

**Tomasz Chłopecki, *Myśl polityczna i prawna obozu rządzącego w Polsce w latach 1935–1939. Państwo–Prawo–Gospodarka*, Wydawnictwo FNCE, Poznań 2018, pp. 605.**

The year 1935, when Marshal Józef Piłsudski died, undoubtedly reshaped the political situation in Poland, ruled by the Sanation camp, which – deprived of its leader – had to pull itself together in the new reality. This had visible repercussions not only in the political arena inside the country, but also in international relations – Polish diplomacy after 1935 followed slightly different paths than those set until then. In the Polish literature on the subject there are already studies that cover the described issue, but their chronological frameworks vary to a large extent. The reviewed work by Tomasz Chłopecki, in turn, provides the synthesis of the political thought of the Sanation in the second half of the 1930s. The discussed study may be a valuable point of reference for political scientists and historians of political thought, as well as a source of important information for students of the above-mentioned areas of research. However, it constitutes a synthesis of sorts rather than a work supplementing historiography with relevant information.

The book is a publication of a doctoral dissertation defended in 2014 at the Faculty of Law, Administration and Economics of the University of Wrocław. The Author is a lawyer by profession, which may lead one to conclude that the book involves mainly the legal analysis of the social and political system during the covered period. Nothing could be further from the truth: the Author devoted most space in his publication to political thought and the concepts of political system developed in the Polish ruling camp. The publication *de facto* concerns the history of political thought; with legal thought being of much less importance within it.

As the aim of the work the Author indicates ‘an attempt to answer the question of how the political and legal thought of the ruling camp in Poland was shaped after the death of its spiritual leader’<sup>1</sup> (p. 8). He adds a rather puzzling research question: ‘whether the introduction of the strong executive government brought Poland closer to authoritarian states, or

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<sup>1</sup> ‘próbę odpowiedzi na pytanie, w jaki sposób kształtowała się myśl polityczna i prawna obozu rządzącego w Polsce po śmierci jego duchowego przywódcy’.

whether it allowed it to remain independent and relatively secure in the international arena<sup>2</sup> (*ibidem*). However, would Poland's rapprochement with authoritarian states (as I understand – in terms of the political system) automatically entail the lack of independence and relative security in the international arena? If so, that position should have been justified, as it is at least debatable and I, personally, disagree with it.

The introduction to the work is very extensive, too extensive, in my view. Perhaps it is due to the fact that it was previously published in 'Zeszyty Naukowe', a periodical of Witelon State University of Applied Sciences in Legnica. However, a question can be asked whether there are grounds for providing such a comprehensive, nineteen page long introduction, especially since it contains the Author's synthetic analyses, which, in my opinion, should be included in the individual chapters of the work, or perhaps in the conclusion. I believe, an introduction to this type of work should be rather concise and, apart from specifying its purpose, should include such elements as: grounds for its chronological scope, reasons for choosing the subject, presentation of the work's innovative aspects, etc. However, we will not find those elements in the introduction to the subsequent parts of Chłopecki's work.

In the introduction, the Author informs his readers that 'the subject of the work is the political and legal thought developed by the ruling camp in Poland in the years 1935–1939, perceived as a form of legal and scientific activity, implemented through relations and mechanisms related to the exercise of power, lawmaking, aimed at realizing a specific legal and political order'<sup>3</sup> (p. 7). When writing about scientific activity, with reference to the political discourse on the systemic and legal concepts in the Second Polish Republic (as he must have meant those), in my view the Author might fallen prey to exaggeration. The nature of the ongoing polemics was hardly scientific. However, the aim of the work was defined by the Author precisely, and the research questions he asked (pp. 8–9) are definitely accurate and well-founded.

The source material is generally rich. The Author performed queries in the Central Archives of Modern Records (AAN), the National Archives in Krakow (AN), the library resources of Jagiellonian Library in Krakow,

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<sup>2</sup> 'czy wprowadzenie silnej władzy wykonawczej zbliżało Polskę do państw autorytarnych, czy też pozwalało jej zachować samodzielność i względne bezpieczeństwo na arenie międzynarodowej'.

