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**The Reform of the Polish School System in the Era of Enlightenment**

Reforma szkolnictwa polskiego w epoce Oświecenia

Школьная реформа в Польше в эпоху Просвещения

The Polish school system was changed radically during the last three decades of the eighteenth century by the committee for National Education — a lay body acting on behalf of the State and formed by the Polish diet to deal with educational affairs. Thus the educational ideas of the Enlightenment became fully institutionalized for the first time in Poland. The change was by no means sudden. It was preceded during the 'forties of the eighteenth century by the reform introduced by Stanisław Konarski into the teaching done in a few schools, scattered all over Poland, run by the Piarist Order. The innovations introduced by Konarski went counter to the traditional schooling controlled at the time almost entirely by the Jesuit Order. It was the reformed Piarist schools that educated the men who were soon to become enthusiastic advocates of the ideas of enlightenment. They stood at the centre of the cultural mainstream which differed both from the generally accepted concepts and from the whole way of living. The reformers firmly believed that the new education, bred by the philosophy of the enlightenment, would free people from prejudice and as a result would lead to an improvement in the social and political situation of the country. This activity in the field of education was a ray of light in the darkness, for it went on at a particularly tragic period in Polish history, when the neighbouring states — Russia, Prussia and Austria — were gradually depriving Poland of her independent existence by the three successive acts of partition which took place in 1772, 1793 and 1795.

To look for direct and close connections between the ferment of the enlightenment and the fall of Poland would be to simplify things too

much. A lot of studies have been written in Polish historiography about what caused the loss of national independence and a number of factors have been indicated, among them: political weakness, a weak social organization, the lack of a strong army, ineffectual diplomacy, rapacious neighbours, etc. I share here the opinion of B. Leśnodorski who maintains that the partitions of Poland „were the consequence of a long process in which there merged — with results fatal for Poland — various factors both domestic and international, economic and political, institutional and cultural”.<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless, it is an indisputable fact that while foreign powers were prepared to tolerate the existence of a weak Poland („the Polish anarchy” as the French diplomats defined the organization of the gentry’s commonwealth), they did not intend to permit any attempt at reform of political organization in Poland. There was even a doctrine which maintained that the existence of a weak Poland ensured the balance of power in that particular part of Europe. Hence the Polish gentry repeated the absurd opinion that a weak government was a guarantee of Polish independence, while strong and ambitious monarchs could bring about conflicts with Poland’s powerful neighbours.<sup>2</sup>

When Poland became fertile ground for progressive ideas and — what is more — began to carry out those ideas — her independence must have alarmed the absolute powers around.

It should be remembered that Hugo Kołłątaj, the foremost thinker of the Polish enlightenment and its leader, spoke openly about a „mild revolution” and that Thomas Jefferson made no distinction in his remarks between the American revolution, the French revolution and the revolution in Poland. Those who opposed the reform and tried to stop it appealed to the Russian empress to defend Poland against „Jacobinic despotism”. At the same time the invading powers seeking justification for the lawlessness of the partitions explained to Europe that it was necessary to put an end to the Polish „subversive movement”. The Russian empress Catherine II stated explicitly that there were many clubs in Warsaw modelled on the Jacobinic clubs and that they were spreading „infamy” which could engulf all the Polish lands and reach the territory of the neighbouring countries. The alarm of the neighbours was justified when Tadeusz Kościuszko leading his countrymen against the invading forces organized an army which was modelled in many respects on the French revolutionary army.

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<sup>1</sup> B. Leśnodorski: *Państwo polskie na przełomie dwu stuleci*, [in:] *Polska w epoce Oświecenia, Państwo, społeczeństwo, kultura*, Warszawa 1971, p. 438.

<sup>2</sup> E. Rostworowski: *Polska w układzie sił politycznych Europy XVIII wieku*, [in:] *Polska w epoce Oświecenia, Państwo, społeczeństwo, kultura*, Warszawa 1971, p. 40 and ff.

Whatever were the varied and complex causes of the downfall of Poland, the reform of the country's government could not have met with the approval of the neighbouring powers which had no desire to witness the birth of another France in East-central Europe. In reality the advocates of reform in Poland acted with considerable caution limiting their programme to half-measures both in proposed changes in political organization and in social organization.

Up to the time when Stanisław Konarski's Collegium Nobilium was founded in 1741 Jesuit ideas dominated in Polish education. Jesuit schools taught the sons of the gentry some Latin and a good deal of religious fanaticism; they also developed in the young men contempt for the peasants and the townsmen together with groundless admiration for the state organization in Poland, because of the inertia and anarchy that it allowed. Cracow University was no better: it offered lectures on scholastic philosophy making it the principal subject of disputes and scholarly dissertations. Natural sciences and mathematics, developing rapidly in the West, were viewed with hostility at the University. Copernicus' system was also rejected there, even though the great astronomer had been educated at Cracow University and was its pride; Cartesian philosophy and Newtonian theory met with similar disapproval. Professors of astronomy lectured without an observatory, physicists were busy with metaphysical speculation and neglected experiments. The situation was similar at the University of Wilno. According to Stanisław Staszic, a leading representative of the Polish Enlightenment, Jesuit schools were at that time „strongholds of ignorance propagating errors that extinguished all light”.

