

Seweryn Pieniążek

Rally as an Important Element of Living in a Rural Community in the Interwar Period Based on Deputy Jan Pieniążek's Activities

*Wiec jako ważny element życia społeczności wiejskiej w okresie
międzywojennym na podstawie działalności posła Jana Pieniążka*

ABSTRACT

The article is an attempt to show rallies as an important element of living in rural communities in the light of the activities of deputy and people's activist Jan Pieniążek in the interwar period, i.e. 1918–1939. The rally in this period was the most effective form of reaching the rural population with its message, clearly winning over the press (illiteracy, lack of access to printed material, unwillingness to read, after 1926 restrictions due to increasingly repressive censorship). Rallies became one of the main means of exchanging information, presenting one's achievements, or discrediting opponents. Therefore, they were also often a place of 'political struggle', sometimes taking on rather violent forms (the so-called 'breaking up' of rallies). At the same time, however, they were also genuine spaces for meaningful discussion on various issues, becoming a manifestation of a kind of local democracy (an example is the rally referendum in 1933, in which the inhabitants

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of the village Mokra Strona decided to join the city of Przeworsk). This article describes in detail issues related to the organisation of the rally and its setting. The role and significance of the rally presidium and the resolutions adopted at the rallies are examined. The topics discussed at these meetings are also presented. Finally, issues of attendance and the emotions evoked by the rally speeches are addressed.

Key words: rally, Pieniążek, people's movement, Witos, Polish People's Party 'Piast', interwar period

STRESZCZENIE

Artykuł jest próbą ukazania wieców jako istotnego elementu życia społeczności wiejskiej poprzez pryzmat działalności pośła i działacza ludowego Jana Pieniążka w okresie międzywojennym, czyli w latach 1918–1939. Wiec w tym okresie był najbardziej skuteczną formą dotarcia ze swoim przekazem do mieszkańców wsi, wyraźnie wygrywając z prasą (analfabetyzm, brak dostępu do materiałów drukowanych, niechęć do czytania, po 1926 r. ograniczenia wynikające z coraz bardziej represyjnej cenzury). Wiece stawały się jednym z głównych środków wymiany informacji, prezentacji własnych osiągnięć lub dyskredytacji oponentów. Dlatego często były także miejscem „walki politycznej”, niekiedy przybierającej dość brutalne formy (tzw. rozbijanie wieców). Były jednak jednocześnie także realnym miejscem ważnych dyskusji na przeróżne tematy, stając się przejawem swoistej lokalnej demokracji (przykładem jest wiec-referendum w 1933 r., w którym mieszkańcy wsi Mokra Strona decydowali o przyłączeniu do miasta Przeworska). W artykule szczegółowo opisano kwestie związane z organizacją wiecu i jego przebiegiem. Analizowano rolę i znaczenie prezydium wiecu oraz uchwały przyjmowane podczas wieców. Przedstawiono również tematy poruszane na tych spotkaniach. Wreszcie poruszono kwestie frekwencji oraz emocje wywoływane przez przemówienia podczas wiecu.

Słowa kluczowe: wiec, Pieniążek, ruch ludowy, Witos, PSL „Piast”, okres międzywojenny

INTRODUCTION

This paper aims to present rallies as an important element of living in a rural community in the light of the activities of deputy and people's activist Jan Pieniążek in the interwar period, i.e. between 1918 and 1939.

During this period, J. Pieniążek's rallying activity was not a single, unchanging sequence. Obviously, a particular mobilisation occurred during the period of election campaigns in which Pieniążek was running for a deputy seat (1919, 1922, 1928, 1930, 1938). However, also in the period between campaigns, Pieniążek tried to maintain contact with the electorate by organising numerous meetings, described in the press as the so-called deputy's report rallies. Nevertheless, we can also record Pieniążek's greater rallying activity in 1920, because he organised rallies encouraging support for the Polish Army, as well as in the second half of the 1920s,

when he argued with supporters of Sanacja (Sanation). In the countryside, until the Centrolew (Centre–Left) was formed, they were the activists of the so-called peasant left wing, i.e. Polish People's Party "Wyzwolenie" (Polskie Stronnictwo Ludowe „Wyzwolenie”), Polish Peasant Party (Stronnictwo Chłopskie). I recorded that he was less active in the 1930s when he was outside parliament. Inevitably, most of the analysed material comes from the periods in which he organised the largest number of rallies.

This is not the only limitation of the research area. Showing the role and significance of rallies in the context of J. Pieniążek's activity also links the research to a specific geographical area and group of people – potential voters. The deputy was actively involved in rallies in what was then known as the former Western Galicia¹, mainly in his electoral district. Naturally, he attended rallies in other regions of the then – Second Polish Republic², but these were truly sporadic cases. The rally meetings were organised for his electorate, that is, in the case of the Member of Parliament of Polish People's Party 'Piast' (Polskie Stronnictwo Ludowe „Piast” (PSL 'Piast')), almost exclusively for rural population³.

This group was predominantly male. In the case of deputy Pieniążek's rallies, I have not come across any information that a woman was an organiser of the rally, spoke at it, or was part of the rally's presidium. However, we know that they were present at Pieniążek's rallies⁴. Infor-

¹ In the interwar period, Galicia was replaced by the name 'Małopolska, although the territorial extent of thus understood Małopolska overlapped only slightly with its historical predecessor. In line with the nomenclature of Austrian times, when the terms Western and Eastern Galicia were used, with the San being their border, the names Western and Eastern Małopolska were now used. [...]. Małopolska understood in this way included four voivodeships in the interwar period. One of them constituted Małopolska Zachodnia, which was the Kraków voivodeship, three others: Lwów, Stanisławów and Tarnopol voivodeships – Eastern Małopolska' vide: <https://web.archive.org/web/20150626172228/http://www.nowamalopolska.pl/newsysn/formatka.php?idwyb=288> [access: 9.07.2024]. In the study, I have adopted the former division derived from Austrian times as more logical, understandable and historically justified.

² In 1930, he traveled to agitate in Wielkopolska, vide: *Klub parlamentarny PSL Piast 1926–1931. Protokoły posiedzeń*, ed. J.R. Szaflik, Warszawa 1969, p. 162.

³ City dwellers generally did not vote for peasant parties. In 1928, in Rzeszów, only 29 votes were cast for the Polish People's Party 'Piast' from whose list Pieniążek ran, vide: T. and K. Rzepecki, *Sejm 1928–1933*, Poznań 1928, p. 98.

⁴ *Dzienniczek Basi Rosenberg 1938–1939*, introduction and prep. J. Kluczyńska, transl. R.M. Reichbeg, Przeworsk 1997, p. 32. Basia Rosenberg was present in 1938 at a rally of Obóz Zjednoczenia Narodowego (Camp of National Unity) in Przeworsk, where Pieniążek spoke.

mation about women being part of the rally's presidium⁵ or speaking during discussions⁶ is rare in the material analysed. Nonetheless, this does not mean (especially in the 1930s) that the people's movement did not organise meetings in which women led the way⁷.

The subject of the study is a rally, understood, as given by the online *Słownik PWN*, as a gathering of the population to discuss certain issue and express their attitude towards it⁸. The definition of a rally is fluid and it is difficult to draw a clear line between, for example, a village assembly and a rally. Today, the slogan 'everything is politics' is becoming popular. This notion could just as well be applied to the interwar period. Political opponents accused each other of taking advantage of every opportunity for agitation by turning every event into a rally. This was also the case with Pieniążek⁹. Therefore, the nature of the rally is accurately captured by the definition in *Słownik Historii Polski*, which emphasises with political character¹⁰.

