

PROPERTY AND ITS ROLE AS INTERPRETED BY POLISH AGRARIANISTS 1933 – 1946

The concept of ownership formulated by Polish agrarianists assumed the creation of a new socio-economic system, pluralistic with regard to the forms of ownership, based on small private ownership in agriculture, craft and retail trade as well as co-operative, self-government and state ownership in the remaining branches of the economy. Opting for maintenance and popularisation of individual ownership (agrarians did not treat it); however, as the absolute (sacred) right, but an institution subjected to social control. They did not condemn variation in financial status, though at the same time, they definitely rejected both far-fetched disproportions in ownership (characteristic of capitalism) as well as equality in the field postulated by communists. Apart from the socio-economic functions, the agrarianists assigned an important political role to ownership. In their opinion, it constituted the protection of a citizen's property, the guarantee of their freedom and the way to a truly democratic political system. Relatedly, they put great emphasis on popularisation and protection of the individual, co-operative and self-governed ownership and referred to state ownership, characteristic of totalitarianism, with great caution.

Keywords: agrarianism, third way, socialisation of ownership

According to the political thought of the turn of the 19th and the 20th centuries a strong differentiation of views concerning property occurred. Apart from ideologies which affirmed (even sacralised) property such as liberalism or conservatism and of communism which aimed at elimination of the private ownership of means of production, there were also vivid ideologies such as socialism, nationalism and agrarianism, whose attitude to the question of property was in between the two above mentioned ones.

The last one mentioned here, i.e. agrarianism was founded in Germany in the second half of the 19th century, but its greatest influence was in the predominantly agricultural countries of the Central and Eastern Europe. The Central European agrarianism was the ideology of peasants and it proclaimed that land was the greatest wealth of the nation, agriculture was the most important branch of economy, and peasants were the morally healthiest and thus the most valuable part of the society. That is why, its main aim was the political and economic subjectification of peasants and formation with the peasants' dominant

participation of a new socio-economic system based on land, work, cooperative movement and economic self-government.¹ Agrarianism was a personalistic ideology, which proclaimed a conception of man as a subject of social and economic life.² It criticised both the extreme liberalism and the totalitarian conceptions of political and economic systems and propagated the conception of “the third way to development” between capitalism and communism.

The history of agrarianism in the Central-Eastern Europe was strictly connected with the rise and development of the peasant movement. In both cases the problem of property played a considerable role at each stage of its development. Questioning of the property structure existing in agriculture of this area and demands of land reform were in the last decades of the 19th century a decisive issue which united peasants politically and stimulated foundation of peasant parties.³ The postulate of land reform was one of the main issues in the programmes of these parties and a permanent element of agrarianist ideology until they were liquidated by communists after World War II. Besides, the discussion going on in the first half of the 20th century on land reform and methods of its implementation as well as on the subject of property relations in agriculture and other branches of economy in general was the main factor of changes in the programmes and ideology in the peasant movement and in agrarianism.

In agrarianism considerations on property were focused for obvious reasons on the problem of land property although its founders also spoke about the property structure in industry, crafts and trade and the role of property on how the state and society functioned.

¹ Tokarczyk Roman, *Współczesne doktryny polityczne* [The Contemporary Political Doctrines], Wolters Kluwer Polska – Kantor Wydawniczy Zakamycze, Kraków 2000, p. 238 – 244; The above subjectification was to consist in granting to peasants of election rights and distribution of land among them (through land reform) which until that time was in the possession of large landed estate owners. In this way “retaining their own identity, peasants were to achieve full civic participation in the life of the nation”; see: Cywiński Bohdan, *...Potęgą jest – i basta. Z minionych doświadczeń ruchów społecznych na wsi* [No Way – There is Power. From the Past Experiences of Social Movements in the Rural Areas], Editions Spotkania, Paris 1983, p. 94.

² S. Miłkowski, the main founder of Polish agrarianism stated unequivocally that “the aim of all economic activity is man – and forms of running economy are only to be the means leading to this aim”; see: Miłkowski Stanisław, *Agraryzm jako forma przebudowy ustroju społecznego* [Agrarianism as a Form of Reconstruction of the Social Order], Nakładem Związku Młodzieży Wiejskiej Spółdzielni Oświatowej w Krakowie [Published by Związek Młodzieży Wiejskiej Spółdzielni Oświatowej in Cracow], Kraków 1934, p. 68.

³ Zakrzewski Andrzej, *Od Stojałowskiego do Witosy* [From Stojałowski to Witos], Krajowa Agencja Wydawnicza, Warszawa 1988, p. 13, 16; Łuczak Aleksander, *Spoleczeństwo i państwo w myśli politycznej ruchu ludowego II Rzeczypospolitej* [The Society and the State in the Political Thought of the Peasant Movement of the Second Republic of Poland], Ludowa Spółdzielnia Wydawnicza, Warszawa 1982, p. 73-74; Michałowski Stanisław, *Lud a niepodległość Polski w myśli politycznej okresu zaborów* [The People and the Independence of Poland in the Political Thought of the Time of Partitions], [in:] Jachymek Jan, Sowa Kazimierz Z., Śliwa Michał (Eds) *Chłopi. Naród. Kultura* [Peasants. Nation. Culture], Vol. I, *Myśl polityczna ruchu ludowego* [The Political Thought of the Peasant Movement], Wydawnictwo Wyższej Szkoły Pedagogicznej, Rzeszów 1996, p. 141 – 145.

The aim of this article is to present a conception of property of Polish agrarianists and their plans of reconstruction of property relationships in Poland. Its aim is also to show what role was ascribed by them to property in the life of individuals and in the society as a whole. Since this study is short, the centre of considerations are the views of representatives of the main current in Polish agrarianism, i.e. so called "wiciowy" or "młodowiejski" [Village Youth] agrarianism. The timeline is the period from the appearance in 1933 of a work of Aleksander Zaleski (Orkacz) titled *Agraryzm. Próba izolacji i syntezy ludowej myśli politycznej* [Agrarianism. An Attempt at Isolation and Synthesis of the Peasant Political Thought] until adoption at the Polskie Stronnictwo Ludowe [Polish Peasant Party] on 19-21 January 1946 of the programme of this party, which is considered as the top achievement of Polish agrarianism.

