

SOCIOPOLITICAL ASPECTS OF THE WORK OF PHYSICAL EDUCATION TEACHERS IN THE WEST POMERANIA IN THE YEARS 1945–1950

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Abstract. The article presents a pioneer period of organization of the education system in West Pomerania in the years 1945–1950. The author shows the social and political aspects of this process and the financial conditions of employment in this profession. From the beginning of 1949 the authorities initiated an extensive action of ideological and political indoctrination of the teaching personnel. A further step was an ideological self-education of teachers and school administration. A great deal of emphasis was put on the preparation of the youth to compete at work and studies, though, probably using young people in production works and subbotniks within the “Serving Poland Scheme” was of paramount importance. The number of gyms, playgrounds and equipment was insufficient and low salary did not encourage the employees to take the job. Ideologization of physical culture, an inflow of candidates for teachers from the rural areas and communities of physical workers as well as financial limitations efficiently lowered the teaching quality in this period.

Key words: Western Pomerania, years after 1945, physical education

Introduction

The development of education in the times of the inflow of Polish settlers to the West Pomerania from 1945 onward encountered a variety of problems related to the lack of building infrastructure and qualified personnel. Direct personal security hazards did not add to its harmonious and efficient realization. Commandeering of the gyms and schoolyards by the military, criminal police and government offices further complicated the situation. Because of the significance of education, generally accepted norms and traditions in the government policy, creating schools as a factor integrating the incoming settlers, immigrants and repatriates, became an extremely important task. Many a time such facilities were launched in private apartments due to a lack of appropriate infrastructure, and students were taught by people without professional background (Turek-Kwiatkowska 1977). The end of WWII on the territories on which The Republic of Poland was formed, initiated a migration of the people from the east to the

west and returns of the Poles from the Western Europe. At the same time, the communist takeover initiated changes of great socioeconomic and political impact. The first post-war years were thus characterized by rather critical transformations, including social upgrades of individual professional communities. Among the settlers coming to the West Pomerania there was also a group of teachers. Their number was characteristic of many other regions incorporated to Poland in 1945. It also reflected the social structure of the new citizens coming from rural areas and small town communities of manual workers, as well as a population loss resulting from genocidal policy of the German and the Soviet occupants aimed at the Polish intelligentsia. Unfortunately, many teachers decided not to work in their trained profession, which only aggravated the already poor situation in education in this region. The group of settlers included people from central Poland, Eastern borderlands, Pomerania, re-emigrants from the West, discharged army officers, camp prisoners, and Polish workers operating in the West Pomerania during German occupation or returning from Germany after the war. The settlers also included local people (mainly the region of Złotowszczyzna). It is noteworthy, however, that, aside from the displaced people, repatriates and peoples looking for better living conditions or personal security, a certain group was directed to the West Pomerania by the order of the official administration and, later, this was based on the so-called "work orders". These orders pertained to assumed positions in school administration.

The selection of the professional activities on the reclaimed territories was primarily based on the economic and social conditions. It is little wonder that the conditions of buildings, destroyed in many instances and lack scientific aids, were a sufficient discouragement for the teachers. A permanently present danger from the Soviet soldiers or criminal organizations sufficiently discouraged from coming to the regained lands. Looting and usual burglaries of the school buildings by the Red Army soldiers, where Polish education had already been launched, were a daily bread (APSz, KOSS, sygn. 395). Add general demoralization of youth by the years of occupation and the uncertainty as to the final decisions related to the Polish West border and you can imagine how ungratifying the work in the Szczecin education region might have seemed. Considering the difficult choices of the teachers coming to the West Pomerania, the position of a teacher of physical education should be perceived in an entirely different light – there were no PE teachers at all. Any potential PE teacher was instantly hired in the education administration offices. The deficit was so large that PE classes in the initial period were not realized or were conducted by the military because of their professional background and the new tradition of combining sports with military training. A rescue to this difficult situation was the activity of various youth organizations and the formation of sports teams and inter-school sports clubs and circles.