The subject matter of this article was not unfamiliar to me. In part, deputy Pieniążek's rallying activity was described in a 2010 political biography which I authored¹¹. I also returned to this topic in an article

⁵ "Naprzód" 1930, no. 214, p. 1 (second edition after confiscation). During the rally of 14 September 1930, to the presidium of the assembly: 'elected as honorary members were Comrade dr. Ciołkoszowa, wife of the arrested former deputy, and Mrs. Stawarzowa, daughter of the arrested former deputy Witos, and Comrade Prof. Ciołkosz, Cit. Mączko from PSL 'Piaśt' and Cit. Berek, a former deputy from the Peasant Party (Stronnictwo Chłopskie)'. Here, however, there was a manifestation; the presidium included people close to Centre-Left (Centrolew) politicians arrested during the so-called Brest elections.

⁶ "Piaśt" 1928, no. 35, p. 2. According to this account, during the rally with Witos in attendance, 'many voices were raised and women too'. The presence of women at the rally, according to this account, did not, however, have a soothing effect on the emotions of those gathered. When one of the activists tried to interfere with Witos's speaking, the peasants 'threw him outside the rally'.

⁷ "Piaśt" 1938, no. 30, p. 3. The convention concerned members of the Women's Section of the People's Party (Stronnictwo Ludowe) and dealt with several issues, including the timing of further education courses for rural women.

⁸ <https://sjp.pwn.pl/szukaj/wiec.html> [access: 28.06.2024].

⁹ "Piaśt" 1938, no. 30, p. 3. According to the anonymous author of a letter to the editor, the Przeworsk District Agricultural Society (Okręgowe Towarzystwo Rolnicze w Przeworsku) became so involved in Jan Pieniążek's election campaign that it completely lost track of 'where the boundaries of economic work and election agitation are'.

¹⁰ T. Łepkowski, *Słownik historii Polski*, Warszawa 1973, p. 527. This definition emphasises that 'In the twentieth century, the term r[ally] is also used to refer to a mass gathering of a political nature'.

¹¹ S. Pieniążek, *Jan Pieniążek (1881–1963) działacz ludowy i poseł*, Rzeszów 2010.

on deputy Pieniążek's social activities¹². Even so, I continued to encounter additional intriguing information about this person. Of particular interest to me was an account in the pages of "Przyjaciół Ludu" of a rally or meeting attended by deputy Pieniążek, which took place on 28 F.

February 1926 at the home of 'the mayor in Maćkówka, who was his first cousin'¹³. As this mayor was my great-grandfather, it was with all the more interest that I began to look through the press accounts of the rally once again. This included both the sources I had previously used in my biography of the deputy and those I consulted for the first time.

This allowed me to realise that in the Polish academic literature concerning this period, there are no studies dealing exclusively with the issues of rallies, their organisation, course, role, significance, emotions they evoked. Certainly, information on the rallies appears, for example, in biographies of politicians of the period, but they are not the main subject of these studies and have not been able to answer the questions that have been bothering me. And these have only increased over time. Starting with questions related to the interest in the rallies (why were they organised? what was the attendance at the rallies, what emotions did they evoke? etc.), their organisation (how were the rallies called? what was the organisation and setting like? was it difficult to organise? what formalities had to be fulfilled? what was the role of the rally's presidium? who was invited to the rallies and why? etc.), to questions related to the rallies themselves (what was the course of the rally like? what was discussed? what was the role of the resolutions? what did the political struggle look like at such meetings? etc.).

To answer these questions, I analysed the material I had collected, above all press reports¹⁴. I also used documents and materials that I found while compiling the deputy's biography, such as transcripts of parliamentary sessions available on the parliamentary library website¹⁵. I supplemented these materials during searches made in preparation for this article. Thus, in the paper I used archives from Archiwum Państwowe w Przemyślu (State Archive in Przemyśl), Archiwum Akt Nowych w Warszawie (the Central Archives of Modern Records

¹² S. Pieniążek, *Spółeczna aktywność posła Jana Pieniążka (1881–1963)*, in: *Warmińsko-Mazurskie studia z historii najnowszej*, vol. 3, ed. K.A. Kierski, Olsztyn 2020, pp. 225–256.

¹³ "Przyjaciół Ludu" 1926, no. 11, p. 7.

¹⁴ I have used three titles in particular here: "Piast", "Przyjaciół Ludu" and "Gazeta Chłopska".

¹⁵ The transcripts of the sessions of the Parliament of Second Polish Republic and the texts of most of the Sejm's interpellations and printed papers are available in the Sejm Library's catalogues and databases at <https://bs.sejm.gov.pl> [access: 1.07.2024].

in Warsaw), Muzeum w Przeworsku (Museum in Przeworsk), Muzeum-Zamek w Łańcutie (Castle Museum in Łańcut) and Muzeum Wincentego Witosa w Wierchosławice (Wincenty Witos Museum in Wierchosławice). I also re-analysed the parish registers of Holy Spirit's parish in Przeworsk and an interview I conducted with deputy Jan Pieniążek's son, Tadeusz¹⁶. I approached all these materials, especially the press reports, with great caution, fully aware that the press (especially the party press) not only distorts the message but knowingly publishes falsehoods. I therefore tried to verify any information in opposing press publications and, if possible, from other sources.

WHO WAS JAN PIENIAŻEK?

Jan Pieniążek was born on 10 June 1881 in the village of Mokra Strona near Przeworsk¹⁷. His parents, Wojciech and Małgorzata Kotlińska, were modest farmers¹⁸. After returning from the army, he married Ewa Teresa Konieczna¹⁹ and began his public activity by joining the peasant movement. After Poland regained independence in 1918, he was elected a member of the Sejm (lower house of the national legislature of Poland) in 1919 and renewed his mandate in 1922 and 1928. During this time he remained an activist of PSL 'Piast', even though in his electoral district the party was plagued numerous splits. He was a supporter of the merger of PSL 'Piast' with the parties of the so-called Peasant Left²⁰, although he clashed fiercely with representatives of these parties at rallies on many occasions (especially after the May Coup). Until the 1930s, he was counted among Wincenty Witos's loyal supporters, after 1926 he spoke out strongly against the successive Sanacja governments. In 1930, he did not get into the Sejm, as the common electoral list of almost all the major opposition parties from the centre and left, the so-called Centrolew (Centre-Left) list, from which he was running at the time, was invalidated in his electoral

¹⁶ An interview with Tadeusz Pieniążek, 9 December 2009, in the author's collection.

¹⁷ Archiwum Parafii pod wezwaniem św. Ducha w Przeworsku, Księga Urodzeń (Book of births), Mokra Strona 1851–1890, fol. 52v.

¹⁸ *Ibidem*. The *conditio* column describing the social status of the future deputy's parents contains the entry *hortulanus* – meaning crofter, owner of a house with a piece of land for farming.

¹⁹ *Ibidem*, Księga Zapowiedzi 1907, fol. 44.

²⁰ S. Pieniążek, *Jan*, pp. 32–33. Jan Pieniążek was, inter alia, one of PSL 'Piast' representatives at the PSL-Left congress on 27 August 1922, where a joint run for election was discussed.

district. At the same time, Pieniążek faced absurd charges of supporting the Bolshevik army in 1920²¹. He was one of the defence witnesses during the so-called Brest trial, which took place in 1931–1932²². He did not return to the Sejm until 1938, officially as a non-partisan candidate (the opposition parties boycotted the elections, considering them undemocratic), but his informal rapprochement with Sanacja (Sanation)²³, with which he formally cooperated after the elections, was evident²⁴.

Jan Pieniążek was characterised by great involvement in local affairs; problems of rural local government were close to his heart and he was active in many agricultural, economic, and social organisations. It is worth mentioning, for example, that between 1920 and 1934 he was mayor of his home village of Mokra Strona and that, with his participation, the first Polish Sugar Beet Growers' Union was founded in Przeworsk, bringing together the so-called smallholders²⁵. It was also on his initiative, and with his financial support that the Sugar Beet Grower's House was built in Przeworsk²⁶.