Later, after a prolonged stay in Rome and in France, Stanisław Konarski reformed Piarist schools. The Collegium Nobilium, a school established for the sons of Polish nobility and wealthy gentry, became the first educational institution where rote-learning that was still in common use was superseded by understanding and intelligent study. Konarski often told teachers that a proper understanding of a problem by pupils made learning and remembering easier. He also revised the school syllabus in which he included a good deal of history and had the mother tongue taught along with Latin. The rhetorical style that boys were taught in Jesuit schools was replaced by a clear and coherent language. A prominent place was granted to the teaching of natural sciences and mathematics. Konarski was the first to bring from abroad equipment necessary for scientific experiments, as well as globes and maps for teaching geography. In philosophy he retained logic and ethics, carefully separated from scholastic accretions; lastly, young men were

taught elements of law and economy, as well as principles of social morality.<sup>3</sup>

Konarski did meet with opposition when he was introducing these changes into the Piarist schools which were much less numerous than the schools run by Jesuits. The latter had 66 schools, while the former had only 19. Konarski's reformatory activity aroused the protest of the gentry strongly attached to Jesuit education. He was called a heretic and the papal nuncio, Durini, described him in his reports to the Holy Sea as a man of „uncertain faith”. Yet he received the support and approval of the more thoughtful members of the community. He was particularly highly regarded by the King, Stanisław August Poniatowski. „This learned monarch and great supporter of learning and of educational institutions not only acknowledged Konarski's merits with a special medal on which he placed a brief but well-devised inscription: „*Sapere auso*” i.e. „to him that dared to be wise”, but also placed his bust in his own rooms”.<sup>4</sup>

It was at the King's initiative that the first school financed by the State was founded. It was called the Knights' School or the Corps of Cadets. It was not an ordinary military school but rather an institution of civic education. It had fine scientific equipment, excellent teachers, mostly laymen, often foreigners. Its pupils were for the most part supported by the State, hence sons of less wealthy families could also enrol there. Young men living on the premises and wearing uniforms were learning military skills and acquiring general knowledge. Pupils had to represent a high standard of morality and the school inculcated patriotism in them and taught them to participate actively in social life. The first commander of the school, Prince Adam Czartoryski, was the author of *A Knight's Catechism* in which he presented models of conduct for the cadets in the form of concise questions and answers. The Knights' School educated many eminent officers and politicians who remained faithful to the ideals inculcated in them by the school. One of those who received their education there was Tadeusz Kościuszko.

The 'sixties of the eighteenth century brought along a noticeable increase of intellectual activity in Poland. A vigorous group of intellectuals

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<sup>3</sup> B. Suchodolski [wrote in:] *Komisja Edukacji Narodowej*, Warszawa 1972, p. 85: „Thus, remaining within the framework of the feudal system and preserving fully the concept of different education for different social orders [...] Konarski yet strove to make the school serve the needs of social life by preparing young people to seek the reform of all those things which in the conditions then existing in Poland seemed to him wrong and harmful.”

<sup>4</sup> Quoted after: *List króla do Konarskiego i dwie mowy powitalne w czasie odwiedzin królewskich w Collegium Nobilium w Warszawie*, [in:] *Epoka wielkiej reformy, Studia i materiały do dziejów oświaty w Polsce XVIII wieku*, Lwów 1923, p. 149.

into existence in Warsaw; its members professed the new ideology and a belief that „the enlightened reason”, freed from prejudice, as it was then expressed, would enable Poles to view their situation critically and to improve it.

The philosophy of the West flowed into Poland through many channels. It was spread by the young men educated in the reformed schools of the Piarist order and by sons of nobles and those of the gentry who had studied abroad; the number of the latter had at that time risen sharply. King Stanisław Leszczyński, forced by Russia and Austria to resign from the Polish throne received from the French King Louis XV the duchy of Lorraine to hold till his death. In 1737 he established a Knights' Academy at Lunéville for the youth of Poland and of Lorraine. It operated till his death in 1776 and during its thirty-year existence it offered education to several hundred young people, among whom 167 were Poles destined to hold important posts in their country both in military service and in other branches of public life.<sup>5</sup>

