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The activity of military underground organizations of peasants in occupied Poland (1939–1944)

У статті розглядається діяльність польських селянських молодіжних організації в умовах гітлерівської окупації в 1939—1944 рр. На підставі використання архівних матеріалів, документів та праць науковців розглянуто соціальний склад, програми, форми, методи та зміст їх роботи.

<u>Ключові слова</u>: польські організації, сільська молодь, підпілля, Стронніцтво Людове, Батальйони Хлопські.

В данной статье рассматривается деятельность польских сельских организаций в условиях гитлеровской оккупации в 1939—1944 гг. На основе использования архивных материалов, документов, исследований польских научных деятелей рассмотрен социальный состав, программы, формы, методы и содержание их работы. Ключевые слова: польские организации, сельская молодежь, подполье, Стронництво Людовое, Батальоны Хлопские.

This article describes the activities rural Polish organizations during the occupation in 1939–1944. Using archival materials, documents and scientific works of Polish scientists examined social structure, programs, forms, methods and content of their work.

<u>Key words</u>: Polish organizations, rural youth, underground activities, Stronnitstwo Ludowe, Battalions Hlopski.

The relevance of investigation is determined by the need of objective research of main stages of organizational development of Polish underground military youth organizations of peasants on the basis of current knowledge, evaluations, methodological principles and new visions, clarifying the specifics of their work during the period of occupation in the context of state-building underground structures in Poland.

The purpose of the study is to reveal main characteristics of military youth formations of peasants in occupied Poland in 1939–1944, to identify the stages of their organizational development, main tasks and areas of armed struggle on the basis of analysis of sources, scientific papers of native and foreign researches, using characteristic features of political and critical approach to published documents.

The largest number of documents relating to the problem of developing of Polish underground military organizations in 1939–1942 is

contained in the Archives of New Records in Warsaw (Archiwum Akt Nowych – AAN). The second group of sources includes published papers. Collections of documents published in the Soviet era, mainly submit the diplomatic nature of the material and only a small number of documents relates directly to organizational measures on creation of Polish underground forces. However, much more documentary materials have been published in Poland.

It is worth while mentioning that historiography of this period can be divided into two chronological periods. The first covers the 50's – late 80's of the XX century. The second period began at the beginning of 90's and continues until now. Among the historiography of the first period the work of A. Noskova is of great interest to us, who uses many archival sources, highlights the stages of military peasant organizations during the Nazi occupation.

Among the works of the second period the historical explorations of T. Hryhoryants, Y. Novopashin, T. Medovarova should be named. Along with the works of local scientists we should mention the investigations of A. Kazakov, A. Rusnachenko, I. Ilyushin.

Quite a significant contribution to the study of this issue was done by Polish researchers, among them are B. Hillibrandt, J. Harlinskyi, E. Durachynskyi, P. Matusiak.

Setting of the occupation regime, the so-called "new order" was accompanied by permanent terror and repression that caused the growth of a large-scale Resistance movement (Ruch Oporu), which swept almost all over the post-war state, among all social strata of society, including the peasantry.

It is worth while noting that among all political parties in Poland which created their own armed groups at an early stage of occupation, was the Peasant Party (PP) (Stronnitstvo Ludowe). Until 1928 there was only one Central Union of Peasant Youth. However, in 1928 it was divided into two unions: the Central Union of Peasant Youth – "Siew" and the Central Union of Peasant Youth – "Wici." Those divisions arose because of a dispute about the participation of the union in political life of the country. The members of "Wici", except social and educational work, were actively involved in political activities. Instead of it, the members of "Siew" were against the intervention into politics [1].

It was during the period when "Siew" started the cooperation with a number of Polish youth organizations, among them were the Union of Infantry, the Union of Polish Scouts (Hartsers), the Organization of Young Workers. In pre-war Poland "Siew" conducted extensive educational activities. They organized public Universities for peasants, which yearly entered about 600 students, various courses to teach rural authorities, foundations of agronomic knowledge, farming [2, p. 201].