<sup>3</sup> 'przedmiotem pracy jest myśl polityczna i prawna obozu rządzącego w Polsce w latach 1935–1939, rozumiana jako forma działalności prawnej, naukowej, realizowana poprzez stosunki i mechanizmy związane ze sprawowaniem władzy, stanowieniem prawa, mająca na celu urzeczywistnienie określonego ładu prawnego i politycznego'.

the Library of Lithuanian Academy of Sciences in Vilnius, the National Library in Warsaw, the Raczyński Library in Poznań, the Central State Archives in Vilnius, the Library of Józef Piłsudski Institute in New York ('scanned documents'), numerous printed sources, including memoirs, press publications, and studies. However, in his work he rarely refers to those archival materials; the majority of references comes from printed sources and studies. The number of studies used is also significant – just listing them in the bibliography took over thirty pages (sic!). However, I had the impression that T. Chłopecki did not always use a proper selection of monographs available in Poland. For example, in the case of the works by Marek Kornat he lists, he did not benefit from the latter's *Polityka zagraniczna Polski 1938–1939. Cztery decyzje Józefa Becka*<sup>4</sup>, recognised with an award by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The Author also qualifies memoirs and diaries as 'scientific and journalistic literature', undoubtedly a mistake, as these constitute printed sources. The very term 'scientific and journalistic literature' is, in my opinion, incorrect; T. Chłopecki could simply introduce a distinction between studies and press materials. I also do not understand why the Author uses the old name 'State Archives in Krakow', with the archive having been renamed the National Archives in Krakow in 2012.

The structure of the work is clear, and the structure of the subjects – justified. The individual titles of the chapters correspond to the adopted thematic framework of the work, which is also appropriate. Certainly, however, it could have been extended by, for example, the educational policy of the Polish government of the discussed historical period. For this purpose, it would be reasonable to use, for example, the recently published work by Marek Jakubiak<sup>5</sup>. Educational policy was an important element of Piłsudskites' political propaganda, in which, among other things, the cult of Józef Piłsudski was promoted. However, the copy of the work that I have read contains a major printing or editorial error – pages 195 to 214 are placed in the wrong order, which looks terrible aesthetically and prevents the reader from efficiently navigating this part of the study. It is also a pity that the work does not include an index of the names of people who appear in it. In such a monumental book, of over six hundred pages, it is highly advisable, not to say downright essential.

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<sup>4</sup> M. Kornat, *Polityka zagraniczna Polski 1938–1939. Cztery decyzje Józefa Becka*, Gdańsk 2012.

<sup>5</sup> M. Jakubiak, *Relacje państwo – Kościół katolicki na tle polityki oświatowo-wychowawczej sanacji*, Warszawa 2016.

The publication by T. Chłopecki consists of an introduction, six main chapters and a conclusion. In the first chapter, the Author touched upon the issue of the systemic and legal concepts that appeared on the Polish political scene in the years 1926–1935. The second chapter shows the decomposition of the government camp after the death of Marshal Józef Piłsudski in 1935. It highlights the political thought of the most important political camps, i.e. the ‘colonels’ camp’, the Edward Rydz-Śmigły’s adherents, camp of National Unity, as well as the so-called ‘Castle group’, and the notions developed by the Polish conservatives. The third chapter presents the political and legal thought from 1935–1939, concerning the legislative, executive, and judiciary branches of the government. The fourth chapter describes and analyses the economic policy of the Polish government and the political discussions related thereto. The fifth chapter deals with the analysis of Polish foreign policy between 1935 and 1939, taking into consideration the political alliances of Poland and the concept of the so-called maritime policy. The ultimate, sixth chapter is dedicated to the difficult topic of national minorities in Poland, i.e. Ukrainians, Jews, Belarusians, and Germans.