The intellectual ferment was brought to Poland from the West also by foreigners who were engaged as school teachers or as secretaries of special missions. One can mention here Pierre Samuel Dupont de Nemours, a Physiocrat who collaborated with the Committee of National Education, Pyrrhys de Varille, Nicolas Saudeau, Saint Leau and others. Other things which indicated the quickening of intellectual life was the stormy development of the press in Warsaw, a lively publishing movement and the organization of learned societies and clubs. Yet, owing to the political and social differences between Poland and France as well as to the independence of the Polish intellectuals, Western philosophy was not absorbed uncritically or automatically.<sup>6</sup>

Naturally, the advocates of the philosophy of Enlightenment aimed chiefly at the widest possible acceptance of the new outlook upon the world which meant in practice declaring war on deep-rooted traditions. A belief in reason was set against theological disputes, practicality and utilitarianism tempered by reason and a concern for the well-being of the community were set against the former concern for eternal happiness. For obvious reasons the reformers were interested in education. Many of them accepted the physiocratic belief that agriculture is the only source of true wealth and they attacked the narrow-minded conviction of the gentry that education makes peasants unwilling to work by awakening their ambitions and stimulating futile aspirations. Demanding education

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<sup>5</sup> *Historia wychowania*, ed. by L. Kurdybacha, vol. I, Warszawa 1967, p. 581 and ff.

<sup>6</sup> G. L. Seidler: *Polish Contribution to the Age of Enlightenment*, Ann. Univ. Mariae Curie-Skłodowska, sectio G, vol. XVIII, 1971.

also for the peasants they argued that only an educated farmer would be able to work well in agriculture thanks to the application of specialized knowledge about farming. This idea was expressed with clarity by Antoni Popławski (1730—1783) who wrote: „Let us lead the peasants out of the gross darkness of ignorance by giving them the learning that is proper for them; certainly, as we increase their willingness to work and make them more useful citizens of their country, so shall we make them better farmers when their reason, raised high and as if awakened, will stimulate their ability in every respect.”<sup>7</sup>

This interest in education grew when news reached Poland that the Jesuits had been expelled from Portugal in 1759 and that several years later their schools had been closed in France, an event that was soon followed by the expulsion of the order from that country. Polish intellectuals were interested in the problems of reforming French schools outlined by Rolland and in particular in a book by René De la Chalotais: *Essai d'éducation nationale ou plan d'études pour la jeunesse*, published in 1763 and soon renowned in all Europe. The postulate of national education conspicuous in the title of the book, had been convincingly put forward twenty years earlier by Konarski; now it became the war cry of all the advocates of the new education.<sup>8</sup> Polish reformers were attracted by the views of La Chalotais who was a determined opponent of Jesuit schools that made education a tool of the Church and neglected national needs. It was under his influence that a new model of education began to take shape; the new schools were to serve the whole community, to have lay teachers, to be part of a uniform school hierarchy and to aim at bringing up young people as practical and loyal citizens. The same ideas were expressed in the diet. In 1764 Andrzej Zamoyski demanded: „that there should be one education in the whole country and that its aim should be the good fortune of the Commonwealth”. Wyrwicz expressed a similar conviction in the diet ten years later saying: „The public good requires that in one nation, ruled by one government, there should be one manner of teaching, one kind of learning, and one kind of books used by students, as also the same laws and regulations; this cannot be achieved if schools are not under common supervision, and who can better accomplish this than the King?”<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> A. Popławski: *Zbiór niektórych materyi politycznych*, Warszawa 1774, p. 130.

<sup>8</sup> Professor Jan Dobrzański pointed out to me that the conception of national education worked out by Stanisław Konarski appeared earlier than did similar ideas in West-European theories of education.

<sup>9</sup> Quoted after S. Kot: *Komisja Edukacji Narodowej, 1773—1794*, Kraków 1923, p. 13.

But the acceptance of ideas does not always mean their being put into practice and it was the latter that became the problem that a group of Polish reformers had to face when on 21st of July 1773 Pope Clement XIV issued his bull *Dominus ac Redemptor noster* dissolving the Jesuit order whose property passed into the hands of the government. Three months later, on the fourteenth of October 1773, the Polish diet formed the Committee of National Education which was to control and supervise all schools; simultaneously, the property that had previously belonged to the Jesuits was set aside for „the maintainance and increase of knowledge in the nation.” This body, newly formed to control education, was responsible to the diet and was in essence an agency of the State and of the society. It consisted of eight members, so-called commissaries, who were appointed for seven years. During their first meeting members of the Committee of National Education, who were all among the most distinguished men of the epoch, resolved to remain friends, to try to achieve unanimity and to keep their proceedings secret. This resolution was kept through the entire period of the Committee's existence and it was to this that the Committee owed its remarkable efficiency. More than a decade later Hugo Kollataj, one of the most untiring members of the Committee, was to characterize the atmosphere in which its work had been done in the following words: „All the resolutions of the Committee were passed unanimously, and in no single instance, was any matter settled by the voice of the majority. The commissaries, once they were elected, worked all the time with untiring assiduity.”<sup>10</sup>