²¹ *Ibidem*, pp. 114–115.

²² He was then to strongly defend Witos by denying that he had ever referred to government officials as thieves, vide: *Z procesu brzeskiego*, "Zielony Sztandar" 1931, no. 46, p. 4.

²³ Zbigniew Zaporowski regards Pieniążek as an example of a politician who did very well in the 1938 elections without party support, running as an independent candidate, vide: Z. Zaporowski, *Sejm Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej 1919–1939. Działalność posłów, parlamentarne koncepcje Józefa Piłsudskiego, mniejszości narodowe*, Lublin 1992, p. 47. On the other hand, Władysław Fołta states that Pieniążek was de facto put forward by the Sanation camp to break the boycott of peasants who, according to the guidelines of Stronnictwo Ludowe (People's Party), were not to go to the elections, vide: W. Fołta, *Ruch ludowy w Przeworskiem*, Warszawa 1975, p. 122. Jan Pieniążek himself in his biography from the 1950s. (and thus written down years later) explained his reasons for running for election as follows: 'I said that Stronnictwo Ludowe should not abstain, but go to vote. I declared that if Jews, Germans, Ruthenians are allowed to go to vote, why should we abstain, and who cares. I also declared that black clouds hang over Poland and we should unite', vide: Archiwum Państwowe w Przemyślu [hereinafter: APP], Akta Józefa Benbenka [hereinafter: AJB], ref. no. 24, fol. 18. Documents are also found in the Pieniążek family.

²⁴ However, in the Sejm (although he got there as a non-party member) he sat in the club of the pro-Sanation Obóz Zjednoczenia Narodowego (Camp of National Unity), and in the next elections, this time for the Przeworsk municipal council, he ran from a local committee formed by politicians linked to the ruling camp, vide: S. Pieniążek, *Jan*, pp. 142–144.

²⁵ *Idem*, *Spółeczna*, pp. 242–243. Unions of this type were organised by landowners, but this one was the first to be formed on the initiative of small sugar beet growers.

²⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 244.

JAN PIENIAŻEK: A POLITICIAN OF RALLIES AND SOCIAL ENGAGEMENT

Jan Pieniążek's rallying activities look impressive, especially when one compares his activity in the 1920s with that of other politicians and parliamentarians. Such a subjective comparison was made by Pieniążek himself in 1928. At that time, in a letter to the party president Witos, Pieniążek complained that his prominent party colleague (and at the same time rival who threatened his position) 'did nothing and went to no powiat. I attended 15 rallies in the Łańcut powiat and five in the Rzeszów powiat'²⁷. When we add to this the Przeworsk powiat (the deputy's home powiat), where he did not even give the number of rallies he organised, it is clear that Pieniążek valued his involvement in direct meetings with voters highly.

This approach was motivated by several factors. It seems that he did not have much faith in the power of the press (other media like radio were only slowly developing). Indeed, the reach of the press was limited. At the time, the problem of illiteracy was still present²⁸, which naturally limited the pool of people reaching for the press and literature. Nor should we forget censorship, which after 1926 particularly persecuted the opposition press. Between 1931 and 1939, at least 203 out of 630 issues of "Zielony Sztandar" (the press organ of Stronnictwo Ludowe, People's Party) and no fewer than 212 issues of the weekly "Piaś" were confiscated²⁹. In addition, there were economic issues, the poorest could not afford to buy newspapers or books. In many cases, it was also a simple but also evident aversion to the printed word among the villagers.

J. Pieniążek was no stranger to these problems; when he was mayor of Mokra Strona, he publicly stated that no one read municipal notices (which, however, should be of interest to the villagers) and therefore called village assemblies³⁰. Even as a deputy, he believed that this form of political agitation (direct contact with the voter during a rally) was the most effective in the countryside, which he mentioned during meetings of PSL 'Piaś' parliamentary club³¹. Years later, when describing his

²⁷ Muzeum Wincentego Witosa w Wierchosławicach, List Jana Pieniążka do Wincentego Witosa z 8 III 1928 r., [no pagination].

²⁸ <https://www.polskieradio.pl/39/156/arttykul/2399329,walka-z-analfabetyzmem-w-ii-rzeczpospolitej-infografika> [access: 19.06.2024]. For example, in 1921, the proportion of illiterate people over the age of 10 was 1.5 per cent in the Silesian voivodeship, 23.1 per cent in the Lwów voivodeship (where Jan Pieniążek was active), 36.6 per cent in the Stanisławów voivodeship and as high as 48.4 per cent in the Polesie voivodeship.

²⁹ A. Paczkowski, *Prasa polityczna ruchu ludowego (1918–1939)*, Warszawa 1970, p. 31.

³⁰ Muzeum Przeworsk, Dokumenty Archiwalne [hereinafter: MP, DA], ref. no. 156, fol. 22.

³¹ *Klub PSL protokoły*, p. 31.

public activities, Pieniążek listed some of his most significant speeches³². On par with his speeches in the parliamentary forum, he listed those delivered during rallies, which also in some way shows how he perceived these gatherings.

ATTENDANCE AT POLITICAL RALLIES

Since Pieniążek believed that rallies were an effective way to reach villagers with information, the question of attendance at such meetings naturally arises. Logically speaking, one must conclude that since the deputy from Mokra Strona valued rally meetings so much, it would seem that, 'the juice must have been worth the squeeze'. And indeed, if one looks at the press reports, there is much information indicating that 'crowds', 'masses' and 'multitudes', sometimes numbering in the thousands, turned up at such meetings.

When in 1920 Pieniążek became heavily involved in agitation encouraging people to join and support the Polish Army fighting against the Red Army, he organised several smaller and larger rallies within a short time, all reportedly marked by significant attendance. According to an account in the weekly "Piaś", only at a rally in Pantalowice on 29 August 1920 'a crowd of four thousand people gathered'³³. In later years, Pieniążek's rallies, especially when he invited Witos, were also characterised by high turnout. For example, at a rally in Błazowa on 22 June 1930, around 2,000 people were said to have listened to speeches by Witos and Pieniążek³⁴. There were also smaller gatherings, an example being the rally in Żurawiczki on 11 May 1930, which was attended by 500 people³⁵.

Evidently, such accounts should be approached with considerable caution. In the press, information about the number of participants was overstated for propaganda purposes (if it was about rallies of their own political camp) or underestimated (when it was about political competitors). In such a case, it becomes legitimate to attempt some comparisons. For this purpose, I have analysed the data from the press with the calculations held by Ministerstwo Spraw Wewnętrznych (Ministry of the Interior, MSW). Here, clear differences emerge regarding the assessment of the number of participants in the same rallies. For example,

³² APP, AJB, ref. no. 24, fol. 17.

³³ "Piaś" 1920, no. 38, p. 19.

³⁴ "Piaś" 1930, no. 26, p. 4.

³⁵ "Piaś" 1930, no. 21, p. 2.

on 12 August 1928, a public rally of deputies Witos and Pieniążek was held in Przeworsk in which, according to the weekly "Piast", 1500 people took part, while an earlier rally in Żołynia attracted 800 people³⁶. On the other hand, according to data held by MSW (Ministry of the Interior) relating to the same gatherings, there were supposed to be 500 participants in Przeworsk, while 400 in Żołynia³⁷.

Here we can see a significant difference in the figures given (threefold in the case of Przeworsk). However, this does not mean that the data compiled by MSW are necessarily closer to the truth than those reported in the press organ representing PSL 'Piast'. In fact, from today's perspective, it is difficult to accurately and unequivocally estimate the number of people gathered.

