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*The Role of Presidia of National Councils in the Recruitment Process  
for Higher Education in 1953–1956 on the Example of the Voivodeship  
of Zielona Góra*

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Rola prezydiów rad narodowych w procesie naboru na studia wyższe w latach 1953–1956  
na przykładzie województwa zielonogórskiego

SUMMARY

On 2 March 1953, the Prime Minister established a new procedure of recruiting university entrants. In order for the high school graduates to pursue higher education they had to receive a positive opinion from the administrative authorities in their district. The communist authorities directed to the universities young people who were of a peasant and working class. Young people who were considered to be of “a foreign social class” were prevented from attending university. This procedure was in force until 1956. The article presents the process of the recruitment for the university candidates in 1950–1953 in the realities of the Voivodeship of Zielona Góra.

**Keywords:** Stalinism; recruitment for universities; Zielona Góra Voivodeship

INTRODUCTION

The aim of this article is to present how the Prime Minister’s Bill no. 31 from 2 March 1953 on the tasks and organisation of selecting candidates for the studies in the higher education institutions<sup>1</sup> was carried out. It radically changed the system of recruitment of young people for universities, introducing political criteria in place of substantive criteria. In the process of selecting the university candi-

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<sup>1</sup> M.P. 1953, no. 29, item 363.

dates the key role was played by the presidia of the district and regional national councils. The Bill was in force until 1956 so the article's timeframe covers the period between 1953 and 1956. However, the system of choosing the candidates for university studies – which was in force in Poland between 1945 and 1953 – was also presented. The sources which were used include, first and foremost, the protocols from the session of the Voivodeship National Council (*Wojewódzka Rada Narodowa*, WRN) and the protocols from the plenary sessions of the Presidium of WRN in Zielona Góra, kept in the National Archives of Zielona Góra (*Archiwum Państwowe w Zielonej Górze*, APZG) in 1950–1956. The inquiry into the documents of the Voivodeship Committee of the Polish United Workers' Party (*Komitet Wojewódzki Polskiej Zjednoczonej Partii Robotniczej*, KW PZPR) in Zielona Góra did not reveal, however, any material which could be useful in presenting the subject discussed in this publication. While drafting the article, the state law acts on the higher education in 1950–1956 were also used. Although the article refers to the Voivodeship of Zielona Góra, it can be assumed that the implementation of the Prime Minister's Bill no. 31 was carried out similarly also in other voivodeships.

The problem addressed in this publication has already been partly presented in the work by Dorota Gałaszewska-Chilczuk and Jacek W. Wołoszyn<sup>2</sup>. The authors have presented mainly the process of selecting candidates for the studies at the university level. This article is a supplement to the work by Gałaszewska-Chilczuk and Wołoszyn through the presentation of the selection process at the level of a peripheral voivodeship.

#### EDUCATION IN THE VOIVODESHIP OF ZIELONA GÓRA IN 1950–1956

On 28 June 1950, the parliament passed a law on changes in the administrative division of the state<sup>3</sup>. There were three new voivodeships created in the western and northern territories: voivodeship of Koszalin, Opole, and Zielona Góra with headquarter of the Voivodeship National Council (WRN) in Zielona Góra. The Voivodeship of Zielona Góra included 17 districts (*powiat*) which had previously belonged to the Voivodeship of Poznań and Wrocław. The first session of the WRN in Zielona Góra took place on 8 July 1950<sup>4</sup>. The Presidium of WRN was selected. In fact, the composition of this body had already been established by the Executive of the Voivodeship Committee of the Polish United Workers' Party

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<sup>2</sup> D. Gałaszewska-Chilczuk, J.W. Wołoszyn, *Od przedszkolaka do studenta. Kryteria selekcji społecznej i politycznej w edukacji lata 1947–1956*, Lublin 2012, pp. 101–138.

<sup>3</sup> Journal of Laws 1950, no. 28, item 255.

<sup>4</sup> *Protokół z I-szej Plenarnej uroczystej Sesji Wojewódzkiej Rady Narodowej w Zielonej Górze, odbytej w dniu 8 lipca 1950 r.*, Archiwum Państwowe w Zielonej Górze (APZG), PWRN Zielona Góra, ref. 158.

(KW PZPR) in Zielona Góra in agreement with the Central Committee PZPR. The national councils' presidia were strictly subordinated to the structures of PZPR<sup>5</sup>. The scope of the formal prerogatives of the local authorities was defined by the resolution of the Ministerial Cabinet of 31 May 1950 – Instruction no. 7 on the scope of issues covered by the local economic plans and the procedure for submitting projects of these plans<sup>6</sup>. In accordance with this document, the duties of the local and voivodeship national councils included management of the activities of educational institutions in their region, with the exception of higher education.

The period between 1950 and 1956 was difficult in the history of Polish education. In 1945–1949, the communist authorities pacified by means of terror the opposing circles of young people and removed from schools both the principals as well as teachers who did not hide their critical attitude towards communism. The process of “communisation” of education was intensified in 1949. Those of the remaining, independent school principals were replaced by those from the party. The senior teaching staff was replaced by young teachers who were hastily educated in the spirit of communism. According to Krzysztof Kosiński, “the schools in 1951 were by no means resembling those from 1947”<sup>7</sup>. As was proven by Elwira J. Kryńska and Stanisław W. Mauersberg, the indoctrination of school children and teenagers in the spirit of communism took on a total character in the 1950s<sup>8</sup>. According to Sabina Bober, the authorities set for the teachers a task “to educate the youth in the spirit of socialist morality and to convince them that socialism is the most modern form of social and economic system”<sup>9</sup>.