The Committee of National Education inaugurated its activity proclaiming a manifesto in which it set forth its goals and appeals to all members of society to send their views and proposals concerning education. The manifesto is the first official document issued by the Committee and one in which it was announced that „school education” is a national affair and is controlled by a State agency. This was followed by a number of instructions and regulations for schools many of which were facing the prospect of closure after the dissolution of the Jesuit order. Among others the Committee appealed to former Jesuits to remain in schools and to teach in the new spirit. Grammar schools, which were attended by sons of the gentry, were a particular concern of the Committee. They were generally district schools, serving a voivodship or its subdivision — the poviát and a bill of 1783 renamed them departmental schools and subdepartmental schools. From the beginning the instructions issued by the Committee aimed at re-orientating education: firstly, the new schools were to become institutions that trained young people to

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<sup>10</sup> *Hugona Kollataja korespondencja listowna z Tadeuszem Czackim*, ed. by F. Kojśiewicz, vol. III, Kraków 1884, p. 259.

become good citizens; secondly, all the subjects taught in them were to be applicable in practical life. All the instructions defined the new aims of education and thus became the basis of a carefully prepared process of remodelling education.

While the appeal to society for suggestions and proposals concerning education aroused a good deal of interest in problems of reform and led to the formulation of several important projects and some important books on education, the results of the first instructions directed to schools did not inspire optimism. Visitors sent to schools to see their equipment, teaching staff and their attitude to the instructions reported that the level of teaching was deplorable.

Yet the Committee was not discouraged by its initial failures. Having no ready models and little practical experience its members assiduously studied the reports of the visitors and the suggestions for the reform submitted by others and went on supervising schools and coping with financial affairs, the latter mostly connected with the administration of former Jesuit estates which came under the Committee's control only in 1776.

Among the projects of reform submitted to the Committee there is one by Antoni Popławski that deserves special attention. Its title is: *On Conducting and Perfecting Civic Education*. Popławski's project, sent in 1774, was based on his wide knowledge of West European writings and on his long experience in teaching and it substantially influenced the educational policy of the Committee. Popławski postulated education for all children arguing that an „improved education” serving all the nation would uplift the declining country. He was convinced that schools should develop young people's physical, intellectual and moral abilities while mental development was understood to mean an ability to reflect and to think independently as well as to draw conclusions.

In his project of a school syllabus Popławski proposed to teach first about those things with which a child comes in contact gradually in his immediate surroundings. Thus he thought that children should first learn to distinguish between different species of animals, then learn about the human body, mind and character, and finally — on account of the needs of living in a community — they should be taught reading, writing, arithmetic, geometry, principles of economy, foreign languages, history and geography. He postulated in his project that textbooks should be written by the most eminent authors, „the greatest men by virtue of their wisdom and learning” as he put it. He also advocated the idea of establishing colleges for teachers in the universities. He was so deeply convinced about the importance of education in social life that in teaching he saw a special vocation which deserved exceptional respect.



Apart from the projects submitted by Popławski many bold and original ideas occurred in proposals by Franciszek Bieliński, Adolf Kamiński, Adam Czartoryski, Ignacy Potocki, Pierre Samuel Dupont de Nemours and others.

In 1775 the Committee of National Education formed a special body called Society for Elementary Textbooks which set to work in a systematic way on syllabuses and on appropriate textbooks. Gradually the Society took over the task of visiting schools and that of evaluating their work. The vigorous and fruitful work of this agency was largely due to the exceptional personality of the Society's secretary. This post was for many years held by Grzegorz Piramowicz, a modest man, gifted with exceptional talents for organization, possessing wide knowledge as well as an ability to think clearly and express his thoughts concisely.

In 1777 the Committee of National Education set out to reform the University of Cracow. This task was entrusted to Hugo Kołłątaj who — acting at first as Visitor and then as Rector — transformed it into a modern centre of research and teaching. The other university — that of Wilno — came to be reformed slightly later owing to the efforts of an eminent astronomer, Martin Poczobut-Odlanicki, who became the rector of the university in 1780.

The reformed universities, which were then called Main Schools, became the foundation of the new educational organization as well as centres for the education of teachers in the spirit of the ideals of the Enlightenment.

Towards the end of 1780 Ignacy Potocki, a member of the Committee of National Education, proposed that all the instructions and regulations issued up to that time as well as experience gathered by educators be used as a basis for the preparation of a statute that would indicate the goals, the organization and the program of the new schools as well as new methods of teaching, and the rights and duties of both teachers and pupils. Potocki's proposal was accepted. Piramowicz became editor of the document and in the course of the first half of 1781 he prepared his *Project of the Statute of Education* which was sent to schools to be put to practice. When later the visitors found that the new regulations were in agreement with the needs of schools, the project was declared in 1783 to be the new bill of education.<sup>11</sup> Thus all the matters pertaining to education became codified for the first time.

