

REZENSION

Przemysław Gasztold-Señ: Koncesjonowany nacjonalizm. Zjednoczenie Patriotyczne Grunwald 1980–1990

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Reviewed by August Grabski.

The Patriotic Union Grunwald¹ was a very well-known ‘anti-Zionist’ organization in Poland in the 1980s and targeted ‘Zionists,’ German revisionists, and the leadership of the ‘Solidarity’ movement, which was accused of yielding to anti-Polish influences. Grunwald was dominated by people representing various anti-Semitic views, rather ineptly disguised as anti-Zionism. In practice, their so-called ‘anti-Zionism’ consisted mainly in attacking anti-communist dissidents of Jewish origin as ‘Zionists’ or ‘Trotskyists’ and in blaming Stalinism in Poland for communist activists of Jewish origin.

In the 1980s the Union became a public issue in Poland covered intensively by national and local media. It also caused considerable alarm in the Jewish community in Poland and elsewhere. The significance of Grunwald was highlighted even by popular films from the 1980s, such as the television series *Alternatywy 4* and *Zmiennicy*, which made satirical references to the activities of this organization. However, it is only recently, more than twenty years after the liquidation of Grunwald, that the first monographic study on the subject was published.

Przemysław Gasztold-Señ’s study follows the ideological pattern characteristic of the *Institute of National Remembrance* [IPN], which favours narratives that merely evaluate the anti-communist opposition as positive, whereas the Polish People’s Republic is invariably criticized. Nevertheless, it has to be admitted that the results of the author’s extensive archival research dispel many misconceptions about Grunwald, which have been well established in both journalism and academic writing. This refers mainly to such questions as to the membership and influence of Grunwald, the political profile of this organization, and its relations with the Ministry of Internal Affairs.

Let us begin with the first aspect. The historian Marcin Zaremba estimated that there were about 250.000 members of Grunwald.² In 1981 various figures—100,000,

¹ Officially registered by the authorities in April 1981.

² Zaremba, Marcin: *Komunizm, legitymizacja, nacjonalizm. Nacjonalistyczna legitymizacja władzy komunistycznej w Polsce* [Communism, Legitimation, Nationalism. The Nationalist Legitimation of Communist Rule in Poland], Warszawa 2001, p. 385.

200,000 or 250,000—circulated in the Polish press. Gasztold-Señ argues that the true number could not have been more than 1300 fee-paying members of whom only some—about several hundred—were active (p. 115). This was considerably less than the membership of such niche organizations as the Polish Society of Friends of Astronomy or the Polish Society of Rose Lovers. Gasztold-Señ proves that despite its high profile and sombre reputation, Grunwald was only a marginal organization. However, the immense interest of the public and extensive media coverage was incredibly disproportionate to the actual relevance of the Union.

Another indicator for the organizational frailty of Grunwald is the fact that in the mid-1980s this national organization had just seven full-time employees (p. 133) and the press organ of the Union had a circulation of merely 1-2 thousand copies (p. 265). Moreover, Gasztold-Señ unequivocally disposes the claims that the known weekly *Rzeczywistość* (*Reality*, led by communist hardliners) was the organ of Grunwald (pp. 232–240). As to the political influence of the organization, its meagerness is evident from the fact that it counted among its members only one, hardly known, Member of Sejm (the Polish Parliament).

How then can we explain the grossly inflated public perception of Grunwald as an organization of great significance? Of course, an important part of the explanation is that the state authorities permitted radically nationalist and actual anti-Semitic views to be propagated among the public, which is something that an authoritarian state based on socialist ideology did not have to tolerate. Other important factors, shown by Gasztold-Señ, were the megalomania of Grunwald activists and their manipulations, which misled journalists as to the influence of this organization. Finally, both for the liberal wing of the PZPR [Polish United Workers' Party] and for the post-KOR [Committee for the Defense of Workers] part of the anti-Communist opposition, Grunwald was a convenient point of reference for defining their own ideological identity in opposition to anti-Semitic and xenophobic attitudes.

Gasztold-Señ discusses furthermore the political profile of the Union. The research literature usually describes Grunwald in the same way as Marcin Zaremba does: as 'nationalist communist'.³ Gasztold-Señ partly echoes these opinions, but also provides counterarguments challenging the perspective and perception of Zaremba and many other historians.

