulate programs to defend ethnic groups, assist acculturation and achieve the “emancipation” of Polish immigrants.<sup>38</sup>

<sup>34</sup> Protest of Poles from New York, mss., Jagiellonian Library, Cracow, Manuscript Division, mss 4987, pp. 64-65.

<sup>35</sup> *Wiara i Ojczyzna*, March 27, 1888, p. 382, April 10, 1888, p. 398, January 14, 1891, pp. 24-25; *Gazeta Polska w Chicago*, April 28, pp. 2-3.

<sup>36</sup> *Cleveland Leader and Herald*, 13 July 1885, p. 8.

<sup>37</sup> *Polak w Ameryce*, February 7, 1888, pp. 1-2, February 10, 1888, p. 2; *Dziennik Chicagoski*, June 10, 1893, p. 1.

<sup>38</sup> L. Orzell, “A Minority within a minority: The Polish National Catholic Church, 1896-1907”, *Polish American Studies* (1979), no 1, pp. 16-17; B. Domagała, “Ideologia społeczna Polskiego Narodowego KOścioła Katolickiego w Ameryce w latach 1897-1939”, *Przegląd Polonijny* (1984), no 2, passim.

The Opinions, a secular mutual benefit society, outlined a similar program even earlier. The PNA's weekly *Zgoda* (Harmony) approved legal worker protests as early as 1886, rejecting only violent actions associated with socialist or anarchist agitation.<sup>39</sup> In 1890 the PNA declared, "To condemn a struggle for an eight hour working day does not make any sense (...) it [the eight hour day] is just, since it was approved by American authorities (...) a peaceful workers' march supporting that struggle is as acceptable and rational as an electoral parade."<sup>40</sup> By the end of the century socialists began to infiltrate the officers of the PNA. In December 1893, a local PNA lodge *Nowe Życie* (New Life) in Chicago even attempted to create an Alliance of Polish Workers in America to educate workers and help those injured at work. In a memo addressed to the PNA Convention in 1893, it demanded that the PNA devote more attention to workers' physical needs and to the creation of a compensation fund for accident victims. The memo ended with the exclamation: "Long live the Polish National Alliance of Workers".<sup>41</sup> The Polish National Alliance indeed claimed to be a "workers' organization" and declared full support "of legal struggles against capitalism,"<sup>42</sup> and advocated the participation of Poles in unions.<sup>43</sup> But it also took care to stress the additional point, "let us make it as Poles – not to disappear in this English ocean."<sup>44</sup>

### 3.2 Polish labor organizations

By the 1890s the problem of creating ethnic Polish labor organization was widely discussed. In 1892, the influential clerically controlled daily, *Dziennik Chicagoski* wrote: "American unions aim, first of all, to support high wages and

<sup>39</sup> *Zgoda*, 3 March 1886, p. 3, 24 March 1886, p. 3, 31 March 1886, p. 3, 14 May 1886, p. 2.

<sup>40</sup> A. Waldo, *Sokolstwo przednia straz narodu*, Pittsburgh 1956, Vol. 1, pp. 373-74.

<sup>41</sup> Archives of New Files, Warsaw (hereafter quoted ANF), Collection PPS 305/II/41, file "Varia"; *Przegląd Emigracyjny*, February 1, 1894, p. 33.

<sup>42</sup> *Zgoda*, 23 May 1894, p. 1, 13 December 1893, p. 1, 25 April 1894, p. 1.

<sup>43</sup> *Zgoda*, 18 July 1894, p. 4, 25 July 1894, p. 4, 1 August 1894, p. 4, 27 March 1895, p. 1, 29 May 1895, p. 1, 5 July 1900, p. 417; Olszewski, *Historia Związku*, Vol. 2, pp. 214, 251-52.

<sup>44</sup> *Zgoda*, 6 December 1893, p. 4, 10 October 1894, p. 1, 20 September 1900, p. 1, 27 September 1900, 1 November 1900, p. 2, 19 March 1900, pp. 200-201; Olszewski, *Historia*, Vol. 2, p. 214; Groniowski, "Polonia amerykańska a Narodowa Demokracja (1893-1914)", *Kwartalnik Historyczny* (1972), no 1, p. 35.

only secondly to help in the case of sickness or unemployment." The paper cited an obvious discrepancy between the views of the AFL and those of immigrants – mostly common laborers. "We also know that before the unions accept someone as a member, they will first examine his skill ... How many Poles could pass such a test?"<sup>45</sup> Instead, the paper argued, Polish workers should belong to self-help, self-educating organizations: "we need to form workers' associations, which apart from educating their members would also provide some material aid to them, not only in the case of death, but in case of injury or sickness".<sup>46</sup> About the same time, the weekly organ of the secular PNA, *Zgoda* raised "the idea of creating clubs of Polish workers. Such clubs would serve as popular schools, developing the Polish workers mentally, we want him to strengthen his forces, to understand his position and to try to improve it."<sup>47</sup>