It should be noted that during the war National movement, based largely on pre-war personnel, primarily on members of "Wici", was replenished mainly by farmers, leading to a certain extension position of the representatives of movement in the countryside. Relying on peasants the representatives of National movement started the formation of their party in secret. The party was called the Peasant Party-Roch (PP-Roch) (SL-Roch). PP-Roch took a leading position in national movement, which experienced a momentary hiccup. Therefore, from first days of occupation "sanation" workers tried to take advantage of it. The manual of Services of Victory in Poland (Służba Zwyciestwu Polski) restored the work of Peasant Youth Union-"Wici". with the help of which it was able to bring to its members, and later to the Union of Armed struggle, significant staff resources from the Peasant Party [32, p. 18]. In 1940 in February the representatives of National movement held a meeting in Lublin, where it was decided to begin underground activities of the Peasant Party and to establish the leadership: J. Netsko, J. Hrudzynski. S. Otetski, M. Schavinska [2, p. 187].

At the end of March in 1940 the next stage of structural development of secret peasant movement started. The members of "Wici" were dissatisfied that "sanation" representatives actually controlled their organization and recruited their human resources to the Union of Military struggle (Związek Walki Zbrojnej). So, they convened a national conference and liquidated "Wici" as an independent organization, and the youth from it was subordinated to the central leadership of peasant movement, conventionally called "Roch" [8, p. 29].

In its turn, the rest of peasant movement that was represented by former Central Union of Peasant Youth "Siew", created a political organization "Raclawice" (Raclawice), which functioned as a part of their own troops, led by a prominent figure – R. Tychynskyi. Structurally it covered almost the entire country, except Poznan province. In their program they declared: a resolute struggle against invaders, a widespread involvement of farmers in the armed forces, fighting for an independent Poland. The organization included experienced pre-war military personnel having experience of struggle secretly [19, p. 398].

As a result of R. Tychynskyi's negotiations and consultations there was established a new organization – the Revolutionary Union of Liberty (RUL) (Rewolucyjny Związek Wolności). It happened in first days of October in 1939. The composition of the founding team consisted of: R. Tychynskyi, G. Bzhusko, B. Vozik, B. Podhurska, Z. Dymek, M. Wojcechowski, S. Skoczylas, B. Shcherba, L. Libersbah, P. Yaloha Olbryskii, J. Kowalski. At first, the organization had no specific program and began to develop its structure. It should be noted that slogans declared by R. Tychynskyi were rated by the members of the organization as radically left [20, p. 15].

Later R. Tychynskyi went to Lviv where he launched the activities to create a similar underground organization called the Revolutionary Union of Liberty and Freedom (RULF) (Rewolucyjny Związek Niepodległości i Wolności). Its founders were: J. Shchyrek, S. Herhstall (socialists), F. Wilk, B. Zalenskii, M. Klenbitskyi, Ch. Raczkowskyi (young farmers), S. Olshewskyi, B. Zubzhytskyi, E. Kulesh, A. Heida, A. Kopacz (the members of the Democratic Party), M. Lang, B. Prochke (syndicalists), R. Tychynskyi, E. Suhorek (the members of "Siew"), L. Charnik, J. Lech (the representatives of hartserstva) and E. Perskyi (the activist of the Polish Social-Democratic Youth Organization) [15, p. 378].

In its ideological declaration the Union proclaimed the need to struggle against the totalitarianism and the imperialism, the same as with the Nazis and the Communists. The RULF declared that the post-war independent Poland would become a member of the federation, which had to create "free nations of Czechoslovakia, Ukraine, Belarus and Lithuania." The witness of the events, O. Charnik described that grouping as a kind of "a debating and programming forum, the focus of ideological inspiration" [15, c. 34].

The organizers of the RULF in those centers were F. Rychlik and B. Hlodt. As noted in the report, workers eagerly joined the Union because "quickly figured out that social liberation announced by newcomers was only accustomed propaganda of Russian imperialism and carried a worse economic exploitation than potential capitalism" [23, p. 118]. As the members of other secret groups, the members of the RULF also cared for accumulation and storage of weapons and prepared for future armed intervention. The activists of the Union issued "Information Bulletin" edited by J. Lech [9, p. 148].

The organization had two radio stations – in Lviv and Sambor. But all their activity was reduced only to listening to French and British stations, which was later printed in periodical press [18, p. 319].