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<sup>11</sup> *Ustawy Komisji Edukacji Narodowej dla stanu akademickiego i na szkoły w krajach Rzeczypospolitej przepisane, [in:] Komisja Edukacji Narodowej, Pisma Komisji i o Komisji, Wybór źródeł, Wrocław 1954.*

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In presenting the scope of the activity of the Committee of National Education let us concentrate on four main problems: school organization, syllabuses, teachers and textbooks.

**School organization.** The reforming of the two universities by the Committee of National Education helped to create a uniform school hierarchy. The radical transformation of Cracow University was a great achievement of Kollątaj. In the new university there was no room for scholastic philosophy, for religious intolerance, for feeble oratory and sterile disputes. Latin was replaced by Polish in the lecture rooms, new branches of philosophy came to be taught, students became acquainted with the latest developments in the sciences, younger professors, mostly laymen, were added to the teaching staff, finally, foundations were laid for experimental sciences when laboratories, clinics, an astronomical observatory and botanical gardens were established. Good care was taken that theories presented in the lecture rooms should serve practical needs. After its re-organization Cracow University had two faculties: the faculty of physics, which included three disciplines — mathematics, physics and medicine; and the faculty of moral philosophy which likewise had three disciplines: theology, law and literature. At the request of the Committee of National Education similar changes were introduced at the University of Wilno in the 'eighties of the eighteenth century. Moreover, colleges for teachers were established in both universities.

The reform of the universities created a new, tri-partite school organization, with a strict hierarchy of parts and their mutual dependence. At the top of the pyramid stood the universities which decided the nature of teaching, trained the teachers and supervised and controlled the grammar schools in their regions. All the country was divided into ten school districts: Great Poland, Little Poland, Mazovia, Volhynia, the Ukraine, Lithuania, Ruthenia, Samogitia, Polesie, the Piarist district. In each district there were grammar schools, the so-called departmental schools, and subdepartmental schools, and these in turn controlled the elementary schools, called parish schools. Departmental and sub-departmental schools in Poland were controlled by Cracow University, and those in Lithuania by the University of Wilno. Both universities discharged their duty of supervising schools in their respective regions sending visitors who were selected from among university professors.

A departmental school had six forms and education in each of the forms lasted one year with the exception of the fifth form which took two years to complete. The teaching staff of a departmental school

consisted of eleven men: six teachers, the rector, the prefect, the catechist and two lecturers for teaching foreign languages. The rector of the school was the same time the principal of all the schools located in his department. The sub-departmental school had three forms each lasting two years. Even though the number of teachers in a sub-departmental school was smaller, the syllabuses of both types of grammar school were identical. Only a shortage of teachers prompted the Committee's decision to differentiate between the departmental and the sub-departmental schools. The teaching staff of the latter consisted of only three teachers, the prorector, the catechist and the lecturers teaching foreign languages.

The lowest position in this hierarchy was that occupied by the elementary schools, called parish schools because there was generally one in a parish. The statute regulating matters of education declared that the goal of such schools was „instructing the people in religion, informing them about the duties of their estate, about labour craft appropriate for that estate [...]"<sup>12</sup>. Latin was eliminated from these schools and the subjects taught were: reading in Polish, writing, arithmetic and such things as could be useful in practical living. On account of agricultural work teaching in those schools went on from Michaelmas to St. Adalbert's day, i.e. from the 29th September to 23rd of April. Visitors' reports show that parish schools taught boys and girls together.

Just as Kollataj reformed the universities, so the modernization of the parish schools was the achievement of Piramowicz. Earlier teachers of those schools were casually employed and did not have to be specially trained. Owing to the efforts of Piramowicz the Committee of National Education published the excellent *Primer for Parish Schools in Poland*. It was the result of collective effort and was to serve in the teaching of reading, writing, catechism, arithmetic and principles of morality. Piramowicz attached great importance to the role of the teacher in parish schools and to help the teacher he wrote a separate work entitled *The Duties of the Teacher of Parish Schools*, published in 1787. This book is the finest fruit of Polish educational thinking in the eighteenth century. It consists of four parts: the first one discusses the duties of the teacher, the second deals with physical training in primary schools, the third — with moral instruction and the fourth is devoted to the teaching of those subjects which are to prepare the pupils for practical living.

The *Primer* and *The Duties of a Teacher* are proofs not only of the manysidedness of Piramowicz's knowledge but also — and perhaps even more — of his intimate knowledge of the people.

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<sup>12</sup> See *ibid.*, p. 699.