The Author is capable of developing syntheses and making judgments, although the latter, in my opinion, at times happen to be incorrect. By far the most controversial statement on his part is the one he makes about Piłsudski’s May Coup. As the Author concludes: ‘it must be stated with absolute certainty that the existing situation in the Polish state required Piłsudski’s reaction and authorized him to act’<sup>6</sup>. In a footnote to this sentence, he adds: ‘Therefore, we cannot speak of a coup d’état, because Piłsudski’s actions were dictated by his concern for the existence of an independent Polish state’<sup>7</sup> (p. 41). What T. Chłopecki fails to notice here is that Piłsudski’s reaction was somewhat delayed – the recently elected new Polish government had already started to introduce significant changes and was on its way to stabilizing the political situation in the country. This was the main reason for the condemnation of the May Coup expressed by the Polish Episcopate. The Marshal had also been carrying out personnel purges at the officer level of the Polish army for a long time and may have been intending to instigate a military coup for an equally long time. Furthermore, contrary to what the Author writes, it was indeed a coup d’état, however noble reasons it might have resulted

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<sup>6</sup> ‘z całą pewnością należy stwierdzić, że sytuacja, w której znajdowało się państwo polskie, wymagała reakcji Piłsudskiego i upoważniała go do wystąpienia’.

<sup>7</sup> ‘nie możemy tutaj zatem mówić o zamachu stanu, bowiem postępowanie Piłsudskiego podyktowane było troską o byt niepodległego państwa polskiego’.

from, because it was conducted illegally and with the use of military force. The comment signalled here, which could also be extended to include other references to T. Chłopecki's controversial statements, may lead to the conclusion that the Author – at least in some respects – lacks adequate historical knowledge.

In the subsection titled 'Political Effects of the Coup', the Author does not mention the establishment of the Camp of Great Poland (OWP) at all, which was a direct and one of the most important political consequences of the May Coup. In the future struggle, this camp was supposed to encounter a paradoxical situation because, as the Author rightly notes, 'after Piłsudski's death, nationalist ideas began to infiltrate the ruling camp'<sup>8</sup> (p. 477). One of the 'political effects of the Coup' was also the Brest trials, which resulted in the imprisonment of Piłsudski's main opponents from the Centrolew (Centre-Left). The Author, repeatedly analyzing the political system created by the Piłsudski's supporters, in terms of whether and to what extent it was an authoritarian or totalitarian one, could also have analyzed the so-called Place of Isolation at Bereza Kartuska, bearing certain features of a concentration camp, where also the opponents of the said political faction were sent. There already is a considerable literature on the subject<sup>9</sup>.

Neither does the Author mention the support of the May coup by the Zionists<sup>10</sup> or the 'May error' of the Polish Communists, as their support for Piłsudski's coup d'état came to be called, and their subsequent change of heart on this matter<sup>11</sup>. It is further important as T. Chłopecki, describing in detail the Jewish minority in Poland and their legal situation after 1926, should bear in mind the fact that the philo-Semitic attitude of the Piłsudskites (before the Marshal's death) resulted to some extent from the deference they were treated with by the Polish Jews. He also does not mention the 'Wawel Conflict'<sup>12</sup> immediately after the death of the Marshal, which caused a great stir in Poland and, according to Jacek Czajkowski, distracted the Polish authorities from the threat posed by Germany<sup>13</sup>.

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<sup>8</sup> 'po śmierci Piłsudskiego w obozie rządzącym zaczęły się upowszechniać idee nacjonalistyczne'.

<sup>9</sup> See: I. Polit, *Miejsce odosobnienia w Berezie Kartuskiej w latach 1934–1939*, Toruń 2003; W. Śleszyński, *Obóz odosobnienia w Berezie Kartuskiej: 1934–1939*, Białystok 2003.

<sup>10</sup> J. Walicki, *Polscy syjoniści wobec pierwszych miesięcy rządów Józefa Piłsudskiego (maj–sierpień 1926)*, 'Seminare. Scientific Research' 2005, 21, p. 100.