The educational institutions in the voivodeship were led by the Presidium Department of Education (*Wydział Oświaty Prezydium*) of WRN. According to the resolution of the Ministerial Cabinet of 17 April 1950 – Instruction no. 2 on the composition, division of work duties, and the mode of operating the national council presidia<sup>10</sup>, all the departments of the presidia of the voivodeship national councils had a “supreme authority”. The “supreme authority” for the education departments was the Minister of Education. Some of the issues concerning education were discussed at the plenary sessions of the Presidium of WRN. In 1950–1956, the matters of education were addressed 74 times at the meeting of the Presidium of WRN in Zielona Góra, which

<sup>5</sup> E. Nowacka, *Samorząd terytorialny w systemie władzy publicznej w Polsce. Studium politycznoprawne*, Wrocław 1994, p. 31; H. Izdebski, *Historia administracji*, Warszawa 2001, p. 58; W. Witkowski, *Historia administracji w Polsce 1764–1989*, Warszawa 2007, p. 428.

<sup>6</sup> M.P. 1950, no. 70, item 813.

<sup>7</sup> K. Kosiński, *O nową mentalność. Życie codzienne w szkołach 1945–1956*, Warszawa 2000, p. 312.

<sup>8</sup> E.J. Kryńska, S.W. Mauersberg, *Indoktrynacja młodzieży szkolnej w Polsce w latach 1945–1956*, Białystok 2003.

<sup>9</sup> S. Bober, *Walka o dusze dzieci i młodzieży w pierwszym dwudziestolecu Polski Ludowej*, Lublin 2011, p. 78.

<sup>10</sup> M.P. 1950, no. 57, item 654.

constituted around 2% of the discussed topics. Education was not the leading subject for the Presidium but the issues referring to this subject were addressed during the sessions more often than, e.g. matters of medical care (around 1%).

During one of the first sessions of the Presidium of WRN in Zielona Góra on 18 August 1950, the head of the Department of Education presented a short report on the topic of the situation in education in the Voivodeship of Zielona Góra found after the previous authorities<sup>11</sup>. According to the report, there were altogether 804 educational institutions functioning in the area of the voivodeship, which were attended by 71,890 students. The teaching staff included 1,803 people and administrative – 379 officials. The level of education in schools in the voivodeship was described by the head of the Department of Education as poor and the technical condition of school buildings as bad. Part of the report was devoted by the head of the department to the political situation in schools, which he also considered unsatisfactory:

In the majority, teachers are not only disloyal but also hostile towards the current reality. E.g. in the district of Sulęcín there are only 4 party-oriented teachers, including only one from PZPR. There is evidence collected by the inspectors that the majority of teachers are clerical people, fighting in favour of the Vatican politics, who are, to a large extent, suspected of being in contact with the underground. One of the school principals, Jodko of Skwierzyna, testified that high schools were a centre of opposition. Another principal testified that the underground organisations included not only the high school students but also the teaching staff from Zielona Góra [...]. Kopeć, a teacher in the district of Sulęcín, who has a very bad moral opinion, stated during a lecture on Lenin that he had been a madman. She was suspended from work and the case was referred to the prosecutor<sup>12</sup>.

The process of pacifying the teaching staff was, therefore, not yet finished in the Voivodeship of Zielona Góra in 1950. This was probably due to the peripheral location of its districts in the Voivodeships of Wrocław and Poznań – up until 1950 – and the lack of a sufficient number of young teachers. The location of the seat of political authorities with the status of the Voivodeship in Zielona Góra meant, however, that the process of “communisation” of education in the region was fast-tracked.

There were 710 primary schools in the Voivodeship of Zielona Góra in 1951<sup>13</sup>. There were 2,236 teachers employed there and the number of school departments amounted to 2,976<sup>14</sup>. In 1952, the number of departments in primary schools increased to 3,125 and the number of teachers to 2,321 people<sup>15</sup>.

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<sup>11</sup> *Protokół z posiedzenia Prezydium Wojewódzkiej Rady Narodowej, odbytego w dniu 18 sierpnia 1950 r.*, APZG, PWRN Zielona Góra, ref. 595.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>13</sup> *Protokół z przebiegu V-ej zwyczajnej Sesji budżetowej Wojewódzkiej Rady Narodowej w Zielonej Górze, odbytej w dniu 15 maja 1952 r.*, APZG, PWRN Zielona Góra, ref. 160.

<sup>14</sup> *Protokół VIII-ej zwyczajnej sesji Wojewódzkiej Rady Narodowej w Zielonej Górze w dniach 11 i 12 grudnia 1952 r.*, APZG, PWRN Zielona Góra, ref. 161.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibidem*.

In the academic year 1954/1955, the number of primary schools in the Voivodeship of Zielona Góra increased to 713<sup>16</sup>. There were around 2,400 teachers employed in primary schools. On the other hand, the number of students in primary schools reached 88,000<sup>17</sup>. Therefore, it was significantly higher than the number of students of all types of schools in the Voivodeship of Zielona Góra in 1950. This was undoubtedly the result of a high, post-war baby boom. The number of high school students was significantly lower than primary school students. In the academic year 1954/1955, there were around 3,280 pupils in all the high schools in the Voivodeship of Zielona Góra<sup>18</sup>. One thousand, five hundred and ninety-six young people studied in pedagogical schools which had a syllabus similar to high schools. For many of them the higher education was the main goal. At that time there were no universities in the Voivodeship of Zielona Góra. Information points were opened in Zielona Góra only in 1962 by the Law Faculty of Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań and Poznań School of Economics<sup>19</sup>.