On 29 June 1936, the largest peasant manifestation in the Second Polish Republic took place in Nowosielce near Przeworsk. It was connected with the celebrations of the consecration of a mound built in honour of Wojciech Pyrz, the mayor of Nowosielce, who in 1624 commanded the defence against the Tartar invasion³⁸. According to estimates, as many as 120–150,000 villagers from the surrounding poviats were expected to attend the ceremony, and the crowds gathered can be seen in a short propaganda film of the event made by Polska Agencja Telegraficzna (Polish Telegraphic Agency (PAT))³⁹. The propaganda film, which makes General Edward Rydz-Śmigły (later Marshal) the main protagonist of these events, is silent on the fact that in Nowosielce peasants handed him a petition demanding Witos's return to the country⁴⁰. The General himself was received with hostility by the majority of attendees, who raised

³⁶ "Piast" 1928, no. 35, p. 2.

³⁷ Archiwum Akt Nowych [hereinafter: AAN], Ministerstwo Spraw Wewnętrznych [hereinafter: MSW], ref. no. 849, fol. 7.

³⁸ For more on the defence of Nowosielce in 1624, vide: J. Domka, *Nowosielce w legendzie i historii, w literaturze i wspomnieniach*, Przeworsk 2008, pp. 50–52.

³⁹ https://www.podkarpakahistoria.pl/artykul/619,29-06-1936-wielki-wiecz-chlopski-w-nowosielcach-film#google_vignette [access: 25.06.2024]. There is a video on the website along with a description of the historical background of these events. The video is also available directly at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SSj7L6SYA1w&t=3s> [access: 25.06.2024].

⁴⁰ Witos went into exile in 1933, just before the Supreme Court approved the Brest verdict, which sentenced Witos to imprisonment for a year and a half, vide: A. Zakrzewski, *Wincenty Witos*, Warszawa 1978, p. 306; L. Malinowski, *Dramaty ludzi władzy II Rzeczypospolitej*, Łomża 2001, p. 366.

anti-Sanation slogans and chanted Witos's name, as a result of which Rydz-Śmigły left the celebrations⁴¹.

The number of people gathered in Nowosielce shows not only the organisational potential of the people's movement of the time, but also that Pieniążek's rallies a few years earlier could have been a success in terms of attendance as well. And the propaganda film (irrespective of the fact that it is far from the truth) allows us to realise the enormous amount of work that was sometimes required to organise such events.

RALLY PREPARATION

The most important issue was the correct choice of event date. Sundays and public holidays (non-working days) or market days in the city (when more rural residents came to the cities) were popular. Potential participants in the upcoming event had to be informed of the date. The simplest form was to communicate such information directly by spreading the word. Tadeusz, the deputy's son, recalled that in the 1930s he often acted as the person who notified interested parties of an upcoming rally: 'I used to sit on my horse at the time and ride like mad. It was such an adventure for me because it was sometimes a bit of a risky activity. Well, such gatherings in the 1930s did not always have the approval of the authorities. And my father used to send me then, because he thought that, after all, the police wouldn't be fooling around and they wouldn't take consequences against the youngster'⁴². Written or verbal information about an upcoming rally, meeting, etc. was then passed on.

According to an account in the pages of "Przyjaciół Ludu", the rival of PSL 'Piast', Związek Chłopski (Peasants' Union), in 1926 organised a party assembly upon the written invitation in the village of Maćkówka⁴³. At that time, deputy Pieniążek immediately convened a village assembly of inhabitants through the local mayor 'by verbal invitation'⁴⁴. Leaving aside the exact manner in which the gathering was invited, this is also

⁴¹ This is how an eye-witness of these events from Przeworsk, Prince Andrzej Lubomirski, wrote in his diaries: 'More shouts in honour of Witos and: may Witos return, than any other. [...] The consecration and parade of the army, then countless ranks of peasants. Shouts the same, Rydz disappears. We stay at the presbytery and eat lunch, because the priest is worried that it will go unused', vide: Muzeum-Zamek w Łańcutie [hereinafter: MZŁ], ref. no. 1986 R 59/7, fol. 610.

⁴² An interview with T. Pieniążek, 9 December 2009.

⁴³ "Przyjaciół Ludu" 1926, no. 11, p. 7.

⁴⁴ *Ibidem*.

a good example of how easily a village assembly could be transformed into a political rally. This was openly acknowledged in the ‘opposing’ account of the same event published in “Piaś”, which emphasized that during the meeting, it became evident that ‘almost the entire commune stands firmly with PSL ‘Piaś’’⁴⁵. This clearly suggests that the gathering had a primarily political context.

Another form of providing information about upcoming rallies was through the press⁴⁶ or posting placards⁴⁷.

Rallies were inherently open events. The material I have researched indicates that this is exactly how rallies were perceived in the interwar period in the former Galicia. One of the accusations directed at political rivals was that they were trying to organise such events clandestinely, limiting invitations only to their supporters while ignoring their opponents. Such an accusation was also made against deputy Pieniążek. For example, in 1926. “Przyjacieli Ludu” published information that deputy Pieniążek in the village of Wysoka ‘tried to hold a rally in the Dojlidy style [an allusion to the so-called Dojlidy affair⁴⁸ – S.P.] in secret and without any announcement’⁴⁹.

The appearance of distinguished guests raised the profile of the meeting (such as three-time Prime Minister Witos, especially at the time of his greatest popularity) and, colloquially speaking, ‘guaranteed attendance’. This is why Pieniążek invited other parliamentarians and politicians,

⁴⁵ “Piaś” 1926, no. 14, p. 18.

⁴⁶ For example, before the 1922 parliamentary elections, “Piaś” reported that three rallies would be held in J. Pieniążek’s electoral district, and ‘all PSL ‘Piaś’ candidates for deputies from this district will speak at these rallies’, vide: “Piaś” 1922, no. 4, p. 15.

⁴⁷ Example of a placard announcing a rally at <http://cyfrowe.mnw.art.pl/pl/zbiory/9913> [access: 4.04.2024].

⁴⁸ The estate in Dojlidy was purchased by Polsko–Amerykański Bank Ludowy (Polish–American People’s Bank) after the First World War. The bank was established just before the transaction, acquired the estate, and then sold it at a substantial profit. However, the final buyer of the estate, who turned out to be Prince Jerzy Rafał Lubomirski of Przeworsk, acquired it below its nominal value. The case had strong political overtones, as it was formally overseen by the head of Główny Urząd Ziemi (Main Land Office), a close associate of Witos, Władysław Kiernik. A veritable storm broke out in the press, and the matter was debated by the Sejm. The Sejm eventually decided that Kiernik had not violated the law and had acted lawfully. However, the case continued to raise doubts, as a result of which the label of ‘Dojlidy’ and large-scale speculation was permanently ‘stuck’ to Witos and his associates. The subject of the so-called Dojlidy affair and its political significance is described extensively by Adam Miodowski vide: A. Miodowski, *Przewłaszczenie dóbr dojlidzkich na tle kampanii politycznej 1921/1922*, Białystok 2003.

⁴⁹ “Przyjacieli Ludu” 1926, no. 49, p. 5.

representatives of the state administration and local government, and clergymen to his rallies⁵⁰. On many occasions, Pieniążek himself was the 'main attraction' of such meetings, gathered people interested in hearing what the deputy had to say⁵¹. Representatives of the media⁵² were also invited to the rallies, but very often the organisers themselves played this role. Most of the press reports I have used come from the organisers of the meeting or the presidium of the rally⁵³.

Adequate transport or overnight accommodation for the most important guests had to be arranged in advance, and wealthier farmers often assisted with this. This is because they considered it a kind of honour to receive respected guests at their home. And so, for example, in 1920. After the rally in Przeworsk, Witos was probably accommodated by Wawrzyniec Kapusta⁵⁴, the wealthiest farmer in Mokra Strona.