The basic sources for this article were studies of theorists of agrarianism, programmes of Związek Młodzieży Wiejskiej Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej „Wici” (ZMW RP “Wici”) [Village Youth Association of the Republic of Poland „Wici”], Stronnictwo Ludowe (SL) [Peasant Party] and Polskie Stronnictwo Ludowe (PSL) [Polish Peasant Party], documents in archives collected in Archiwum Zakładu Historii Ruchu Ludowego [Archive of the Department of Peasant Movement History], in particular works by J. Borkowski, T. Chrobak, J. Jachymek, A. Lech, W. Piątkowski, A. Wojtas and J. Ziemiński as well as a collection of articles published in *Roczniki Dziejów Ruchu Ludowego* [Yearbooks of the History of Peasant Movement] from the years 1983-1984 (double issue #23/24) and the journal *Wieś i Państwo* [Village and State] from 1991.⁴

⁴ Borkowski Jan, *Wizje społeczne i zmagania wiciarzy w świetle młodzieżowej prasy ludowej 1928-1939. „Wici”, Znicz, Społem, Młoda Myśl Ludowa, Chłopskie Życie Gospodarcze* [Social Views and Endeavours of ‘Wici’-Activists in the Light of Peasant Youth Press 1929-1939. Wici, Znicz, Społem, Nowa Myśl Ludowa, Chłopskie Życie Gospodarcze], Ludowa Spółdzielnia Wydawnicza, Warszawa 1966; Chrobak Tadeusz, *Filozoficzne przesłanki agraryzmu. Studium wybranych zagadnień* [Philosophical Premises of Agrarianism. A Survey of Selected Problems], Wydawnictwo Wyższej Szkoły Pedagogicznej, Rzeszów 1998; Dąbrowski Stanisław, *Koncepcje przebudowy Polski w programach i publicystyce ruchu ludowego 1939-1945* [Conceptions of Reconstruction of Poland in the Programmes and Journalism of Peasant Movement 1939-1945], Ludowa Spółdzielnia Wydawnicza, Warszawa 1981; Golec Anna, *Agrarystyczne koncepcje gospodarcze* [Agrarianist Economic Conceptions], Wydawnictwo Uniw. Marii Curii-Skłodowskiej, Lublin 1994; Jachymek Jan, *Neoagrarium i trzecia droga. Przebudowa i walka o nową Polskę* [Neo-Agrarianism and the Third Road. Reconstruction and Struggle for the New Poland], "Czas", Lublin 1993; Lech Andrzej, *Agraryzm wiciowy* [‘Wici’-Agrarianism], Wydawnictwo Uniw. Łódzkiego, Łódź 1991; Piątkowski Wiesław, *Wokół idei agraryzmu* [On the Idea of Agrarianism], Naczelny Komitet Wykonawczy Polskiego Stronnictwa Ludowego, Warszawa 1993; Wojtas Andrzej, *Problematyka agrarna w polskiej myśli politycznej 1918-1948* [Agrarian Problematic in Polish Political Thought 1918-1948], Ludowa Spółdzielnia Wydawnicza, Warszawa 1983; Ziemiński Jan, *Z zagadnień genezy i podstawowych założeń ideowo-politycznych agraryzmu w Polsce* [Selected Problems of the Origin and Fundamental Ideological and Political Assumptions of Agrarianism in Poland], Roczniki Dziejów Ruchu Ludowego, Vol. 2, 1960, p. 106-147.

The beginnings of Polish agrarianism are connected with the publicist writings of B. Wysłouch in the journal *Zaranie* and the so called “Zaranie” movement in the Kingdom of Poland in the years 1907–1914. When World War I ended, the idea of agrarianism gained followers in the scientific circles and among members of village youth organisations.⁵ Agrarianism became a fully fledged ideology in Poland at the beginning of the 1930s thanks to a group of activists of Związek Młodzieży Wiejskiej RP “Wici” [Association of Polish Village Youth “Wici”] led by Stanisław Miłkowski. In the course of time, the ideology they developed gained the status of the main trend in Polish agrarianism. Due to the circles in which it was created, it was given the name of “wiciowy” or “młodopolski” agrarianism.⁶ As the only agrarian conceptions in Poland, it gained a large group of followers and exerted a major influence on the history of Polish peasant movement.⁷ Moreover, it appeared one of the most vivid conceptions in the history of Polish political thought of the 20th century since till today it is present in the political life being the ideological basis of the Polish Peasant Party.

The birth and development of the main current of agrarianism in Poland is the result of aspiration and work of a group of intellectuals (usually of peasant origin), members of ZMW RP “Wici” who made an attempt at the beginning of the 30s as a reaction to the economic crisis and authoritarianism to develop on scientific foundations an ideology of peasant movement.⁸ According to them, this ideology corresponded to the social role and aspirations

⁵ Agrarianism came to Poland from Czechoslovakia (and to a lesser degree also from Bulgaria, Yugoslavia, Switzerland and Denmark) through scholars, thinkers and politicians who dealt with problems of agrarianism among others: F. Bujak, W. Grabski, J. Kuncewicz, J. Dąbski, S. Miłkowski and others. The rise and development of agrarianism in Poland is characterised in detail by A. Lech, J. Ziemiński, T. Chrobak in the above mentioned works.

⁶ In the period between the two world wars apart from the peasant movement and village youth organisations, agrarian conceptions were also formulated by representatives of the large landed estates, scholars and by some Roman-Catholic Church representatives. In this way, the next three trends of agrarian thought were formed: that of landed gentry, that of “professorial” (also called an apolitical one) and Catholic one; see: Chrobak Tadeusz, *Filozoficzne ...*, p. 158 – 169; Listowski Anatol, *Uwagi ogólne o zagadnieniach ustroju rolnego* [General Remarks on the Problems of Agricultural Order], [in:] Lutosławski Jan (Ed.), *Księga Pamiątkowa na 75 lecie Gazety Rolniczej 1861-1935. Księga wsi polskiej: źródła, dzieje i kierunek jej kultury* [A Memory Book for 75th Anniversary of ‘Gazeta Rolnicza’ 1861-1935. The Book of Polish Village: Origins, History and Its Cultural Trend], Wydawnictwo Zakładu Narodowego im. Ossolińskich we Lwowie, Warszawa 1938, p. 936, Vol. II, p. 927-941; Bujak Franciszek, *O naprawie ustroju rolnego w Polsce* [On the Improvement of the Land Reform in Poland], Gebethner i Wolff, Kraków 1919; Belch Józef, *Katolickie odrodzenie wsi* [The Renaissance of the Village], S. A. “Ostoja”, Poznań 1939.