#### ORGANISATION OF UNIVERSITY ADMISSION IN 1945–1956

After the Second World War, a hasty process of Sovietisation of higher education took place in all the countries of Central Europe<sup>20</sup>. According to John Connelly, the Soviet model of university was radically different from the model which had functioned in Central Europe until the Second World War: “In comparison to Central Europe university, the Soviet WUZ appeared to be a high school repainted as a university”<sup>21</sup>. Students were required to follow a strict timetable, unified across the country. The studies’ programmes, regardless of specialisation, were filled with indoctrinating content. Soviet universities had no autonomy. The most important figure at the Soviet university was not a chancellor but the first secretary of the party organisation. A careful selection of candidates for the studies in terms of politics became a significant element of the Soviet university model. The admission system which functioned at the Soviet universities preferred children of labour workers and peasants<sup>22</sup>. Young people who were considered as “of a foreign class” were prevented from studies.

<sup>16</sup> *Protokół III-ciej zwyczajnej sesji Wojewódzkiej Rady Narodowej w Zielonej Górze, odbytej w dniu 22 maja 1954 r.*, APZG, PWRN Zielona Góra, ref. 163.

<sup>17</sup> *Protokół z przebiegu II-giej zwyczajnej (budżetowej) Sesji Wojewódzkiej Rady Narodowej w Zielonej Górze, odbytej w dn. 14 i 15 maja 1956 r.*, APZG, PWRN Zielona Góra, ref. 167.

<sup>18</sup> *Protokół III-ciej zwyczajnej sesji Wojewódzkiej Rady Narodowej w Zielonej Górze, odbytej w dniu 22 maja 1954 r.*, APZG, PWRN Zielona Góra, ref. 163.

<sup>19</sup> H. Szczegółka, *Zielona Góra. Rozwój miasta w Polsce Ludowej*, Poznań 1984, pp. 171–172.

<sup>20</sup> J. Connelly, *Zniewolony uniwersytet. Sowietyzacja szkolnictwa wyższego w Niemczech Wschodnich, Czechach i Polsce 1945–1956*, Warszawa 2014.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 51.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 53.

In the interwar period, universities in Poland had a substantial autonomy. The Act of 15 March 1933 on the academies<sup>23</sup> left the matter of students' admission criteria to the universities. The decision of accepting a candidate as a student at a university faculty was taken by the Dean. In the case of a negative decision, a candidate could appeal to the Faculty Board. Admission to the university was determined by the results of entrance examinations. This system preferred in fact young people from wealthier families who had the opportunity to attend schools with a better level of teaching, they could devote more time to studying and were supported in their studies by their families. Young people of working and peasant class were a minority at the universities. This phenomenon was present at the universities in Poland also in the first years after the Second World War. According to Marcin Kruszyński's research, there were around 14% of students from a working class and around 26% from a peasant background amongst those studying at Maria Curie-Skłodowska University (MCSU) in Lublin in the academic year 1945/1946<sup>24</sup>. In the following years, the percentage of young people from the working and peasant background amongst university students was increasing rather slowly taking into consideration the fact that MCSU also had the Faculty of Agriculture where largely young people from the countryside studied. According to Gałaszewska-Chilczuk and Wołoszyn, there were 10 children of labour workers and 9 of peasants for every 100 people studying at the university in mid-1945 in Poland<sup>25</sup>.

The university admission system which functioned in the Second Polish Republic was impossible to accept by the communist authorities. According to Connelly:

New students had to be recruited from the class of labour workers and peasants, the circles whose experiences made them a natural ally in the class struggle. Universities could teach a lot of things but they could not teach class hatred nor could they instil a "healthy class instinct". This did not mean that students could not be recruited at all from the middle class but their representatives could not constitute a majority of students<sup>26</sup>.

In July 1947, the Central Committee of the Polish Workers' Party (KC PPR) adopted a resolution on the admission to the first year of studies at university<sup>27</sup>. It projected "democratization" of the social composition of students by increasing the percentage of young people of working class amongst students to 30% and of peasant background to 20%, sending to universities a higher number of PPR

<sup>23</sup> Journal of Laws 1933, no. 29, item 247.

<sup>24</sup> M. Kruszyński, *Uniwersytet Marii Curie-Skłodowskiej w latach 1944–1989. Zarys dziejów uczelni w warunkach PRL*, Lublin 2015, p. 99.

<sup>25</sup> D. Gałaszewska-Chilczuk, J.W. Wołoszyn, *op. cit.*, p. 102.

<sup>26</sup> J. Connelly, *op. cit.*, p. 305.

<sup>27</sup> C. Lewandowski, *Kierunki tak zwanej ofensywy ideologicznej w polskiej oświacie, nauce i szkolach wyższych w latach 1944–1948*, Wrocław 1993, p. 195.

members and its youth organisation of the Union of the Youth Struggle (*Związek Walki Młodych*, ZWM), and also preventing the “open reactionaries” access to studies. On 21 July 1947, the Minister of Education issued a regulation on establishing “Commissions for the selection of university candidates with the input from a social factor”, which made decisions on accepting the candidates to the first year of studies<sup>28</sup>. The Commission included: Dean of the Faculty (as a chairman), a deputy from the Ministry of Education, a representative of the Faculty Board, a representative of the District Commission of Trade Unions, a representative of the Voivodeship Board for the Union of Peasant Self-Help. The Commission had the opportunity to select to its circle the examiner of a major subject but this was not necessary. University candidates took exams in major subjects, studies on Poland and modern world, and foreign language. However, the exam results had no relevance in the admission to the university. Moreover, in some cases (e.g. former participants of armed conflict or former political prisoners) the Commission could exempt the candidates from the necessity of taking the exams.