The rally itself could also be held in a peasant farmhouse⁵⁵, but it was difficult to accommodate a large number of people there. Buildings with large halls, often located in urban areas, were therefore preferred and mainly comprised catering establishments, offices, schools, and people's houses⁵⁶. In such cases, it was necessary to obtain permission from the owner or operator of the premises. Yet, it was not uncommon for these people to change their minds at the last minute (under pressure

⁵⁰ Information gathered by Józef Benbenek from conversations with J. Pieniążek shows that rallies organised by him were attended by, among others, the Prime Minister (i.e. Witos), ministers (such as the Minister of Agriculture), Prince Andrzej Lubomirski Ordynat of Przeworsk, district governors and other representatives of the administration, councilors, mayors, lawyers and clergy, such as Przeworsk parish priest Father Leon Gondełowski vide: APP, AJB, ref. no. 25, fols. 26–28.

⁵¹ "Piaśt" 1928, no. 3, p. 5. According to this account, the participants of the meeting with deputy Pieniążek in Rozbórz asked him 'to visit our village more often'.

⁵² In Pieniążek's case, it was often the journalist and editor-in-chief of the "Piaśt", Jan Brodacki, but it should be remembered that he had a double role, as he was also a deputy.

⁵³ This is evidenced by the captions under the texts: secretary, chairperson, etc. If names appear they are often the same as those of the organisers, chairperson, secretaries of the rally.

⁵⁴ W. Kapusta quite often organised rallies in his farmhouse with the participation of leading politicians (even before the First World War) he was also, in addition to deputy Pieniążek, the host of the said rally, vide: APP, AJB, ref. no. 25, fols. 28, 37–38.

⁵⁵ "Piaśt" 1929, no. 20, p. 5.

⁵⁶ "Piaśt" 1920, no. 16, p. 10. A rally in Wólka Niedźwiedzka with the participation of deputy Sobek was held in the People's House, so that 'the spacious hall of the people's house was filled to the top'. Jan Pieniążek also organised rallies in People's Houses, such as in Ubieszyn in 1930, vide: "Piaśt" 1930, no. 7, p. 6.

from superiors, political opponents, representatives of the clergy, etc.) and withdraw their earlier consent⁵⁷.

When large numbers of people were expected, the rallies already had to be held in open areas (squares, markets). This implied additional complications for the organisers of the event, as in such cases it was mandatory to obtain permission from the relevant administrative authorities.

According to Austrian law (in force in the area of former Galicia until 1932), in the case of public assemblies in enclosed spaces, it was sufficient to inform the relevant authorities in writing three days before the event, specifying the place, time, and purpose of the assembly⁵⁸. However, already in the case of assemblies in open spaces, the permission of these authorities was required⁵⁹. Exempt from this obligation were rallies organised in the pre-election period, which was regulated by the adoption on August 5, 1922 of the liberal Act on the Freedom of Pre-election Assemblies⁶⁰.

Rally organisers in the 1930s encountered great difficulties on the part of the administration. The Law of 11 March 1932 made it easier for the administrative authority to prohibit the holding of an assembly or to dissolve it⁶¹. This inevitably gave rise to protests. In my opinion, it is not just solely a matter of the legislation itself, which in many cases is legitimate and in the case of the former Galicia area is similar to the former Austrian legislation, but how it was used. As the proverb goes, 'it is easy to find a stick to beat a dog'. If the authorities wanted to 'impede' the organisation of rallies, they could do so based on Austrian regulations. The new law merely provided them with additional tools to do so. This approach to assemblies had existed previously but intensified in the 1930s. As Sebastian Kwiecień rightly points out: 'A change in orientation and way

⁵⁷ According to an account in the pages of "Przyjaciół Ludu", the effect of the local priests' criticism of Stronnictwo Chłopskie (Peasant Party) rally organisers in Dubno 'was that we were refused a hall. Given this, the rally was cancelled', vide: "Przyjaciół Ludu" 1926, no. 28, p. 4.

⁵⁸ *Dziennik praw Państwa* [hereinafter: DPP] 1867, no. 135 item 104 (§ 1) in: *Przekłady Ustaw, Rozporządzeń i Obwieszczeń z Dziennika Praw Państwa dla Królestwa Galicyi i Lodomerji, tudzież Wielkiego Księstwa Krakowskiego. Rocznik 1867, Lwów 1867*, p. 282.

⁵⁹ *Ibidem*, § 2. The refusal required a written justification.

⁶⁰ *Dziennik Ustaw Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej* [hereinafter: DURP] 1922, no. 66, item 594. Article 1 of the law stated that all pre-election assemblies (from the announcement of the election until the holding of the election) 'do not require the permission of the administrative authorities'. Only (art. 2) 'a pre-election assembly on roads and squares should be reported [...] before the relevant administrative authority of the first instance or the nearest police station no later than 24 hours before the assembly'.

⁶¹ DURP 1932, no. 48, item. 450.

of looking at freedom of assembly undoubtedly took place after 1926, when we had to deal with a restriction of freedom of assemblies by increasingly frequent prohibitions of their holding by administrative authorities⁶². An example of this can be seen in the rally in Błazowa (14 October 1928) with the participation of deputy Pieniżek, which was eventually held, despite the ban by the district authorities⁶³.

The actions of the authorities led to changes in the way rallies were convened. In such circumstances, a significant number of meetings and rallies could be held without the knowledge of the authorities responsible for overseeing them as noted by the, previously quoted, deputy's son. This was mentioned by the son of a deputy already quoted⁶⁴. However, this carried obvious legal consequences for the organisers of such an event⁶⁵. The ruling camp was well aware of these practices (not reporting organisation of the gatherings to the authorities)⁶⁶.

SETTING AND COURSE OF THE RALLY

The simplest rallies (meetings with voters and residents) did not require a grand setting. Especially if they were convened hurriedly and limited to one small village. However, large rallies, attracting crowds and featuring well-known figures, required a proper setting. An example

⁶² S. Kwiecień, *Wolność zgromadzeń w świetle ustawodawstwa II RP*, "Rocznik Nauk Prawnych" 2013, 23, 1, p. 70. This author also believes that 'Too general definition of the prerequisites giving the administrative authority the right to prohibit the holding of an assembly or to dissolve it, as was the case in the 1932 Act, may be regarded as a kind of distortion of the idea of freedom of assembly'.

⁶³ "Piaśt" 1928, no. 44, p. 5. According to the weekly, the Poviāt Board of PSL 'Piaśt' 'announced and reported to the Starosta a public rally in Błazowa', but the latter firmly 'forbade the holding of the rally for formal reasons' (this concerned the organisers failure to give a 'closer' indication of the purpose, place and time of the event). Under those circumstances, the nature of the rally was changed to a report rally of deputies, which ultimately made it possible to hold the rally (deputies Brodacki, Pieniżek and Rzaśa spoke at the rally).

⁶⁴ An interview with T. Pieniżek, 9 December 2009.

⁶⁵ DURP 1932, no. 48, item 450. According to Article 25, organisers of a meeting who violated the provisions of the law were liable to a fine or up to six weeks imprisonment, and this on condition that 'the act in question is not punishable more severely under other provisions'. However, this was also the case in Austrian law, where the same penalties were imposed, i.e. a fine or arrest of up to 6 weeks, vide: DPP 1867, no. 135, item 104, section 19.