⁷ Agrarianism was the foundation of political programmes of the following organisations: ZMW PR „Wici” from 1935 to 1948, Stronnictwo Ludowe from 1935 to 1939, conspiratorial Stronnictwo Ludowe „Roch” during World War II and Polskie Stronnictwo Ludowe from 1945 to 47; see: Lato Stanisław, Stankiewicz Witold, *Programy stronnictw ludowych* [Programmes of Peasant Parties], Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, Warszawa 1969, p. 315, 336 – 337, 367 – 368, 370, 380, 450 – 452, 457 – 458.

⁸ According to the founders of agrarianism, the authoritarian political system (including the so called “szlachetczyzna” [nobilitism] and “paternalism”, which were relicts of feudal relations) and monopoly capitalism caused deprivation and poverty in villages and that is why they should be eliminated and replaced by a solution which would guarantee freedom and social justice.

of peasants and enabled solution of the most important social, economic and political issues in Poland, including those of villages and agriculture.

The main socio-economic postulates resulted from the rejection of the monopolistic capitalism, which was responsible for the crisis and communism, which was the threat to peasant property and negation of the hitherto property structure in Polish agriculture, industry and trade. Criticising capitalism and communism and their approach to the problem of property, agrarianists endeavoured to establish a socio-economic system which would remove the contradiction between the capital and the labour and which would protect the workers against exploitation and of small owners (peasants in particular) against expropriation. This was to be a system that would be “adopted to human nature”, the system which would “bind man with the results of his work and the one which would guarantee economic development and a just distribution of national income.”⁹

A turning point in the history of Polish agrarianism was the publication in the years 1933-1934 of works by Aleksander Zaleski (Orkacz) titled *Agraryzm. Próba izolacji i syntezy ludowej myśli politycznej* [Agrarianism. An Attempt at Isolation and Synthesis of the Peasant Political Thought], by Jerzy Kuncewicz titled *Na nowych drogach. Próba programu z uwzględnieniem potrzeby koniecznej przebudowy życia społecznego i państwowego* [On the New Roads. An Attempt to Develop a Programme of Taking into Account of the Need to Reconstruct Social and State Life] and by Stanisław Miłkowski titled *Agraryzm jako forma przebudowy ustroju społecznego* [Agrarianism as a Form of Reconstruction of the Social Order].¹⁰ The latter work in a comprehensive and coherent manner presented the outlook and goals of the village youth’ movement and thus its author gained the status of the most important representative of Polish agrarianism.¹¹

Apart from the above mentioned works, the most important publications and documents are: another work by S. Miłkowski, *Walka o nową Polskę* [The Fight for the New Poland], of 1936, *Deklaracja społeczno-gospodarcza ZMW RP* [The Socio-Economic

⁹ Miłkowski Stanisław, *Agraryzm...*, p. 43.

¹⁰ Zaleski Aleksander (Orkacz), *Agraryzm. Próba izolacji i syntezy ludowej myśli politycznej* [Agrarianism. An Attempt at Isolation and Synthesis of the Peasant Political Thought], publisher unknown, Warszawa 1933; Kuncewicz Jerzy, *Na nowych drogach. Próba programu z uwzględnieniem potrzeby koniecznej przebudowy życia społecznego i państwowego* [On New Roads. An Attempt at Taking into Account of the Need of Required Reconstruction of Social and State Life], Wydawnictwo “Piaś”, Cieszyn 1934; Miłkowski Stanisław, *Agraryzm...*

¹¹ Personally, S. Miłkowski did not claim to be the founder of agrarianism and emphasised that his work was the result of discussions and debates going on in the circle of Cracow students and during conferences on the ideology of the ZMW RP in Kępa Celejowska 2-10 July 1933 and in Otfinów 23-26 July 1933; see: Lech Andrzej, *Agraryzm...*, p. 17; Miłkowski Stanisław, *Agraryzm...*, p. 8-9.

Declaration of ZMW RP] of 28 October 1935, *Program Stronnictwa Ludowego* [Peasant Party Programme] of 7 December 1935, *Uchwała Walnego Zjazdu Delegatów ZMW RP* [The Resolution of the General Congress of the Delegates of ZMW RP] of 11 December 1937, *Deklaracja ideowo-programowa Ruchu Ludowego* [The Ideological and Programme Declaration of the Peasant Movement] of the Centralne Kierownictwo Ruchu Ludowego [The Central Committee of the Peasant Movement] of December 1943, *Deklaracja ideowo-programowa ZMW RP "Wici"* [The Ideological and Programme Declaration of ZMW RP "Wici"] adopted at the Walny Zjazd Delegatów [The General Congress of Delegates] of 18 December 1945 and the Programme of Polskie Stronnictwo Ludowe of 19-21 January 1946

¹²

In his work, A. Zaleski set "the right to land", according to which "every man deprived of work, capable of doing farm work, has the right to get as much farmland as is needed to sufficiently feed and maintain his family", against the capitalist property right and socialist right to work.¹³

He supported land reform with compensation paid to the former owners of the land, however, in some particular circumstances, he allowed the possibility of deviating from this rule. He accepted economic liberalism (understood as an economy based on private property and freedom), but criticised the rule of great monopoly capital, nameless anonymous joint ventures, stock exchange speculation, dumping, price dictation and, generally, the monopolistic capitalism. At the same time, A. Zaleski was very much against making everybody equal mechanically, but he was also against excessive differences in the possession of material goods. He was in favour of offering equal opportunity to people from different social groups through equal access to education, but also through allocation of "the proper amount of land for people to set up their own self-dependent farms".¹⁴ According to A.