Along with the growing ideologization of physical education and propaganda pressure of the communist regime came organizational activities and financial support aiming at the reconstruction of the buildings, training of the personnel, and improvement of the sports achievements. The said investments, however, related to professional competitive sports only, leaving school physical education and recreation with hollow declarations. Mass event shows and the mere physical activity preparing for the military line of duty also played its role in the education of youth in a new sociopolitical reality. Aside from 'as-needed' trainings for sports instructors, assistants of sports instructors, physical education instructors and, later, leaders of physical education, from 1947, summer courses were organized of this subject for unqualified teachers working in the Szczecin region education system. Upon opening of secondary schools: Physical Education Teacher-training High-school in Stargard Szczeciński (1950) and Technical High-school of Physical Education in Szczecin (1952) began a period of planned and organized work aiming at educating specialists and developing own scientific and didactic personnel. Within the realized scientific

tasks, scholars began to draw attention to the historical and organizational aspects of preparing PE teachers in the Szczecin Province. The first attempt was made by Tadeusz and Zofia Mieczkowski. However, it was only the formation of the Institute of Physical Education at Szczecin University that made the work more dynamic in this field. The research at that time covered the development of organizational structures, scientific-didactic personnel, curricula and education systems, as well as sports achievements (Eider and Eider 2010; Laskiewicz 2001; Łyskawa 1995). It still lacked an approach in a wider historical perspective. Materials gathered in the National Archives in Szczecin and the analysis of the local press provided information showing the social and ideological work background of the teachers in the period under discussion. Such topics were not discussed earlier by the historians due to the censorship limitations and too short a time perspective hindering a critical evaluation.

Results of the research

Together with the communist takeover, new methods of society ideologization were implemented that came from The Soviet Union and aimed at a creation of a new type of citizen – obedient to the Party (PPR – Polish Workers' Party/PZPR – Polish United Workers' Party). In the process of education/national indoctrination, very important from the point of view of the party, was the education activity of the schoolteachers. For this reason, the approach of a teacher had an invaluable role in the creation of the new reality. The mere term “democratization of the education system” confirmed the tight relation of education with the politics. That is why, as new schools were launched and the PPR power was reinforced nationwide, the authorities attempted to control the employment statistics of teachers on given positions. Even if initially the control of the personnel employment was a bit out of the reach of the Party's eye, particularly in regions where a serious deficit of teachers was observed, it is a fact that the process of government surveillance of the entire society reached new levels of organization (APSz, KOSS, sygn. 81). The closure of this first stage of organization of the education system was a symbolic teacher oath ordered by the Minister of Education on 26 August 1949 in which the teachers solemnly vowed to: “strengthen in young citizens the respect for law and faithfulness to the People's Republic of Poland” (APSz, KOSS, sygn. 170). Appropriately formed contents were targeted at the youth as well. In the instructions of the minister of education in the school year 1949/1950 in chapter: “educational matters”, indications were made to “induce love and affection towards communist Poland (...), development of friendship towards the Soviet Union and the communist bloc.” Nevertheless, the authorities still drew attention to “providing conditions for the realization of physical education” (APSz, KOSS, sygn. 171). As the time passed, these declarations turned out to be hollow because the personnel and funding were insufficient.

Already with the beginning of the school year 1947/1948, after winning the election and getting rid of both legal and illegal opposition, actions were intensified aiming at increasing employment in the education sector of personnel of predefined ideological and political views i.e.: “the fighters of the Communist Poland”. Dismissal of teachers, schoolmasters or school inspectors who did not wish to subdue to the new authority was provoked. They were referred to as rotten elements in the socialist newspeak. The rules of “people's democracy” were advertised along with the ethos of work and the alliance with the Soviet Union. Little wonder that the repertoire of school events was enlarged by “The month of Polish-Soviet Friendship” when classes were extended by a series of lectures. Gradually, such propaganda activities dominated the school celebration assemblies. Anniversaries of the October Revolution were prepared and organized; let alone the 70th birthday of Joseph Stalin, or the anniversary of the union of PPS (Polish Socialist Party) and PPR (Polish Workers' Party). Conferences devoted to the “sociopolitical” issues were

quite frequent as well. These activities gained momentum starting from 1949. In these actions, however, there was no room for spontaneity. A strict supervision of the society led to a situation when these events became orchestrated performances. Speeches such as: "The role of schools in increasing the level of education" were prepared according to precisely determined controlling ideas i.e.: the growth of the power of the progress movement with the Soviet Union as the leader in the struggle for peace with the warmongers; liberation of the People's Republic of China and its great role in the Far East; Heroic attitude of the working class under the rule of communist parties in capitalist countries in the struggle with the warmongers (APSz, KOSS, sygn. 81).