On 28 October 1947, the Ministerial Cabinet issued a decree on the organisation of teaching and higher education<sup>29</sup>, which replaced the act from 15 March 1933 that was still formally binding. In accordance with Article 86 of the above-mentioned decree, the candidates were admitted to the university by the Dean of the Faculty, but: “[...] in the case of limiting the number of admissions to a given faculty, by the means ordered by the Minister of Education [...]”<sup>30</sup>. On the other hand, Article 83 stated that if there were more candidates applying for the studies than the university could have enrolled: “[...] then the Minister of Education may order an appropriate procedure for selection and elimination”. In the realities of the post-war Poland the number of candidates for nearly every area of studies was higher than the number of vacancies. On 15 December 1951, the Parliament passed the Act on higher education and academic staff<sup>31</sup>. Pursuant to Article 26 of the above-mentioned law: “The Minister of Higher Education, in consultation with the minister to whom school matters are subjected, defines the mode in which the candidates are selected and the conditions for admitting to studies at university”<sup>32</sup>. The minister also determined the number of students who could be enrolled in a given year in an area of study at specific universities. In accordance with the provisions of the analysed act, the university authorities lost in fact any influence on the selection of candidates to the universities. Issues associated with the selection of university candidates were determined by the Minister of Higher Education.

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<sup>28</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 196.

<sup>29</sup> Journal of Laws 1947, no. 66, item 415.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>31</sup> Journal of Laws 1952, no. 6, item 38.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibidem*.

On 2 March 1953, the Prime Minister issued a circular no. 31 on the tasks and organisation of the selection of candidates for university studies<sup>33</sup>. It contained a new procedure of recruiting candidates for universities. As was stated in the document under discussion: “The task of selecting candidates for universities is [...] to provide such a class composition and moral and political aspects of young people from universities that they could most effectively fulfil their tasks of teaching and educating the staff of the peoples’ intelligentsia”<sup>34</sup>. Work on the selection of candidates for university studies was expected to be preceded by a “broad and comprehensive action for informing and educating”, which was expected to make young people acquainted with the tasks of higher education, academic requirements that the candidates for specific areas of studies had to face, regulations and duties of a student, importance of specific areas of studies for economy and national culture, and the opportunity for finding an occupation after graduating from studying courses chosen by the candidate. University candidates were required to have necessary medical examinations.

In order to select candidates for university in accordance with the provisions in the circular no. 31 there were school recruitment commissions appointed in high schools, in the district areas – district (alternatively civic or regional) recruitment commissions, in the areas of voivodeships – plenipotentiaries at the presidia of the voivodeship national councils for recruitment, and at the universities – commissions for recruitments and faculty commissions for the selections of candidates for the first year of studies<sup>35</sup>. School recruitment commission was appointed at the request of the school principal by the head of the education department of the voivodeship national council. It included: school principal (as a chairman), representative of the trade union organisation, representative of parents’ committee, representative of the district board of the Association of Polish Youth (*Związek Młodzieży Polskiej*, ZMP). District members (alternatively civic or district) of the recruitment commissions were appointed by the presidium of the relevant national council. It included a delegate of the presidium (as a chairman); 2–5 representatives of the commission of education and culture of the district national council; representative of the district’s trade union council; representative of the district’s board for the Union of Peasant Self-Help, member of the district’s presidium of ZMP. In the voivodeships where universities were located, the function of a plenipotentiary for the recruitment issues was exercised by the Delegate of the Minister of Higher Education for Youth. In the voivodeships where there were no universities, the presidia of the voivodeship national councils appointed a plenipotentiary for the recruitment issues amongst the officials from

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<sup>33</sup> M.P. 1953, no. 29, item 363.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibidem*.

the education faculty. University commission for recruitment included a university Chancellor (as a chairman) and “a representative of the relevant minister and a representative of the trade union organisation from a given university”<sup>36</sup>. Faculty commission for the candidates’ selection for the first year of studies included: Dean of the Faculty (as a chairman); Chancellor’s delegate; “member of the teaching staff from a given faculty”; “representative of the minister interested in the scope of studies at a given faculty”; “representative of the Association of Polish Youth, appointed by a chancellor at a request of the voivodeship board of the Association of Polish Youth” According to the circular no. 31 of the Prime Minister, the recruitment procedure for the first year of university was quite complicated. The candidates submitted application for university enrolment in the districts’ recruitment commissions together with a CV, birth certificate, and secondary school certificate. The candidates who were of a peasant background additionally had to attach a certificate confirming that their parents met the obligatory deliveries’ requirement. The districts’ recruitment commissions sent requests to the relevant school recruitment commission to issue opinions about the candidates. On the basis of available documentation as well as interviews with pupils and their parents, the school commissions worked out a detailed information on every candidate. Their main task was to check the accuracy of the data provided by the pupil on his or her social background and financial situation. The opinion of the school recruitment commission was passed to the district’s recruitment commission which verified the opinion presented by the school and issued a final opinion. Then the commission passed it together with the candidate’s documentation to the Chancellor of the relevant university. The candidates did not know (at least officially) the commission’s opinion. There was also no procedure to appeal the commission’s decision. Neither the university candidate nor the district recruitment commission had a possibility to indicate a given university because regionalization was in force. High school graduates from the areas of the voivodeship were obligatorily assigned to specific universities. Supervision over the work of the school and district recruitment commissions in the voivodeship area was exercised by a plenipotentiary of the presidium of the voivodeship national council for recruitment. His main task was to ensure a proper selection of candidates by the commission.