¹² In the brochure *Walka o nową Polskę*, S. Miłkowski developed his views and compared the programmes adopted by ZMW RP and SL, both of which were based on the principles of agrarianism; see: Miłkowski Stanisław, *Pisma publicystyczne 1930 – 1939* [Journalistic Writings 1930-1939], Wiesław Piątkowski (Ed.), Ludowa Spółdzielnia Wydawnicza, Warszawa 1936; Borkowski Jan, Kowal Józef (Eds), *Materiały źródłowe do historii polskiego ruchu ludowego* [Source Materials for the History of Polish Peasant Movement], Vol. III (1931-1939), Ludowa Spółdzielnia Wydawnicza, Warszawa 1966, p. 249; Gołębiowski Edward, Jarecka-Kimłowska Stanisława (Eds), *Związek Młodzieży Wiejskiej RP „Wici”. W walce o postęp i sprawiedliwość społeczną. Wybór dokumentów 1928-1948* [Village Youth Association of the Republic of Poland „Wici”. The Fight for Progress and Social Justice], Ludowa Spółdzielnia Wydawnicza. Warszawa 1978, p. 109, 145, 249; Nowak Jan, Mańkowski Zygmunt (Eds), *Materiały źródłowe do historii polskiego ruchu ludowego* [Source Materials for the History of Polish Peasant Movement]. Vol. IV (1939 – 1945), Ludowa Spółdzielnia Wydawnicza, Warszawa 1966, p. 245; Lato Stanisław, Stankiewicz Witold, *Programy ...*, p. 354; Dąbrowski Stanisław, *Koncepcje ...*, p. 92 – 100.

¹³ Zaleski Aleksander (Orkacz), *Agraryzm. Próba izolacji ...*, p. 29 – 30.

¹⁴ *ibidem*, p. 23.

Zaleski, land reform was to counteract overproduction and at the same time satisfy the hunger for land and lift unemployment through creation of small self-sufficient farms in the place of large profit bringing ones. That is why land reform was a universal means against crisis in agriculture in a situation when the state could take for it “almost free of charge the landed estates of almost all its owners for back taxes and debts in banks without any disputes – whether for compensation or without any compensation – and without lifting the property right safeguarded in the Constitution.”¹⁵ Owners of the newly established “self-sufficient agricultural workshops” were supposed to work and gradually return to the society the value of the land received. If he was decisively for land reform and establishing of small, as he described them, “self-sufficient” farms in agriculture, he did not see any need of more radical property changes in industry and accepted “the existence of large workshops, which with the present development of technology produce better results”.¹⁶ He also spoke in his work for social solidarism, democratic system and cooperative movement. His conception of reconstruction of property relations, which assumed taking over indebted landed estates by the state and offering land for payment to those who had no or very little land was an attempt at reconciliation of the changes in the agricultural structure with economic liberalism and the principle of private property.

Like all agrarianists, J. Kuncewicz considered agriculture as the most important branch of economy, glorified peasants and claimed that „land as a workshop of productive labour should be in the possession of farmers” and in other cases it could „be the property of individuals to such an extent as there are needs of their home and farm”.¹⁷

Large landed estates were considered by him as „the anachronism of the past epoch of cereal production”, which should be liquidated and parcelled out among peasants. These estates were to be bought by the state for “for a decent price” with the reservation that those whose landed estates would be expropriated would invest the sums received in the development of industry. He considered expropriation without compensation as dangerous and remarked that it offers chances to “least valuable and most rapacious individuals”.¹⁸

To him work and the possibility to use its results by an individual were most important. However, he imposed restrictions on property and ownership since:

tamed by human genius and effort, the powers and features of nature cannot be the basis of profits for a small group of people; but they must be a subject of universal prosperity. Subordination of the

¹⁵ *ibidem*, p. 49- 50

¹⁶ *ibidem*, p. 24, 31

¹⁷ Kuncewicz Jerzy, *Na nowych drogach*, p. 30.

¹⁸ *ibidem*, p. 61.

technological progress to the universal good will prevent injustice, which seemingly flows today from this progress. **Under these conditions property is actually a life-long and inherited use** [emphasis – T.J.]. This use cannot be taken away from anybody in case of the effective and purposeful managing of the production workshop. Destruction of the universal good through its faulty management is sufficient enough to take this workshop away without any compensation at court.¹⁹

When further justifying in his work the conception of property as „life-long use”, he claimed that:

all material goods, no matter in whose hands they are, are the result of effort and work of a great number of generations, they must be treated as a common good and due to this treated as a social deposit in the hands of their users today.²⁰

As can be seen from the above, J. Kuncewicz appreciated the importance of private property and was convinced that there was a necessity of preserving it, but under condition of its being submitted to social control and that it would be used to create universal prosperity. He was also in favour of economic planning, which was supposed to solve the question of unemployment and to lead to a balance between production in particular branches of economy and to ensure to wide masses of peasant their share in the social income and to widespread among the society material goods which, in his opinion, had a positive influence on the position of man since:

widespreading of material goods will allow and order preservation of the principle of individual property, a property which under new conditions, devoid of the features of sanctity and inviolability, will enable an individual to preserve his material freedom.²¹

In this way, J. Kuncewicz drew attention to the importance of property for man’s freedom and subjectivity, which beside the conception of property as „a life-long use” and social control of property was his greatest contribution into the development of agrarianism in Poland.

A. Zaleski’s and J. Kuncewicz’s publications influenced the development of the Polish agrarianist thought, however, the most extensive and most complete study presenting the conception of the „third way” was S. Miłkowski’s work *Agraryzm jako forma przebudowy ustroju społecznego* a large part of which was devoted to property and its role in the functioning of economy and society.²²

¹⁹ *ibidem*, p. 19

²⁰ *ibidem*, p. 61

²¹ *ibidem*, p. 54-56.

²² Starting in 1935, the theses contained in S. Miłkowski’s work became a basis of the programmes of ZMW RP and SL as well as of PSL.