⁶⁶ AAN, MSW, ref. no. 851, fol. 36. The message pointed out that Stronnictwo Ludowe was carrying out agitation using meetings 'to some extent convened conspiratorially'.

of such an event is Witos's visit to Przeworsk in the spring of 1920 when deputy Pieniążek organised an honorary horse escort, which accompanied the leader of PSL 'Piast'. According to Józef Puchała's memoirs, this is how Witos's arrival looked like: 'On the appointed day we gather [...]. The participants arrive dressed in żupan coats and linen coats (*plótnianka*)⁶⁷ [...]. A gathering of troops from all over the powiat is assembled in the market square. [...], the Prime Minister [the author is referring to Witos, but he was not yet Prime Minister at the time – S.P.] and those accompanying him get out of the car, the commander of the division gives a sabre salute to the officer, and the trumpet-player gives an honour-welcome signal'⁶⁸. A rally of Obóz Zjednoczenia Narodowego (Camp of National Unity) in Przeworsk in 1938, where J. Pieniążek spoke, had an equally large setting. The teenage Basia Rosenberg recalled: 'There were speeches in the market square. It was the first time in my life that I had seen megaphones used, amplifying the voice and a radio broadcasting station, because these speeches were broadcast all over Poland'⁶⁹.

However, every rally, whether small or large, with more or less setting, could not take place without the chairperson(s) of the rally. Together with the organisers of the meeting, they were to ensure that 'order was maintained at the meeting'⁷⁰ and had the authority to close it down if there was a breach of the law⁷¹. The role of the chairperson was clarified by the 1932 Act. It was clearly stated that the assembly could not take place without the chairperson, who opened, directed the proceedings, and closed the assembly⁷². The chairperson also had the right to expel any person from the meeting who 'by his or her behaviour obstructs the proceedings or attempts to violently obstruct the proceedings'⁷³.

In practice, it was sometimes the case that the powers of the chairperson were delegated to several people, who formed the so-called presidium of the rally. At the rally in Przeworsk on 19 September 1926, according to an account in the *Gazeta Chłopska* (*Peasant's Newspaper*), the entire presidium (dominated, by Pieniążek's supporters) decided to take away

⁶⁷ A type of men's summer clothing also known as *pótlonka*, *plytónka* or *potlenka* vide: K. Ignas, *Ludowe stroje przeworskie – przeszłość i przyszłość*, Przeworsk 2017, pp. 42–48). The study contains photographs of honorary horse escort members wearing *plótniaks* (pp. 48, 212).

⁶⁸ Quoted by S. Świtalski, J. Benbenek, *Wspomnienia z odzyskania niepodległości przez miasto Przeworsk msp 1968–1985*, Miejska Biblioteka w Przeworsku, ref. no. R–20, pp. 13–14.

⁶⁹ *Dzienniczek*, p. 32.

⁷⁰ DPP 1867, no. 135, item 104 (§ 11).

⁷¹ *Ibidem*.

⁷² DURP 1932, no. 48, item 450 (art. 13).

⁷³ *Ibidem* (art. 14).

the vote or exclude from the rally⁷⁴. The presidium might have included a larger group of people, but in the vast majority of cases two, rarely three, presidium members are mentioned. In addition to the chairperson, the deputy chairperson and the secretary are most frequently mentioned in the accounts.

The chairperson, along with other members of the presidium, was elected by all participants at the beginning of the rally. This was followed by speeches of invited guests and the organisers, in which they presented the general agenda of the meeting. In the case of deputies (like Pieniążek), so-called report rallies were often held. Deputies reported orally on their work in parliament, that is, they provided an account to their voters.

This part of the rally was followed by a free discussion overseen by the chairperson and the members of the presidium supporting him. On the one hand, questions were directed to the guests or the rally organisers, who responded with relevant information⁷⁵. On the other hand, it was the residents themselves who reported on their problems and put forward their demands and requests. We do not have information on whether deputy Pieniążek noted them down, but this was done, for example, by Prince Andrzej Lubomirski Ordynat of Przeworsk⁷⁶. These were very specific and important problems for local communities⁷⁷. Sometimes, however, these 'everyday problems' could be surprising. At deputy Pieniążek's reporting rally in Grodzisk on 7 November 1926 'there were complaints about the owner of the tobacco warehouse, Piotr Stopyra, who, instead of looking after the warehouse, was constantly drunk'⁷⁸.

The discussion itself, naturally, took various courses, with no shortage of demagoguery, lies or slander which were 'mere humbug, aimed at the naivety of the uninformed'⁷⁹, intended to strengthen the speaker's position or to fight political rivals. There were serious clashes, not only verbal but also physical. I will address this aspect of rally discussions

⁷⁴ "Gazeta Chłopska" 1926, no. 34, p. 11, where we can read that 'the Pieniążek's presidium started to give the floor unilaterally, excluded Mr. Pluta'.

⁷⁵ "Piaś" 1925, no. 38, p. 11. At the rally in Gniewczyna Łańcucka, deputy Pieniążek answered 'a number of queries raised in the discussion'.

⁷⁶ MZŁ, ref. no. 1986 R 59/1, fol. 111.

⁷⁷ *Ibidem*. Prince Lubomirski assigned specific problems to each town where the rally was held, the solution of which was demanded by the assembled, e.g.: 'Kańcuga: River Mlecza regulation. Scales at the station. Arrangement of the fair matter of the pasture /Bujniak versus Olexiński/ [...]. Urzejowice: River Mlecza regulation, teachers' College in Przeworsk'.

⁷⁸ "Piaś" 1926, no. 48, p. 12.

⁷⁹ "Piaś" 1926, no. 14, p. 18.

in greater detail later in the article, in the section addressing the political struggle at rallies.

The closing element of the rally was the voting and passing of resolutions. Their shape was often the result of polemics among rally participants; as one account of the rally notes, resolutions were 'the fruit of this discussion'⁸⁰. Sometimes their content (more or less detailed) was published in the press. Thus, for example, we know that the members of the rally in Błazowa on 14 October 1928 passed 'economic resolutions demanding the consolidation of taxes, mortgages, support for the export of pigs and cattle across the borders of the country, and political resolutions condemning the draft amendments to the constitution of the Non-Partisan Block approving the proposals of the PSL 'Piaśt' Club and its policy'⁸¹. The resolutions adopted were examples of unambiguously articulated demands, hence it is not surprising that summaries of the rally resolutions also appeared occasionally in the studies prepared by MSW (Ministry of the Interior)⁸².

A traditional feature of peasant rallies was also the confidence vote for specific activists or political parties. In the case of rallies organised by deputy Pieniążek, the participants of the event usually expressed a vote of confidence in him, as was also in the case of Witos and PSL 'Piaśt', then Stronnictwo Ludowe.

Resolutions, as expected, had no legal force, but the constant adopting of resolutions with similar content was bound to irritate the audience. Thus, the organisers of the rally had to create the image that they were treating the resolutions as serious commitments. Given the complicated reality of the Second Polish Republic, we know that this could not have been the case. Often we were dealing only with an element of a peculiar game, although accounts to the contrary can also be found. I have cited this example several times already⁸³, but it is so interesting that I will present it once again. Namely, in 1933, there was the possibility of incorporating Mokra Strona into the city of Przeworsk. Then it was the village mayor, J. Pieniążek, personally opposed to this solution⁸⁴, who called a meeting of the Commune Council and all the residents of the village (which could be seen as a form of village rally). As he explained: 'Not wanting the Council alone to decide on such a big issue, I allowed myself

⁸⁰ "Piaśt" 1926, no. 13, p. 12. An account of the rally by deputy Pieniążek.

⁸¹ "Piaśt" 1928, no. 44, p. 5.

⁸² AAN, MSW, ref. no. 849, fol. 50 oraz *ibidem*, fols. 101–102. These resolutions were adopted at rallies organised by deputy Pieniążek.

⁸³ S. Pieniążek, *Jan*, pp. 133–134.