The university recruitment commission made a decision on admitting a candidate to the entry examination which was conducted by the faculty recruitment commission. The final decision on the candidate was taken by the university recruitment commission having taken into consideration the results of the entry examinations as well as the opinions issued by the districts’ recruitment commissions. The results of the entry examinations were of no definite significance. As was stated in the Ministerial Cabinet’s circular:

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<sup>36</sup> *Ibidem.*

Amongst the candidates who pass the examination with similar results, priority is given to: 1) children of shock workers, rationalisers, intelligentsia of social advancement, labour workers employed in industrial or agricultural production, in construction and transport, members of collective farming, technical and creative intelligentsia, and teachers, 2) children of peasants from small and medium-sized farms, physical and intellectual workers not listed in point 1, and craftsmen – members of workers' cooperatives. The remaining candidates will be enrolled provided that there are places available and depending on examination results<sup>37</sup>.

There was no appeal against the decision of the recruitment commission. Candidates who successfully passed the entry examination but were not admitted to the university "due to the lack of available places" could only apply for admission to university courses for which complementary examinations were set.

The system of selecting candidates for universities, implemented under the Prime Minister's circular no. 31 from 2 March 1953, officially sanctioned the practice which had in fact existed at universities from 1947. In place of substantive criteria, this system introduced political ones in selecting candidates for higher education. Both a young person's knowledge as well as his or her skills played a secondary role in the recruitment process. His or her social background was of a decisive significance. Therefore, young people were divided into "better" and "worse", depending on the family they were born into, a fact over which they had no power whatsoever. Thus, some candidates became, to a large extent, privileged and some were discriminated. Paradoxically enough, the process was officially taking place as part of the "democratization" of universities.

#### RECRUITMENT FOR HIGHER EDUCATION STUDIES IN THE VOIVODESHIP OF ZIELONA GÓRA BETWEEN 1953 AND 1956

On 17 March 1953, the Presidium of WRN in Zielona Góra adopted a resolution on "the organisation of selecting young people for higher education studies in 1953"<sup>38</sup>. Immediate appointment of school and district recruitment commissions was recommended. Henryk Korwel, the vice-director of the Education Department of the Presidium of WRN in Zielona Góra, was appointed as the plenipotentiary of the Presidium of WRN for the recruitment process<sup>39</sup>. Consequently, he received a great power over the fate of many young people in the Voivodeship of Zielona Góra.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>38</sup> *Protokół z posiedzenia Prezydium Wojewódzkiej Rady Narodowej, odbytego w dniu 17 marca 1953 r.*, APZG, PWRN Zielona Góra, ref. 631.

<sup>39</sup> According to the official biography: "Korwel Henryk was born on June 30, 1921 in Vilnius as a son of a telephone exchange technician. By profession he is a former teacher, currently he studies pedagogy at the University of Warsaw. He is an active member of PZPR, an active activist at the Polish Teachers' Trade Union, awarded with the Silver Cross of Merit and the Medal of the 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Polish People's Republic" (*Protokół z przebiegu VII-ej sesji Wojewódzkiej Rady Narodowej w Zielonej Górze, odbytej w dniu 14 października 1955 r.*, APZG, PWRN Zielona Góra, ref. 166).

During the session of Presidium of WRN on 17 March 1953, the director of the Education Department of the Presidium of WRN presented information on organising the recruitment process. He included in the statement the main criteria of selecting the university candidates:

The task of this year's recruitment campaign is to ensure further improvement of the social composition and the moral and political aspect, as well as the health condition of young students, the selection of candidates who are more thoroughly prepared for a creative mastering of knowledge, and to guide the selection of the areas of studies in a way that young peoples' choice for specific university courses could take place in accordance with their preparation and preferences, fully taking into consideration the realistic needs of the country. Priority is given to children of shock workers, rationalisers, intelligentsia of social advancement, members of collective farming, technical intelligentsia, and teachers who prove to have good academic achievements and good health<sup>40</sup>.

This criteria was in accordance with "the tasks of selecting candidates to studies at universities", included in the Prime Minister's circular no. 31, but they were in contradiction to the elementary sense of justice and pedagogical principles. However, the implementation of selecting candidates for university studies turned out to be difficult in practice. At the session of the Presidium of WRN on 9 June 1953, it was stated that young people who were drawn to university studies were mainly of a "lower-middle-class", and thus they were of a foreign class<sup>41</sup>. Young people of working and peasant class wanted to start working for money as soon as possible, and they were not interested in studying.

According to Connelly, relatively low interest of young people of working and peasant class in higher education was a widespread phenomenon in this period throughout Central Europe<sup>42</sup>. These circles did not have a strong ethos of scholarship and "intellectual" occupations did not usually provide a high financial status. The spread of higher education in workers' and peasants' circles required time. An additional factor which often encouraged young Polish people of working and peasant class was their strong attachment to the Catholic religion. Universities carried out an intensive political indoctrination in a spirit which was hostile to the Church and religion<sup>43</sup>. According to Agata Zysiak, young people of working and peasant background often faced dislike from academic staff and other students at the universities<sup>44</sup>. According to Gałaszewska-Chilczuk and Wołoszyn, a significant number of people who were admitted to

<sup>40</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>41</sup> *Protokół z posiedzenia Prezydium Wojewódzkiej Rady Narodowej, odbytego w dniu 9 czerwca 1953 r.*, APZG, PWRN Zielona Góra, ref. 634.