Others in the Polish American community also urged Polish workers to organize themselves as ethnics.<sup>48</sup> The Cleveland weekly, *Jutrzenka* (Dawn), called unsuccessfully for the organization of an Alliance of Polish Workers'.<sup>49</sup> Such arguments reached the few Polish American skilled workers or craftsmen, who sometimes, with moderate success, took such initiatives. The Polish Printers Association (Stowarzyszenie Drukarzy Polskich) created by Jan Migdalski in Chicago was a typical craft union, and in 1894 it became an autonomous Polish local branch of the International Typographical Union.<sup>50</sup> Another example is the Union of Polish Actors in America.<sup>51</sup> The Polish Tailors Union established in Newark in 1896 accepted only those "who knew well their craft," including Czechs and Slovaks;<sup>52</sup> other examples can be found in Newark, Cleveland, Chicago, Johansberg, Pa. Though there were a few organizations of unskilled workers – the Alliance of Polish Workers established in 1892 in Bay City, Michigan, and the Mutual Help Society

<sup>45</sup> *Dziennik Chicagoski*, 5 July 1892, p. 2.

<sup>46</sup> *Pamiętnik srebrnego jubileuszu parafii Najświętszej Rodziny w Sugar Notch, Pa. 1903-1928*, Sugar Notch 1928, p. 251.

<sup>47</sup> *Zgoda*, 6 December 1893, p. 4.

<sup>48</sup> Cf. *Ameryka*, June 20, 1896, p. 1, May 30, 1896, p. 1, August 22, 1896, p. 1.

<sup>49</sup> *Jutrzenka*, 6 December 1893, p. 4.

<sup>50</sup> J. Chonarzewski, *Drukarz. Jednodniówka wydana przez Stowarzyszenie Drukarzy Polskich w Stanach Zjednoczonych P.A.*, Chicago 1901.

<sup>51</sup> *Dziennik Ludowy*, January 13, 1914, p. 4; March 10, 1914, p. 1.

<sup>52</sup> *Zgoda*, September 20, 1896, p. 3.

established in Pullman, Illinois, in 1896 might be noted – these were soon transformed into local branches of national fraternal insurance societies (such as the Polish National Alliance). Some Polish skilled workers also entered a few American labor unions where they acted jointly with other groups but not much is known about these cases at this time.<sup>53</sup>

#### 4. Work, immigrants and 20th century control struggles

At the beginning of the twentieth century workers started to overcome ethnic boundaries, clearly learning new ways of reacting to industrial reality. Then, it meant – as James R. Barrett phrases it – “*Americanization from the bottom up.*”<sup>54</sup> Understanding the transformation in the nature of industrial work in the United States in the twentieth century is of fundamental importance for explaining changes in working class behavior. At the turn of the century employers undertook a number of organized efforts to reform worker-management relations in industry. Together with the modernization of technology, attempts were made to reorganize work in such a way as to make it keep pace with the requirements of technology and the market. Due to mechanization and automation, the workers became extensions of the machines. This was the movement toward scientific management.<sup>55</sup> By introducing the division of labor, as well as the production line employers restricted considerably, or even eliminated, the number of jobs requiring special skills. For the “new” immigrants this meant, paradoxically, closer contact with the realities of the plants. Although they found it hard to identify their own work in the finished products, it began to give them a feeling of their strength.

The skilled workers tried to defend their previous position. The immigrants, in turn, rebelled against the numerous hardships and wrongs, against the new

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<sup>53</sup> Cf. Central Labor Union. Building Trades Council, *Labor Day Souvenir. 1901*, Cleveland 1901, pp. 31, 27, 45.

<sup>54</sup> James R. Barrett, “Americanization from the Bottom Up: Immigration and the Remaking of the Working Class in the United States, 1880-1930”, *The Journal of American History*, 79 (1992), no 3, pp. 999-1000.