⁸⁴ MP, DA, ref. no. 156, fol. 52. The reason for his attitude were land issues.

to invite all the citizens of the commune to declare themselves where they wanted to belong and thus give the Council a guideline as to what position to take on the matter⁸⁵. The assembled villagers voted against the mayor's position and in favour of joining the city and this resolution was finally implemented⁸⁶.

RALLIES AS PART OF THE 'POLITICAL STRUGGLE'

The rally was an effective tool for spreading all kinds of information as well as demagoguery (as I have already mentioned in rally discussions). For this reason, controlling what was said at rallies became extremely important. This gave rise to every temptation to obstruct, or to disrupt this message. It was all the easier because rallies were open meetings. In this context, it is not surprising that some participants would interrupt speeches, shout loudly, brawl, question the decisions of the rally's presidium, and engage in similar disruptive behavior. When asked to leave, some participants refused and were forcibly ejected. For this reason, the organisers ensured that they had adequate security guards watching over the safety of the rally (i.e. party militia) and on the other hand, those who wanted to make the rally fail also mobilised their most loyal supporters (i.e. party militia). We must remember the very high intensity of political strife in the interwar period, which undoubtedly translated into what happened at rallies. The rally, therefore, became an important element of the 'political struggle', taking on quite violent forms.

In extreme cases, there were shocking scenes, such as those that took place on 17 November 1929 in Poznań during the PSL 'Piast' congress. According to a report by the weekly newspaper "Piast", during the congress, a 'Sanacja-landowners' militia' allegedly broke into the hall⁸⁷. They began throwing „special missiles, something like bombs filled with 80% sal ammoniac [a caustic substance – S.P.]’⁸⁸ towards the presidium. The clash, during which shots were reportedly fired as well, ended in a 'victory' for PSL 'Piast' supporters, who forcibly removed the hostile militia, restored order in the hall and continued the discussion. However, the police then intervened (twice) and eventually ordered the crowd to leave the hall, giving rise to suspicions that the incursion of the militia was intended to provide a pretext for closing the gathering. This does not change the fact

⁸⁵ *Ibidem*, fol. 60.

⁸⁶ S. Pieniążek, *Jan*, p. 134.

⁸⁷ "Piast" 1929, no. 48, p. 1.

⁸⁸ *Ibidem*.

that several of the most affected people were taken to hospital, among them PSL deputy Jan Józef Nosek, who lost his sight in one eye⁸⁹.

This course of events is confirmed by the socialist newspaper *Naprzód* (*Forward*). According to this account, during the PSL 'Piast' congress in Poznań, a hostile militia broke into the congress hall: 'Rotten eggs and terror shots were involved, and also aggressive liquids... As a result of tumult and fights, the congress was terminated by the police. Several people were severely beaten during the incidents. [...]. PSL deputy Nosek was among people that were attacked'⁹⁰. "Naprzód" also assessed that the whole attempt to break up the rally was organised by the ruling camp⁹¹.

The official PAT press release, representing pro-government perspective, blamed the incident on the gathering itself, which was supposed to be dominated by peasants extremely critical of Witos' policies. When attempts were made to raise shouts in Witos' honour: 'there was an extraordinary uproar in the hall and thunderous shouts of »Down with Witos« were heard [...] rotten eggs were thrown in the direction of the congress presidium. At the same time, shots were fired into the air. Witos, fleeing from the hall, and surrounded by a group of people, overturned the banner'⁹². According to PAT, the outrage of peasants against Witos was enormous, a huge brawl ensued, and the situation was only brought under control by the intervention of the police, who 'in the space of a dozen or so minutes closed the entire event'⁹³.

J. Pieniążek was no stranger to such situations either. We have many 'picturesque' descriptions from the press, which show that his rallies were sometimes 'rough'. From these accounts, we learn that there were disturbances, opponents were removed and pushed out of the rallies (in other words, physical altercations took place), or even situations like the one in Żołynia occurred in 1928. This rally, if the party press is to be believed, ended with 'the people storming and Pieniążek being knocked to the ground along with the rostrum'⁹⁴.

⁸⁹ *Ibidem*, pp. 1–2. I confirmed the information that deputy Nosek had lost an eye as a result of a clash with a hostile militia 'attempting to break up the rally' in his biographical note, vide: Jan Józef Nosek, in: *Słownik biograficzny działaczy ludowych*, author of entry J. Abramczyk, ed. J. Dancyngier, Warszawa 1989, p. 389.

⁹⁰ "Naprzód" 1929, no. 265, p. 5.

⁹¹ *Ibidem*.

⁹² "Dziennik Bydgoski" 1929, no 267, p. 1. The daily reprinted the PAT telegram in full, then added an account by its own correspondent, who largely negated the credibility of the news item, stating that a group of provocateurs were responsible for the brawl, thrown out by congress participants before the police even intervened.

⁹³ *Ibidem*.

⁹⁴ "Przyjaciół Ludu" 1926, no. 49, p. 5.

However, such reports should be approached with considerable caution. The press coverage of the time (especially of the party press) is in many cases nothing more than mere propaganda that bears little relation to reality. It is sufficient to compare several descriptions of the same rally described in competing outlets.

I will provide more information (including the account in the "Przyjacieli Ludu") and discuss in greater detail a remarkable example that I already highlighted in my 2010 biography of the deputy⁹⁵. According to an account in *Gazeta Chłopska* (*Peasant's Newspaper*), prior to a rally organised on 19 September 1926 in Przeworsk by the then pro-Sanation peasant left wing (Peasant Party, Stronnictwo Chłopskie), deputy Pieniążek, hostile to the Sanation, 'went around the communes all week organising a militia, and in addition, brought in Mr Brodacki and Mr Nawrocki'⁹⁶. Special mention should be made here of Jan Brodacki, a journalist and editor-in-chief of the weekly "Piaś", who likely ensured that the event was properly reported in the press. Thanks to the 'team' assembled in this way, on the day of the rally Pieniążek's supporters seized control of the presidium and directed the proceedings of the assembly. Outraged by this, the peasants left Pieniążek's rally and went elsewhere. However, the deputy did not give up and appeared there as well. He continued to disrupt the speakers, until finally, the agitated peasants 'pushed out the PSL 'Piaś' deputies and their barkers. Mr Pieniążek was nearly crushed, while Mr Brodacki and Mr Nawrocki managed to escape'⁹⁷.

In a similar vein, "Przyjacieli Ludu" described the course of events, mentioning that Pieniążek made many efforts to torpedo the actions of the peasant political competition. However, these proved unsuccessful. As reported, Pieniążek 'gathered his escort members to go to the Old Market and break up the rally or at least not let them speak'⁹⁸. First his supporters dominated the presidium of the first rally. Then, when a group of disgruntled people went to rally elsewhere, Pieniążek's supporters followed them. There, they were told to 'howl and squeal'⁹⁹. Eventually, having realised that their actions were futile, they dispersed and returned home.

In "Piaś", these events are presented quite differently. Only one rally is mentioned, which reportedly ended with Witos winning a vote of confidence. The rally itself was assessed in this title as an unquestionable success for Pieniążek and a defeat for his opponents. According

⁹⁵ S. Pieniążek, *Jan*, p. 73–74.

⁹⁶ Janusz (probably S. Janusz), *op. cit.*, "Gazeta Chłopska" 1926, no. 34, p. 11.

⁹⁷ *Ibidem*.

⁹⁸ "Przyjacieli Ludu" 1926, no. 40, p. 4.

⁹⁹ *Ibidem*.

to this account, his main opponents, deputies Jan Bryl and Andrzej Pluta, after Pieniążek had 'exposed [their – S.P.] dirty business with facts and figures'¹⁰⁰ had no choice but to leave the rally 'with a stigma of disgrace'¹⁰¹.