Moreover, that group formed the section of reconnaissance, which mainly dealt with the calculations in the Red Army, as well as spying on special social groups and ethnic minorities. Civil reconnaissance, except conducting surveys about various attitudes among civil population, tried, for example, to set the personal data of all Germans who lived in Eastern Galicia. It is interesting that there were attempts to establish the possibility of cooperation with the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN). R. Zahrodskyi had to establish a contact with the OUN "to join the struggle against the Soviets" due to instructions, received from L. Charnik, E. Yehlyazh. At the beginning of January of 1940 it was reported to Ukrainian society: "... it is characterized by anti-Soviet sentiments and kind attitude towards Poles. Moreover, R. Zahrodskyi gave the names of his

two acquaintances among Ukrainian nationalists of the OUN – B. Komarnitskyi and B. Liskovich, describing them as respected among the Ukrainians and with Whom it was possible to find common ground in the case of relations with our organization". In its turn, E. Yehlyazh tried to get an audience with the Greek Catholic Metropolitan A. Sheptytskyi and to talk to him on the subject of mutual understanding between the Poles and Ukrainians during the Soviet occupation, but the Patriarch did not give the consent [12, p. 175–181].

We note that the RULF and the RULF were formed not only on territories of Soviet occupation – in Lviv, but also in Vilno. Along with the severely conspired RUL, its founders decided to revive the mass organization, which could operate, based on activists' from "Siew" and "Wici", young teachers and workers. That organization was named the Peasant Organization of Liberty "Raclawice" and its founders were R. Tychynskyi, G. Bzhusko, M. Wojciechowskyi, W. Vondik, S. Skochylias [15, p. 73].

Later, after the formation of "Raclawice" J. Marshal (the member of the Governing Council of "Siew"), K. Banach, K. Mai (the members of the Presidium) got an offer to participate in it. At that time the Central Committee of "Raclawice" was composed of: R. Tychynskyi (Chairman), J. Marshalek, K. Banach, K. Mai, H. Bzhusko. The Committee operated significantly in larger cast. Close collaborators to the Committee and organizers of underground work at that time were: E.Heykin, W. Vodik, W. Shcherba, M. Wojciechowskyi, S. Reymont, K. Kazimirskyi, V. Zakzhevskyi, A. Pyenkyevich, J. Zhabovskyi, K. Lesjak, E. Mazhets, E. Sulkovskyi. The Committee was divided into such departments: the Organizing, the Press, the Military [1].

With time, as a result of arrests and other actions, the Committee changed its formation [10, p. 193]. As noted by S. Reymont, in November of 1939 the Committee had some differences of views: "... the military headed by Ruzhitskyi took out a military organization in the first place and set the state system after the war into the background". J. Marshalek, B. Zakzhyvskyi supported that view. Finally it was agreed that the work would be carried out in two areas: civilian and military.

Military activities were decided to perform in two directions. The Military Department, directed by K. Ruzhitskyi, was directed to organize a wide military structural formations (battalions, platoons) with a forecast rise of subversive actions during attacks on the Western Front in the spring of 1940. That department soon separated from "Raclawice" and became a new military formation called the Polish Armed Organization (PAO) (Polska Organizacja Zbrojna).

Parallel with a military character of the organization, "Raclawice" was characterized by mass character, indicating the formation of military personnel in conspiracy that united mainly officers. It was the Military Organization of Liberty – "Znak" (MOL) (Wojskowa Organizacja Wolności). As a result of adopted provisions "Znak" – MOL had to add human resources to the PAO. Also in the Military department there was formed a new group called "Unia" which partially consisted of the officers of "Znak" – MOL and civilians [15, p. 398].

Social and political program of "Raclawice" was not only strongly well-defined, but also had a very general nature. V. Zakzhevskii was requested to process ideological declarations. Prepared thesis by him caused active discussions in various circles, including the meeting of the Committee. In a very short time "Raclawice" developed activities in the country, built a network of underground movement, increased in its size. In the report of "Raclawice" for the period of June, 15 – July, 15 of 1940 it was reported that the ranks of the organization collected about 36 000 out of 1000 communities, and an underground network covered 76 districts [21, p. 135].