<sup>11</sup> A monograph on this subject is currently being prepared by historian Mariusz Wołos.

<sup>12</sup> J. Czajkowski, *Kardynał Sapięha*, Kraków 1997.

<sup>13</sup> The conflict related to the transfer of the Marshal's remains to the Wawel Cathedral by the decision of the Archbishop Adam Sapięha, a development which caused a great political and social upheaval in Poland.

Presenting the attitude of the Polish authorities to fascism, the Author mentions insignificant fascist political factions in Poland, such as the Polish Fascist Organization or the Polish Fascist Faction (SFP; p. 90). However, the National-Radical Camp (ONR) and the entire National Democracy Party (ND) were also accused of fascist inclinations, which was and still is visible in the journalistic and scientific historiographic narrative of a leftist orientation<sup>14</sup>. T. Chłopecki, presenting the attitude of the then authorities towards fascism, could have also referred to its criticism of the National Democracy, and the basis for that position. Authoritarian inclinations were not alien to National Democracy, and there was a rumor spreading directly before the May Coup that it was the National Democrats who were preparing a coup d'état. The work by Krzysztof Kawalec<sup>15</sup>, one the Author does not refer to, discusses the attitude of the National Democracy Party to fascism.

As one of the book's most serious shortcomings I consider the fact that the relationship between the state and the Roman Catholic Church has not been thoroughly analyzed. The Author mentions it on a meager two (!) pages. In the Second Polish Republic, the Church had enormous influence and to a large extent was able to shape people's attitudes. At that time, the Catholic press could boast of exorbitant circulation figures, and it very often raised social and political issues, sometimes even related to the entire political order. The Author is convinced that the cooperation between the Church and Sanation was almost exemplary. As proof of this, he writes: 'in March 1935, the Primate of Poland, August Hlond, summed up the cooperation between the Church and Sanation during the crisis, emphasizing that there were no significant contradictions between the two authorities, and their opinions were not antithetical, but complementary of one another'<sup>16</sup> (p. 49). In this case, he refers to the lucubrations of the Marxist historian Władysław Mysłek. It is regrettable that he does not refer to more contemporary and valuable works devoted to these issues, such as those by Krzysztof Krasowski<sup>17</sup>, Jarosław Macała<sup>18</sup>, or Stanisław Wilk<sup>19</sup>. Especially the former two deal

<sup>14</sup> See: G. Krzywiec, *O klerykałnym faszyzmie po latach. Na marginesie Curriculum vitae Jędrzeja Giertycha*, 'Zagłada Żydów. Studies and Materials' 2013, 9, pp. 537–548.

<sup>15</sup> K. Kawalec, *Narodowa Demokracja wobec faszyzmu 1922–1939*, Wrocław 1989.

<sup>16</sup> 'w marcu 1935 r. prymas Polski August Hlond podsumował współpracę Kościoła z sanacją w okresie kryzysu, podkreślając, że między obu władzami istotnych przeciwieństw nie było, a ich zdania nie były sprzeczne, lecz się uzupełniały'.

<sup>17</sup> K. Krasowski, *Episkopat katolicki w II Rzeczypospolitej. Myśl o ustroju państwa – postulatory – realizacja*, Poznań 1992.

<sup>18</sup> J. Macała, *Polska katolicka w myśli politycznej II RP*, Zielona Góra 2004.