S. Miłkowski started his considerations from the criticism of monopolistic capitalism, which was responsible for the poverty of peasants and workers and of communism, which deprived peasants of their property and freedom. He treated the Great Depression as a proof of “the decline of the capitalist system”, which, according to him, required fundamental reforms in all domains of economic life, including a thorough reconstruction of property relations.²³

Since in the capitalist system based on liberalism, the principle of unrestricted and inviolable property leads to exploitation and poverty of social groups S. Miłkowski postulated „lifting of private property where it becomes the source of exploitation and where social reasons require it”. However, agrarianism in his interpretation: „does not claim that private property should be eliminated altogether and the whole society should become proletarian” since “the main (...) assumption of agrarianism is the creation of a system adopted to human nature and connecting man with the results of his work”.

The above thesis was the result of his observation that “man in his nature has a quite deeply rooted instinct of possession and usually works differently when he is aware that the results of his work will be shared by him”.²⁴ Against this background, Miłkowski criticises communism, which deprives people of their property and “kills in man motivation of personal activity and private initiative” and also capitalism in which “private initiative and unrestricted free competition often lead to exploitation and to the economic anarchy”. In contradistinction to the above mentioned ideologies, agrarianism as interpreted by S. Miłkowski:

while preserving motivation of individual activity and private initiative, wants to make them the driving power of progress and a source of more efficient work for the good of an individual and the whole society.²⁵

That is why:

he accepts private property everywhere where it is necessary because of the kind of production and dependence of the efficiency of production on the individual attitude of the economic subject to a given workshop. Hence agrarianism does not totally preclude economic liberalism, but it tries to extract and preserve from it that which is positive and creative.²⁶

Like J. Kuncewicz, S. Miłkowski emphasised the significance of property for the preservation by peasants of their independence and self-dependence. In this context he quoted in his work

²³ Miłkowski Stanisław, *Agraryzm...*, p. 21 – 24.

²⁴ *ibidem*, p. 43

²⁵ *ibidem*, p. 44

²⁶ *ibidem*, p. 44

an opinion of one of the precursors of agrarianism and the founder of folk universities, Ignacy Solarz:

One of the inestimable spiritual values, which can be offered by the possession of a peasant farm is the sense and fact of personal independence either to the violence of the capital or political power. If almost every other social group becomes corrupt morally, they break being forced by their need to have daily bread, to give up their convictions or to lie hypocritically, when clerks sell themselves, teachers-educators lie, workers conceal their faith and become silent out of fear of losing their jobs, it is only the peasant who has enough courage to speak his own mind publicly and bravely since he feels that he eats his own bread, which grew on his own land and which he produced himself. This possibility of maintaining independence of convictions and of expressing them is such an important means of defence of the most essential content of democracy and a factor of its progress.²⁷

If in reference to individual property and private initiative as well as of their social role, S. Miłkowski's attitude was similar to that of A. Zaleski and J. Kuncewicz, his view concerning the question of property relations in Polish economy and the necessary changes in it, he was decisively more radical. For obvious reasons, in his work he devoted most space and attention to the agricultural issues. After having negated the hitherto agricultural structure and recognising a self-dependent peasant farm as the foundation of the future agricultural system, he said that through land should "be transferred into the hands of those who work on it personally, and for whom it will be a workshop. No one can possess land who has not worked on it" through land reform and that there should be no compensation paid to the former owners.²⁸

S. Miłkowski justified peasants' right to land by the fact that their predecessors worked on the land of estate owners and in the course of this work they had "paid even more" than its value. He also justified the necessity of division of large landed estates into small farms by the greater productivity of the latter (here he referred to W. Grabski's conception of deconcentration of land) and to the attachment to "one's own piece of land" and to work on one's own so deeply rooted in peasants' psyche.²⁹

Apart from the reconstruction of property relations in agriculture, S. Miłkowski also postulated socialisation of factories, coalmines and banks and elimination of the private trade

²⁷ Miłkowski Stanisław, *Agraryzm...*, p. 38

²⁸ *ibidem*, p. 50; The idea of land reform without compensation was discussed within the peasant movement since the beginning of the 30s, and particularly intensively since W. Witos's interview in 1932, in which he spoke in favour of such a solution of the agricultural question; see: Zakrzewski Andrzej, *Wincenty Witos. Chłopski polityk i mąż stanu* [Wincenty Witos. A Peasant Politician and Statesman]. Ludowa Spółdzielnia Wydawnicza. Warszawa 1978, p. 292.

²⁹ Miłkowski Stanisław, *Agraryzm...*, p. 49; Agrarianists referred in particular to two works by Władysław Grabski titled *Znaczenie czynników psychicznych w produkcji rolnej* [The Importance of Psychic Factors in Agricultural Production], publisher unknown, Warszawa 1927 and *Wieś i folwark. Drobne i duże gospodarstwa rolne ze stanowiska ekonomicznego* [Village and Manor Farm. Small and Large Farms from the Economic Point of View], Drukarnia M. Grasińskiego, Warszawa 1930.

mediation. Industry should become the property of “organised society” through expropriation and without buyout.³⁰ This was mainly to be the case of great industry while small and medium-sized companies should become “some form of cooperatives”. Also private banks should be expropriated and in their place credit cooperatives and savings and credit institutions, “which would be in the hands of economic self-government”, should be established.³¹

Since Miłkowski considered private trade mediation in the capitalist system as one of the forms of exploitation (particularly of poorly organised peasants), it should be replaced with cooperative trade so that according to the general assumptions of agrarianism “each man (...) would live off his own work”.³²

In connection with the postulated land reform, S. Miłkowski saw the problem of the shortage of capital for the start of a business in case of many peasants who either owned no or very little land. That is why as a temporary solution he allowed collective forms of property and working on land in the form of production cooperatives through the establishing of self-dependent, separate farms.³³

Generally speaking, from S. Miłkowski’s work emerges a conception of the far-reaching reconstruction of property relations in all sectors of economy, consisting in elimination of the large landed estates and socialisation of industry and trade. At the same time he claimed that preservation of private property even though a small one in agriculture is necessary and useful due to economic and social reasons while it is harmful and unnecessary in the other sectors of economy.