**Syllabuses.** The work conducted by the Committee of National Education in the field of teaching programs preceded its efforts in the sphere of school organization. It was evident from the very start of the Committee's activity that its principal objective was to make the young people educated in the reformed schools „succeed well in life and make them useful members of society.” This concern is echoed in many writings of the members of the Committee; it is also reflected in the pages of the *Statute of Education*, where we read that teachers should „consider the essence of the education of man and citizen and of how important it is in this process to try by all means to prepare the pupil to do well and to make the community well satisfied with him.”<sup>13</sup> The makers of the reform strove to reach this goal by linking the subjects of study with life.

The new syllabuses brought a change in the selection of subjects of study and in the proportion of sciences and humanities. Thus, after the reform, sciences received 67 hours in the total number of 140 hours taught weekly in a grammar school. If we remember, however, that in upper forms geography was taught together with history we can assume that fully half the total number of teaching hours was offered to sciences. But the change affected not only the number of teaching hours; the method of teaching also changed and now there were efforts on the part of teachers to make pupils understand the subjects taught and to make wide use of experiments. Natural sciences offered more scope to practical instruction but regulations requested even teachers of mathematics not only develop pupils' abilities in practical arithmetic but also to make them apply these abilities e.g. in surveying fields, in construction work etc. The syllabus included also learning modern languages: German, French, and in the Eastern provinces, Russian.

The reformers of the Polish schools professed the opinion that learning which had no practical application was sterile and useless. The practical quality of learning was to be strictly connected with the development of human character and this task was chiefly the task of teachers of humanities. The Committee wanted the graduates of the new schools to be characterized by a high moral standard and a sense of social duty so that „others would be well satisfied with them.”

There is a detailed teaching program for grammar schools and parish schools in *The Statutes of the Committee of National Education*. It shows that the reformers aimed at the all-round development of youth including training the intellect, forming the character and developing physical strength.

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<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 656.

The development of the intellect was to result not only from a proper selection of the subjects of teaching and from their practical character, but also from the application of new teaching methods, which were to develop the pupils' curiosity, reflection and independent judgment. *The Statutes* declared: „In all disciplines the professors should try and see to it that their pupils learn more by reason and understanding than by heart [...]. The teacher should make incessant effort to make the youths entrusted to him accustomed to reflect upon everything, to think and to observe everything by themselves; for this purpose experiments and all sorts of exercises should be in use.”<sup>14</sup>

As has been mentioned before, an important role was assigned at school to the teaching of secular morality and of law. The former was to make young people aware of their duties in different situations in life, to help them understand social relations and define the place of the individual in society. In the lower forms pupils were taught the duties of man towards himself and towards those who were most closely connected with him; in the upper forms they were taught law and economy as there was a conviction that these would strengthen young men's sense of social justice.

An inseparable part of education was physical training. Chapter XXV of *The Statutes* was devoted to this problem and there is a statement in it: „Man cannot be happy and cannot develop an enlightened mind, neither can he come to possess a brave soul or an ability to use his faculties, nor fitness and skill in discharging the duties of his estate without a strong and resistant composition of his body. Now, health and vigour and fitness of the senses are unfailingly dependent on the early care of the infant and the manner of living in early youth.”<sup>15</sup> Owing to these assumptions there were many hours in the syllabus for exercises, excursions and the teaching of principles of hygiene.

New programs and new teaching methods could be of use only if there were good teachers and proper textbooks and these two factors were the main concern of the Committee.

**T e a c h e r s.** The reformers had too few well-trained teachers to be able to put their plans into practice. The majority of state schools employed former Jesuits as teachers and these at first disregarded the orders of the Committee. The Piarists willingly adopted reforms in their schools but the number of their schools was small. Visits, instructions and changes in the syllabuses did not solve the problems; it was necessary to train lay teachers and this became the first task of the reformed universities.

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<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 662.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 718.

The Committee was fully aware of the important role of teachers in social life and this prompted it to take a bold and unprecedented decision to create a separate order of teachers, called „the academic order”, which included the grammar school and university teachers. The opening sentences of *The Statutes* emphasize the exceptional rank of teachers in society. „The Committee guarantees that high respect will be paid and gratitude shown to this order both by virtue of its vocation and its services and owing to the experience that its individual members possess and to the profit that accrues to the Motherland from their labour.”<sup>16</sup> *The Statutes* granted teachers considerable autonomy, freedom of conduct within the framework of existing laws and made all posts elective; but at the same time required from the teachers good qualities of mind and character, so that they would give conservative gentry no occasion for criticism.