The placement of Grunwald within the political spectrum of the PZPR is highly debatable. The organization could only count on tacit support from a few well-known party functionaries connected with the conservative wing (such as Stanisław Kociołek or Stefan Olszowski), but on the other hand it was the object of constant criticism and ridicule from the liberal wing of the PZPR (led by the weekly *Polityka*). Is it therefore justified to emphasize the connection between Grunwald and the PZPR? The organization was not a zealous defender of the ideological line

³ Grunwald could be seen as the "nationalist wing of the PZPR." Marcin Zaremba, op. cit.

of the party, focusing instead on nationalist ideas and on the hunt for "Zionists" (p. 126). The basic unit of the PZPR at the Patriotic Union Grunwald counted, at its peak, the number of 11 (eleven) members, and was regarded as a disgrace (p. 315).

In analyzing the political profile of Grunwald, Gasztold-Señ proves that some of its leading activists and associates could have never been called 'communists' (not even with the qualifier 'nationalist'). This is the case, for example, for Kazimierz Studentowicz, a Catholic activist, Tadeusz Bednarczyk, a former soldier of the Security Corps of the AK [Home Army], Józef Kossecki, a member of the nationalist anti-communist underground in the 1960s, and Napoleon Siemaszko, an activist of the pre-war National Party. One of the associates of Grunwald was Colonel Zygmunt Walter-Janke, a former commander of the Silesian District of the AK. Further doubts about the definition of Grunwald as a communist organization arise from the nature of materials published in its organ. The *Biuletyn Informacyjny Zjednoczenia Patriotycznego Grunwald* [Newsletter of the Patriotic Union Grunwald] published, among others, sermons by Primate Stefan Wyszyński and Primate Józef Glemp. As a matter of fact, Grunwald maintained unofficial contacts with the latter, whose brother was a member of the organization (pp. 399–400).

Thus, although it is possible to trace the political genealogy of Grunwald to nationalistic currents of the PZPR, it might just as well be presented as an outgrowth of anti-Semitic traditions going back to the Second Polish Republic and adapted to the censorship requirements of the final years of real socialism. Another reason to emphasize the non-communist identity of the activists of Grunwald is the course of their careers after 1989. Most of them did not join any left wing organization, not even the Union of Polish Communists 'Proletariat' (since 2002, the Communist Party of Poland), which is very patriotic, judging by the language of its propaganda. With respect to the post-1989 activities of the Grunwald members the study of Alina Cała provides further information.⁴ In light of the findings of these two authors, most members of Grunwald who remained active after 1989 resurfaced in different rightist, nationalistic and clerical groups.

Although the fall of the socialist regime in Poland put an end to the activities of Grunwald, it is hard not to venture the opinion that the organization continued to cast a shadow over the historical debates of the 1990s, when the liberal wing of the post-'Solidarity' camp feared that the prosecution of Stalinist criminals of Jewish origin might open Pandora's box of anti-Semitism. These issues go beyond the scope of Gasztold-Señ's study, but may be discussed in future research on the post-1989 historical policy.

The question of relations between the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Grunwald is one of the weaker points of the study. It certainly requires further research. The picture emerging from the materials collected by Gasztold-Señ is incomplete and contains some contradictions. The organization received financial support from the Ministry (pp. 133–134). The Ministry also resolved an internecine conflict in the organization between the followers of Bohdan Poręba and Zdzisław Ciesiołkowicz

⁴ Cała, Alina: *Żyd – wróg odwieczny? Antysemityzm w Polsce i jego źródła* [Jew – The Eternal Enemy? Polish Anti-Semitism and Its Sources], Warszawa 2012, pp. 712–716.

in favor of the former. This undoubtedly enabled the Union to sustain its feeble activities during the final years of the Polish People's Republic. The Ministry also turned a blind eye to the illegal publishing activities of Grunwald, in particular concerning its openly anti-Semitic publications and to the fact that the organization received money from Arab diplomats (pp. 307–313, 358–361).

Although the Patriotic Union Grunwald, was a subject of enormous interest and various public debates in the 1980s, Gasztold-Seń's study proves that it was an organization of only minor relevance. It is a pity that we had to wait so long for the discovery of the actual significance of Grunwald. All in all, despite its various anti-left ideological clichés, Gasztold-Seń's study is certainly noteworthy and valuable. It fills an important gap in historiography in an original and well-documented way and as such was recently honored with several Polish historical awards.

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