<sup>42</sup> J. Connelly, *op. cit.*, pp. 303–304.

<sup>43</sup> M. Kruszyński, *op. cit.*, pp. 175–187.

<sup>44</sup> A. Zysiak, *Punkty za pochodzenie. Powojenna modernizacja i uniwersytet w robotniczym mieście*, Kraków 2016, p. 301.

the universities due to their “proper” background did not finish their studies because of their learning difficulties<sup>45</sup>.

The recruitment for universities in the Voivodeship of Zielona Góra in the academic year 1953/1954 was summarised at the session of the Presidium of WRN in Zielona Góra on 12 January 1954<sup>46</sup>. The presented report stated that “the district recruitment commission” had regularly consulted “the Plenipotentiary of the Presidium of WRN” before making the decisions. Documentation on 52 candidates was sent by the commission to the Plenipotentiary in order to make a decision: “[...] they usually referred to candidates of the foreign class, with reasonable individual reservations [...]”<sup>47</sup>. The report summarised what follows:

As a result of informative and educative work carried out for the academic year 1953/54 from the area of the Voivodeship of Zielona Góra, there were 719 candidates who applied for university entry in the country. [...] From this number, around 520 candidates successfully passed the entry examination and at the moment study at the universities in the country. [...] A significant number of 243 candidates had chosen technical studies in various specialisation, 93 agricultural studies, 77 economy, 68 studies at Pedagogical Universities, 84 various university courses, 34 W.A.T. Out of the total number of applying candidates, 251 people is of a working class background, 190 of a peasant background, and 278 of a working intelligentsia<sup>48</sup>.

It is noteworthy that amongst the university candidates there are no young people who did not come from working or peasant families, or from “working intelligentsia” (intelligentsia from the post-war social advancement), although at least 52 candidates were “of a foreign class”. Young people “of a foreign class” were not admitted to higher education. There were complaints in the report on a diverse level of candidates which was revealed during the examinations to enter universities. Some of the high school graduates who were proud of good and very good marks on their high school certificates were compromised during the exam. A graduate from the High School in Zielona Góra: “[...] when passing the entry examination to the University of Technology in Łódź received failing grades in all the subjects [...]”<sup>49</sup>. A graduate from the High School in Nowa Sól: “[...] while taking the entry examination to the Faculty of Electrical Engineering at the University of Technology in Wrocław did not know what the sine of the angle was even though he had received a very good mark in mathematics at his high school final exam”<sup>50</sup>.

<sup>45</sup> D. Gałaszewska-Chilczuk, J.W. Wołoszyn, *op. cit.*, p. 135.

<sup>46</sup> *Protokół z posiedzenia Prezydium Wojewódzkiej Rady Narodowej, odbytego w dniu 12 stycznia 1954 r.*, APZG, PWRN Zielona Góra, ref. 645.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibidem* (original writing).

<sup>48</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibidem*.

The report under discussion drew attention to very diverse results of the entry examinations of candidates who came from different schools. Nearly all of the candidates passed their entry exams for universities from some of the schools in the Voivodeship of Zielona Góra. In the case of other educational institutions, the “sifting of candidates” was at a very high level. The best results were achieved by high schools in Świebodzin, Międzyrzecz, and Krosno Odrzańskie, and the worst by high schools in Nowa Sól, Lubsko, and Zielona Góra. Having analysed reasons for a versified level of knowledge of high school graduates which had been revealed during the entry examination for university, the author of the report pointed out that in the institutions, in which the results were the lowest, the majority of teachers was young and they had only recently graduated from university: “[...] in the majority of cases they have a necessary stock of general knowledge and materialistic skills of presenting academic material. However, due to the lack of pedagogical practice and experience, the results they achieved are disproportionate in relation to their effort [...]”<sup>51</sup>. Therefore, it was indirectly acknowledged that better results during the exams for the university studies were received by young people studying at schools in which teachers were older, educated before the war.

The recruitment of candidates from the areas of the Voivodeship of Zielona Góra for university studies was similarly conducted in 1954 and 1955<sup>52</sup>. The Presidium was pleased to note a significant increase of university candidates from the workers’ and peasants’ families. It is unknown to what extent this was a realistic increase in the interest in university studies amongst young people of working and peasant background, and to what extent this process resulted from the fact that the university candidates attempted to declare the “correct” social background in order to increase their chance to receive university ID. During entry examinations for university the candidates from the Voivodeship of Zielona Góra still suffered compromising “mishaps” which was noted with regret at the sessions of the Presidium of WRN. In 1954, at the exam at the University of Economy in Poznań a graduate from the high school in Świebodzin: “[...] could not find Gliwice, Białystok, and Lublin on the map of Poland, and she looked for the coal basin and iron ore mines of Krzywy Róg in Poland”<sup>53</sup>. This particular case triggered irritation amongst the Presidium members.