There are many more similar examples of completely different presentations of the same events in the press. Here is another interesting example, recently found by me in the press, dating from 1924, when the situation was somewhat reversed. This time, it was deputy A. Pluta who allegedly obstructed Pieniążek's speech, and was thrown out of the room. According to "Piaś", on 18 January 1924, deputy Pluta (who had recently left the ranks of PSL 'Piaś') was to appear at the congress of the PSL 'Piaś' in Jarosław with 'a small group of his supporters (about 10 people)'¹⁰². He wanted to speak, but as 'deputy Pieniążek had signed up to speak beforehand, the chair called on deputy Pluta to abstain for the time being'¹⁰³. Pluta, however, was so insistent on his right to speak that a vote was held by all those present to decide who should speak first. Pieniążek was elected, but Pluta did not give up. He interrupted the speaker and 'started to make cynical remarks'¹⁰⁴, which eventually 'exhausted the patience of the audience'¹⁰⁵. As a result, Pluta 'was expelled from the hall by those surrounding him, with constant shouts of 'traitor', 'Judas', etc.'¹⁰⁶.

"Przyjaciół Ludu" depicted the circumstances of these events in different light. According to this account, supporters of PSL 'Piaś' 'announced a public rally'¹⁰⁷, where anyone could enter and speak. However, it turned out on the spot that deputy Pluta was not welcome. When he wanted to speak, 'not only was deputy Pluta not allowed to speak, but hyenas [an allusion to Chrzescijański Związek Jedności Narodowej, ChZJN (Christian Union of National Unity) commonly referred to as the hyena – S.P] rushed at him and pushed him out the door'¹⁰⁸.

Despite considerable discrepancies in the way of reporting the same events, these materials cannot be ignored. Thanks to them, many facts can be established and corroborated across two sources, such as the date of the rally, the attendees, and other details. Some, seemingly completely

¹⁰⁰ "Piaś" 1926, no. 40, p. 8.

¹⁰¹ *Ibidem*.

¹⁰² "Piaś" 1924, no. 5, p. 14.

¹⁰³ *Ibidem*, p. 15.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibidem*.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibidem*.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibidem*.

¹⁰⁷ "Przyjaciół Ludu" 1924, no. 5, p. 9.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibidem*.

disparate accounts, often reach a common conclusion. One example is the Rakszawa rally of November 1926. According to "Piaśt", deputy Pieniążek and senator Jachowicz were to convince the local peasants to their point of view, so that the peasants overwhelmingly adopted a resolution expressing support for Witos¹⁰⁹. *Gazeta Chłopska* also noted Pieniążek's success, but attributed it to the fact that he 'deceived the peasants'¹¹⁰. Thus, we have information from two sources about the success of deputy Pieniążek, although it is possible to quibble about the methods by which it was achieved (as suggested by *Gazeta Chłopska* account).

Given such descriptions, it is therefore not surprising that some politicians, who did not feel comfortable confronting a crowd (not always favourable to the speaker) avoided rallies. When we add to this the fact that, after 1926, the state administration made its political allegiance clear, rally activity and criticism of the authorities gradually became, a kind of declaration that not everyone could afford. In the case of PSL 'Piaśt', this was particularly evident after the May Coup, when there was a noticeable outflow of supporters among the rural population from the party led by Witos. A significant part of the activists, who only a few years ago used to hold court at rallies (especially in the presence of Witos), suddenly disappeared. Regardless of political sympathies, Pieniążek's attitude in such a situation deserves recognition, as it can be seen as an example of personal courage, if only for the fact that rallies with his participation almost always concluded with a resolution expressing a vote of confidence in Witos.

Pieniążek's firm stance on matters he considered essential was reflected in one of the motions to the Sejm to waive his immunity filed by Sąd Powiatowy w Przeworsku (Przeworsk District Court). This case concerned the incident in which Pieniążek struck Walenty Ochyra, the organiser of a rally in Mokra Strona in 1927. According to the explanations of the deputy of Mokra Strona (reported by the chairperson of the Sejm's Rules of Procedure Committee), when a procession to consecrate fields was taking place in the village, Ochyra organised a rally in front of one of the local chapels. It was at that point that Pieniążek intervened. As soon as he 'pointed out this inappropriateness to him, Ochyra and the whole group attacked deputy Pieniążek, and the latter, defending himself, actually struck Ochyra'¹¹¹. The Committee did not consider the circumstances

¹⁰⁹ "Piaśt" 1926, no 49, p. 10.

¹¹⁰ "Gazeta Chłopska" 1926, no 25, p. 6.

¹¹¹ Biblioteka Sejmowa [hereinafter: BS], Stenogram z posiedzenia sejmu II RP, II kadencja, [hereinafter: RP/II/2/38], p. 46.

of the incident¹¹² but concentrated on the nature of the act itself and concluded that 'in this case, it was slight bodily harm'¹¹³ and therefore both the Committee and the Sejm saw no reason to waive Pieniążek's immunity¹¹⁴. This account has a very significant shortcoming, i.e. the absence of a statement from the other side. Nevertheless, it provides, in addition to press accounts, a kind of 'official' confirmation of Pieniążek's rallying temperament.

CONCLUSIONS

As a result of a careful analysis of newspaper accounts and other sources, I was able to answer most of the questions that had arisen after reading the reports of the rally in Maćkówka. Only this closer look at the rich material related to deputy Pieniążek's activities allowed me to fully appreciate the role of the rally in the lives of the villagers in the former Western Galicia in the interwar period.

The rally provided the villagers with many opportunities. On the one hand, it allowed them access to information that interested them (e.g. the deputy's report rally), and it was also a place to exchange opinions and knowledge. On the other hand, it provided an opportunity to express their demands both in the course of rally polemics and in the form of resolutions passed at the conclusion of the rally. The effectiveness of resolutions remains an open question. They were merely a form of pressure (like petitions, for example) on decision-makers, who were under no obligation to pursue them at all. This is exemplified by the political situation in the Second Polish Republic after the May Coup and especially in the 1930s. The Sanacja authorities intended neither to give way to peasant resolutions adopted at rallies nor to yield to much harsher forms of protest. This repeatedly led to human tragedies and took a deadly toll. In 1937, during the Great Peasants' Strike alone, 44 people were

¹¹² It is also necessary to consider here the possibility that the whole procession was a counteraction to the rally being organised; it was intended to draw the peasants away. On another occasion, the "Gazeta Chłopska" published a text about a rally in Wola Zarczycka in May 1926, which attracted crowds, despite the fact 'that the parish priest, having learnt about the rally, ordered a procession into the field after the High Mass', vide: "Gazeta Chłopska" 1926, no. 16, p. 9.

¹¹³ BS, RP/II/2/38, p. 46.

¹¹⁴ *Ibidem*.

killed, of whom 22 died from police bullets in the Jarosław powiat neighbouring Przeworsk powiat¹¹⁵.

It appears that the importance of rallies was appreciated by many villagers. This is evidenced not only by the number of such gatherings and the attendance (certainly large, although difficult to estimate accurately from today's perspective). This is also evidenced by the emotions that the rallies aroused and in particular those emotions that provoked the desire to obstruct the organisation and conduct of the rallies. This refers both to the actions of the administration and political competitors seeking to dominate the rally, disrupt it, or even break it up.

This article is an attempt to show the rallies through the lens of one folk activist. It is a study that is undoubtedly important, but full of various limitations. It necessarily makes us aware of the vastness of the research area, which may provide an interesting field for further inquiry. One may wonder what people's rallies looked like in other regions of Poland at that time. Equally intriguing are questions: concerning the rallying activities of other politicians, other political groups, the participation of women in rallies, or rallies addressed to social groups other than the rural population (workers, city dwellers, etc.).

Many more such issues could be explored. However, answering them requires a much broader scope of research.

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