Organizational contacts were tuned both by territorial activists from "Siew", configurating relationships with the central figures in Warsaw and by the emissaries of the Central Committee "Raclawice". Members of the Central Committee together with the asset often penetrated deeply, restoring a torn organizational network [4, p. 153].

The significant attention was paid to the organization of advocacy activities. A network of underground printing and publishing was widely created. In December of 1939 the first number of "Radiowy" was edited (1-2 times weekly circulation of approximately 1,000 copies). The most significant printed editions were: "Iskra Anteny polskie" (1940), "Dwa dni" (1940-1944), "Wojna i Wolnośc" (1940-1944), "Wojsko i Niepodległość" (1940-1943), "Polski Zhovnyer" (1940-1942) and others. Publishing activities were major organized and conducted by the Military department of "Raclawice" [6, p. 262].

So, "Raclawice" was included into the staff of the Central Committee of Independent Organizations (CCIO) formed by R. Svyentohovskyi. The CCIO united underground organizations, supporting the Government of Sikorskyi, and was not associated with any of three major pre-war opposition political parties – the National Party, the Peasant Party and the Polish Socialist Party. E. Durachynskyi submitted the lists of figures related to the CCIO: M. Bozhetskyi, T. Shpotanskyi, T. Slavinski, K. Drevnovskyi, R. Tychynskyi, I. Orzechowski, A. Olehovich, F. Kvyetsinskyi, S. Witkowski, N. Barlitskyi. The Political Bureau was created involving the activists who were in the cooperation with R. Svyentohovskyi [21, p. 287].

G. Bzhusko being one of the founding members of "Raclawice" wrote about the first contacts of the committee "Raclawice" with supporters of General W. Sikorskyi and some other clandestine groups: "Establishing connection with the team of W. Sikorskyi was very important to us: solving financial problems"[20, c. 16].

The situation in the country and in other political centers at that time was very difficult. As we know from the narrative of Commander E. Rydza-Smihlyi, in September of 1939 a new military underground organization was formed – the Service of Polish Victory (SPV) (Służba Zwycięstwu Polski), led by M. Tokazhevskyi-Karashevich. In November of 1939 a new Prime Minister W. Sikorskyi, who was the Commander-in-chief of a newlycreated organization – the Union of Armed struggle (UAS) (Związek Walki Zbrojnej), which appeared instead of the SPV, the commander of which became K. Sosnkovskyi, while being in France. The SPV conveyed its secret network to the UAS and Tokazhevskyi was appointed as the Commander-in-chief of the UAS in Lviv. S. Rovetskyi was the head of District number 1 and later on was appointed as an Alternate Commander-in-chief of the UAS, and then the Commander-in-chief (after the fall of France in June of 1940) [18, p. 412].

In developing the political line of the party the leaders of the Peasant Party-Roch (PP-Roch) came out of position of the chief forces in the coalition of bourgeois, petty-bourgeois and reformist parties that prevailed in the struggle for independence. One of the most important tools which strengthened their position was the creation of armed forces in conspiracy. At first "Roch" with some fluctuations recognized the Union of Armed Struggle (UAS) naming it "army in secrecy" and recommended peasants to join it, as the result there was a quick expansion of the ranks of the Union by peasants. Fears of peasants grew because of the formation of such military organizations as the National Party (NP) and the Polish Socialistic Party (PSP). There was a growing discontent among the peasants because of the domination of "sanation" officers in the UAS [7, p. 60–61].

As one of the most pressing directions of the peasant movement was the matter of building a military organization, it became "Hlostra", which was later transformed into the Battalions of Peasants (BP). Historians in their research believe that it is chronologically impossible to determine when the BP emerged as the Peasant Military Organization. The members of this movement F. Nechko, F. Kamynskyi argue that the concept of the BP as a military union developed in the first half of 1940 [13, p. 411]. In one of the documents dating back to August of 1940, organizational arrangements were designed to establish that military group, which should have the character of self-defense and act on the basis of the ideas of peasant interests. We admit the fact that in the same month the Central

Committee of the Peasant Party finished the creation of "Hlostra" [16, p. 32]. Demonstrating the radicalism of the movement, the leaders of the Peasant Party-Roch (PP-Roch) inadvertently became in conflict with their current allies in the political camp. It could result in: 1) program concessions (which was quite dangerous as threatened the reduction of massive base of the party); 2) breach of collaboration with "center-right" members (which broke the concept of coalition of "consolidated" society); 3) the struggle for strengthening their political position within the "London" camp through strengthening their left flank.