In every grammar school teachers formed a separate corporation. They shared living quarters and ate their meals together. They were also distinguished by their clothes: „A teacher in his first six-year period of teaching should wear a shorter gown, while one who has remained in the academic profession for over six years should wear a longer gown. Outside school they should wear clerical garb.”<sup>17</sup>

Candidates for 'the academic order' were selected with great care, as they were to constitute the élite educated in the ideals of the Enlightenment and to transform the Polish educational system. Young men of special promise were selected from among the graduates of the seven-year departmental school and were sent to a four-year course at the university. Completing their course they received their degree of doctor and went back to their school, though they could always leave it to receive a chair at the university.

The Committee of National Education attached equal importance to the problem of teachers training and that of publishing new textbooks, in order to raise the teaching in all schools to a uniformly high level.

**Textbooks.** In 1775 the Committee formed the Society for Elementary Textbooks which was to prepare syllabuses and textbooks. The Society approached the best specialists in Poland and abroad to write textbooks. So great an importance did the reformers attach to the application of new methods in teaching that in 1778 they asked De Condillac to write a manual of basic logic for Polish schools. The philosopher accepted the proposal and a year later sent the manuscript of the textbook.

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<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 575.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 621.

Out of the 27 textbooks that were published when the Society was active five were written by foreigners, among them the above mentioned manual of logic by De Condillac, and one of algebra by L'Huillicre; the latter eventually went into more than a dozen editions. Before any single item was published it was studied carefully in outline, then the whole manuscript was discussed and finally given to the printer. Three things were required from a textbook: a general idea, precision and clarity. „Order, clarity and good presentation”, wrote the secretary of the Society, Piramowicz, „are the essential qualities of such works. A man ought not to compose an elementary book if he does not see clearly every part that makes up his selected discipline and if he does not know the proper place that should be assigned to each particular truth in that discipline or if he is unable to indicate to the teachers in what order things should be taught.”<sup>18</sup>

The high standard set before the authors of textbooks and the complicated procedure involved in accepting them made the work of the Society slow and by 1783 only the lower forms were provided with textbooks. The following were the best textbooks: O. Kopczyński, *Grammar for National Schools*; L'Huillicre, *Arithmetic for National Schools*, also *Geometry for National Schools* and *Algebra for National Schools* by the same author; A. Popławski, *Morality for National Schools*. In later years a number of textbooks for the upper forms appeared. Those that deserve attention among them are: M. J. Hube, *Physics for National Schools, Part One: Mechanics*; and G. Piramowicz, *Rhetoric and Poetry for National Schools*. Parish schools had one excellent textbook, the already mentioned *Primer for National Parish Schools* published in 1785.

Even a brief presentation of the work of the Committee of National Education would be incomplete without mentioning the lively discussion that went on in it over separate schools for girls. Those schools were to be modelled on grammar schools for boys, but the idea was never put to practice. For all the efforts of the Committee education for girls could not become very advanced in eighteenth-century Poland because the poorer gentry still professed the opinion that women did not need any education and in wealthier homes, especially among the nobility, the education of girls was usually entrusted to governesses who were generally French.

This lack of achievement in the field of education for girls does not essentially change the fact that in the course of the twenty years of its existence the Committee of National Education revolutionized the Polish school system stubbornly attacking old habits of thinking and the igno-

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<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 336.

rance of the gentry. It triumphed over the gentry's charge that the new education was a threat against religion and morality. As late as 1790 eight out of twenty of regional diets demanded that the Jesuits be brought back and three called for the abolition of the Committee of National Education. At that time thousands of young people were already studying according to the new syllabuses and the new methods in 1500 primary schools, 75 grammar schools and two universities. Under the influence of the new education Poland began to understand that „the power of the nation”, as Jacek Przybylski expressed it in 1792 „is not measures either by the number of its soldiers, or by the expense of its buildings, or by the glitter of its rites or by the zeal in preserving old customs or by the taste of novelty; nay, it must be sought in its fields, in the thatched houses of its peasants, in the talents of the people inhabiting its towns, in the products of its looms and workshops, in the flow of its goods and its money, in the education of its youth [...]”.<sup>19</sup>

April 10, 1794 was the day of the last session of the Committee of National Education. It ceased to exist when Poland lost its national independence but the Polish nation was to live by the heritage of its ideas and its organization through the period of subjugation.

And when today, in independent Poland, we are celebrating solemnly the 200th anniversary of the formation of the Committee of National Education we pay homage to its makers who, believing in man and in progress, created something of lasting value.

## STRESZCZENIE

W ostatnim trzydziestolecu XVIII wieku w szkolnictwie polskim nastąpił zasadniczy przełom. Dokonała go Komisja Edukacji Narodowej — świecki organ państwowy, powołany przez Sejm 14 października 1773 r., tj. w trzy miesiące po rozwiązaniu zakonu jezuitów. Równocześnie z powierzeniem Komisji Edukacji Narodowej kierownictwa i opieki nad wszystkimi szkołami Sejm przeznaczył majątek pojezuicki na „utrzymanie i powiększenie światła w narodzie”.