<sup>55</sup> Graziosi, “Common,” pp. 528-529; D. Montgomery, *Workers*, pp. 114-127; D. Brody, *Workers*, pp. 10-12.

discipline. New machines were cursed and referred to as “devils,” while the managers were thought of as “czars”. Strikers from Black, Printz, and Co. thus described their boss in 1911: “Black, the greatest philanthropist who, like the Russian Czar loves us like children and proves it by hiring thugs to club us.”<sup>56</sup> “...this is not a country of slaves and there are no tsars here,” complained someone else.<sup>57</sup>

Immigrant worker enthusiasm and perseverance attracted union organizers and agitators. The AFL, attempting to take part in these disputes or even control them, persuaded the immigrants to join their organizations and then educated them. This was the case with the Chicago slaughtering and meat packing industry. When the AMCBW organized in 1900, it created supralocal and supranational locals for workers representing particular professional groups, often scattered over the territory of the entire city. During the wave of strikes in the years 1916-1922 the main objectives were an increase in worker independence, freedom, autonomy and control in the industrial plants. These claims were put forward by the “new immigration” and their communities, which also exerted a decisive influence on the shape and the course of many of the conflicts. The events which occurred in those years document that “new immigrants” were forming and becoming a part of the American proletariat. This is supported by a considerable increase of activity from the bottom up, the formation of immigrants’ own (but not ethnic) unions, and shop committees quite independent from unions shop committees. Representatives of different skills and nationalities entered the unions. However, it was the ordinary members who tried to shape the policy of the organizations and determine the character of the events.<sup>58</sup> Polish workers not only supported the unions, by identifying themselves with them, but they tried to act on their own, solving their own local problems. Besides, they demanded all these things from the union and were taught to do it by Polish union activists such as J. Kikulski, S. Rokosz, F. Krasowski, A. Nielubowski, A. Budzinski, M. Janik, L. Krzycki, etc.

Ethnic leaders and press changed their attitudes to the labor unions. Formerly conservative, now *Gazeta Polska w Chicago* stressed the importance of strikes,

<sup>56</sup> *Cleveland Citizen*, June 24, 1911, pp. 4.

<sup>57</sup> J. Kalendo to Polish Embassy in Washington, Febr. 9, 1926, Polish Embassy in Washington Collection, ANF, Cont. 2137, pp. 96-98.

<sup>58</sup> Montgomery, “The New Unionism and the Transformation of Workers’ Consciousness in America, 1909-1922”, *Journal of Social History*, 1974, no 4, pp. 516-517.

which were called "*just and right workers' struggle*," unions and even prompted entering them. All Poles should belong to unions, simultaneously remaining members of Polonia mutual aid society.<sup>59</sup> More supportive were also clergymen. During the 1919 Passaic textile workers' meeting, a pastor from Polish parish said that although he did not understand workers' issues, for it was difficult for him to judge whether strikers' demands were right, but nonetheless encouraged strikers to demand justice, declared material help, and blessed the gathering.<sup>60</sup> Before the steel strike, during a Catholic mass the pastor of Cleveland's St. Stanislaus had asserted: "*The worker has a right to organize for his defense and such organization is in accord with Christian principles.*"<sup>61</sup>

The idea of creating of ethnic or Polonia's unions was less often brought up. It might be found in appeals such as the one directed to workers from Utica, N.Y.: "*Polish weavers (...) from the area should understand workers, and their own good and thus create their own paper.*"<sup>62</sup>

#### 4.1 Workers, unionists, Americans

When the organization of packinghouses was completed, The National Committee for Organizing the Iron and Steel Workers started to organize the steel and coke industry agitating across the country. In Cleveland itself, 25 speakers fluent in the languages of unorganized foreigners worked. Each Sunday in Koreny Hall the invited Polish socialists "*turned passive people into unionists.*" Workers enthusiastically responded to the agitation. "*The Polish worker (...) understood now that the improvement of his work and protection of future life are in the workers' union, he trusts and believes in the unions.*"<sup>63</sup> Antoni Pilawski, a Polish union agitator

<sup>59</sup> *Gazeta Polska w Chicago*, 6 July 1912, p. 1, 2 November 1910, p. 15, 23 December 1909, p. 10, 16 December 1909.

<sup>60</sup> *Telegram Codzienny*, 6 March 1919, p. 3.

<sup>61</sup> *Jutrzenka*, 25 September 1919.

<sup>62</sup> *Telegram Codzienny*, 3 November 1916, p. 5; T. Kozak, "Unie robotnicze i zawodowe i Polacy", in: *Sprawa polska w Ameryce Północnej na pierwszym zjeździe Towarzystwa Literatów i Dziennikarzy Polskich*, Chicago 1912, pp. 170-171.