<sup>19</sup> S. Wilk, *Episkopat Kościoła katolickiego w Polsce w latach 1918–1939*, Warszawa 1922.

in detail with the legal and political postulates of the Catholic Church in the Second Polish Republic. The Church was active in the political sphere, and for some time the Catholic clergy even had the right to sit in the parliament. They spoke out not only on matters directly related to the Church, such as the concordat, but also on matters of the political system of the state. That relationship was not always incredibly positive. Many clergymen received the news of the May Coup very negatively<sup>20</sup>. In 1932, Cardinal August Hlond, the Primate of Poland, submitted in Rome a memorandum on the situation in Poland, in which he 'drew attention to the religious indifferentism and negative attitude towards Catholicism expressed by the majority in the ruling bloc in the Sejm and Senate, i.e. socialists, freethinkers, sectarians, apostates, and freemasons. The government, according to Cardinal Hlond, consisted mostly of legionnaires who had little intellectual culture and poor political preparation. In the government's program, the idea of state was not crystallized. It oscillated between the fascist and Bolshevik concepts. The main principle of the political system was the omnipotence of the state. The cult of Józef Piłsudski was promoted in schools'<sup>21</sup>. Those words, quoted after Fr. Dębiński, require no comment. In fact, Cardinal Hlond was rather favorably inclined towards Józef Piłsudski and his camp, which does not mean, however, that was blind to the threats and anti-clericalism manifested in the wide milieu of Sanation politicians.

The Author also cites M. Romeyko (p. 44) and his book *Przed i po maju*, published in 1967 and – commenting on his findings – states that the most important thing for Piłsudski was not simply pinning his program to the Left or Right wing, but the 'morality of public life'. However, official declarations by Piłsudski did not always go in line with his actions, as proved by the way he treated his political opponents. The academic reliability of Polish communist historians also left much to be desired and I do not understand why T. Chłopecki decided to quote their works, and in addition to that, do it without his own comments or evaluation.

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<sup>20</sup> Rev. J. Dębiński, *Kościół rzymskokatolicki wobec przewrotu majowego i rządów sanacji*, in: *Zamach stanu Józefa Piłsudskiego i jego konsekwencje w interpretacjach polskiej myśli politycznej XX wieku*, eds. Z. Karpus, G. Radomski, W. Wojdyła, Toruń 2008, p. 220.

<sup>21</sup> 'zwrócił uwagę na indyferentyzm religijny i negatywne nastawienie do katolicyzmu większości w bloku rządzącym w sejmie i senacie, a więc: socjalistów, wolnomyslicieli, sekciarzy, apostatów i masonów. Rząd, zdaniem kard. A. Hlonda, składał się przeważnie z legionistów o niezbyt wysokiej kulturze intelektualnej i o słabym przygotowaniu politycznym. W programie rządu nie została skryształizowana idea państwa, która oscylowała między koncepcją faszystowską a koncepcją bolszewicką. Główną zasadą systemu politycznego była omnipotencja państwa. W szkole rozwijano kult Józefa Piłsudskiego'. *Ibidem*, p. 228.

In the footnotes, T. Chłopecki gives 'biographical notes' of historical figures that he refers to in his publication, sometimes figures commonly known, such as August Hlond, Wincenty Witos, or Władysław Grabski. I have encountered a similar procedure several times in my research and find it completely superfluous, especially concerning the key figures in the history of the Second Polish Republic. Moreover, at times the Author provides it 'too late', such as on p. 181, where in the footnote 1034 he explains the worldview of 'Czas' magazine, although the periodical was already mentioned earlier in the book. Analysing this magazine, T. Chłopecki should have also reviewed the political journals affiliated with Sanation, such as 'Gazeta Polska'. From the beginning to the end of the book, the footnote numbering is continuous, meaning that they total at about three thousand. In my opinion, in each chapter the numbering should be restarted, allowing for a more aesthetic look.

I have ambivalent feelings when it comes to the general assessment of T. Chłopecki's work. On one hand, it is an extensive publication, covering many topics, and at times verging on being exhaustive. The problem, however, lies in its innovativeness, and in fact, as I believe, in the scarcity thereof. The Author did not indicate the threads with which he intends to fill in the gaps in the existing historiography and literature on the subject, and some of the theses he puts forward raise serious doubts and are not properly supported by source references. Perhaps the reason for the above is that the subject of the work was presented from the perspective of a lawyer, not a historian, and these are, after all, separate areas of knowledge.

(translated by LINGUA LAB)

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