In the process of setting the list of candidates accepted by the “districts’ recruitment commissions” to study, the decisive role was played by the “Plenipotentiary of the WRN Presidium to recruitment issues”. In 1954 and 1955, this function was held by Korwel. He essentially approved the candidates’ lists presented

<sup>51</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>52</sup> *Protokół z posiedzenia Prezydium Wojewódzkiej Rady Narodowej, odbytego w dniu 13 lipca 1954 r.*, APZG, PWRN Zielona Góra, ref. 654; *Protokół z posiedzenia Prezydium Wojewódzkiej Rady Narodowej, odbytego w dniu 21 stycznia 1955 r.*, APZG, PWRN Zielona Góra, ref. 663.

<sup>53</sup> *Protokół z posiedzenia Prezydium Wojewódzkiej Rady Narodowej, odbytego w dniu 21 stycznia 1955 r.*, APZG, PWRN Zielona Góra, ref. 663.

by the districts' commissions and in the cases that could have triggered doubts, he was requested with an application to make a decision. Every decision undertaken by the Presidium of WRN had to be previously accepted by KW PZPR<sup>54</sup>. Therefore, before making the decision Korwel had to have it agreed on with the secretary of the KW PZPR Department of Propaganda, which was responsible in the Committee for issues associated with education. According to Gałaszewska-Chilczuk and Wołoszyn, the security apparatus played a big role in the process of selecting university candidates<sup>55</sup>. Voivodeship Public Security Bureaus (*Wojewódzkie Urzędy Bezpieczeństwa Publicznego*, WUBP) prepared, on the basis on information provided by the district and central security authorities, registers of people to be eliminated from the lists of university candidates. These registers were then passed by WUBP to the KW PZPR Department of Propaganda. Through this method young people who were displaying a negative attitude towards the current system were eliminated.

Regardless of the recruitment for state universities, there were also recruitments organised in the Voivodeship of Zielona Góra for universities in the USSR. These universities were regarded as prestigious in the times of the Polish People's Republic. There were 32 young people from the areas of the Voivodeship of Zielona Góra who submitted their application. "The competition examination at a central level which was associated with going to the USSR for the studies was passed only by 17 graduates"<sup>56</sup>. In 1954, the recruitment for the studies in the USSR was moved to the voivodeship level, similarly to the recruitment for state universities<sup>57</sup>. On 12 January 1954, the Presidium of WRN appointed, in agreement with KW PZPR Department of Propaganda in Zielona Góra, "the Voivodeship Recruitment Commission for the selection of young people for the studies in the USSR". It was composed of: the Director of the Department of Education of the Presidium of WRN (a chairman), Vice-Director of KW PZPR Department of Propaganda, Vice-Director of the Department of Education of the WRN Presidium, deputy to the Chairman of the Voivodeship ZMP Board, Director of the Branch of High School Teaching in the Department of Education of the Presidium of WRN. There were 38 candidates from the entire voivodeship who applied for studies in the USSR<sup>58</sup>. Their examination was conducted in the Pedagogical High

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<sup>54</sup> Interview with Hieronim Szczegóła, member of the WRN Presidium in Zielona Góra in 1969–1973, took place on 24 November 2016, in the author's possession; Interview with Józef Grzelak, Chairman of the Voivodeship Commission for Economic Planning of the WRN Presidium in Zielona Góra in 1968–1973, took place on 8 December 2016, in the author's possession.

<sup>55</sup> D. Gałaszewska-Chilczuk, J.W. Wołoszyn, *op. cit.*, p. 127.

<sup>56</sup> *Protokół z posiedzenia Prezydium Wojewódzkiej Rady Narodowej, odbytego w dniu 12 stycznia 1954 r.*, APZG, PWRN Zielona Góra, ref. 645.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>58</sup> *Protokół z posiedzenia Prezydium Wojewódzkiej Rady Narodowej, odbytego w dniu 9 lutego 1954 r.*, APZG, PWRN Zielona Góra, ref. 646.

School in Zielona Góra on 1 February 1954. Their knowledge of the following subjects was examined: the Polish language, chemistry, physics, mathematics, Constitutional studies, but also knowledge of the Russian language. The exam was failed by seven candidates. All of the candidates for the studies in the USSR proved to have a very limited knowledge in the Russian language. Therefore, the decision was made to organise additional classes in the Russian language with the chosen candidates from February to May 1954. Also in 1955, the candidates applying for studies in the USSR proved to have a very limited knowledge in the Russian language and it turned out to be necessary to organise additional classes for them in this language<sup>59</sup>.

In 1956, the regulations on selecting candidates for universities were changed. The Prime Minister's circular no. 31 from 2 March 1953 was repealed by the Ordinance of the Prime Minister of 25 May 1956 on the selection of candidates for the first year of higher education studies<sup>60</sup>. Pursuant to this Decree, the districts' recruitment commissions were cancelled and the schools' recruitment commissions forwarded the candidates' application, together with the written opinions, to the universities' recruitment commissions. Candidates for evening courses, extramural and extension studies submitted their applications directly to the universities. The communist authorities never resigned from the selection of candidates for universities in respect of their social background but in the later period the selection of students was not conducted in such an ostentatious procedure as between 1953 and 1956.

The authorities of the Voivodeship of Zielona Góra were probably satisfied with the work done by Korwel as a Plenipotentiary of the Presidium of WRN for the recruitment procedures. On 14 October 1955, he was appointed a Secretary of the Presidium of WRN in Zielona Góra<sup>61</sup>. Thus, he became one of the most important people in the administrative apparatus in the Voivodeship of Zielona Góra. It was a high promotion from a rather mediocre position of a vice-director of the Department of Education of the Presidium of WRN, which had been so far held by Korwel.