Taking into consideration the attitude to private property and the postulated scope of changes in property relations in Poland, the agrarianist conceptions of A. Zaleski and J.

³⁰ When presenting the conception of socialisation of economy, agrarianists wanted to prevent excessive state control of the economy. S. Miłkowski understood the concept of “organised society” as workers of the above mentioned companies, bound by the results of their work and organised in economic self-government so that man in the new system “was not only a passive tool, performing mindlessly and mechanically the operations which he was told to do, but that he should become a cooperating and co-creating new life”; see: Miłkowski Stanisław, *Agraryzm ...*, p. 68.

³¹ Previous owners of factories, foundries and banks were to obtain only small sums of money set as “the highest norm of possession during the reconstruction of the system”. As far as the former land owners are concerned, it was provided that they would keep “either farms as workshops of work on their land for themselves and their families or they would be paid money which would not exceed the value of a medium-sized farm”; see: *Materiały źródłowe do historii polskiego ruchu ludowego*, vol. 3 (1931-1939), p.178; Miłkowski Stanisław, *Agraryzm...*, p. 62.

³² Miłkowski Stanisław, *Agraryzm...*, p. 67.

³³ *ibidem*, p. 55-56.

Kuncewicz may be described as moderate ones while S. Miłkowski's views as radical ones.³⁴ In the course of discussion on agrarianism, which was going on in the circles of ZMW RP "Wici" in the years 1934-1935, A. Zaleski's and J. Kuncewicz's moderate conceptions were dominated by S. Miłkowski's views.³⁵ No doubt this state of affairs was influenced by the economic crisis, the growing authoritarianism of the sanacja [Sanation] government and the general political radicalisation of Polish youth in the middle of the 30s. In these circumstances, an unequivocal condemnation of capitalism and undemocratic forms of wielding power and postulates of expropriation of large land estate owners better suited the mood prevalent in the society.³⁶

In the columns of peasant press associated with ZMW PR "Wici", „Młoda Myśl Ludowa” [Young Peasants' Thought] and "Znicz" [Torch] opinions were published in defence of private property in industry and against expropriation without compensation (among others by T. Rek, A. Zaleski and J. Kuncewicz), but they were criticised and rejected by the more radical majority, especially S. Miłkowski, J. Niećko, L. Lutyk and S. Młodożeniec.³⁷

Starting in 1935, S. Miłkowski's conception which combined the postulate of preservation of individual property (which would be subordinated to social interest and which was not the basis of exploitation of one man by another), which demanded thorough changes in the property structure in Poland became a canon of agrarianist thought and a part of the official ideology of peasant movement. S. Miłkowski's views on property became a foundation of appropriate point in the 1935 and 1945 programmes of ZMW RP "Wici", SL of

³⁴ Here the relativity of the adopted division into the moderate and the radical one should be emphasised, particularly where the location of agrarianism in the whole of socio-political conceptions, which were developed in the interwar Poland since from the point of view of the Narodowa Demokracja [National Democracy], landed gentry and the Church the whole agrarianism was a leftist ideology or even the one which tended towards communism.

³⁵ The exception were the youth from the Wielkopolski Związek Młodzieży Wiejskiej and their press organ „Społem”. In contradistinction to Warsaw and Cracow agrarianists, the inhabitants of Wielkopolska (although they were officially in favour of the agrarian point of view) did not totally condemn capitalism until 1939 and defended private property, they did not support unequivocally expropriation without compensation, see: Borkowski Jan, *Wizje społeczne...*, p. 209-211.

³⁶ At this stage, agrarianism has most of its supporters among country youths, but the conception of "the third way of social development", i.e. an endeavour to create "the peasant democracy" as a system between capitalism and socialism also found its supporters among peasants-farm owners for who the model were the economic and political relations (including the role of peasants and agrarianism) in Czechoslovakia, Denmark and Switzerland.

³⁷ In one of his articles, Leon Lutyk said simply that "property, an inviolable taboo in the capitalist system should be lifted. Preservation of property would result not from its dogmatic inviolability, but only due to profits of social economy and only there and so much where and how much it is necessary and useful"; see: Lutyk Leon, *Ustrój państwowo-społeczny w ramach ideologii agraryzmu* [A State and Economic System according to the Agrarianist Ideology], *Młoda Myśl Ludowa*, nr 7/1935.

1935, SL „Roch” of 1943 and PSL of 1946.³⁸ From 1935 the development of agrarianism was closely connected with the development of political thought and programmes of peasant movement.

Authors of the above mentioned programmes consistently spoke in favour of expropriation of large landed property to owners without compensation, socialisation of industry, banks and trade by the organised society (especially by cooperatives and economic self-government) and it was emphasised that the only “title to sharing profits is man’s work”, and “private property must be subordinated to the social interest of utmost importance and cannot be the basis of exploitation of man by man”.³⁹

The conception of property formulated in this way did not change much until the independent peasant movement ceased to exist in 1947. Modifications from the time of World War II and just after it ended were concerned with the role of state in economy and dissemination of property not only among peasants but also of other social groups who lived off their own work. The first modification was connected with the agrarianists’ resignation of the earlier thesis of the prevalence of agriculture over industry and that of the country over the city and admitting of the need to industrialise the country as a precondition of “finding jobs for the excess number of village population”.⁴⁰ In turn, the second change was a result of ever more stressed interdependence of preservation of private property and development of democracy and was a tool of gaining supporters not only among peasants but also other social groups.⁴¹

As early as the first half of the 30s under the influence of observations of economic life in the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics and in Germany, agrarianists developed a

³⁸ S. Miłkowski personally took part in developing programmes of ZMW RP „Wici”, SL of 1935 r. and SL „Roch” of 1943. In the latter case since the spring of 1940 he was Chairman of Komisja Programowa Centralnego Kierownictwa Ruchu Ludowego [Programme Commission of the Central Committee of the Peasant Movement], which allowed him to invest the Deklaracja Ideowo-programowa Stronnictwa Ludowego „Roch” [The Declaration of Ideological Programme of Peasant Party “Roch”] with a strictly agrarianist character; see: Polski Słownik Biograficzny [Polish Biographical Dictionary], Vol. 21, p. 261-262; Lato Stanisław, Stankiewicz Witold, *Programy...*, s. 315, 336-337, 367-368, 370, 380, 450-452, 457-458; Dąbrowski Stanisław, *Koncepcje...*, s. 70-102.