Due to the need to restore the economy under the new sociopolitical conditions came the necessity of using people in the production sector – the inhabitants of towns and villages. The new 6-Year Plan was another test of the "Communist Rule." Its realization was conditional upon the development of "the work competitive movement (...), reorganization of the cultural and educational activity to create new forms of propaganda and canvassing, politicizing of all cultural and educational institutions and, most of all, incorporating the entire educational activity to the "6-Year Plan." The authorities also touched the most delicate matters of the socialist ideology: "the question of education of the masses (...) in the spirit of faithfulness to the great idea of Marxism-Leninism and in the spirit of brotherhood with the Soviet Union – we shall incorporate the work of our public halls, clubs, community centers and libraries." The tools for the dissemination of propaganda were wall gazettes, public readings, lectures, broadcasts on PAs, film shows including documentaries and amateur group performances (APSz, KOSS, sygn. 108). Because of the actions of "making the people aware," the educational community was incorporated in the system of ideological and political influences. The commitment of the youth in the reconstruction of the state and production work was also very important from the point of view of the economy. To this end a Common Organization "Serving Poland" was formed. The youth participated in a variety of Subbotniks competing in work and education (APSz, KOSS, sygn. 142). Similarly to the industrial sector, the community of educational employees adopted the plans to realize appropriate quotas. Before the labor day in 1950 Podstawowa Organizacja Partyjna (Local Party Organization) in the Szczecin Department of Education stated: "All teachers in the Department of Education will participate in an ideological training, will take tests and pass final exams in December 1950" (APSz, KOSS, sygn. 184).

The analysis of archive materials and newspapers confirms a dynamic ingress of political propaganda into the realm of physical education in 1948. In the years 1946–1947, despite the communists using mass events, including those aimed at the youth, the system lacked a pushy propaganda. In the agendas of the School Physical Education Day there were gymnastic shows, folk dances and songs, performed by the local folk groups (APSz, KOSS, sygn. 282). The actions introduced from 1948 were related to the organization of Państwowy Urząd Kultury Fizycznej (National Office for Physical Education) that consequently realized the assumptions of the PPR/PZPR policy of making sports a mass phenomenon and using it for reinforcing of the communist power, particularly since sports perfectly fitted in the value system of the "socialist ideology." The school administration supported this kind of actions, joining in at regular official state ceremonies: "to enter a path of making physical education commonplace among the masses and school youth and to commemorate the *Labor Day* (...) the Department of Education summons all schools to a mass participation in this year's *Bieg Narodowy* (National Marathon) on 2 May at 12.15 starting at a radio announcement." Starting from that year on, mass team marathons became a standard part of the *Labor Day* celebrations. Aside from the spectacular commemoration loaded with propaganda, their constant part were the speeches of the authorities and youth marches. When giving rewards and diplomas to the winning teams, students were gathered at sports assemblies where speeches were given hailing the sports in the Soviet Union and

films were shown such as "Młodzi idą" (The youth is coming) (APSz, KOSS, sygn. 119). Such events were constant elements of teacher conferences in the first half of the 1950s, similarly to instructor trainings at summer camps for children and youth that always had some ideological content blended in (e.g. getting acquainted with the resolutions of the Politburo of KC PZPR related to Physical education in 1949) (APSz, KOSS, sygn. 121).

Each important official event had to be planned according to a detailed scenario. Hence, the events in individual schools did not differ much in terms of their agenda. On the occasion of the beginning or end of a school year or during conferences marches and parades of the youth and the representatives of PZPR, local authorities, National Council, Department of Education, commanders of the 'Serving Poland' organization, army and ZMP (Polish Youth Association) was a common view. The topics of the speeches were: "The struggle for freedom and the attitude of the State towards the Church." An obvious element was adopting resolutions that reflected the propaganda slogans and indicated the tasks to be realized: "The strife to educate the youth in the spirit of Marxism-Leninism so they become patriots and builders of the socialist Poland through a constant extension of the meaning of socialism in daily schoolwork (...). Systematic ideological training of the teaching personnel within ZNP (Polish Teachers association) (...). Provision of Pre-school education to all children of the workers and farmers in every community (...). Introduction of competitiveness in achieving results and making progress at school and during courses)" (APSz, KOSS, sygn. 128, 135).