<sup>63</sup> *Wiadomości Codzienne*, 5 March, 4 October 1918, 11 March, 7 April, 9 June, 14 and 19 July 1919.

declared: "Our compatriots learned about the value of workers' organization and not only enter it massively but also stay firmly in its ranks."<sup>64</sup>

As members of American unions or Polish language local branches immigrants turned out being aware of their position. Calling themselves 'workers' in resolutions, they stressed being free and to have rights – "just rights". "We wish to win and we must do so for these are our legitimate rights"<sup>65</sup> "What we have in mind is the defense of our dignity against brutal attacks, which we experience daily in different plants."<sup>66</sup>

We should note another important element of workers' demonstrations. Stressing so strongly that they belonged to the ranks of the working class, Polish immigrants equally strongly felt that they were stressing their "Americanism". During manifestations, strikes, and pickets in fronts of factory gates, and marches on the streets people carried American flags jointly with the Polish ones. They were carried during meetings where union leaders such as L. Krzycki, J. Kikulski, S. Kucharska were making speeches.<sup>67</sup> The American banner supported (workers thought it almost guaranteed) success, it was to inform that strikers were "not scums of society, but wise people, good workers".<sup>68</sup> In Hammond, Indiana, when the strikers confronted the strike-breakers, they were led by Tomasz Skuba, a former soldier in the American army, who was wearing an American army uniform and holding the American flag. Later when fleeing before shots fired by the policemen, he was blamed for dropping the flag, allowing it to be defiled by the boots of others. The funeral procession in honor of the victims of this police attack was also preceded by workers bearing the American flag.<sup>69</sup> The strikers stressed that they were Americans: "...there has been some talk to infer that we are a foreign corporation and that we are not loyal. I do not think that has got anything to do with the case".<sup>70</sup> "Americanization" programs

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<sup>64</sup> *Jutrzenka*, 26 September 1920.

<sup>65</sup> *Dziennik Ludowy*, August 17, 1917, p. 6.

<sup>66</sup> *Telegram Codzienny*, February 29, 1916, p. 4.

<sup>67</sup> *Dziennik Ludowy*, August 17, 1917, p. 6.

<sup>68</sup> *Wiadomości Codzienne*, August 2, 1919, p. 2.

<sup>69</sup> *Dziennik Związkowy*, September 10, 1919, p. 8, September 13, 1919, pp. 6, 10.

<sup>70</sup> *Employees of Riverside Mills vs. Otis Steel Castings Co.*, Hearing, Jan. 3, 1919, NWLB, case 881; Preliminary report of Examiner, *Ibidem*; *Wiadomości Codzienne*, September 29, 1919.

were addressed to foreign workers and forced at that time, such as "America First", or the Liberty Loan Bonds campaign – authorities and employers wed the action as a loyalty test. But the workers themselves, ethnic communities, enthusiastically supported the purchases of bonds, competing with the others. In Cleveland in the unofficial group rivalry, immigrants were trying to declare the highest sum of money. In the collections, Poles "are on the first place", informed *Wiadomości Codzienne*. Three days later, 10 of April 1918: "Germans pushed Poles in Cleveland from the first place to the second. Poles in Otis, Wait and other factories should register their Polish ethnic origin." The race had to help demonstrate the loyalty of the group to the US and it was supported by all political orientations among Polonia – unionists, socialists, conservatives, and clergy.<sup>71</sup>

The above remarks might sound strange, since parallelly, in the war years Polish communities made a big effort to support a fight for the independence of Poland, thus supporting in practice the initiatives of nationalistic ideologies. Talking about that period one historian even deprived socialist organization of their radicalism, stressing that they would be better understood as nationalists and patriots fighting for the independence of the country. Such characterization is misleading, but nonetheless workers and their communities were at the time operating and active in different spheres.<sup>72</sup> Different, but not contradictory. After the war once the independence of the country was reconstructed there was no significant return migration. The patriotic slogans so omnipresent formerly now dissappeared. Most people decided to stay in the US, and – consequently – more broadly participate in American life. After the war Polish Americans, active unionists, and proud workers, reinterpreted their own ethnicity. Even if they were not coming back to Poland, they neither could nor wanted to dissappear among the other "American" workers. Struggles for control in the working place helped Polish workers think about themselves as Americans but those of Polish descent. Being recognized as members of working class they also believed and hoped to receive recognition in the core society as an ethnic group, similarly to the recognition and respect they received as workers from the Polonia leaders and middle class. This was why while ending the successful strike in Camden, N.J., workers sang "Poland has not perished yet," the Polish national

<sup>71</sup> *Wiadomości Codzienne*, 8 April 1918, p. 4, 10 April 1918 and other.

<sup>72</sup> Cf. Mary E. Cygan, *Political and Cultural Leadership in an Immigrant Community: Polish American Socialism, 1880-1950*, Ph.D. Diss., Northwestern University, Evanston.