³⁹ Lato Stanisław, Stankiewicz Witold, *Programy...*, p. 336.

⁴⁰ *ibidem*, p. 336.

⁴¹ Before the war the peasant movement was of a class character. During the war activities were undertaken to extend its social base. In this connection a new conception of peasant movement, which should not only be the peasant movement, but should be a movement on the national scale, whose base and vanguard are peasants. Similarly, agrarianism, which before the war was an ideology of village youth organised in ZMW “Wici” organised an action during which it gained supporters among the other inhabitants of villages and after it ended, when PSL, which referred to agrarianism and which became the only opposition party of importance, became an ideology of the all-nation character.

negative attitude to state control and a too far-reaching interference of the state in the economic life, which in their opinion was characteristic of totalitarian systems and dangerous to the small private property. Moreover, they were afraid that profits of the companies would be intercepted by state treasury and they were convinced (as it was expressed by S. Miłkowski) that:

state bureaucracy by its very nature is clumsy and whatever it does, it does worse and more expensively than an individual who is interested in the results of his work”, [that is why] “the whole economic life should be based on the society and organisations set up by it – and the tasks of the state be would general supervision and care.⁴²

Still during the work on the programme of the peasant movement in 1943 which concerned the future property structure in industry, it was considered that “the direct nationalisation and administration by the government to be the worst form of socialisation.”⁴³ However, in the final version of the programme the necessity of industrialisation of the country was recognised and a conception of two forms of socialisation of industry was adopted. Apart from taking over of industrial plants by the organised society (mainly by cooperatives and self-government), which was postulated as early as the 1930s, existence of state property was allowed, which was expressed in the Deklaracja Ideowo-Programowa of December 1943 that:

military industry, industries and facilities of key importance for the whole social economy (raw materials industries, mining, foundries, means of transport and the like) and large forest areas should be nationalised.⁴⁴

In the same Declaration when referring to companies which were not nationalised, they stated in accordance with the conception of social control, which was characteristic of agrarianism that “an industrial or trade companies, which are in private hands, will be submitted to the control of associations of economic self-government according to the general economic plan”.⁴⁵ Acceptance of state property in some selected areas of national economy could also be found in the 1946 PSL programme. However, according to the general endeavour of agrarianists to disseminate and strengthen the (small) individual private property it was distinctly stressed that:

⁴² Miłkowski Stanisław, *Agraryzm ...*, p. 48, 48-49.

⁴³ Archiwum Zakładu Historii Ruchu Ludowego (AZHRL), Centralne Kierownictwo Ruchu Ludowego „Roch”, Wydział Planowania. Projekty i zagadnienia – 1943 [Archive of the Department of the History of Peasant Movement. The Main Leadership of the Peasant Movement „Roch”. Planning Department. Projects and Issues – 1943], catalogue number: 13, document: *Tezy ustrojowo-gospodarcze i polityki gospodarczej* [Theses on Political and Economic System and Economic Policy], p. 9.

⁴⁴ Lato Stanisław, Stankiewicz Witold, *Programy ...*, p. 337

⁴⁵ *ibidem*, p. 337.

nationalisation of the main branches of national economy cannot inhibit the development of purposeful private initiative where it is socially useful and is an indisputably higher form of economy than any other forms” and they warned that „State monopoly in economy can force workers to consent to low living standards and endanger them with a new coercion and pressure on the part of the state economic administration⁴⁶ .

It is just the conception of dissemination and reinforcing/strengthening of small individual property contained in the Deklaracja Ideowo-Programowa SL “Roch”, and particularly in the programme of PSL of 1946 was the second significant change in agrarianists’ approach to the problem of property. In contradistinction to ideological declarations and political programmes of the 30s in which only peasants’ property deserved particular protection and recognition, in the PSL programme of 1946 it was said that:

The area of private initiative and property should be farms, small and medium-sized industry, which would not exceed the norms, handicrafts and certain categories of trade. Private initiative in these branches deserves protection and support of the state and economic self-government.⁴⁷

The above approach to property, which distinctly deviates from the radical conceptions of the 30s, was to help peasant movement to take the role of the representative of interests of the whole nation (at least its most numerous social strata) and in taking over power in the liberated country. It was the result of the thesis that was more and more stressed by agrarianists that individual property is a foundation of self-dependence and independence of an individual and thus a condition of development of democracy. They expressed this conviction unequivocally in their 1946 programme when they said that:

Usable personal property is not a tool of man’s exploitation but it safeguards personal independence of a citizen and is the foundation of a truly democratic system. That is why citizens’ endeavour to possess either his own workshop or house or a flat is justified from the point of view of social good and should be supported by the state.⁴⁸

Speaking in favour of preservation of private property, agrarianism proclaimed the necessity of subordinating it to the overall social interest. That is why economy, no matter what its form of property (state, socialised or private), was to be subordinated to a uniform system of planned economy, in which agriculture and industry were to be equally important and should run parallel to each other.⁴⁹

SUMMARY

⁴⁶ *ibidem*, p. 369-370.

⁴⁷ *ibidem* p. 370.

⁴⁸ *ibidem*, p.370.

⁴⁹ *ibidem*, p. 370.

Next to work, property was the main economic category in Polish agrarianism. Agrarianists, starting from the assumption of S. Miłkowski that “the aim of all reforms is man as an individual and a community and everything else must be a means leading to this aim”, created a conception of “social democracy” based on “socialised individualism” in which due to economic and psychological reasons were in favour of preservation of private property serving the development of an individual and society.⁵⁰ This property was to be subordinated to overall social interest and the building of the universal prosperity and which would not be the basis of exploitation of one man by another.

This type of property was to be the foundation of a new socio-economic system which would preserve and disseminate private property (in the form of small farms and small but even medium industrial and trade companies, sharing of profits and co-ownership of industrial plants and usable personal property) “adopted to human nature” and binding “man with the results of his work” and guaranteeing economic development and just division of national income.