In order to achieve the predefined ideological objectives, aside from the indoctrination of the teachers' community, ideological and "educational" contents had to be implemented in the school curricula. This was done according to the assumption: "The selection of the curricula aims at getting the youth acquainted with the materialistic viewpoint and to induce a deep conviction that socialism means a higher form of socioeconomic system, better and fairer form of coexistence, a higher level of culture and morality" (APSz, KOSS, sygn. 128). Aside from the ideologization of the school curricula, actions were taken to politicize the teaching personnel. Important places for those actions were teacher-training high-schools, formally preparing future teachers for primary schools. The trainers in these facilities were obliged to prepare speeches on "sociopolitical topics." In a teacher training high-school in Słupsk in October 1948 the first of such lectures delivered during the teaching staff meeting was related to "the Marxism philosophy" (APSz, KOSS, sygn. 392). Despite an instrumental approach to sports by the state and political authorities, high profile propaganda school events brought much dynamics to the life of school students. They provided an opportunity of letting off steam for boys and girls, particularly those coming from the municipal areas. Gradually, the rural communities were also included in the actions. One of such events was the Regional Youth Event held in Szczecin on 4–6 June 1949, at the same time playoffs for the Nationwide Sports Games were held (Warsaw, 16–19 VI 1949). Within this event, light athletic, volleyball, basketball, handball, and swimming competitions were played (APSz, KOSS, sygn. 170).

From the beginning of 1949 the authorities initiated an extensive action of ideological and political indoctrination of the teaching personnel. In the curriculum of the political and ideological courses were issues related to international revolutionary movement, workers' movement in Poland, the 3-Year Plan and the preparation for the 6-Year Plan (APSz, KOSS, sygn. 143).

A further step was the ideological self-education of teachers and school administration organized by ZNP (Polish Teachers' Association). This was defined by the instructions of the Minister of Education, dated 27 October 1949, on obligatory ideological training of teachers and employees of school administration in civics, contemporary world, and socialist pedagogy (APSz, KOSS, sygn. 311). The whole action was to serve a purpose of creation of

a socialist viewpoint. The “training” would be realized in the form of lectures, seminars, and self-education activities. One of the obligatory books was a book by Bolesław Bierut: “Ideological Fundamentals of PZPR”. The evaluation of the acquired knowledge i.e. the proper results of the indoctrination was done through a test that was also a condition for admittance to the exam and it pertained to teachers of grades VIII, IX, X and XI of general education schools, teacher training facilities and vocational schools. The test covered the following topics: I – The 6-Year Plan; II – Civics; III – National Issues; IV – Workers-Farmers Alliance; V – Fundamentals of Socialist Pedagogy; VI – Theory of Teaching (APSz, KOSS, sygn. 109). The ideological awareness project also covered future teachers. For example, during the Physical Education Camp in Myślibórz, the students of the Teacher Training High-school in Stargard Szczeciński, for 168 hours of classes had as much as 48 hours of “ideological and cultural-educational activities” (APSz, KOSS, sygn. 109).

A great deal of emphasis was put on the preparation of the youth to compete at work and studies, though, probably using young people in production works and subbotniks within the “Serving Poland Scheme” was of paramount importance (“Kurier Szczeciński” No. 81, 23 III 1949).

In 1950, the Ministry of Education introduced yet another solution in the training of specialized teachers for primary education. The specializations in teacher training high-schools also covered physical education. Also in this case, ideological and political manipulations were present. This was confirmed by “the Resolution of the Management of ZMP (Polish Teachers’ Association) dated 31 January 1950 on the input of ZMP members in the dissemination of physical culture”:

“In order to provide teacher training, high-schools sufficient teaching personnel Departments of Education will delegate there the most valuable teachers, both professionally and ideologically, who excel at their work. Other changes will be instituted as needed” (APSz, KOSS, sygn. 284).

Conclusions

To recapitulate, we need to admit that the conditions under which the PE teachers took their jobs in the years 1945–1950 were extremely harsh. PE classes counted up to 50 persons (APSz, KOSS, sygn. 128). The number of gyms, playgrounds and equipment was insufficient and low salary did not encourage the employees to take the job. Well-trained professionals were also efficiently intercepted by the government offices. Only in large cities, due to the existence of sports clubs and school administration where qualified teachers and instructors were employed, could the students have professional PE activity. Ideologization of physical culture, an inflow of candidates for teachers from the rural areas and communities of physical workers, as well as financial limitations, efficiently lowered the teaching quality in this period.

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