<sup>73</sup> *Telegram Codzienny*, 29 February 1916, p. 4.

anthem.<sup>73</sup> “What we have in mind is to create a club of Polish unionized machinists and to concentrate with them all workers. The aim of such club would be a defense of Polish workers’ interests, to provide help for Poland”, so it was written. Being a program of employees’ defence it also was a program of ethnic group’s defence: unionists would also serve as political pressure group.<sup>74</sup> Thus, after the war Polish workers were saying basically the same thing as the ethnic leaders had said in 1925 during the Emigration Congress in Detroit: “We do not want to separate, we do not want to create a state within a state as some are accusing us, we want ... to prove that identically to the others we are members of this wonderful Republic life.”<sup>75</sup> Polish-American workers, unionists, even socialists, proved themselves to be more involved in the American scene, and – as J. Bukowczyk has shown it – followed the middle-class ideology of “Polish-Americanism.”<sup>76</sup>

POVZETEK

**POLJSKI DELAVCI V ZDA (1880-1925):  
KMETJE – POLJAKI – ETNIČNOST**

*Adam Walaszek*

*Prispevek obravnava reakcijo poljskih priseljencev – industrijskih delavcev v ZDA na tamkajšnje družbene in politične razmere. Vključeni so primeri, kjer narodnost sovпада s socialnim razredom. Avtorja predvsem zanima, kako so Poljaki*

<sup>74</sup> *Dziennik Ludowy*, 12 August 1920, 7 May 1924, p. 5.

<sup>75</sup> *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. 3, 16; *Urzędowy Protokół Sejmu XXIV Związku Narodowego Polskiego, odbytego w dniach 25-go do 30-gosierpnia 1924 w Lulu Temple w mieście Philadelphia, Pa., Chicago 1925*, pp. 3-25.

<sup>76</sup> John J. Bukowczyk, “The Transformation of Working Class Ethnicity: Corporate Control, Americanization, and the Polish Immigrant Middle Class in Bayonne, New Jersey 1915-1925”, *Labor History*, 25 (1984), no 1. pp. 80-81.

v ZDA v obravnavanem obdobju uporabljali prvine svoje prvotne narodne in ljudske kulture v boju za izboljšanje svojega družbenega položaja. Študija prikazuje, kako je "namenska uporaba" narodne kulture omogočila poljskemu delavskemu razredu v ZDA pritegnitev širše etnične skupnosti, vključno s srednjim slojem priseljenih rojakov, k podpori njihovih delavskih stavk in drugih oblik socialnih protestov.

Rekacija poljskih Američanov na življenjske razmere v Ameriki je bila kreativna. V njihovih delavskih protestih zasledimo na eni strani mnoge prvine, značilne za sorodna prizadevanja v njihovi rojstni deželi, na drugi strani pa tudi precej novih vzorcev in postopkov. Med slednjimi je treba omeniti predvsem ustanavljanje delavskih organizacij in sindikatov.

Ker se je moral avtor v pričujočem prispevku omejiti na primerni obseg razprave, se v le-tej osredotoča na najpomembnejša spoznanja glede sodelovanja poljskih priseljencev v delavskih stavkah in njihovega odnosa do delavskih sindikatov. V prispevku podaja analizo odnosa med protestnimi nastopi poljskih delavcev v ameriški industriji in njihovo etnično identiteto v naslednjem – predvsem kronološkem – zaporedju: 1. "uporaba" evropskih oblik kmečke kulture v stavkah na delovnem mestu; 2. ustanovitev izključno etničnih delavskih organizacij kot oblike delavske samozaščite; 3. pojav nove narodne in družbene identitete: "ameriškega delavstva" znotraj delavskega razreda poljskih Američanov. V slednjem primeru gre za identiteto, ki so jo spodbujali in razvijali predvsem voditelji ustanov srednjega sloja poljskih Američanov. Razvoj dogodkov pa kljub vsemu ni vselej sledil linearnemu vzorcu; poljski Američani so si namreč tudi po koncu prve svetovne vojne, ko se je med njimi že občutno utrdil občutek "ameriške" narodne pripadnosti, še vedno prizadevali za večji ugled svoje etnične skupine v ameriški družbi.

Pričujoči model do neke mere sovпада z modelom D. Lokwooda, ki navaja tri prevladujoče vzorce v okviru ameriškega delavskega razreda: 1. hierarhični oziroma diferencialni model; 2. nasprotni oziroma konfliktni model, "povezan z (...) razredno solidarnostjo in skupinsko pripadnostjo na osnovi dela"; 3. zasebni model, v katerem se odraža "dojemanje dela in posameznih vlog v delovnem procesu zlasti z vidika družinskih interesov".