To carry it out, agrarianists foresaw a fundamental reconstruction of property relations in Poland, which would consist in liquidation (through land reform) of large land estates and socialisation (i.e. taking over by cooperatives and economic self-government) of the majority of industrial and trade companies. The armaments industry, and industries and facilities, which were of key importance to the whole economy as well as large forest areas were to be nationalised.

As a result a new, pluralistic as far as the forms of property are concerned, socio-economic system was to arise, which would be based on small private property in agriculture, handicrafts and retail trade and on the cooperative, self-government and state property and which would help realise the idea of economic democracy, which, according to agrarianists, was a precondition of existence of political and social democracy.

Speaking in favour of preservation and dissemination of individual property, agrarianists did not treat it as an absolute right (“sanctified one”), but as an institution which could be submitted to social control. The basic criterion of evaluation was the contribution of a given form of property into the development of man and society and building of universal prosperity.

Due to this, they particularly appreciated the individual peasant value as well as cooperative value, which were effective and just from the economic point of view and had a

⁵⁰ Miłkowski Stanisław, *Agraryzm...*, p. 41; Miłkowski Stanisław, *Pisma...*, p. 352.

positive influence on man's development and psyche. In agrarianists' opinion, a peasant who worked on his farm did not exploit anybody and at the same time was not exploited by anybody since he was neither a capitalist nor a proletarian, but "self-dependent producer, who worked in his own workshop" and in this way property and labour were creatively combined. Such a form of economy develops self-dependence and responsibility in people as well as "the sense of law and order in the economic, social and civic life".⁵¹

In turn, a special value of cooperative property consisted in this that it led to the increase of prosperity through a good will cooperation of one man with another and through bringing mutual help.⁵² Based on good will association and equality of members it did not preclude the value of an individual and was not a threat to his property (in opposition to Soviet style collectivisation), but at the same time it was a sum of individual initiatives and a common effort towards the economic and social development. Agrarianists emphasised that in connection with the performance of various social tasks by cooperatives, in this form of economy (as distinct from capital joint ventures) "money ceases to be the aim and master, but is resolved to the role of means."⁵³ Also because of the democratic decision making, the cooperative movement was a model of economic democracy, which they postulated.

Seeing the motivational role of property, agrarianists did not condemn differences in material status although they decisively rejected both too great differences in this status (which is so characteristic of capitalism) and equality, which was postulated by communists. In this connection, they did not preclude the possibility of getting rich by some people providing the source of this prosperity was one's own work. This kind of differences in affluence was considered by them to agree with social justice. At the same time the upper limits of riches gained in this way were not precisely determined and only "goods owned in excess" and "the highest norm of possession" were mentioned.⁵⁴

Apart from the socio-economic functions agrarianists ascribed to property a politically very important role. According to them, it was protecting citizens' independence, was a guarantee of their freedom and in this way it became a foundation of a truly democratic

⁵¹ Miłkowski Stanisław, *Agraryzm...*, p. 37; Golec Anna, *Poglądy ludowców na własność środków produkcji* [Views of Peasant Activists on the Ownership of Means of Production], [in:] Jachymek Jan, Sowa Kazimierz Z., Śliwa Michał (Eds), *Chłopi. Naród. Kultura*, Vol. I, p. 334; Miłkowski Stanisław, *Na szlakach walki o samodzielną myśl chłopską* [On the Route of Struggle for the Independent Peasant Thoughts], *Młoda Myśl Ludowa*, nr 13/1934.

⁵² Miłkowski Stanisław, *Agraryzm...*, p. 46; Lato Stanisław, Stankiewicz Witold, *Programy...*, p. 368.

⁵³ Miłkowski Stanisław, *Agraryzm ...*, p. 45.

⁵⁴ Zaleski Aleksander, *Agraryzm. Próba izolacji...*, p. 20-22; Miłkowski Stanisław, *Agraryzm...*, p. 62.

system. This conviction was strengthened in them by the analysis of the Great Depression and the economic life in the Soviet Union and in the Nazi Germany. It could be seen that a characteristic feature of development of large corporations and totalitarianisms was the occurrence of a relationship between restriction (or even liquidation) of small private property and deprivation of people of their freedom. Since agrarianists clearly spoke in favour of the democratic system, that is why they put strong emphasis on the dissemination and protection of individual, cooperative and self-government property and their attitude to state property, which was characteristic of totalitarianism, was very cautious.

In Poland after World War II the conception of “the third way” between capitalism and proposed communism, which combined the idea of preservation of property and private initiative (at least as far as farms, crafts, small scale industry and trade are concerned) with the idea of social justice (in its framework land reform, socialisation of industry and elimination of contradictions between capital and labour) quickly gained popularity which led, among other things, to a conflict with communists. It is a paradox that the latter after the failure of collectivisation and subsequent crises of socialist economy were forced to accept a socio-economic system, which was pluralistic as far as forms of property are concerned and which was devised by agrarianists whom they fought.

Tadeusz Janicki – doktor habilitowany historii, adiunkt w Zakładzie Historii Gospodarczej Instytutu Historii UAM w Poznaniu. Laureat Nagrody Prezesa Rady Ministrów za wyróżniającą się pracę doktorską (1995). Autor licznych publikacji, m.in.. książki *Wieś w Kraju Warty (1939-1945)*. W latach 2007 – 2010 uczestnik międzynarodowego grantu *Agrarismus in Ostmitteleuropa 1890–1960* (Viadrina Universität).
e-mail: wyki@amu.edu.pl

Tadeusz Janicki – Ph.D. in history, adjunct professor at the Department of Economic history of the economic history of Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań. Laureate of the Prize of Prime Minister for an outstanding Ph.D. dissertation (1995). Author of numerous publications including a book *Wieś w Kraju Warty (1939-1945)* [Village in the Warthegau]. In 2007-2010 a participant in the international research programme *Agrarismus in Ostmitteleuropa 1890–1960* [Agrarianism in East-Central Europe] at Viadrina Universität.
e-mail: wyki@amu.edu.pl