Komisja Edukacji Narodowej rozpoczęła działalność od ogłoszenia uniwersału, w którym sformułowała swe cele oraz wezwała społeczeństwo do nadsyłania uwag i projektów na temat szkolnictwa.

Wśród nadesłanych projektów na szczególną uwagę zasługuje opracowanie Antoniego Popławskiego, oparte na rozległej znajomości literatury zachodniej i dłużejletniej praktyce pedagogicznej autora. Koncepcje Popławskiego w wielkim stopniu wpłynęły na kierunek prac Komisji. Wiele

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<sup>19</sup> Quoted after S. Tyn c [introduction to:] *ibid.*, p. CVI.



śmiałych i oryginalnych myśli zawierały również propozycje F. Bielińskiego, A. Kamińskiego, A. Czartoryskiego, I. Potockiego i innych.

W r. 1775 Komisja Edukacji Narodowej powołała specjalny organ — Towarzystwo do Ksiąg Elementarnych, które przystąpiło do systematycznej pracy nad programami szkolnymi i opracowaniem podręczników. Z biegiem lat Towarzystwo to przejęło również wizytację szkół i analizę ich działalności.

W r. 1777 Komisja Edukacji Narodowej przystąpiła do reformy Akademii Krakowskiej, powierzając to zadanie Hugonowi Kołłątajowi. W kilka lat później, dzięki wysiłkom wybitnego astronoma Marcina Poczobuta-Odlanickiego, zreformowano drugi uniwersytet — Akademię Wileńską. Odnowione uniwersytety, które nazywano Szkołą Główną Koronną i Szkołą Główną Wielkiego Księstwa Litewskiego, stały się ośrodkami kształcenia nauczycieli w duchu ideałów Oświecenia. Ponadto reforma uniwersytetów pozwoliła zbudować nową, trójstopniową strukturę szkolnictwa, w której wszystkie ogniwa były wzajemnie ze sobą powiązane hierarchiczną zależnością.

Niejako ukoronowaniem działalności Komisji Edukacji Narodowej była dokonana w r. 1783 kodyfikacja wszystkich problemów związanych z oświatą.

Prace Komisji dotyczyły czterech dziedzin: 1) struktury szkół, 2) programów nauczania, 3) nauczycieli, 4) podręczników. Ta wszechstronna działalność sprawiła, że w ciągu dwudziestolecia swego istnienia Komisja Edukacji Narodowej zdołała dokonać przewrotu w szkolnictwie polskim, przełamując tradycyjne nawyki i ciemnotę.

## РЕЗЮМЕ

В последнем тридцатилетии XVIII века в польской системе образования наступил существенный перелом. Его совершила Комиссия народного образования — светский государственный орган, созданный Сеймом 14 октября 1773 г., т. е. три месяца после роспуска ордена иезуитов. Поручая Комиссии народного образования руководство и опеку над всеми школами, Сейм одновременно предназначил имущество иезуитов на „сохранение и расширение света в народе”.

Комиссия народного образования начала свою деятельность с объявления универсала, в котором она сформулировала свои задачи и цель, а также призвала общество присылать замечания и проекты на тему школьной системы.

Среди присланных проектов следовало бы обратить особое внимание на работу Антона Поплавского, основанную на широком знании западной литературы и долголетней педагогической практике автора. Кон-

цепции Поплавского сильно повлияли на направление работ Комиссии. Много смелых и оригинальных замечаний высказали также Ф. Белински, А. Каменьски, А. Чарторыски, И. Потоцки и др.

В 1775 г. Комиссия народного образования образовала специальный орган — Общество книг для начальной школы, которое приступило к систематической работе над школьными программами и книгами. Со временем это Общество приняло также на себя задачу инспекции школ и анализ их деятельности.

В 1777 г. Комиссия народного образования приступила к реформе Краковской академии, поручая эту задачу Хуго Коллонтаю. Несколько лет спустя, благодаря усилиям выдающегося астронома Мартина Почобута-Одзяницкого, был реформирован второй университет — Академия в Вильно. Обновленные университеты, которые получили названия Главная коронная школа и Главная школа Великого Литовского княжества, стали центрами обучения учителей в духе идеалов Просвещения.

Реформа университетов позволила создать новую трехступенчатую структуру образования, в которой все звенья были связаны иерархической зависимостью.

Как бы увенчанием деятельности Комиссии была осуществленная в 1783 г. кодификация всех проблем, связанных с просвещением.

Работа Комиссии касалась четырех областей: 1) структуры школ, 2) программ обучения, 3) учителей, 4) учебников. Результатом этой всесторонней деятельности был совершенный Комиссией народного образования переворот в польской системе образования. За 20 лет своего существования Комиссия преломила в польской школе традиционные привычки и невежество.