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<sup>59</sup> *Protokół z posiedzenia Prezydium Wojewódzkiej Rady Narodowej, odbytego w dniu 21 stycznia 1955 r.*, APZG, PWRN Zielona Góra, ref. 663.

<sup>60</sup> M.P. 1956, no. 42, item 521.

<sup>61</sup> *Protokół z przebiegu VII-ej sesji Wojewódzkiej Rady Narodowej w Zielonej Górze, odbytej w dniu 14 października 1955 r.*, APZG, PWRN Zielona Góra, ref. 166.

## CONCLUSIONS

The procedure of selecting candidates for the university studies in Poland in 1953–1956 determined the possibility of undertaking studies at the universities by the high school graduates by an approval expressed by the state’s administrative authorities and, if fact, by the instances of PZPR at a district and voivodeship level, to which the administrative authorities were strictly subordinated. It also made it possible to block access for young people to universities by the authorities of public security. Selection of candidates to universities was a part of the project implemented by the communist authorities, aiming at creating a new intelligentsia in Poland that would be contrasted with the “pre-war” intelligentsia – strongly associated with the national tradition, reluctant in the majority to the communist ideas. According to Hanna Palska:

A new intellectual was to be recruited from the people and therefore to be associated with the classes from which he grew up. Thanks to his background, he was also supposed to be “equipped” with a proletarian class consciousness. Apart from the fact that he had at his disposal a different work tool, he was no different from a labour worker. A number of propagandistic activities indicates a conscious blurring of differences between the intelligentsia and the rest of the society<sup>62</sup>.

Implementation of this project seemed to be even easier since the “pre-war” Polish intelligentsia had suffered heavy losses during the Second World War. According to the findings of Krystyna Kersten:

It can be assumed that amongst people who received higher education in the Second Republic of Poland 37.5% were missing, high school education – 30%, while for the entire population the percentage of losses reached 21%, including the Jewish population. [...] The losses in the form of war victims were joined by the loss that the intelligentsia in the country suffered due to the fact that many tens of thousands of people with at least a high school education remained in exile<sup>63</sup>.

In the opinion of Andrzej Friszke, the first generation of the intelligentsia educated in People’s Poland that came from peasant families was the most important social base of the communist authorities:

The upbringing model with a significant role of authority stemming from the family home, limited contact with culture and knowledge about the world, clear-headed, practical way of thinking, aversion towards “others”, unreflective belief, conviction of the impossibility to create one’s own biography, all of this created a predisposition to assimilate Stalinist Marxism. In a literal content, the rural model of behaviour was impossible to transfer into the new conditions. Communism provided a system of truths, beliefs and explanations of the surrounding world, which could not be easily assimilated by an individual who was not equipped with the ability of critical analysis<sup>64</sup>.

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<sup>62</sup> H. Palska, *Nowa inteligencja w Polsce Ludowej. Świat przedstawień i elementy rzeczywistości*, Warszawa 1994, p. 205.

<sup>63</sup> K. Kersten, *Między wyzwoleniem a zniewoleniem. Polska 1944–1956*, Londyn 1993, p. 7.

<sup>64</sup> A. Friszke, *Polska. Losy państwa i narodu 1939–1989*, Warszawa 2003, p. 175.

However, according to the findings of Gałaszewska-Chilczuk and Wołoszyn, the attempt undertaken by the communist authorities in Poland in the 1950s to radically change the social composition of young people studying at the universities ended up in failure<sup>65</sup>. Studies at the universities were still dominated by young people coming from the families of intelligentsia. In the long run, the communist project of creating “a new intelligentsia” in Poland turned out to be a utopia. However, many young and ambitious people were severely hurt as a result of this project since they had been prevented from undertaking university studies. The Prime Minister circular from 2 March 1953 on the tasks and organisation of selecting candidates for the studies in the higher education institutions<sup>66</sup> is a dark card in the history of education in Poland.

As was presented in this publication, the regional authorities in the Voivodeship of Zielona Góra were very eagerly involved in implementing the circular’s guidelines. Young people of “a foreign class” were removed from the lists of university candidates without any serious scruples. There is also no information on any attempts of protests from school directors or teachers. The schools’ recruitment commissions provided the required information on the university candidates to the districts’ recruitment commission without any resistance. There is also no information on any protests from the student communities. However, the school system had been earlier pacified by the communist authorities. Directors of schools, teachers, and pupils who could have protested, had been removed from the schools or threatened.

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<sup>65</sup> D. Gałaszewska-Chilczuk, J.W. Wołoszyn, *op. cit.*, pp. 136–137.

<sup>66</sup> M.P. 1953, no. 29, item 363.

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## STRESZCZENIE

W dniu 2 marca 1953 r. Prezes Rady Ministrów ustalił nową procedurę rekrutacji kandydatów na studia wyższe. Aby podjąć studia wyższe, absolwenci szkół średnich musieli uzyskać pozytywną opinię od władz administracyjnych w swoim powiecie. Władze komunistyczne kierowały do uczelni wyższych młodzież pochodzenia chłopskiego i robotniczego. Młodym ludziom, uznanym za „obcych klasowo”, uniemożliwiano podjęcie studiów. Procedura ta obowiązywała do 1956 r. W artykule przedstawiono proces rekrutacji kandydatów na studia w latach 1950–1953 w realiach województwa zielonogórskiego.

**Słowa kluczowe:** stalinizm; rekrutacja na wyższe uczelnie; województwo zielonogórskie