Since 1943 the dynamic development of troops of the Peasant Battalions began. By the end of the occupation there were about 400 of them (dozens of them were partisans). According to the investigations of the researchers during the occupation they held about 5677 shares, representing about 19 % of the anti-Hitler action with the participation of Poles. Among them 830 out of 5677 had the character of armed conflicts, 233 – diversions in vehicles, 1614 – attacks on the administration and police, 1200 – on economic motives. To a large extent it was a response to terror of invaders, and especially to a massive repression, evictions and killings of peasants [7, p. 68-69].

The radicalization of peasants was expressed in the armed resistance to the Nazis, in Cooperation with a number of divisions of the BP, units of National Guard (NG) and Soviet partisans. A growing discontent of its members was connected with the cooperation of the Central Committee of the Peasant Party (CCPP) with right-wing political factions within the "Delegature" and of the National Army (NA). Thus, an attempt of the CCPP to combine the BP with the NA met the resistance from soldiers and assets of "Roch". As a result, by the end of the war only 25 % of the BP joined the NA. It did not correspond to the mood of the peasants to introduce peasants' resistance in the limit of "self-defense" by the CCPP, to force them to avoid direct military conflicts with the Nazis, to use preventive measures to confine health care and public safety.

We note that the leaders of "Roch" retained the control over all forms of protection in Zamosc by the BP, separated soldiers of the BP from contacts with the members of the Polish Party of Workers, with the troops of the NG and Soviet partisans. Moreover, they condemned the acts of sabotage. Despite the restrictive position of the Central Committee of National Movement, some troops of the BP (including separate units of the NA) cooperated with the NG and protected the population of Zamosc from repression of occupants, took part in the armed struggle. In spring of 1943 Grot-Rovetskyi, the commander of the NA, noted the existence of conflicts between the Central Committee of National Movement and "lower ranks"

of "Roch" and remarked the presence of "strong antagonisms" in some areas [22, p. 118].

In the process of building of organizational structure of the BP there were two periods relating to the military and political situation in the country. Thus, in 1940–1941 the process of formation of the relevant regional centers took place, while the period of 1942–1944 was characterized by rapid sabotage and military activities, the creation of military units and the objectization of the concept of armed struggle [9, p. 53].

In 1942 there was the growth of human resources in the ranks of the BP. Thus, for the period of 1942–1943 its membership totaled 121,000. With the increasing of members in the organization, its leaders began to arrange "forest" units, the purpose of which was the organization of partisan war with invaders [14, p. 39]. Their adopted Military Service Regulations were important for organizational development of the BP. Unlike other policy documents, it had political nature and determined the areas of ideological activity [11, p. 138].

The BP was one of the most influential military organizations in occupied Poland, which established its territorial organizational structure, covering almost the entire country. It implemented the Directive of the NP: physical preservation of the population, combating the exploitation of agriculture resources, and the extirpation of polish villages.

As for the further activity of the BP, according to some documents, in January of 1944 some sections of the organization began to join the National Army [3, p. 204]. In June of 1944 some sections of the BP participated in the partisan battles in the woods of Yanov, Leipzig and Solsk – the largest partisan battle in Polish lands during World War II. In 1944, some troops joined the NG. Most, however, remained faithful to the Polish Government in London.

Thus, despite difficult conditions of occupation and terror against Polish population, the most influential political parties, military organizations, based on ideological and financial support of emigration and the Government of W. Sikorskyi established a network of underground state institutions (the Delegature), including the judicial system, which became a kind of foundation for the Polish Underground State. In addition, during the period of 1939–1944 on the basis of influential political parties, including the National Party, there were created underground military organizations which had their territorial, organizational structure, covering almost all the territory of occupied country implementing the programs of the National Party: physical preservation of the population, combating the exploitation of agricultural resources and the destruction of polish rural settlements.

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